

FOR PASSION

by

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In recent years, a great deal of attention has been focused on the quality of public education in the United States. Teachers, parents, students, and the public in general are growing increasingly frustrated and cynical: teachers are weary of students who don't seem to care about their education and parents who don't seem to care about their children; students are tired of feeling like nobody cares about them and the world they are inheriting; parents and the public are alarmed by the results of public education and the atmosphere of our schools, and their dissatisfaction is demonstrated by increasing reluctance to finance education.

This paper explores the relationship between education and the ecological crisis, and how this crisis, which is primarily one of culture and its unexamined beliefs, can be utilized to revitalize students' passion and engage them in the learning process by addressing the imperatives of our time.

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CHAPTER I

PLACE

Monkey Face Ranch borders the rimrock that marks the former level of the Crooked River. The ranch house was built right there, on the edge of the rimrock, where its inhabitants can see far down into the gorge of this Central Oregon river--upstream, downstream, and across--to a mind-boggling assortment of rock formations that draw climbers from around the world. Smith Rocks they are called, though I can't see why they should be named after anyone called Smith. The Smith of legend certainly didn't discover them, much less have anything to do with their creation. No, the rocks, if they are to have a name, should probably bear the name of their creators, in which case they would be called "Wind and Rain and River Rocks," or perhaps, "Crooked River Weather Rocks." The Crooked River, after all, is very crooked. It would not surprise me a bit if it was called Crooked River by the animals who frequent it--deer, bear, cougar; pigeon, heron, and crow; crawdads, salamanders, and salmon; a billion bugs; and more. At the very least, that is, if the rocks must bear the proper name of some human being or beings, then that honor should go to the one, or to the group, who first happened upon their extraordinary form. Whoever those people were, I doubt very much that any of them were called Smith.

Monkey Face Ranch gets its name from one of the "Smith" rocks. There is a rock, a massive, dome-shaped rock bigger than the biggest capitol

building domes, that, when viewed from the ranch or most anywhere else on the southeast side of the rocks, looks very much like the profile of a monkey's head. I have tried, on occasion, to imagine how deep into the earth this rock would have to extend in order to match that head with a body of proper proportion. The first thing I notice in doing so is that my imagination is not that vast, or it is vastly out of practice.

Mostly, I think, it is the latter. Along with most everyone else, save children, my imagination is out of practice, and perhaps too, a bit underdeveloped in the first place. I'll be damned if I haven't been stifled. Somewhere along the way I learned that certain things are just this way and it's not your job to do anything about them even if you could, which you can't, so don't waste your time thinking about it. That is, imagination and creativity are not what get you ahead in this world. They might help you get a job, a promotion, or a contract, but they are not what life is about.

Who taught me that?!

Back at the ranch, I'm on edge, literally and figuratively. Sitting on the big back deck, a long wooden structure that actually surrounds the house, I nearly overhang the rimrock. The tips of tall pines reach just over the edge from the small riverside meadow two hundred feet below. With a long pair of pruning shears I could probably top one some winter day and have a perfect Christmas tree. But would the tree prefer I took one of its saplings rather than its own fragile crown? Is that an important question? I roll along the smooth deck in my wheelchair, one end to the other and back, ears and eyes alert to sound and movement all around. A hawk appears just above the bunkhouse and begins an upward spiral: smooth, spread-winged,

carefully tottering on rising currents. Soon it is high overhead, and with a single half-flap sends itself across the canyon, over jutting Smith Rocks, and out of sight. On the floor of the gorge a Great Blue Heron powers low over the water and lands gently, gracefully, in the rippling shallows. Then, with the awkward dignity of a one-legged war hero on parade, it stalks the shoreline, peering intently into its rustling flow. Over the meadow a flock of pigeons weaves its way, up and down, inside and out, in a spiraling game of follow the leader. From time to time they fly in to the cliff and land near a small waterfall that streams down the rimrock. Abruptly, they begin their game again; a single all-white bird is in their midst. Splashing sounds come from the sparkling river as several ducks take off for a short flight upstream where they play and poke around. And beneath my chair, a baby lizard scampers across the wood, stops dead, then squeezes between two planks and is gone. Other lizards bask on the sun-warmed rocks below, doing "push-ups," and spinning dreams.

But as close as I am to the beauty of this river, its canyon, and the creatures who live to play and dream here, I am also nearly as close to the sounds, sights, and smells of civilization. Along with the deer who step cautiously across the golf course-green lawn, there occasionally appear cows that have escaped their nearby pastures. They show only mild interest when I open the door and "moo." They are used to me, or people like me; and like me, they are accustomed as well to the rising and falling drone of the big-rigs forever passing their fields, day and night, on nearby Highway 97. The cows remind me of what is on the other side of the house, only a few miles away. And that puts me on edge too.

Sometimes I think it's going to put me over the edge--that world out there, where I spend most of my time. I only get to Monkey Face Ranch once or twice a year now, for a weekend or so. I used to come here more often, when I lived nearby. Under big open skies and through air fresh off the Cascades I thought it worth the 19 country miles from Prineville. I'd saddle up my Chevy, point it to the west, and glide over here without reason. Besides being an exceptional setting for croquet, gin and tonics, and sleeping outdoors, it is a great place just to be, to just be. It is also a great place to climb to high places, like right to the top of the monkey's head. From there or from anywhere else near the top of Smith rocks the house is almost hard to see, tucked in as it is to the junipers and sage, and itself the color of wood. Besides, it's a long ways down, and across. I don't get to that side of the river any more though, which makes me sad, nor do I come here often enough.

My Central Oregon days ended almost eight years ago when I moved back to my roots, the Willamette Valley, where I was in a little deeper. I was back in Eugene, between jobs, and not really looking forward to the one toward which I was headed, when I broke my neck horsing around in my backyard. I was wrestling with a friend, playing like the kid I had learned to be--but I was no longer a kid. At the age of 27, I had been up all night, dancing and drinking, "playing" in the playground of adults--a bar. The games had spilled over into the daylight, and then into the backyard. Concerned about his exuberant spirit, I cautioned my friend before we began to grapple: "Let's be a little careful. I wouldn't want to chip a tooth." But we had long since moved beyond being a little careful that night, as I had used little caution in my life or with my time throughout my adult years. My teeth, it is now very

clear, should have been amongst the least of my worries, that morning, or in general.

That was six years ago. I think I had been gunning for a wake-up call, something to help me focus on what I did want to do, but that, perhaps, was a little more than I expected. I spent the next three and a half months in the hospital while my body healed and strengthened and my mind, my heart, and my soul began the adjustment to living with new limits. By the time I was discharged I could walk short distances, but the struggle would leave me shaking, exhausted, and unable to walk a step further. My life, physically, was forever changed. Now when I come here I don't get to cross the river and climb, or even play croquet on what must be one of the greenest lawns east of the Cascades. But my life--intellectually, emotionally, spiritually--has changed forever too. I'm in a place inside that I'd rather be, which is not to say it feels entirely peaceful. But I am at peace with myself, or more so, anyway, than I was seven or eight or ten years ago. What I am not at peace with is this world, this world that's driving all creatures to the edge, this world of human beings.

Nor do I think I should be. Actually, I haven't been at peace with the world since I was a kid. I was mad enough when my father's plane was destroyed in Vietnam, but as I grew up (I was six when he died) and learned more about that war than the body counts and "official" reports I used to read in the newspaper, I began building some rage. The thing was, I didn't even know it at the time. I was hurt and angry and frustrated but I didn't know where to direct it, so it settled in me and settled me in to a state of general disillusionment instead. Worse yet, I didn't really even recognize that. I was

disillusioned and didn't know it, in junior high and jaded. I had taken legitimate anger and appropriate frustration with a screwed up world and let it mess with me instead of me messing with it. Like everyone else I knew--my mother, my relatives and my teachers, not to mention the media, the politicians and the preachers--I was trying to "accept" what had happened: my loss, our loss. Somewhere in all of this there was a message of inevitability. It wasn't as if anyone was saying it was okay; some people, in fact, were raising hell and saying I told you so. But generally there was a feeling that it probably couldn't be helped; or what were we supposed to do; or it's over now so let's not dwell on it, let's get past it, let's accept it, let's heal the wounds. Maybe it hurt too much. Maybe it was too complicated. Maybe we had better things (easier things) to do. All I know for sure is that I didn't do anything with my anger. I just accepted that lousy things happen--people are corrupt, governments do the wrong things for even worse reasons, that "the system" is far from perfect. And that little was being done about it. It certainly didn't seem to be much of an issue at school, where I was supposed to be learning. To do what? Make a difference? Make sure we didn't make the same mistakes again, or even worse mistakes?

More like get by, is the way I remember it. Thinking back to high school, that time when minds are eager but easily scattered, I recall not one instance of a teacher relating what was being taught to something of importance in the outside world, not one single attempt to apply the experience of learning to the world at large or to an issue that called for action. What does remain boldly in my memory is from a section in a psychology class. We read from the book Creative Dreaming, not only

because the teacher wanted us to learn to interpret our dreams, but because he wanted us to be able to control them, to dream lucidly, to deal unconsciously with our fears, our demons. He wanted us to be healthier as individuals. He wanted to help us get by. This is not a criticism of the man or his intention, for there is little we can do on the outside if we are not at peace on the inside. But as the strongest memory I have of learning, it says much about our priorities at the time.

Well I got by all right. Very well, in fact. I excelled at school--academically, socially, athletically. My high school teachers thought I was "very well adjusted," meaning that like most of the other kids I played the game, didn't rock the boat, accepted things as they were. *Accepted things as they were!* And why not? My teachers did. The principal did. We were wallowing--yes, even then in the late 70's--in a world deep in economic and social injustices, environmental disregard, nuclear proliferation, and more. But that was not exactly the concern of the people who were (or were supposed to be) the most profound influence on my "formative" years.

And while I let go of the past, that is, became adjusted--"well adjusted," I couldn't shake it clean free. I began eventually and gradually to notice that I was disillusioned, that while I could often enjoy happiness, I was as frequently, if not concurrently, aware of a deep dissatisfaction with the way the people in my world--my Western world of politicians, preachers, teachers, parents, and leaders of all sorts--were able to pay only lip service to, if not ignore altogether, the many issues and problems that seemed to me more important than the things with which they genuinely concerned themselves. Perhaps, despite all that those around me unwittingly did to distract me from

it, my disillusionment was rising to the surface where it was uttered in words and acts of discontent. I became a little more critical of what I read and heard than most of my friends, a little more cynical, and a little more outspoken. I realized at last that I had once been very angry and for good reason, but had relegated that anger to a sort of benign disregard, something that I could live with, if a little unhappily, but for reasons unknown. It was an escape, a retreat down a path beaten clear by so many before me, others, who like me did not know where to go with their anger but away, backwards, or at the very least, nowhere.

Well I'm coming back now. The 1970's were a long time ago, and it's taken me this long, but I'm through with accepting. I'm still disillusioned, as there is much that disenchants, but not at the expense of my anger. That I hold on to: my anger and my determination not to be subdued, stifled, or silenced. That path is old, hardened, and fruitless; it is time, I think, to wear some new paths. Paths that don't back down or go around but which approach head-on, or from the side, the top, the bottom--from any and every angle; paths that encircle, that wind and twist and double back on themselves; such creative approaches to the things there before us that they can worm their way through the hardest soil and leave it open and accessible and ready for good weather.

I didn't really start coming back until after my spinal cord injury. I wanted to start up a new path, or at least find one headed in the right direction, for quite a while beforehand, but I wasn't looking in the right places. I think I knew where to look, but I might have been a little afraid to look hard and long enough, afraid of the challenge, the responsibility. I

realized consciously just weeks before my injury something I had sensed even as a student: that the path for me to take was in the direction of education, of teaching. After all, it was education and educators, I was beginning to realize, that had failed a generation by separating learning from living and people from planet. When the closest your education ever comes to steering you toward the problems of the real world is showing you how to balance a checkbook in the mandatory course "Marriage and the Family," you know it is drastically out of touch with its purpose, regardless of its underlying philosophy. If we were ever going to make this world a better place, I thought, we would have to start with its kids, which is why I was so nonplussed by what otherwise would have looked like a great job opportunity in advertising. Instead it depressed me. "What good is that going to do anybody?" I asked myself. I tried to think of it as a stepping stone to something useful, and it might have been, but the odds were against that and I knew it. So when I broke my neck and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation offered to "retrain" me, I jumped at the chance to get into education. Here was one of the paths that needed some widening, that other paths might emerge within it and diverge from it toward the challenges that abound around us. Here was where imagination needed to build a nest, that it might hatch a world of ideas in a species that more than anything else needs some new, and perhaps as much, some old beginnings.

The course work is done now: classes in educational theory, teaching strategies, classroom management, assessing reading skills, teaching writing and many more. I took them all, was certified to teach "language arts" to fifth through twelfth graders, and moved on to an advanced degree. Now, while I

finish my masters program, I substitute teach for the experience, and of course, the income. I'm in the classroom still, but now I'm the teacher, not the student.

Or am I?

There's certainly a lot to learn here, not just about teaching, but about the young human beings who treat this place like anything but opportunity. They do not share, it seems to me, the sense of what it means to be alive--neither the exigency nor the peace--that I notice among the creatures around Monkey Face. In fact, they remind me of myself when I was their age.

Back at Monkey Face I sit on the weathering wooden deck and ponder the lack of purpose I feel in the lives and attitudes of the kids I teach. It is not just one group, for I teach different kids almost every time I'm called to substitute. Nor are they miserable or unenthused, one and all. But they sure don't take to their lives with urgency, and this confounds me a bit. Don't they know?

Sitting here in this deepening violet evening I am reminded of a time, long ago, when I stood with a friend behind a sheet of rain water that spilled from clogged gutters overhead. Huge drops pounded the roof and poured over the side, while behind it we shared an odd sensation. It must have been the motion, the steady stream of water before us that formed a screen on which our dim reflections danced in jerky, uneven movements. For together we agreed at that moment that our lives--life itself--seemed like a movie, revealing itself scene by scene, the frames themselves passing too quickly to hold or freeze or really know, but affecting us nonetheless with an eerie sense of being actors in our own lives. It was a brief glimpse, a brief shared glimpse

into a way of knowing that changed me. Not all at once, but the sense of that moment has never let me forget that I am the actor of my life, that in this movie, I am the lead.

So like the other creatures who rely on this place to sustain them, I take my role seriously. I realize now under this deep bruised sky that my recollection of the movie screen of water began taking shape with this morning's unusual sunrise. Day dawns suddenly here, for the rocks they call Smith loom large to the east and prohibit any sun from striking the ranch till, at once, it is not only morning, but day. Meanwhile, in the meadow below the rimrock, morning remains. The broad rocky shadow that only moments before gave way to the rising sun where I sit is just now beginning its descent to the riverbed, where it will lie cool and tranquil beneath the flow till evening conjures it again. It draws an uneven line across the east-facing cliff on which I am perched--the outline of one cliff projected onto the face of another. The shadow drops lower and lower until soon there appear patches of sunshine on the dewy morning meadow far below, while silhouettes of the larger peaks keep much of the meadow in relative darkness. Another day is unfolding on a land that never slept. Before long the sun will bear directly on the river which hugs the far cliffs, the last place every morning to receive its silent golden issue.

As the earth continues its spin, the sun moves farther overhead, and the increments we call hours pass lazily for me. I am engaged, but by my surroundings, not by the fast-action, time-accelerating things I am accustomed to at home, so the day moves slowly, the way days actually move. Eventually, though, the inexorable revolution of the earth leaves the sun at my back and

places me and my side of the river in its shadow. And now, instead of disappearing before me as it did this morning, the shadow spreads away from me, as if to return to some secret cave in the rocks, where, until morning, it will gather in the darkness it holds against the sun's return. There are no obstructions, however, on this side of the river, no massive, jutting rocks, so the broad shadow spreads in an even line, down the rimrock, across the cooling meadow and through the rippling river, and then gradually begins edging up the cliffs and filling the crannies of the Smith Rocks themselves. With the sky above still bright, the river basin below seems almost under darkness of night, so marked is the contrast. The climbing shadow seems to stall in its ascent of the opposing cliff for a while, and with the sun so low on the western horizon, the trees lining my side of the rimrock appear in its upper fringe. I can even pick out individual pines and junipers and distinguish their silhouettes on the cliffs more than two hundred yards away. If I had really big hands, I think whimsically, I could put on one of those projector shows. But the show, I soon realize, is already in progress, and today's performance is building to its climax even as the shadow closes on the stage.

The shadow has stalled. The rimrock on my side of the gorge is clearly outlined, trees and all, midway up the far cliffs. The sun has set below this immediate horizon, shading the meadow and the river below. But higher up on the cliffs, on the monkey's face itself and on the faces of the other high peaks, the sun still shines brightly. The rimrock may have shaded the gorge, but the higher peaks will see the sun until the Cascades far to the west spin round to block their view. The sun's angle is very low now though, and the

detail in the cliffs disappears in the glare. Where they are sheer, they appear almost white, while the other rocks appear flat, tawny, and unspectacular. This impression is only momentary though, as short-lived as the position of the earth in relation to the sun. Soon the glare is gone, but the rocks do not return to their previous, earthy daytime colors. Instead, they seem to be heating up. They begin to glow and take on an orange hue that highlights every detail, every shade, every shadow one rock casts upon another. Each pinnacle, each towering spire takes on a life its own, stands out over the gorge, and grows. Details continue to emerge even as darkness approaches until, suddenly, the stone faces blush. Like a sailor in a sunset, the faces of these awesome and massive volcanic remnants blush and blush until their ruddy complexion turns to fire as the last bending rays of sunlight meet their cheeks. They shimmer in their glow and look as if they'll lose form altogether, returning to the molten state that brought them here so many million years ago.

But it's over in a minute. Color drains from the face, the imperfections fade, and the shadow line is subsumed by a lighter shade that swallows all the land. That is the way it happens, on every clear day. Just before sunset, when the rocks turn red.

Of that phenomenon I had been forewarned by my host, who insisted, unnecessarily, that I stay until I saw the rocks turn red. What I was not prepared for was the spectacle that occurred after dark. With all color gone from earth below and sky above, the first twinkling stars of evening are joined by thousands more that are visible to the naked eye in this lightly populated area. The air cools quickly, and despite the occasional and

inexplicable pocket of warmth that brushes by, I'm forced to put up the hood of my heavy cotton sweatshirt. I'm still fascinated by the colors I saw such a short time ago, and am left trying to decide where they really were. Were those the colors of the sun or of the rocks? What was energizing what up there? I try to recall my physics and remember that the color of a thing has to do with the frequencies of visible light that it absorbs and those that it reflects, which in turn depend on its composition. I remember too that the colors of a sunset are explained by roughly the same principles; that is, certain frequencies--red, orange, yellow--the lower ones, are scattered least by molecules in the atmosphere, so when the sun is low and the atmosphere its light passes through is thick, we see more and more orange, and eventually, red.

But what, if anything, does all this add up to I wonder? The rocks had the capacity all along to reflect light of the frequency we call red; the fact that they turned red at sunset means only that there was less of the other frequencies to reflect to my eyes. Scattering the high frequency light in the atmosphere is just like color mixing: subtract the high-frequency blue from "white" or visible light and the complementary color that is left is yellow; subtract the violet and the complementary color is orange; when green is subtracted, we're left with magenta, all of which explains the brilliant salmon and crimson radiance of sunset.

So what color does this mean the rocks are? Are they simply the color they reflect as all this physics would suggest? By day they have available to them all the colors of the spectrum, yet they appear in full light to be a rather pale, bleached tan. This is confounding. In reality, the color of the rocks is

neither in the rocks themselves nor in the light they reflect. Color is a physiological experience that occurs in the head when electromagnetic vibrations interact with structures in the retina called cones. Some animals, including humans with missing cones or "defective color vision," see no red at all. Color, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder!

What, then, of the transforming beauty I witnessed earlier? No, not witnessed, but experienced. Where was the locus of the elevation of those rocks from the merely majestic or beautiful, to the sublime, as indeed they were in their fiery cloak? Was it in the rocks themselves, since by their composition they are able, under certain circumstances, to reflect frequencies of visible light that make them appear to be extraordinary? Was it in the light, because it did not present the rocks with those frequencies which, when reflected along with the red, would have made them appear less remarkable? Was it in the atmosphere, without which the full spectrum of light would have presented itself anyway? Was it in the earth itself, which, were it not revolving, would never have placed the sun at an angle so low that a portion of its light would be scattered in the first place? Or, since it was incumbent upon my eyes to perceive the colors, was the sublimity of those glowing red rocks resident only in me, in my mind?

That, according to the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, is the only place where the truly sublime exists. To Hegel, whose life spanned the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nature is mere material for the mind. Spirit emerges through the act of the mind, and therefore exists only in the mind, not in nature. Nature is that which needs to be transmuted into art, which is an expression of the spirit, and it is through this process of

transmutation that spirit recuperates itself by creating that which is sublime. Nature has not been processed by the mind, so therefore is neither art, nor sublime.

But Hegel's philosophy of the sublime raises some questions he could not have anticipated given his understanding of the relationship between the eyes and the mind. We know now, for example, that the cones in the retina are not connected directly to the optic nerve (and thus to the brain), but are connected to many other cells that are connected to each other. Yet while these cells are interconnected, only a few actually carry information to the optic nerve. A certain amount of information is therefore "digested" in the retina. Some of what we think of as brain function (or Hegel's "act of the mind"), actually occurs in the eye itself. The eye does some of our "thinking."

This thinking is evidenced in one way by the iris, the colored part of the eye, which regulates the amount of light the pupil admits by expanding or contracting, depending on the intensity of the light. Interestingly enough, the relative size of the expansion or contraction is also related to our emotions. If we hear, taste, smell, feel, or see something that is pleasing to us, our pupils automatically increase in size, and the reverse is also true. Our bodies, it seems, react to what is already out there, prior to any "act of the mind." My irises, I am certain, expanded as I reveled in the rocks ablaze beyond the river. They were, to me, sublime, their transmutation performed not by my mind but by the sun, the atmosphere, the earth.

Night is fully upon the land now, and if any pockets of warm mystery remain, they have chosen other haunts. Probably they have dissipated, spreading thin their abstruse energy, loading all the night with a hint of their

intrigue. Overhead and all around, reaching to every horizon, stars fill the void. They glow so low in the sky that the night is clearly round, not flat as it seems from my porch in the city. It's like being in a full-scale planetarium, without the mood music. An arid chill has settled on the desert and despite the silent beauty in every direction, I'm considering ending my experience of this day's spectacle. I take one last look across the gorge, as if to bid goodnight to the ponderous peaks, the fractured cliffs, the jumbled stones, and then turn away only to catch myself, as something in that dim obscured landscape has caught me too. I wheel around expecting something, but with vague foreboding, for the night has touched me and I don't know what could be there. At first I see nothing, except the dusky outline of the ridge. But then, where the ridge drops low to Asterisk Pass, I spot the gleam that must have fired in my visual periphery. And as I peer through the night, questioning its source, it grows and glows and grows again. From behind the saddle that is Asterisk Pass shines a light so bright it can only be the moon. It shines brighter as it climbs higher till the first gilded edge peeks over the ridge-line and reveals its celestial body. It inches its way forth and soon it is clear by its lines that this moon is not shaded by my earthen sphere. But as its first quarter clears the ridge it becomes clear that it is obscured by something. A little higher though, and the tables turn. The moon is not so much obscured; rather, it illuminates that which is in its foreground: the Asterisk itself, a gigantic boulder, a misshapen cube, its north side deformed, but balancing nonetheless on one precarious edge. It is the asterisk of Asterisk Pass, the boulder that marks the spot, and on this night it too is punctuated by the full moon rising directly behind it.

For the red rocks of evening I was prepared, even primed. For this I had no preparation, no expectation. But none could have readied me for the rare and dramatic image the moon presented that night. As it rose farther from the desert floor it engulfed the Asterisk, enveloping its form, outlining its shape. It revealed the delicate balance of sculpture on pedestal, of creation on place. It looked vulnerable, perilous, unstable. And it made me anxious.

I watched until the moon cleared the huge rock--a matter of minutes--and then left the night behind. It had given me, already, much for my dreams to consume. Inside I wondered just how wobbly the Asterisk really is, for that, to be sure, is the way it looked in the full illumination of the moon. Could it be tipped, I asked reluctantly, by a few pranksters with a mind for mischief and a rudimentary knowledge of engineering? My fears were unfounded, I assured myself, partly because it had not already happened, and partly because to do it seemed so unconscionable that my fears must be preposterous. Yet I knew that vandals had already tipped over several of the volcanic capstones at a site on the nearby Metolius River. I knew that my downstream neighbor was fighting to develop his property into a resort that would sterilize this land in many ways. And I had seen all too many times in all too many places the maleficence of human presence on natural surroundings. The Asterisk may be secure, I decided, but it was no wonder I was anxious.

I wake the next morning to knocking, and though I can't remember my dreams right off, I have the feeling that someone's been knocking in them as well. I can't imagine who it could be and yell "Who is it?" as I climb from bed. There is no answer. "Who is it?" I yell again, just as the sharp knocking

resumes. I roll to the window and pull back the curtains to see who's being so impolite, but there's no one there, which is all I need to know now that my head is starting to clear. My visitor is not human but animal. Flicker, I believe, is its name. A bundle of bird with wings that do not match its ample body. They're powerful enough I suppose--each "flick" lifts the bird a few feet higher in the air. But they're certainly not meant for soaring--between strokes Flicker loses what it gains. Flicker, it seems, is best suited for knocking on wood, and with my concern for the Asterisk still fresh in my mind, I thank it for doing so.

On the other side of the room I open more curtains to the shaded morning faces of the Smith Rocks. The Asterisk is still there, in its more-precarious-looking-than-it-really-is balance, and after all my second guessing last night I wonder if I shouldn't knock on wood myself. It's a different day today, a different kind of day altogether from yesterday. Clouds have moved in, and surprisingly, it looks like rain. I welcome the change and hurry through my morning routine so that I may watch the weather unfurl on the land.

West of here some 30 miles the old volcanoes of the Cascade Range form a barrier upon which the storms that move in from the Pacific drop the lion's share of their moisture. The clouds pack tight against the mountains--Jefferson, Washington, Three-fingered Jack, the Three Sisters, Broken Top, Bachelor Butte, four of which rise over 10,000 feet above sea level--lighten their load, and then spread across the Central Oregon high country where a sparse and drier landscape welcomes both showers and shade. Little rain usually falls here--less than an inch in most months, eight inches or so in a

good year--but it's been a wet spring and from the looks of things it's not over yet.

After breakfast, I grab my rain gear and roll down the short ramp to the big back deck. The weather is coming from the west though, so I spin to the south side of the house where I can see it all: the ripe gray clouds slipping over the range to my right, the checkerboard of irrigated pastures in front of me, the cliffs and clefts of Smith Rocks to my left, and above, the cirrus, the leaders of the storm, a filmy-looking layer of whitish clouds high enough that the Himalayas, let alone the Cascades, pose no impediment to their procession. They've spread far to the east already, probably as far as the Ochocos. There will be no shadows on the land this day.

The rain clouds are still many miles away, and while I await their arrival my mind wanders back to the events of yesterday. "The events of yesterday. . . ." Yes, so true. They were the events of the day and of the night and of the day turning into night. They were not my events, for surely they would have occurred with or without me, their splendor undiminished. Yet they were just as surely sublime, as I have never seen anything more beautiful in art or in nature than the gilded moon rising slow behind the Asterisk, nor could I imagine anything more sublime than the light of the sun firing earth's cold and barren satellite, setting it aglow, and blessing it with the light that graced my eyes from behind the Asterisk last night. No, I cannot agree with Hegel, who because he believes it lacks spirit, concludes that nature itself is not sublime. Nor can I agree with Immanuel Kant, Hegel's contemporary, who philosophized that the excitation of the mind which is caused by nature creates the sublimity of the mind that is greater

than nature. Kant, at least, credits nature with a major role in the invocation of the sublime, suggesting that it is through the contemplation of the beautiful in nature that we may apprehend the sublime. But after the experience of yesterday, my feeling right now is that the sublime exists both within and without, that its locus is not solely in one place or the other, nor dependent in any way on "the mind" for its existence.

The dull gray clouds glide across the land now, over juniper, sage and pine, heavy-looking, as if they were pushed from behind, up and over, before they could rain their customary measure on the spongy lands west of the Cascades. They pass through low, and I can see the rain coming in sprays that tail off behind the darkest clouds. As the first sprinkles reach my location I move under the eaves of the long wooden house and turn away from the rain to face the rocks. It is rain like this, and the wind which now comes in gusts, that is largely responsible for the beauty of this place. The rocks themselves are products of the earth, volcanic tuff that originated in a series of explosive eruptions between 18 and 10 million years ago near the site of the rocks themselves. But it was the presence of water, and the passage of time, that transformed the glassy volcanic ash into the earthy clay minerals we see today. For eons, eternity by any human standard, the rains have pelted these rocks, delivering minerals, eroding the knobs, spires and cliffs, grain by tiny grain, and expressing themselves in designs that reflect the differing compositions of distinct volcanic episodes as well. More recently, only 1.2 million years ago, the Newberry volcano 30 miles to the south sent a flow of highly-fluid lava down the valley of the ancient Crooked River, filling the existing canyon deep with basalt. Here too the rains were instrumental,

feeding the Crooked River at its source in the Ochoco Mountains, helping it to carve from the basalt the present-day gorge.

I spend most of the day outside, watching the rain pass through in gusting sheets that trail low, dark, fast-moving clouds. These miniature squalls seem to approach with regularity, as if to pace themselves as they eat away at the ancient tuff across the river. Much of the rock is very soft--"junk" in the language of the rock climbers who favor this place more for the diversity of its climbs than the composition of its rock. I pick a spot amongst the spires and crags, the face of a cliff with wide cracks and several outcrops, each of which has some smaller fissures of its own, and try to imagine how that face appeared before the rain acted on it for the past 10 million years. But it's no good. I try a million years, one hundred thousand, a thousand, and now I'm within the realm of my imagination. I can think in thousands of years. I have landmarks. I can place a thousand years, even ten thousand years, in the context of human history, and that seems to facilitate my imagination. More than that though, and I'm lost, blocked from the past, unable to go any deeper. Again, I wonder why this is so, why my imagination is so restricted to what I know, to the familiar.

I try to imagine this place as it was 5,000 years ago, long before any Europeans had marked this land, but still within the frame of what I know of as "my" history, Western history. Now I'm in business. In the river below, unperturbed by the wind and the rain, a lone stilted heron stands impassively. It surveys the nearby waters with enviable patience, a quality inherited from countless generations of this ancient and widespread wader. I close my eyes and as I do I notice that I roll them back, as if to draw my

concentration from the older part of my brain. I see the river now, the brushy shore, and the stony walls above, and all is the same except there is no well-worn trail along the water's edge. The heron is there, stolid as before. But now it begins to walk slowly, broadening its potential source of prey. It displays other strategies as well: hovering above the water and stabbing with its long neck at minnows below the surface, plunging head-first to snare crayfish, jumping undetected from nearby branches, probing the river's substrate for underwater insects, flicking its wings to disturb prey and make it easier to spot, snatching flies and other insects from the air about it, even baiting prey by putting in the water material that will attract it. I see it dancing too, doing the "wing preen," the "circle flight," and the "twig shake" in an effort to attract a mate. These behaviors I know by reading about the herons from a book in the house, but now they've come alive as I imagine the primeval bird making this place its home, adapting to its offerings, performing for its very life and for the life of its progeny.

I can imagine too the humans who hunted this area, explored these rocks, and perhaps sought visions high amongst the crags, where there was much to see, where perspective would be challenged and the sense of self made slight. The Tenino Indians of the Columbia Gorge are known to have lived in the valleys of the Deschutes River to the west and the John Day to the east, so these rocks could not have been unknown to them. And the Northern Paiute, whose territory was primarily to the southeast of here, are also known to have ventured into this land at various times. Lithic scatters, debris from the manufacture of stone tools, are not uncommon amongst the rocks, and two depressions in the area are thought to be the remnants of

house pits. An area excavated a mile to the north during the 1920's and 30's revealed artifacts dating back six to eight thousand years.

I wonder about these people, and about the herons as well, because they were successful inhabitants of this land. The herons lived successfully, here and around the world, by adapting to their surroundings, experimentally, and indeed, creatively. There are 60 distinct species around the globe, and numerous subspecies. The people who lived in the river valleys of this region and along the Columbia to the north were great experimenters, great adapters, superb performers in the game of life too. They fished by a variety of means, including weirs, dams, funnel and hoop traps, open-top baskets, nets with wooden floats and stone sinkers, hooks, harpoons, and poison. They hunted deer, bear, elk and other game, dug camas and kouse roots during the spring and gathered berries and nuts into the fall. And despite the notion now in vogue to dismiss the idea that American Indians lived in balance or harmony with their environment, to suggest instead that they were responsible for significant transformations of the land, the fact remains that the Tenino and other Columbia River tribes thrived for thousands of years, physically, culturally and spiritually, and that the rivers were still full of salmon, the forests still rich with game, when the first white settlers arrived.

It's evening now, though the sky is lighter than it's been all day. Either the storm has moved through, or we're just having a break. It's hard to tell from here sometimes. It's bright to the west, where the sun has nearly set, but who knows what's building up behind those mountains? Tomorrow, tomorrow knows I suppose. I'm not feeling like I know too much at all. I

don't know what the weather holds, where the storms lie, what's behind the mountains. I just know the storms are there, and that they're building.

Like the sensation I gained years ago standing behind the screen of water streaming off my roof, these past two days have changed me. I've seen in their unfolding a performance of interconnected things: the flash of sudden sunrise in whose silence I found peace; the light of sunset draw fire from rock; the fire of sun give light to the night; the rains of spring bring life to the land.

So much beauty, so much spirit, I've not at once seen before. Neither though, have my eyes before been open so wide. What opened them so I cannot be sure. Plotinus, the third century philosopher and author of the Enneads, said we cannot see beauty in nature until we see it in ourselves, but I don't think I could have mistaken this recent beauty during even my darkest days, though perhaps, in some gloomy bar, I would have missed it altogether. But Plotinus, unlike Hegel or even Kant, not only posits wisdom and truth in nature, but gives to it the spirit or "Soul" which Hegel denies: "it possesses, therefore, in its repose, a vision within itself . . . and, achieving thus a resplendent and delicious spectacle, has no further aim."

Has nature indeed no further aim? Animals learn, species evolve, but does this constitute aim or intent, or is this simply the result of life living? My sense is that it is the latter, that Plotinus had great insight. Yet this should not detract in any way from the delightful mystery of living, or the spiritual yearnings of our souls. It suggests only that the future is as open as we are to its possibilities. In either case, my wish is to see life go on living, for it is

indeed a delicious spectacle. For that to occur, however, human beings must find their place amidst the sublime, and the sublime within their midst.

I think back to the sunset, and it is clear to me now that the sublime is in all things, for all are dependent upon and connected to one another. Life here, and the sublime here, is in the performance. Like the action of atmosphere on the light of the sun and light on the color of the rocks, like the dance of the heron and the ingenuity of the native people, it is in the acts we perform that the future is held. The question is not one of where the sublime exists--in nature, in the mind of "man," or in the excitation of the one by the other, but in what one does with the experience of the sublime. Longinus said in the first century that the sublime is that which exceeds, that it is potential, and that it appears where the passion inspired by nature meets the language of consciousness. Sublimity, he said, is the echo of a noble mind. Therein, perhaps, lies a future: in nature, in passion, and in thought. My home in the valley beckons, and children still asleep too. I will bring them nature, as I can, and passion, and will ask for passion and thought in return.

CHAPTER II

POLITICS

Home again, the struggle for perspective is on. The fast-moving, busy and noisy world I left behind during my stay at Monkey Face surrounds me once again. I feel bombarded: not only are there the common things that must be done--work, for example--but there are things that, while they are not absolutely necessary, I feel I must do anyway. How can I be a responsible schoolteacher and not stay in touch with current events? This takes time and energy, most of it emotional. Reading the newspaper can be so demoralizing that I know people who abstain specifically because of the effect it has on their psyche. Likewise, I am learning to ration my time and energy. If the story looks like something the television "news" programs--Hard Copy and the like--would pick up on, I avoid it. I don't need another version of an illicit affair turned sour, and of course violent, camped in my memory. Still, scouring the newspapers is a time-consuming endeavor that confuses and dismays as much as it informs. It also makes obvious the causes of such things as voter apathy, distrust of government, and the general sense of pointlessness that pervades our culture. But "staying informed" does one other thing for me as well: it rekindles the rage I repressed as a child and misdirected as a young adult. Maybe that's why I do it, and why I teach. Maybe I need to stay informed to stoke the fire that makes me teach.

The news really is bad. As the sky cleared over my last evening at Monkey Face I wondered if it was just a temporary respite, or if there was more weather on the way. I decided at the time that in fact I could be sure there were more storms behind the mountains, and that they were building. Now, faced with a stack of newspapers which grew daunting while I was gone, as well as an assortment of articles I collected before I left, I can virtually feel the storms brewing.

I work my way through the divulging pile and sort the clippings into several categories, but the divisions are not clean since the pieces often overlap: cartoons that read like sermons, sermons that make me laugh. There are some wrathful people out there writing some fire and brimstone letters to the editor; I wish they could see me grinning at their self-righteousness. Unfortunately, I won't be doing much grinning during this review of events, except at the irony these clippings preserve. The process is sometimes amusing, more often saddening. Mostly, I find myself shaking my head.

That, exactly, is my reaction to one of the first things that ignites me. The headline: "For most, basic rights are denied." It's a recent article, published April 18, 1993, my mother's birthday. Reading it I wonder how she would feel if she knew that "at least half the world's population is deprived of basic human rights and subject to violations ranging from torture and executions to slavery and starvation."¹ The article is by the Associated Press and is based on a report by the United Nations Human Rights Center. These "violations," it says, are politically motivated human rights abuses and include 5000 cases of "disappearances" reported by the end of March. But the

fate of those 5000, while disturbing, pales in comparison to what follows. "Up to 1.4 billion people worldwide lived in absolute poverty and 1 billion more teetered on the brink, deprived of all economic rights," the report stated. The article goes on to mention plans for a world conference of government leaders on issues of human rights scheduled for Vienna in June, and notes that U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has described it as a "milestone on the road to a better world society." It is the first such gathering in 25 years, the last line of the article concludes matter-of-factly, as if that fact was barely worth mentioning. I catch myself, chin in palm, shaking my head: amazed, perplexed, dismayed. Perhaps if such meetings were held a bit more frequently they wouldn't be called "milestones," but policy assessments instead. I wonder again what the hell my dad was fighting for 25 years ago, when, with genuine belief in his government, he bombarded the infrastructure of North Vietnam. Democracy, supposedly, a chance for a better life for just the sort of people to whom this article refers. His life seems more wasted than ever.

Same day, same paper: "Holocaust: Some doubt it happened," reads the headline. The first paragraph: "A third of Americans are open to the possibility that the Holocaust, Nazi Germany's extermination of 6 million Jews, never happened."² The survey, conducted by the Roper Organization, found that 22 percent of the respondents said it seems possible that the Holocaust never happened and 12 percent said they did not know if that was possible or impossible. Added up, it's a frighteningly large percentage of people living in a free country who are not enjoying the benefit of learning from history. Incidentally, education, so far as this study revealed, has little to

do with learning--"21 percent of college graduates said it seems possible the Holocaust never happened, compared to 20 percent of non-high school graduates." Add to this alarming mixture of information an editorial cartoon a page over, and the picture I'm assembling continues to form its unnerving shape: Over a crudely drawn map of the Northern hemisphere the cartoonist's bubble cries "Help!" with a long tail that places the plea in Bosnia, while across the Atlantic pointed eastward from the United States stand a dozen or more missiles with the bubble reading, "Um. . . That's not really what we're set up for. . . ." And at the bottom of the frame, at the cartoonist's drawing board, are the words ". . . nor for the 21st century in general."³ Another "ethnic cleansing" is underway, and all the A-bombs in the world stand as powerless as a single atom to stop it.

That's just one day's news, but as sobering as it is, even more depressing is the fact that it is no fluke, no particularly down-sided edition of the local daily. Flipping through clips from papers before and after I find plenty more of the same. The Associated Press, citing information from a September 22, 1993 report by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) titled (presumably without intended irony) "The Progress of Nations," notes that "one-fifth of American children live below the poverty line--four times the rate of most industrialized countries, and twice that of the next worse performer, Britain."⁴ Just two weeks later, reporting news from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Associated Press says the number of poor Americans of all ages grew by 1.2 million in 1992, bringing the total to 36.9 million or 14.5 percent of the country's population. Like Unicef Executive Director James P. Grant, who blamed "cutbacks in government services for the decline in the

United States" in the Unicef report, analysts blamed "declining social services" for the increasing poverty in the report by the Census Bureau.⁵

Are these statistical summaries painful or unpleasant? Do they make for dry and difficult reading?

Here are some more:

By October of 1993, more children had been shot and killed in the Chicago area than all the people of all ages killed by gunfire in England during 1991.⁶ That fact, which Joan Beck says in her column for the Chicago Tribune "should prompt persistent outrage," comes on the heels of the death by gunfire of the 51st child under the age of 15 in the Chicago area, as reported by the Tribune in late September.

"What kind of people are we?" she asks.

Beck goes on to point out that among the industrialized countries we are alone, substantiating the article's incisive subtitle, "Guns, violence separate U.S. from civilized world." She cites information from Handgun Control Inc. which says that in 1990, handguns killed 22 people in Great Britain, 87 in Japan, 10 in Australia, 68 in Canada, 13 in Sweden--and 10,567 in the United States! Beck also cites a report issued by Unicef saying that 90 percent of all murderers of young people ages 15 to 24 in the industrialized world live in the United States. And, to refute the National Rifle Association's imminent dismissal of this information, as if degrees of difference would make these deaths acceptable, she provides per capita comparisons as well. There are 15.3 homicides per 100,000 young people annually in this age group in the U.S., compared with 0.4 in Japan, 0.7 in France, 0.9 in Britain, 1.9 in Italy, and, in our nearest neighbor, 3.1 in Canada.

Homicide is the 10th leading killer of all Americans, and the second leading cause of death among 15-to-24-year-olds. Even here at home, at the mouth of the Willamette River Valley, in the relatively tranquil city of Portland, 38 people were murdered in the first eight months of 1993 according to Oregonian columnist Steve Duin.⁷ The "City of Roses," it would seem, needs all the flowers it can get.

"So what can we do," asks Beck, "besides letting our eyes glaze over at the daily news reports of more killings?" Several things, she says, are obvious: "Because violence in this country is inseparable from guns, we will have to start disarming ourselves," she says, adding that industrialized countries that have strict gun laws don't have homicide rates like ours. "That means voters will have to convince legislators they may have more to fear at the polls from outraged and frightened citizens than from well-paid and well-connected gun lobbyists."

Beck's point sounds strikingly similar to that made by Oregon's Clackamas County Circuit Judge Patrick Gilroy when he ruled against a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union seeking an injunction to stop votes on anti-gay rights ordinances in several small Oregon communities. Acknowledging the ACLU's contention that his ruling in effect stifled legislation designed to end bitter debate on the issue by preempting elections and their ongoing divisiveness, Gilroy announced that "the remedy for a pointless use of the initiative process is an informed electorate."

An informed electorate? Is that all we need? Thanks for the tip "Judge Sidestep."

A survey released October 19, 1992 by FAIR, the media watch group, reveals stunning ignorance among voters on basic subjects, even though the poll of 600 likely voters found them to be inundated by the media. As reported by media critics Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon, the majority said they watch a television news program virtually every day and most said they regularly read a newspaper. Yet when asked, for example, whether more money goes to "foreign aid" or "the military" or "welfare," 42 percent selected foreign aid, which accounts for only one percent of spending. Oops. Almost a third chose welfare, which is just five percent of the federal budget. The correct answer, the military, was chosen by only one-fifth of those responding, despite the fact that it is more than four times larger than federal welfare spending. As Cohen and Solomon conclude, "Whatever the particular explanations for the various incorrect answers, the survey as a whole indicates that the problem is more serious than simple ignorance."⁸

Still, in theory at least, Judge Gilroy may be correct. Perhaps an informed and activated electorate is the answer to such things as the frequently distorted, unrepresentative and unconstructive (if not destructive) outcomes of the initiative process, as well as the undue influence of self-interested lobbies. But the obvious question persists: How do we gain an informed electorate, one that will, for example, "convince legislators they may have more to fear at the polls from outraged and frightened citizens than from well-paid and well-connected gun lobbyists." Considering the tendency of the nation's media to impart what is sensational or emotional rather than what is substantial or broadly indispensable; or, for example, its taste for campaign rhetoric over readily obtainable facts; in addition to the complexity

and enormity of those issues that are well-covered in the media; coupled with the general public's overall preoccupation with passive entertainment, disinclination toward reading, and its consequent (in)ability to understand complex issues--the question of how we can gain an informed electorate is a good though discouraging one indeed.

Yet even if we make the great leap forward and assume that we can gain an informed and active electorate, there are still many reasons to question its potential effectiveness, and finding them is as simple as turning the pages of my compiled newspapers.

David Broder, a political reporter for The Washington Post, provides a telling example in a column about the United States Senate. How is it, Broder asks, "that a man who is unknown to most Americans, one of 100 senators and a freshman at that, can dictate energy policy and much of fiscal policy as well to an entire nation?"⁹ Broder explains that when Wisconsin Senator Herb Kohl announced he would accept no gas tax higher than 4.3 cents a gallon, President Clinton, in desperate need of Kohl's vote for his budget plan, was forced to comply. "It didn't matter what Clinton or the rest of Congress thought," states Broder. "That was it. Thus, an ambitious plan to reduce dependency on foreign oil, improve the efficiency of energy use and help clean up the environment went down the drain--and a \$49 billion hole was ripped in Clinton's budget, forcing higher taxes on a few and deeper program cuts for many." Whether or not one agrees with Kohl's position, the point is clear: the leverage that Kohl was not alone in using to impose his personal policy and political agenda on the nation has made the United States

Senate, in Broder's words, "a body that defies contemporary understanding of democracy." But this is not half the story of our Senate "representatives."

Because of the "Connecticut Compromise," the plan proposed by Roger Sherman, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1787, membership in the House of Representatives is proportional to each state's population, though each state, regardless of size, has two senators. This principle of federalism has served the country well for more than two centuries. But, as Broder points out, "With very little notice, the Senate has become increasingly unrepresentative of the United States. As population has concentrated in 100 or so major metropolitan areas and a dozen megastates, the disparity between the House and Senate has grown. In this Congress, a majority of senators--actually 54 of 100--come from states that collectively elect only 87 representatives, one-fifth of the members of the House. That is the major reason why measures like the energy tax can command majorities in the house but be killed in the Senate [emphasis added]."

Clearly, this allows the smaller states to retain considerable influence in the Senate at least, and, as Broder says, "All this may simply reflect the modern application of Sherman's famous compromise. But there are other changes inside the Senate that were not contemplated by the Founders--changes that make it even less representative than it otherwise might be." It is here that this brief homily on history and power gets most disturbing. The Senate, says Broder, "has become a haven for the wealthy. No fewer than 27 of the 100 senators, including Kohl, are millionaires. Only seven of the 100 are women. Only one is black. Latinos are totally absent. Economically and

sociologically, this is an elite group—whose members can easily afford to defy presidents, parties or even public opinion [emphasis added]."

Equally unsettling and paramount to the way senators can "afford to defy" most anything they choose is the way today's senators gain office. Originally, senators were elected by state legislatures, meaning their political life depended in part on representing the legislators who gave it to them in the first place. Now, however, since popular election of senators began 80 years ago, a multi-millionaire like Kohl can literally buy a seat in the Senate. Kohl spent \$7.5 million of his own money, wiping out his opponents in the most expensive election Wisconsin has ever seen. Still, notes Broder sardonically, "his Senate seat cost him substantially less than the \$18.5 million he spent on his basketball team, the Milwaukee Bucks." Senators today, says Broder, "essentially operate as individual political entrepreneurs," and one indication of this trend is the fact that "one-fifth of today's senators held no elective office of any kind before coming to the Senate."

"This is not a plea," Broder maintains, "for abolishing the Senate. It remains a great theater for politics, comedy and occasional drama. But when a single senator, operating solely by his personal compass, can set policy for the whole country, the great design of the Constitution has gone awry." Gone too, in the minds of those who live under the guise--the outward aspect of the Constitution--is the sense that they have anything to do with politics or the course of the future. Present instead are cities that, in the words of newspaper columnist Carl Rowan, are "social powder kegs."

Rowan draws this likeness in yet another article on the senatorial abuse, or at the very least, misuse of power. In it he suggests that we are

wrong if we assume our cities are safer now that a jury has convicted Los Angeles police officers Stacey Koon and Laurence Powell of violating Rodney King's civil rights. This verdict, sent down only after the fateful rioting that followed their earlier acquittals on charges of beating black motorist King, was regarded by some, says Rowan, as a message to racist policemen everywhere, and, therefore, as a signal of peaceful times to come in America's inner cities. Rowan, however, warns that "the feelings of economic neglect and discrimination, of virtual hopelessness, in our cities are more explosive than the passions over one episode of blatant police abuse."¹⁰ Recognizing this, Rowan berates Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole of Kansas and Senator Phil Gramm of Texas for "fanning the flames of violence . . . blocking even tiny gestures of economic justice" by leading a Republican filibuster preventing the Senate from voting on a small economic stimulus program (the so-called "Jobs Bill") that is "really more important to urban tranquillity than the Los Angeles trial." Here again, as with Senator Kohl and his position on the gas tax, the point isn't whether or not one agrees with what Dole and Gramm were doing in the spring of 1993, but why they were doing it. That, according to Rowan, "has almost nothing to do with money but everything to do with politically humiliating and punishing President Clinton," a premise few would dispute. In the process, Dole and Gramm not only denied summer jobs to millions of needy youths and blocked extended unemployment compensation to millions of desperate families, they held up \$300 million needed for immunization of poor children and \$200 million for treatment of AIDS victims. Dole and Gramm, as Rowan says, "are beyond shame for ridiculing such programs as 'pork,'" while Gramm "wallows in the gravy" of

multibillion-dollar federal outlays for a super collider and a space station at the same time he is asking Clinton to cut the "fat" out of a \$700 million college scholarship program or a \$1 billion program to help small businesses, either of which will have more long-lasting positive impact on the economic health and overall well-being of the country. Dole, Rowan says, once laughed gustily when Ronald Reagan explained his lack of concern about the budget deficit by saying, "I figure the deficit is big enough to look out for itself." Now he pretends that adding \$15.4 billion to a \$4 trillion debt will wreck the country." When, asks Rowan, "will these senators show the guts and integrity that the jury displayed in convicting Koon and Powell?" When will they allow the Senate to "work its will and approve programs that represent [emphasis added] opportunity and hope for the most deprived people in the land?"

"Represent" indeed. "Represent" is the key word in Rowan's concluding sentence, and perhaps as well to his entire argument, for while the general public may be ill-informed about specific issues, it is well-tuned to the symbols and sound bites that emerge from our capitol. Both the anger it expresses on the streets and the apathy it reveals at the polls suggest a public that is at once issue-unsophisticated yet message-sensitive--in a word--disillusioned. That is why Rowan is not only affronted by Dole's sudden and purely political penny pinching, but also so concerned about the message, about the "flames that it fans." And indeed it did anger many, as Republican leaders are well aware. But what was their greatest concern? It was not that they were obstructing something that may have been worthwhile; rather, in their unanimous opposition, it was that they might be perceived as

obstructionists. Even in Oregon, which had less to gain or to lose than many parts of the country, the issue caused considerable fomentation. Letters to the editor were highly critical of the Republican hamstringing, wishing upon the Republican party a "Pyrrhic" victory, one that, in the end, costs more than it gains. Other letters, of course, supported Gramm and Dole, buying the "pork" argument. And there is little doubt that the "jobs bill" was, as claimed by Republicans, part pay back by Clinton for the support of many big-city mayors, though that doesn't mean it was a bad idea. In any case, amidst all the rhetoric a message was sent, a perception perpetuated: politics, not pragmatism, guide policy, and politicians care more about power than people. The consequence? So long as gridlock persists in the capitol it will dwell too in the people, in what they believe is possible, in their hopes and dreams and actions.

None of this, of course, is intended to suggest that there are easy answers, or that politicians and leaders in government never work hard toward admirable ends, or that the give and take that oils the wheels of our form of government is necessarily evil or at all dispensable. There are many difficult choices to make, and, it would seem, there simply isn't enough to go around--at least, that is, without taking it from something or someone else. The fundamentals upon which this country was founded guarantee particular rights, but not included in those rights is a guarantee of personal prosperity for all. I acknowledge that. But it isn't really the statistics that move me, this information I process and pass on through the written word. Rather, these things only support what many of us, myself included, shut out to some extent--the images: The image of a downtrodden yet dignified

homeless couple, their child's eyes wide--too wide--and perplexed; images of gray, broken cities where sidewalks are beds and street corners are "schools"; of shriveled, misshapen children, flies on their lips, in Africa, Brazil, Mexico; and of excess--luxuriant, nonchalant excess that by itself bears no blame--but which is not by itself. The other images are by its side. And they are connected. So my moral compass goes into a spin when I consider the disparity between rich and poor, powerful and powerless in this country and in this world, when I think of how things came to be this way, why they remain this way, and whether an honest person could truly say there is anything right about it or that there is nothing that can be done about it.

In an speech in Boston in 1850, at the New England Anti-Slavery Convention, Theodore Parker articulated the ideal which Broder suggests we are today losing to big-money, special-interest politics: "A democracy," said Parker, "is a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people."¹¹ That, admittedly, is a standard toward which we can only expect to strive, for democracy, as Plato wrote in The Republic, "is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a form of equality to equals and unequals alike."¹² Plato, in this honest yet transparently facetious observation, describes in a nutshell both what is good and what is bad about democracy. He implies too why Parker's statement is indeed an ideal, why in fact the words "some" or "sometimes" must be inserted into his lines, depending on the context, in order to ground them in the reality of governing a massive nation constantly in flux, comprised of disparate views, and driven to compete both within and without.

This is the reality of our time just as it was in Plato's. Even within the framework of the well-intentioned and honorably-crafted form of government we call American democracy there are glaring omissions of constraint and opportunities for abuse. Plato, perhaps, would say especially under a system such as ours shall we find such weaknesses. But does this mean we should idly accept the things I'm reminded of virtually every time I pick up a newspaper: the violence and the poverty, the exploitation and the grand excess--the pseudo-democracy; the power games instead of people games, the dysfunctional democracy--*the mockery*; and the accompanying disempowerment of the public, both sensed and real? Does this mean we should simply accept as our fate another of Plato's assessments of democracy, that "democracy passes into despotism?"¹³ I review what I've written about my reading experiences and find that, as indirectly connected as they are on the surface, they are but aspects of a common palsy. And, of course, they are precisely the kinds of things that cause potentially acute and active voters to throw up their hands, to disinvest their hearts and time and energy from the process of which they were designed to be a part--of which they must be a part if it is to have any chance at all to serve them with integrity--and to draw or be pushed into corners where they mutter bitterly of futility and spawn new generations of the disenfranchised.

So, what kind of people are we? Is that the proper question, or should we be asking "What kind of system are we in?" "What kind of product of person and process, of nature and nurture are we?" People made the system, but systems are known to run away. Can a runaway system dictate or at least influence the kind of people we are?

That, to be certain, is the position of many people currently addressing the various interconnected crises in American culture, whether those of poverty, drug abuse, gang violence, mental health, or education. The systems that few people seem to address when discussing cultural crises, however, are natural systems--the systems that provide us with the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and the connections we need to live on this planet. Here too we are in the midst of a crisis, a climacteric in the minds of many, and it is as much a crisis of culture as any of those mentioned above. It is as interconnected with culture as natural systems are interconnected with one another. In scope and immediacy it subsumes other crises. It is the ecological crisis, and in the challenge it represents others pale and blend into its potent mix of both danger and opportunity. While politicians thwart one another over power at the expense of the people they are sworn to serve, they are also failing to adequately address ecological concerns of global proportions and consequences. It is within the framework of what he sees as our most indispensable yet rapidly failing systems--natural systems--that Chet Bowers, in his book Education, Cultural Myths, and the Ecological Crisis: Toward Deep Changes, approaches the underlying problems of our culture, their effect on the future of the planet, and the potential of education, in its broadest sense, to guide us toward a sustainable, if not perfect future. That inquiry, its implications and its offerings, we will take up shortly. But first, in order to provide us with a framework in which to consider that inquiry, let us attempt, at least, to answer the elusive but recurring question, "What kind of people are we?"

Notes

¹Eugene (Ore.) Register Guard, 18 April 1993, sec. A.

²Eugene (Ore.) Register Guard, 18 April 1993, sec. A.

³Toles, Buffalo (N.Y.) News, April 1993. Further documentation unavailable at this time.

⁴Portland Oregonian, 23 September 1993, sec. A, p. 4.

⁵Portland Oregonian, 5 October 1993, sec. B, p. 5.

⁶Portland Oregonian, 3 October 1993, sec. B, p. 3.

⁷Portland Oregonian, 14 October 1993.

⁸Eugene (Ore.) Register-Guard, 18 October 1992, sec. B, p. 4.

⁹Washington Post, 3 August 1993, sec. A, p. 17.

¹⁰Eugene (Ore.) Register-Guard, 1993. Further documentation unavailable at this time.

¹¹"The American Idea," 29 May 1850, quoted in John Bartlett, Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, 16th ed., (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 461.

¹²Plato, The Republic, bk. I, 329, quoted in John Bartlett, Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, 16th ed., (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 75.

¹³Bartlett, 75.

CHAPTER III

PEOPLE

Thumbing through the newspaper recently, casually, not at all in the "search and collect" mode I was in a few months back, I came across a story titled "Fossils point to wide range for earliest known human ancestors."¹ The gist of the article centered around the fact that some newly discovered Ethiopian fossils were determined to be related to the famous skeleton "Lucy," despite their strikingly different sizes. This evidence in turn supported the categorization of other fossils found great distances away from Lucy as having been of the same species, *Australopithecus aferensis*, despite their various sizes. The point, then, was that this discovery could settle the lingering debate over whether these 3.4-million-year-old hominids were correctly categorized as a single species or instead represented two species of different sizes, ranges, and behavior.

But that was not the point to me.

I was struck instead by what was already known, simply that Lucy and her fellow *Australopithecus aferensis* lived and breathed and roamed the earth 3.4 million years ago, that these hominids--primates that diverged from the ape lineage--are the common ancestor not only of other more "recent" australopithecines, all of which became extinct a million years ago, but of the *Homo* line as well--the line leading directly to modern humans. None of this was entirely new to me, but it's not something I often think about either.

Being reminded of it caused me to put down the paper for a few minutes while my mind tried to apprehend the lonely expanse of time that humans and pre-humans have walked this planet. It is not, I discovered, an easy thing to embrace, nor is doing so particularly comforting. We have been here for a very, very long time, in relentlessly advancing degrees of similarity to our present form. For some reason I found that a bit disturbing.

To the sociobiologist, my reaction would come as little surprise. We humans tend to think of ourselves as being very unlike anything else on earth, either past and present. We believe without ever stopping to think about it that we are who we are because that is who we wish to be. We may acknowledge the effects of certain experiences--childhood traumas for example--on our self-esteem or our psyche in general, but all in all, we think we control who we are and how we behave. Our genes, we believe, may have dictated our physical form and even our mental capacity to some extent--we see the similarity between ourselves and our parents, for example, and acknowledge it with grace if not gratitude--but the rest of who we are is of our own making. Lucy, her relatives and her ancestors, we long ago left in the dust.

Edward O. Wilson, the Pulitzer Prize-winning sociobiologist, takes aim at this conception of autonomy, this sense of detachment from our biological origins and the processes of evolution in his book On Human Nature. Human nature, he argues, is hardly a thing of the present or of our own making; rather, its deep structure is essentially a biological phenomenon and very much a thing from the past. Says Wilson of the sociobiological view of human nature: "The most diagnostic features of human behavior evolved by

natural selection and are today constrained throughout the species by particular sets of genes."²

This is a strong statement and deserves elaboration, beginning with a definition of sociobiology itself. As Wilson explains it, sociobiology is a "hybrid discipline that incorporates knowledge of ethology (the naturalistic study of whole patterns of behavior), ecology (the study of the relationships of organisms to their environment), and genetics in order to derive general principles concerning the biological properties of entire societies."(H.N. 16) Sociobiology is genuinely new, adds Wilson, because it extracts the most important facts about social organization from ethology and psychology, reassembles them on a foundation of ecology and genetics--themselves fields of recently increasing sophistication--and studies this matrix at the population level "in order to show how social groups adapt to the environment by evolution."(H.N. 17) Sociobiology is based on comparisons of social species, each of which "can be viewed as an evolutionary experiment, a product of millions of years of interaction between genes and environment."(H.N. 17) Because sociobiologists have carefully examined such experiments, Wilson suggests, "it is now within our reach to apply this broad knowledge to the study of human beings."(H.N. 17) And, adds Wilson, sociobiologists agree with Rousseau that "One needs to look near at hand in order to study men, but to study man one must look from afar."(H.N. 17) So Wilson uses the analogy of looking through the front end of a telescope to describe the way sociobiologists view humans. In this way, sociobiologists "place humankind in its proper place in a catalog of the social species on earth,"(H.N. 17) and from this macroscopic perspective they avoid as well the

crippling intellectual vice of the social sciences--"defiantly self-indulgent anthropocentrism."(H.N. 17)

It is based on this unpresumptuous approach to the application of evolutionary biology to humankind that Wilson makes the statement that human behavior, like the behavior of other social species, is today constrained throughout the species by particular sets of genes. "Evolution has not made culture all-powerful,"(H.N. 18) he says, adding that "the question of interest is no longer whether human social behavior is genetically determined; it is to what extent."(H.N. 19) It is a misconception among many traditional Marxists, some learning theorists, and, says Wilson, "a still surprising proportion of anthropologists and sociologists that social behavior can be shaped into virtually any form."(H.N. 18) The formula "culture makes man makes culture makes man," he proclaims, is only a half truth. Instead, proposes Wilson, "Each person is molded by an interaction of his environment, especially his cultural environment, with the genes that affect social behavior."(H.N. 18)

If this sounds like Wilson is espousing genetic determinism, that is because he is; if it also sounds like Wilson is suggesting an absence of free will among human beings, rest assured he is not. Rather, the point Wilson feels compelled to make, in light of what he sees as the misconstructions of theorists in many fields and an abundance of evidence to the contrary, is that the assumption which has steered the social sciences for decades--that humanity has outgrown its own genes to the extent of being singularly culture-bound--is not only wrong but limiting because it ignores information about our species that is potentially useful in many ways. "The proper study

of man is, for reasons that now transcend anthropocentrism, man,"(H.N. 13) he declares, suggesting that while the study of "man" was once fashionable because humans considered themselves to be at the center or apex of the universe--exceedingly worthy of effusive study due to some divine mandate--that same study is now advisable if only to protect life in general, as well as human beings from themselves. Understanding ourselves not only as cultural beings, Wilson implies, but also as biological beings with still-apparent genetically-determined tendencies can only enhance our ability to make choices about our future, about what will or will not fit into the framework of the kind of beings we already are, and about where we want our culture to go from here. Wilson cites Freud, who said that God has been guilty of a shoddy and uneven piece of work, but says that is true to an even greater degree than Freud intended. "Human nature," says Wilson in a point that suggests both the deterministic yet unintentional character of natural selection and genetics, "is just one hodgepodge out of many conceivable."(H.N. 23)

How, one might ask, can Wilson describe human nature as a "hodgepodge," as only one particular consequence of many possible outcomes? On what does he base this sociobiological view of genetic determinism and its logical extensions, applications, and dispositions of notions to the contrary?

First, as Wilson points out, the natural selection pressures of hunter-gatherer existence have persisted for over 99 percent of human genetic evolution. Bones and tools retrieved from ancient campsites in Africa, Europe, and Asia leave little doubt that this way of life prevailed for over a

million years and was abandoned in most societies only during the last few thousand years.(H.N. 84) It is from this form of existence that our genetic history derives, and little can have changed in the relatively few generations since. This plain observation in itself says much as a matter of common sense--it is basic Darwinism. Wilson calls Darwin "the great expansionist [who] shocked the world by arguing convincingly that life is the creation of an autonomous process so simple that it can be understood with just a moment of reflection. No equations, photons, or computer read-outs required. It can all be summarized in a couple of lines: new variations in the genetic material arise continuously, some survive and reproduce better than others, and as a result organic evolution occurs."³ Or even more simply: "natural selection acting on mutations produces evolution."(B. 46) Even insects, Wilson points out, which are separated from human beings by more than 600 million years of evolution, share with us a common multicellular ancestor. The most complicated organisms, even the human brain--the most sophisticated entity in the known universe--is a product of natural selection. And since the mind or consciousness is a creation of the brain, then, like Darwin, who wrote in his 1838 M Notebook, "Origin of man now proved.--Metaphysics must flourish.--He who understand[s] baboons would do more toward metaphysics than Locke,"(B. 47) we can only wonder what a better understanding of the brain can reveal about the mind. Simple evolutionary theory, more recent refinements included, speaks volumes for the continuing effects of genes on human nature and behavior, for the theory of the genetic evolution of human nature, and for the potential of sociobiology--the study of that influence on the social face of humanity--to enlighten us.

But while a simple understanding of evolutionary processes offers much to support both the credibility and the value of a sociobiological perspective of human nature, Wilson adds a deep and ranging supply of information as evidence for his assertions about the influence of behavioral genes on such things as "the form and intensity of emotional responses, the thresholds of arousals, the readiness to learn certain stimuli as opposed to others, and the pattern of sensitivity to environmental factors that point cultural evolution in one direction as opposed to another."(H.N. 47) As threatening as it may be to our sense of control and autonomy, it is only the tendency of environmental factors "to point cultural evolution in one direction as opposed to another," that Wilson insists we recognize in order to more perceptively know ourselves as a social species and as cultural ecologies. Our history as biological beings with a shared evolutionary history should not, Wilson argues, diminish our self-conception, nor should comparing ourselves to other creatures for the purpose of better understanding ourselves. Says Wilson: "Humanity is exalted not because we are so far above other living creatures, but because knowing them well elevates the very concept of life."(B. 22)

A case in point is Wilson's consideration of the chimpanzee. "If the development of human social behavior retains even a small degree of genetic constraint," says Wilson, then "the status of the chimpanzee deserves especially close attention [because] our growing knowledge of these most intelligent apes has come to erode to a large extent the venerable dogma of the uniqueness of man."(H.N. 25) Wilson's discussion of the chimpanzee begins with what is obvious yet significant and expands from there. "The

grimace of fear, the smile, and even laughter have parallels in the facial expressions of chimpanzees," and they are of course "remarkably similar to human beings in anatomical and physiological details."(H.N. 25) More importantly, perhaps, chimpanzees and humans are very close at a molecular level. Genetic studies show "the summed differences between the two species to be equivalent to the genetic distance separating nearly indistinguishable species of fruit flies, and only twenty-five to sixty times greater than that between Caucasian, Black African, and Japanese populations."(H.N. 25) "About 99 percent of our genes are identical to the corresponding set in chimpanzees, so that the remaining one percent accounts for all the differences between us. The chromosomes, the rodlike structures that carry the genes, are so close that only high resolution photography and expert knowledge can tell many of them apart."(B. 130) It is a demonstrable fact, Wilson says, that the human species descended from Old World primate ancestors, a point of little dispute in the scientific community. "We are literally kin to other organisms,"(B. 130) he says, adding that the pygmy chimpanzee in particular is so close in skeletal structure to "Lucy," one of the probable direct precursors of modern humans, that many biologists believe that "the evolutionary lines leading to human beings and chimpanzees split from a common stock in Africa as recently as five million years ago," a relatively short span in evolutionary time.(B. 128) But Wilson's point is not to equate chimpanzees with humans. "By strictly human criteria," he notes, "chimpanzees are mentally retarded to an intermediate degree. Their brains are only one-third as large as our own . . . [and they] do not remotely approach

the human child in the inventiveness and drive of their language."(H.N. 25-26)

Nonetheless, "the capacity to communicate by symbols and syntax does lie within the ape's grasp."(H.N. 26) Wilson provides evidence of this ability and observes that many zoologists now doubt the existence of an unbridgeable linguistic chasm between animals and humans. He adds that "It is no longer possible to say, as the leading anthropologist Leslie White did in 1949, that human behavior is symbolic behavior and symbolic behavior is human behavior."(H.N. 26) Symbolic thinking, in other words, is not unique to humanity, nor, apparently, is self-awareness. Chimpanzees allowed to peer into mirrors for two or three days exhibit increasingly self-aware behavior--they closely scrutinize their bodies--as they change from treating their reflection as a stranger to recognizing it as themselves.(H.N. 26-27)

"If consciousness of the self and the ability to communicate ideas with other intelligent beings exist, can other qualities of the human mind be far away?"(H.N. 27) Wilson asks regarding the chimpanzee. To answer that question Wilson examines the social existence of chimpanzees, which, though it is "far less elaborately organized than even the hunter-gatherers, who have the simplest economic arrangements of all human beings," nonetheless shares "striking basic similarities" with hunter-gatherer social existence.(H.N. 27)

The apes live in troops of up to fifty individuals, within which smaller, more casual groups break off and reunite in shifting combinations of individuals over periods as brief as a few days. Males are somewhat larger than females, to about the same degree as in human beings, and they occupy the top of well-marked dominance hierarchies. Children are closely associated with their mothers over a period of years, sometimes even into maturity. The young chimpanzees themselves remain allied

for long periods of time; individuals on occasion even adopt younger brothers or sisters when the mother dies.

Each troop occupies a home range of about twenty square miles. Meetings between neighboring troops are infrequent and usually tense. On these occasions nubile females and young mothers sometimes migrate between the groups. But on other occasions chimpanzees can become territorial and murderous. Like primitive human beings, chimpanzees gather fruit and other vegetable foods primarily and hunt only secondarily. Perhaps the most remarkable form of man-like behavior among chimpanzees is the use of intelligent, cooperative maneuvers during the hunt. Normally only adult males attempt to pursue animals--another humanoid trait. The distribution of meat is also cooperative. On a few occasions males go so far as to tear off pieces of meat and hand them over to supplicants. This is a small gesture by the standards of human altruism but it is a very rare act among animals--a giant step, one might say, for apekind.(H.N. 27-29)

Also significant, Wilson points out, is the fact that chimpanzees have a rudimentary culture. Zoologists "have discovered a remarkable repertory of tool use in the ordinary life of apes"(H.N. 29) that includes using sticks and saplings to defend against leopards; hurling sticks and stones during attacks on baboons, humans, and other chimpanzees; digging with sticks to open termite mounds and "fishing" for termites with modified plant stems; prying open boxes with sticks; and removing water from tree holes in "sponges" constructed of chewed leaves.(H.N. 29-30) The use of sticks to pry open boxes, in particular, demonstrates the chimpanzees' ability to invent techniques and transmit them to others. This method was invented by one or a few individuals at the Gombe Stream Reserve and then spread through the troop by imitation. Each tool-using behavior recorded in Africa is limited to certain populations of chimpanzees but has a mostly continuous distribution within its range, which, observes Wilson, "is just the pattern expected if the behavior had been spread culturally . . . [and] it suggests that the apes have managed to

cross the threshold of cultural evolution, and thus, in an important sense, to have moved into the human domain."(H.N. 31)

This summary of Wilson's account of the chimpanzee is presented to establish what he calls "a fundamental point about the human condition: that by conventional evolutionary measures and the principal criteria of psychology we are not alone, we have a little brother species. The points of similarity between human and chimpanzee social behavior, when joined with the compelling anatomical and biochemical traces of relatively recent genetic divergence, form a body of evidence too strong to be dismissed as coincidence."(H.N. 31) These points of similarity, Wilson believes, "are based at least in part on the possession of identical genes,"(H.N. 31) and he summarizes his argument in this way:

The general traits of human nature appear limited and idiosyncratic when placed against the great backdrop of all other living species. Additional evidence suggests that the more stereotyped forms of human behavior are mammalian and even more specifically primate in character, as predicted on the basis of general evolutionary theory. Chimpanzees are close enough to ourselves in the details of their social life and mental properties to rank as nearly human in certain domains where it was once considered inappropriate to make comparisons at all. These facts are in accord with the hypothesis that human social behavior rests on a genetic foundation--that human behavior is, to be more precise, organized by some genes that are shared with closely related species and others that are unique to the human species. The same facts are unfavorable to the competing hypothesis which has dominated the social sciences for generations, that mankind has escaped its own genes to the extent of being entirely culture-bound.(H.N. 32)

"Our" history, it seems, goes beyond even the hunter-gatherer existence of early humans. Part of what we call "human nature" is the product of a genetic history--itself shaped by natural selection acting on a primitive culture--that precedes "us."

Still, there is much more to Wilson's argument--that contemporaneous human behavior is constrained by heredity--than this comparison of humans with other species of social animals. He also cites a convincing array of specifically human examples to support his view, including sociobiological explanations (as opposed to the traditional anthropological explanations) of universal human traits such as incest taboos and hypergamy (the female practice of marrying men of equal or greater wealth or status); the implications of persistent genetic disorders; research comparing fraternal and identical twins; learning rules (the predisposition to learn one behavior as opposed to another, even when both are taught with equal intensity), and associated behaviors like the phobias common in humans. Of human phobias, for example, Wilson says "It seems significant that they are most often evoked by snakes, spiders, rats, heights, close spaces, and other elements that were potentially dangerous in our ancient environment, but only rarely by artifacts such as knives, guns, and electrical outlets."(H.N. 68) Biologists understand such phobias as mental developments designed to promote the quick and automatic reactions that insure survival and reproduction. That is, we "overlearn" particular responses for our own protection: "Better to crawl away from a cliff, nauseated by fear, than to walk its edge absent-mindedly."(H.N. 68)

Having laid a foundation of biological evidence in support of sociobiological theory, Wilson proceeds to apply his perspective to "modern" humanity. The influences of hereditary qualities of hunter-gatherer existence on subsequent cultural evolution are substantial, he believes, and can be seen in the major features of the early civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India,

China, Mexico, and Central and South America. The similarities between these cultures, he says, "cannot be explained away as the products of chance or cultural cross-fertilization."(H.N. 89) "It is true," he acknowledges, "that the archives of ethnography and history are filled with striking and unquestionably important variations in the details of culture," but, he insists, "it is the parallelism in the major features of organization that demands our closest attention in the consideration of the theory of the dual track [genetic and cultural--his theory] of human social evolution."(H.N. 89) These parallels in the emergence of civilization are the result, in Wilson's language, of "hypertrophy, the extreme growth of pre-existing structures. Like the teeth of the baby elephants that lengthen into tusks, and the cranial bones of the male elk that sprout into astonishing great antlers, the basic social responses of the hunter-gatherers have metamorphosed from relatively modest environmental adaptations into unexpectedly elaborate, even monstrous forms in more advanced societies."(H.N. 89) Some of these "outgrowths," Wilson points out, "represent only slight alterations that have not yet concealed their Pleistocene origins."(H.N. 95) The details of child care and of kin classification, for example, are recognizable across the millennia; nationalism and racism are the culturally nurtured outgrowths of simple tribalism. Other hypertrophies, however, such as religion and class structure, "are such gross transmutations" of hunter-gatherer existence that they are difficult to trace.(H.N. 95) Still, understanding what we can about the rudiments of human social behavior, which, since we are inescapably social beings is human nature, can only serve us. "Self knowledge," Wilson proposes, "will reveal the elements of biological human nature from which

modern social life proliferated in all its strange forms. It will help to distinguish safe from dangerous future courses of action with greater precision. We can hope to decide more judiciously which of the elements of human nature to cultivate and which to subvert, which to take open pleasure with and which to handle with care."(H.N. 97)

Aggression, for obvious reasons, is one of the elements of human nature about which Wilson is concerned in modern social life. It is, as he notes, a favorite topic of college seminars and cocktail parties, and he answers the question of human aggression--the too familiar nature/nurture simplification--in predictable fashion: Yes, humans are innately aggressive, the result of biological imperative, of gaining control over necessities; yet "like so many so many other forms of behavior and 'instinct,' aggression in any given species is actually an ill-defined array of different responses."(H.N. 101) No fewer than seven categories of aggression, Wilson notes, can be distinguished--the defense and conquest of territory, sexual aggression, acts of hostility by which weaning is terminated, aggression against prey, defensive counterattacks against predators, and moralistic and disciplinary aggression used to enforce the rules of society.(H.N. 101-102) In some combination of factors in this list perhaps, and perhaps as well in some additions to this list, dwells a partial or underlying explanation for the violence that pervades this country. In either case, Wilson says, "The clear perception of human aggressive behavior as a structured, predictable pattern of interaction between genes and environment is consistent with evolutionary theory. It should satisfy both camps in the venerable nature-nurture controversy. On the one hand it is true that aggressive behavior, especially in its more dangerous

forms of military action and criminal assault, is learned. But the learning is prepared; we are strongly predisposed to slide into deep, irrational hostility under certain definable conditions."(H.N. 105-106)

The cultural evolution of aggression, then, appears to be guided jointly by three forces: "a genetic predisposition toward learning some form of communal aggression; the necessities imposed by the environment in which the society finds itself; and the previous history of the group, which biases it toward the adoption of one cultural innovation over another."(H.N. 114) Wilson describes the process with the following topographic metaphor: "The society undergoing cultural evolution can be said to be moving down the slope of a very long developmental landscape. The channels of formalized aggression are deep; culture is likely to turn into one or the other but not to avoid them completely. These channels are shaped by the genetic predisposition to learn aggressive responses and the physical properties of the home range that favor particular forms of responses. Society is influenced to take a particular direction by idiosyncratic features of its pre-existing culture."(H.N. 114) In other words, the question is not one of whether we are aggressive, but of what compels our aggressiveness and in what ways we display it. As Wilson says of the categories of aggression mentioned earlier, not one of them exists in the form of a general instinct over a broad array of species. Rather, "each category can be added, modified, or erased by an individual species during the course of its genetic evolution."(H.N. 101) The next question, then, is whether these categories can be modified during the course of cultural evolution.

In partial answer to that question, Wilson dismisses a theory set forth by Freud and modernized by Konrad Lorenz. Where Freud interpreted aggressive behavior in humans beings as the outcome of a drive that constantly seeks release, Lorenz, in his book On Aggression, concluded that humans share a general instinct for aggressive behavior with other animal species, and that this drive must somehow be relieved, if only through competitive sports.(H.N. 101) This "drive-discharge" model, Wilson says, has been replaced by a more subtle explanation based on the interaction of genetic potential and learning. The most persuasive piece of evidence for this "culture-pattern" model comes from anthropologist Richard G. Sipes, who notes that "if aggression is a quantity in the brain that builds up and is released, as suggested by the drive-discharge model, then it can take the form of war or the most obvious substitutes for war, including combative sports, malevolent witchcraft, tattooing and other ritualized forms of body mutilation, and the harsh treatment of deviates. As a consequence, warlike activities should result in a reduction of its lesser substitutes. If, in contrast, violent aggression is the realization of a potential that is enhanced by learning, an increase in the practice of war should be accompanied by an increase in the substitutes."(H.N. 105) Sipes, therefore, compared the qualities of ten notably warlike societies with those of ten pacific societies and found that the genetic potential and learning or "culture-pattern" model prevails over the drive-discharge hypothesis: "the practice of war is accompanied by a greater development of combatant sports and other lesser forms of violent aggression."(H.N. 105)

So, "although the evidence suggests that the biological nature of humankind launched the evolution of organized aggression and roughly directed its early history across many societies, the eventual outcome of that evolution will be determined by cultural processes brought increasingly under the control of rational thought."(H.N. 116) As primitive humans, Wilson says, it was necessary for us to divide the universe into friends and enemies and to respond almost automatically with quick, deep emotion to even the mildest threats. Doing so enhanced the chance of survival and therefore solidified the predisposition genetically. The practice of war, Wilson says, is a perfect example of hypertrophy, or an outgrowth of this predisposition.

Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that "the full evolution of warfare can be reversed, even in the face of entrenched cultural practice."(H.N. 117) The Maori of New Zealand, for example, "were among the most aggressive people on earth" in pre-European times. Warfare was a way of life. "Insults, hostility, and retribution were carefully tallied in tribal memories. Defense of personal honor and courage were the paramount virtues, victory by force of arms the highest achievement."(H.N. 117) The prime mover of this warfare was ecological competition. "As groups became overcrowded, they expanded by displacing and reducing rival groups,"(H.N. 118) which held overall population at a level density. But when European firearms were introduced the "terrible equilibrium" was finally disrupted, first with even more devastating effects. During twenty years of musket warfare, one quarter of the Maori population--thousands of people from forty different tribes--died as a result of the conflict. Eventually, however, the old

values crumbled and by the 1840's "the Maoris as a whole converted rapidly and massively to Christianity, and warfare among the tribes ceased entirely."(H.N. 119)

Wilson recapitulates the total argument in this way:

Human aggression cannot be explained as either a dark-angelic flaw or as a bestial instinct. Nor is it the pathological symptom of upbringing in a cruel environment. Human beings are strongly predisposed to respond with unreasoning hatred to external threats and to escalate their hostility sufficiently to overwhelm the source of the threat by a respectably wide margin of safety. Our brains do appear to be programmed to the following extent: we are inclined to partition other people into friends and aliens, in the same sense that birds are inclined to learn territorial songs and to navigate by the polar constellations. We tend to fear deeply the actions of strangers and to solve conflict by aggression. These learning rules are most likely to have evolved during the past hundreds of thousands of years of human evolution, and, thus, to have conferred a biological advantage on those who conformed to them with the greatest fidelity.(H.N. 119)

But, adds Wilson, "the learning rules of violent aggression are largely obsolete. We are no longer hunter-gatherers who settle disputes with spears, arrows, and stone axes. Yet to acknowledge the obsolescence of the rules is not to banish them. We can only work our way around them.(H.N. 119)" Wilson mentions the Yanomamo, a surviving hunter-gatherer culture of South America who have been heard to say, "We are tired of fighting. We don't want to kill anymore. But the others are treacherous and cannot be trusted."(H.N. 119) It is not hard to see, Wilson adds, that all people think the same way. So he says that if pacifism is to be a goal, then political and cultural ties that create a confusion of cross-binding loyalties should be promoted to provide a more durable foundation for peace. The thicker the tangle is spun, he suggests, the more difficult it will be for future generations to regard each

other as completely different on the basis of distinctions in race, language, nationhood, religion, ideology, and economic interest. "Undoubtedly," he concludes, "there exist other techniques by which this aspect of human nature can be gently hobbled in the interest of human welfare."(H.N. 120)

So what kind of people are we, all specifics aside? In "Hope," the final chapter of On Human Nature, Wilson says "Human nature is not just the array of outcomes attained in existing societies. It is also the potential array that might be achieved through conscious design by future societies."(H.N. 196) To Wilson, this is not mere wishful thinking: "By looking over the realized social systems of hundreds of animal species and deriving the principles by which these systems have evolved, we can be certain that all human choices represent only a tiny subset of those theoretically possible."(H.N. 196) The human predicament--existing as "a hodgepodge of special genetic adaptations to an environment largely vanished, the world of the Ice-Age hunter-gatherer"--is not so tight, Wilson says, "that it cannot be broken through an exercise of will."(H.N. 196) Moreover, in his chapter on heredity, Wilson notes that genetic studies based on the comparison of identical and fraternal twins suggest that primary mental abilities and perceptual and motor skills are the ones most influenced by heredity, while personality traits are the least influenced.(H.N. 67-68) "The inference to be drawn," Wilson says, "is that the abilities needed to cope with relatively invariant problems in the physical environment develop along narrow channels, while the qualities of personality, which represent adjustments to the rapidly shifting social environment, are more malleable."(H.N. 68) It seems, then, that the answer to the question, "What kind of people are we?"

is undecided. We have what Wilson calls predispositions or tendencies, though it might be more useful to think of them as capacities, for capacities suggest abilities or potentials, and even aggression--aggressive learners and aggressive citizens come to mind--can be used positively. Yet there is also much that we are not, yet could be; that we do not have, but could have, as suggested by many things: the array of human cultures that exist or have existed in forms utterly distinct from our own, each a remarkably functional and aesthetic mutation of fundamental human nature; the extraordinary social systems of other animal species, which, like those of other cultures, tell us much about potential, about what can be; and the qualities of human personality, which, as Wilson notes, are more plastic, more susceptible to culture than the original, essential aspects of human nature. So perhaps we are asking the wrong question. It is important to know what kind of people we were, where our "capacities" lie. As Wilson says, "even if the power of self-determination is turned full on, the energy and materials crises solved, old ideologies defeated, and hence all societal options laid open, there are still only a few directions we will want to take." (H.N. 82) Others, he warns, being too distant from our genetic predispositions, "will lead to social and economic perturbations, a decline in the quality of life, resistance, and retreat." (H.N. 82) But knowing what we were and why we are the way we are is only part of the story, albeit, perhaps, the longer part. What remains, however, a cultural sprint towards a sustainable balance between the human species and the habitat that supports us, may be both more challenging and more exciting than the eonian struggle that brought us here. Perhaps the question we should be asking, then, is what kind of people can and do we want to be? "All

of man's troubles may well arise, as Vercors suggested in You Shall Know Them, from the fact that we do not know what we are and do not agree on what we want to become."(B. 20)

Recognizing what we share in common with other people near and far, as well as increasing the number and complexity of these connections, or inseparably "tangling" ourselves as Wilson suggests, does indeed hold great promise for the hope of this and future generations. But in fact, we are already connected to people around the world in ways of which we are largely unaware. In the natural systems that support life on this planet we are webbed to such a degree that scientists are only beginning to unravel the extent of this interconnectedness, as well as the consequences of perturbations in these systems. In a sense, the acts we execute on the environment are as much acts of aggression as of survival. Where once humans exploited nature as was necessary for their survival yet nonetheless regarded it as something of which they were no more than a part, the natural world has more recently come to be seen as the enemy--something to be beaten back, conquered, and controlled. Our literature is rich with the imagery of domination and defeat as we have pushed our only frontier into the oblivion of space. And a body of counterpoising literature has only recently begun to take hold in our questioning sensibilities. In addition, as humans have accelerated the pace and extent of the war on nature, the developed nations, by consuming resources at startling and disproportionate rates, have subtly declared war on the less developed nations, extracting the world's resources and polluting it at an unprecedented rate. The less developed nations, likewise, in an attempt to achieve a standard of living approaching that of the developed countries,

have counterattacked by pursuing inadvisable short-term measures. The victim, again, is the environment, most notably the world's equatorial rain forests. The roots of this aggressive behavior toward the natural world, as well as a perspective on what can be done about it, are the subject of the next chapter, as we turn to the connections between culture, education, and the ecological crisis.

Notes

¹John Noble Wilford, "Fossils point to wide range for earliest known human ancestors," Portland Oregonian, 18 November 1993, sec. A, p. 20.

²Edward O. Wilson, On Human Nature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 43.

Further citations are included in the text with the abbreviation (H. N.).

³Edward O. Wilson, Biophilia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 46.

Further citations are included in the text with the abbreviation (B.).

CHAPTER IV

PERSPECTIVE

Concluding the first paragraph of his introduction to Education, Cultural Myths, and the Ecological Crisis: Toward Deep Changes, Oregon-based educator Chet Bowers says, "How our cultural beliefs contribute to the accelerating degradation of the environment, it will be argued here, is the most fundamental challenge we face. All other social and educational reforms must be assessed in terms of whether they mitigate or exacerbate the ecological crisis [emphasis added]."¹ Clearly, this is a statement that, if accepted as valid or accurate or simply as sensible, challenges us at the very deepest levels and demands drastic changes in how, and especially why, we do the things we do. It is an incredibly exacting proposition. It tells us that we must use our intellect to recognize the consequences of old patterns of belief and behavior so that we can in turn intellectualize the necessary correctives. Of even greater rigor, it tells us that we must go beyond "merely" intellectualizing our way through an understanding of our stiffly held beliefs, but that we must also reform, if not in ourselves then at least in our children, the very bases upon which we have conceptualized our version of the good life. Ultimately, it entails a genuine change in consciousness, a fundamental change in the way we see ourselves in relation to the world and to one another.

On what does Bowers base this demanding premise? Why should we accept this guideline for cultural transformation, this veritable affront to our society, to the progress and prosperity we have so vigorously strewn across the land?

Bowers answers that it is a matter of perspective, beginning with the opening sentence of his first chapter: "A cultural theme most middle class Americans have grown up with is that change is not only a normal aspect of existence, but that it is also progressive." (Ed. 9) This is one of the "cultural myths" to which Bowers refers in his title, an example of why what is usually labeled "the ecological crisis" by both environmentalists and their skeptics alike is actually much more complicated than that description implies, and, because it is a presumption that pervades mainstream America, it serves as a powerful illuminator of the connection between education, culture, and our ecological future that is the motive for Bower's inquiry.

This cultural myth helps to instill and entrench particular aspects of what Bowers refers to as a person's "natural attitude"--"a culturally based experience of which, by definition, we are not aware." (Ed. 22) A more obvious and clarifying example is the habit within our culture of associating "up" with good and "down" with bad; upon closer inspection our proclivity to associate progress with change is both equally "natural" and similarly unfounded, except within the context of the cultural templates we have received from previous generations, as opposed to associations derived from our own experience.

Bowers substantiates his perspective--that how our cultural beliefs contribute to the accelerating degradation of the environment is the most

critical challenge we face, and that all social and educational reforms must be assessed in terms of their effect on the environment--by citing a growing body of evidence that shows an upward curve in the level of demands being made on the environment while the sustaining capacity of the systems that comprise our habitat show a downward curve. "The evidence of the trends moving in opposite directions," he contends in a brief yet convincing presentation of evidence, "is beyond scientific dispute."(Ed. 3) He goes on to acknowledge considerable disagreement over the many specifics of the ecological crisis--the rate and long-term consequences of global warming, for example. But the point is clear, the details less significant: while the sustaining capacity of the planet is on the decline, the demands of human populations are on the rise--upon this generalization there can be no disagreement. Neither, for that matter, is there any question that on a global scale desertification is expanding, topsoil depletion is worsening, toxic waste is accumulating, water resources are diminishing, and biological diversity is being sacrificed on a daily basis; or that we have crises of economics, distribution, energy, food, housing, sanitation, and so forth. And while human activities are responsible for these predicaments, so too are human societies--the relatively innocent and the plainly indictable alike--suffering in ways both physical and spiritual from their proliferation. Considered alone or together, these things bring into serious question the validity of our culture's assumptions about what constitutes progress. Furthermore, as Wilson suggests, it is a grave error to view all this as simply part of a "Darwinian" process in which humans are just the latest burden on the environment:

Human destructiveness is something new under the sun. Perhaps it is matched by the giant meteorites thought to smash into the earth and darken the atmosphere every hundred million years or so. But even that interval is ten thousand times longer than the entire history of human civilization. In our own brief lifetime humanity will suffer an incomparable loss in aesthetic value, practical benefits from biological research, and worldwide biological stability. Deep mines of biological diversity will have been dug out and carelessly discarded in the course of environmental exploitation, without our even knowing fully what they contained.²

Still, as Bowers notes, it is easy to understand our inclination to assume that change is always good or progressive, that "a change'll do ya' good," as the common parlance (a reliable reflection of unexamined beliefs) would suggest. This tendency, this "taken-for-granted belief," has its roots in centuries past, as Bowers describes:

These beliefs, born in a period of self-conscious emancipation from what was viewed as the "Dark Ages," were seen as the basis for human empowerment: in overcoming illness and death, the drudgery of work, the suppression of human freedom, and the barriers to material success. The partial fulfillment of the promise has not been entirely illusory, but the essential core of these beliefs evolved in such a way that lost touch with the realities of an environment that has natural limits.(Ed. 23)

Progress, in the form of the Industrial Revolution, innovations in high technology, and advances in biomedicine, for example, have continued to foster what Bowers calls a mind set that assumes environmental limits can be transcended through the resourcefulness of human rationality. More problematic yet, says Bowers, is that "the distinctive set of beliefs that many people in the dominant culture [mainstream Americans] associate with progress and modernity fosters mental habits particularly unsuited for recognizing either implicitly assumed beliefs or evidence that challenges the

idea that change is inherently progressive."(Ed. 23) In other words, not only are we unaware of our natural attitudes (and the fact that they are not even really even ours, per se, but rather the templates of previous generations' experience passed down to us through language and tradition), but it is only through them that we are able to "see" at all. Like a myopic lens, they distort the world in such a way that we continue to see change as inherently progressive, despite evidence to the contrary.

And the evidence is everywhere. Besides the presence of burgeoning ecological perils, Bowers cites aspects of society that are breaking down and their consequences--urban violence, teen pregnancies, the abuse of drugs, increasing numbers of the homeless and impoverished, skyrocketing national debt--precisely the kinds of things that accumulated in piles of newsprint during my news gathering foray this past year. These things, Bowers maintains, are manifestations of a mind set constructed during an earlier time and of assumptions about the world that have proved to be specious and therefore ineffective in dealing with many of today's realities. "Yet [because] science continues to promise technological and thus human advancement,"(Ed. 9) we fail to see the connection between these aspects of social breakdown and our underlying assumptions about the world. We unwittingly cling to the myth that change is always progressive, so we see each of these things as having specific causes which can be managed by specific remedies, rather than question the precepts of our culture at a deeper level.

To illustrate the point, Bowers refers to an article in Rolling Stone, wherein Mark Hertsgaard cites examples of how the leading newspapers for

years downplayed environmental issues in favor of more traditional headlines. As an example, Hertsgaard cites an article in the New York Times about how human activity was changing the earth's atmosphere that in 1979 was relegated to page 42, while an article with nearly identical content (by then labeled the "greenhouse effect") made page one headlines in 1988. "This example of highly educated people [top news editors] ignoring a growing body of scientific evidence pointing to the very real possibility of ecological catastrophe within our own lifetime," (Ed. 35) reveals the danger, says Bowers, of continuing to perceive the world through the taken-for-granted beliefs of previous generations, namely, in this case, the blinding presumption that the earth's resilience is boundless, bolstered by the modern notion that technological advances will always overcome whatever problems we may create. Neither belief, we are finally learning, is grounded in reality, yet the attitudes inherited by us have caused this to be a slow and contentious awakening.

What then, are the sources of these dangerously unfounded beliefs? How could beings as rational as us fall victim to such misconceptions?

Ironically, it is our rationality, precisely, that is the answer to those questions, despite the fact that our egos and our natural attitudes call on us to believe something quite to the contrary. After all, wasn't it our ability to reason that carried us to a state of prosperity and convenience never before known to humanity? The answer, of course, is "yes," but the philosophies that raised rationality to a position of unquestioned exaltedness and which paved the way to explosions in industry and technology did not recognize limits to their implementation. The capacity for foresight, so crucial to the

aspects of prediction and control in the development of technology, did not in turn preclude shortsighted ambition. Furthermore, as a cultural bias, the rationalist perspective fails to recognize the depth and force of culture in society, and it is therefore largely useless, if not hazardous, to attempts to reorient our culture.

As a case in point, Bowers cites a special issue of Scientific American devoted to "Managing Planet Earth." In an article that typified the magazine's treatment of the ecological crisis, William D. Ruckelshaus urges that "'a clear set of values consistent with the consciousness of sustainability' be articulated by national leaders." (Ed. 14) In other words, "Provide the data, state the issues clearly, utilize government incentives, and people will have a rational basis for changing their lifestyles," Bowers notes sarcastically. (Ed. 14-15) "Again," he adds, "we find the assumption that humans are rational beings when they have the right data, but no acknowledgment that people are essentially cultural beings, that the world is made up of multiple cultures, and that culture makes the outcome of the political process far more problematic than is recognized by people who hold a rationalistic point of view." (Ed. 15) Similarly, Bowers warns, "if the thinking that guides educational reform does not take account of how the cultural beliefs and practices passed on through schooling relate to the deepening ecological crisis, then these efforts may actually strengthen the cultural orientation that is undermining the sustaining capacities of natural systems upon which all life depends." (Ed. 1)

To understand the relationship between culture and any hope we may have of bringing modern mainstream culture into a sustainable balance with

the habitat, it is first necessary to further define culture itself and to apprehend what Bowers calls the "culture-language-thought connection." This, Bowers suggests, is especially true for a discussion aimed at educators, since culture is the medium of the classroom. Bowers begins his discussion of culture, and of why culture is so difficult to recognize, by referring to the definition provided by anthropologist Clifford Geertz: "Culture patterns--religious, philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, ideological--are 'programs'; they provide a template or blueprint for the organization of social and psychological processes, much as genetic systems provide such a template for the organization of organic processes."(Ed. 21) Geertz, as Bowers points out, is speaking metaphorically, since, unlike genetic codes, it *is* possible to change cultural patterns if they are understood "at the explicit level of awareness." This, however, is more easily said than done, since these "culture patterns" are so pervasive and subsuming. They are, in Bowers' words, "the largely invisible yet always present sources of authority in peoples' lives."(Ed. 21) It is because culture is the source of so much authority, says Bowers, that it is necessary to examine "the specific set of beliefs and assumptions that has had a privileged position in Western thought for nearly 400 years."(Ed. 21)

Much has been written about the influence of so-called Enlightenment thinkers on the modern mind set, but Bowers' description is suitably brief so I will summarize it here with only minimal additions. Key aspects of our belief system, Bowers says, "can be traced directly to the seventeenth-and eighteenth-century thinkers who laid the foundation of modern Western consciousness."(Ed. 23) Included here is a culturally specific view (mainstream American) of individualism, the rational, and the nature of

language; in addition, other similarly problematic Western cultural assumptions that extend even further back in time (like attitudes toward nature) were strengthened by the emergence of these Enlightenment philosophies.

Bowers begins with John Locke (1632-1704), and though many philosophers have been called the founders of modern philosophy, Locke may deserve that distinction above all others. His political theories impacted much of the world, including the founding fathers of the United States, who drew directly upon his ideas for the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. But it was his arguments which helped establish the primacy of the individual that are of particular relevance to this discussion. Like others before him, Locke tried to understand the individual as living in a "state of nature," a theoretical state in which human beings might have lived before societies were organized. In his conception of this state, humans naturally lived strictly according to reason and the only purpose for membership in society was the enhanced self-interest provided by the predictability of government as a third party adjudicator, especially as it applied to property rights. Locke also suggested that the value and purpose of liberty resides in the opportunities for pursuing individual happiness, which is the only thing capable of motivating people, and that good is whatever promotes pleasure--either physical or psychological--and evil is whatever produces pain, again in a general sense. And though his doctrines contributed significantly to both the American and French Revolutions and to democratic ideals in general, it is his conspicuous emphasis on the primacy of the individual that may represent his deepest and most problematic cultural penetration.

René Descartes (1596-1650), Bowers notes, also organized his philosophy around the individual who, "through a process of radical doubt, supposedly is then able to exercise a form of rationality free of the influence of both tradition and culture."(Ed. 24) This should sound familiar to most people, for indeed it is only when we question ourselves most critically that we trust our judgment most securely. Yet we are in error if we believe we ever think in a cultural vacuum, free from culturally imbued biases, despite our most spirited attempts to be conscious of the sources and patterns of our conceptions. In a similar way, despite persistent incongruities, mistakes and disasters, we tend to privilege the "hard sciences" with unquestioning trust because they are restricted by the exacting proofs of scientific method; yet here again we are in error if we assume that culturally imbued biases do not invade the sciences, despite their (and our) presumptions of objectivity. Nevertheless, this is precisely what we commonly do, and this too is a part of Descartes' legacy. As Bowers notes, "Descartes' formulation of thought as an inner mental process [potentially culture-free and genuinely objective] helped establish today's dualisms of mind and body and of thought and nature [the external world]. The contemporary understanding of objective knowledge, procedural thinking, and the reduction of a thing or process to its smallest components also have their roots in Descartes' epistemology."(Ed. 24)

These dualisms and their accompanying belief in the objectivity of human experience are further described by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, according to whom "the fundamental change in our way of thinking introduced by Descartes is to conceive and grasp the world as a picture."(Ed. 27) In other words, the shift of consciousness brought about by

the Enlightenment thinkers led people to view the external world or nature as something that could be known, objectified, reduced, controlled; and exploited with predictability. The external world lost its depth, and its mystery. This was a fundamental shift. No longer was nature something which was learned about inductively, gradually and holistically, and modified in ways that reflected that historical approach. Instead, it was apprehended deductively and thereby quickly; it was perceived in terms of its parts and therefore manipulated more freely, since the interactions that formed the sum went unrecognized. A new "narrative" was formed, one unlike any that existed before, and a multitude armed with science began marching toward the natural places and indigenous peoples of the world. The Tenino and other Columbia River tribes, whose narrative led them to engage their surroundings with caution and respect, were in trouble even as they performed their peaceful and theretofore interminable interaction with nature.

Bowers also cites Ernst Cassirer, who, in summarizing the influence of Descartes observed that "reason is now looked upon rather as an acquisition than a heritage. It is not the treasury of the mind in which truth like a minted coin lies stored; it is rather the original intellectual force which guides the discovery and determination of truth."(Ed. 24) Furthermore, as Bowers notes, "the rational process was considered to be everywhere the same, involving a particular relationship between reflection and sense data."(Ed. 24) So neither cultural differences nor the thought patterns encoded in language were considered to be of consequence to these Enlightenment thinkers.

Knowledge had become a cheap acquisition, truth as accessible as thought, and haste in experimentation common.

It is not difficult to recognize the consequences of this change of consciousness, from one in which authority and knowledge were communal in nature and had their foundations in tradition, to one colored with a sense of being an observer who can make separate and objective judgments, in which all things could be grasped like a picture, free from context, and presumably understood in their entirety through the rational process of individuals. First, and perhaps most importantly, this belief in the rationality of the mind led to the conception of the individual self as the basic social unit. It precipitated the myth of personal autonomy, of freedom from patterns of thinking infused by language and tradition, and it altered the conception of the meaning of freedom itself. By placing the source of authority in the minds of individual "rational" thinkers, freedom became "a matter of choosing one's own values, one's self-identity, and future." (Ed. 25) "Freedom" came to mean "the fullest expression of individual freedom," (Ed. 25) thereby diminishing the role and value of communal involvement and responsibility: a costly and painfully evident psychological loss to both individuals and societies. In fact, says Bowers, "Responsibility is thus viewed in terms of self-interest; and if there is any awareness of living in an interdependent world it is likely to be viewed as an unwelcomed constraint on individual freedom." (Ed. 27) But while this sense of individual autonomy became part of the natural attitude (a culturally based experience of which, by definition, we are not aware) of Western culture, the irony is that nothing could be further from the truth, and the consequences of this taken-

for-granted belief have much to do with the obscure and perplexing nature of the cultural aspects of the ecological crisis.

Of particular significance, to bring the argument full circle, is the way in which regarding ourselves as autonomous beings immune to the vagaries of culture deludes us into believing we are truly rational and therefore capable of addressing new problems within the framework or mental ecology of old beliefs. Perceiving ourselves as autonomous, self-directing individuals causes us to believe that we are "free thinkers," so to speak, when in fact, as Bowers succinctly paraphrases Heidegger, "we do not think the language, the language thinks us." For example, Bowers notes, "thinking of the heart as a pump encodes earlier assumptions about the mechanistic nature of the universe; thinking of North America as 'the New World' encodes the privileged European perspective." (Ed. 26) These examples barely scratch the surface of the cultural assumptions reflected in the language, assumptions formulated by previous generations which, however unsubstantiated, persist nonetheless precisely because they are in the language. "What the current view of individualism [the autonomic view] obscures," observes Bowers, "is that language provides the important schemata or conceptual frameworks that guide the thought process of the individual. In effect, the patterns of individual thought are culturally rooted; while this means that there is far less original thought than is now proclaimed, it does not mean that thought is entirely determined by the encoding characteristics of language." (Ed. 27) In other words, just as Wilson suggests that we can subdue, divert, or otherwise minimize some of our obsolete genetic predispositions, first by recognizing them for what they are and then by making the necessary cultural

adaptations, Bowers is suggesting that we can act similarly on problematic cultural patterns by bringing them to the explicit level of awareness. If, for example, we stop conceptualizing the human body as "the human machine," we may more naturally recognize the connection between mind and body, much to the benefit of both our mental and physical health. Similarly, if we illuminate our taken-for-granted attitude toward nature (the anthropocentric or human-centered view, wherein we are separate from and superior to nature, and in which nature is valued only from the perspective of human needs and interests) the conception of the New World as merely a new land to plunder becomes understood as inconsistent with the principles of a sustainable habitat, as do our attitudes toward what remains of the natural world in general. Language, Bowers concludes, "is not a neutral conduit through which ideas are communicated to others, but plays a constitutive role in organizing the thought process itself." (Ed. 121) It is metaphorical in nature, involving analogic thinking or the understanding of things in relation to other things, and these schema for understanding the world are passed by the language through generations, thereby influencing or even dictating, unbeknownst to us, current thought processes with old formulations. As Wilson notes, "human beings live--literally live, if life is equated with the mind--by symbols, particularly words, because the brain is constructed to process information almost exclusively in their terms."³ Finally, as Bowers observes, "just as language enables us to think about experience (to name it and to think about its patterns and relationships), the lack of language can leave areas of experience unreflected upon and unarticulated--that is, unrecognized." (Ed. 121) Put another way, not only do

we carry with us a stock of unexamined taken-for-granted beliefs (the existence of which reinforce our conceptions of autonomy and rationalism at an unconscious level and, quite amusingly, refute it at the explicit level of awareness), but we lack a means of perceiving the world differently or to a certain extent, realistically, and this is one of the challenges facing educators: the development of new language with which to address attitudes and areas of experience unfamiliar to our culture. As T. S. Eliot said, "Every vital development in language is a development of feeling as well."⁴

What, then, are we to do?

Bowers cites the slowness or outright failure of governments to act in the face of serious environmental problems. And he notes that although "television coverage seems to be awakening people in living rooms around the world to the decimation of dolphins, elephants, and rainforests, and the fouling of shorelines . . . this grassroots political process is counterbalanced, if not overwhelmed, by the power of the media to indoctrinate people with the message that to be modern means to adopt an increasingly materialistic life style."(Ed. 30) (As the beach-set television commercial says, "Be Young, Have Fun, Drink") It is in the area of education, then, that Bowers sees the potential for "cultural renewal," "for reconstituting the conceptual foundations of a culture that is ecologically out of balance."(Ed. 31) This, Bowers says, "is likely to elicit the response from many educators that schools simply cannot take on any more social responsibilities."(Ed. 32) Bowers himself says he vacillates on the issue, yet he cannot see that the public schools can be excluded from the crisis:

The double bind of expanding cultural demands on a contracting resource base is not the sort of issue that will go away. Self-denying strategies,

failure to exercise intelligence commensurate with the scope of the problem, and a diverting of energy to other political agendas (even such heavily contested ones as issues related to race, gender, and social class) will not displace the ecological crisis as the most pressing political and moral [emphasis added] issue facing humankind.(Ed. 32)

Indeed, in all that precipitated it as well as in all of its ramifications, the ecological crisis is as much a moral issue as it is one of politics (which is to say that it must be viewed as both). As Bowers notes, "Public schools and universities are only two of many institutions that pass on the culture, and they do not have the ability to influence thought and expectation to the same degree as the media. Nevertheless, they exert an important influence on what aspects of culture are transmitted to the next generation and in determining which aspects will be understood at the explicit level of awareness and what will be part of the person's stock of unexamined knowledge."(Ed. 32)

Yet as institutions involved with cultural reproduction, schools can be as much a part of the problem as they are of the solution. As Bowers notes in reference to teachers and educational texts,

Given the limited characteristics of their university education, and the even more narrow approach to their professional education, it seems safe to make the generalization that few teachers understand the most critical aspects of cultural transmission in the classroom, particularly how language encodes earlier thought processes, the way in which most of the particular culture learned is taken for granted, and how cultural assumptions underlie the structures of knowledge that constitute the subject area of the curriculum. This is not to say there are no bright or intellectually stimulating teachers: indeed there are many. Rather, the point is that neither the university nor professional education of most teachers provide an adequate basis for understanding the interconnection of culture, language, and consciousness--which, ironically, is at the heart of the educational process.

The hidden dynamics of how the culture that is part of the textbook writer's and the teacher's natural attitudes, their sense of unexamined reality, becomes shared with students and taken for granted gives textbooks their important role in the educational cultural transmission process. By not understanding this process, even the most gifted and environmentally conscious teachers take on a more marginal importance, thus leaving unchallenged the way in which textbooks (actually the mind's of textbook writers) reproduce the conceptual templates of the dominant culture in the next generation of adults.(Ed. 119)

"The socialization of students," Bowers adds, "involves encountering in a more systematic way [than through the media, for example] the language and conceptual frameworks that underpin mainstream culture. If this conceptual framework, which also includes a sense of the moral order, is derived primarily from the period of history that produced the Industrial Revolution, we face the tragic prospect of the next generation being caught in a double bind where the ability to understand the problem will be dependent upon the same patterns of thought partly responsible for the scope of the crisis."(Ed. 32)

The words of Albert Einstein could not be more appropriate: "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."⁵

The challenge, then, and the opportunity, lies in the development of educational strategies (a word that itself is loaded with procedural and reductionist insinuations) that expose our taken-for-granted beliefs and their problematic nature as they apply to ecological balance in a world only beginning to recognize limits to the habitat, and that present alternative metaphors and schema for understanding such concepts as progress, freedom, community, science, technology, knowledge, and time--concepts which, within the formulations of the anthropocentric world view, are responsible

for deepening the ecological crisis they initiated. The failure of both the dominant liberal and conservative philosophies of education to address the ecological crisis in terms of its cultural underpinnings (in what marginal ways they address it at all), a discussion of how their respective approaches perpetuate the mind set responsible for the ecological crisis, a thorough examination of the role textbooks play in the transmission of cultural templates, and recommendations for educational reform constitute the remainder of Bowers' inquiry into the relationship between education, culture and the ecological crisis. It is in the direction of such recommendations and toward a consideration of related ideas that we will turn next.

Notes

¹Chet A. Bowers, Education, Cultural Myths, and the Ecological Crisis: Toward Deep Changes (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1993), 1. Further citations are included in the text with the abbreviation (Ed.).

²Edward O. Wilson, Biophilia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 122.

³Wilson, Biophilia, 74.

⁴Philip Massinger, 1920, quoted in John Bartlett, Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, 16th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 672.

⁵Albert Einstein, quoted in Jennifer James, Ph. D., Visions From the Heart (Seattle: Brownen Press, 1991), 77.

CHAPTER V

PASSION

It's been many months now since I visited Monkey Face--too many--so the drive over the snow-hoarding Cascades stirs anticipation, and a little anxiety as well. It's mid-winter, so I know the roads are even more dangerous than usual. But I have snow tires all the way around, and chains if I need them. What I worry about most, then, is "the other guy." That's how it always is, on small-scale and large alike, here and everywhere. We're all worried about the other guy, in fear, that is, of what "the other guy" will do to or take from us. It's part of who we are. We're inclined to assume the world is a dangerous place, as perilous today as it was throughout our evolution, however truthful that may or may not be.

The first time I heard the expression, I think, it came from the lips of my mother as she reluctantly handed me the car keys one Saturday night: "It's not you I'm worried about, Eric. It's the other guy." Of course, she had more to worry about than she allowed, so it's easy to see from whom I get my wishful thinking. It is also clear that like my mother and most everyone else, when I say I'm worried about the other guy, it is not like the concern I feel when I say I'm worried about my sister or brother or father or mother. When I worry about the other guy, my concern is actually for myself. And yet, I know that is who "the other guys" really are: fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers--my own, in a real sense--and that my working concept of family and

community belies my deeper understanding of their meanings. That's a part of why I teach, I suppose, why I try to help "the other guys" of this world. In that aspect of my life, at least, I can reconcile my behavior with my deeper understanding, my better judgment. Otherwise, it seems, my "working concept" of family or community has little to do with my work. It reminds me of the feeling I get when I hear someone, myself included, say they are not prejudiced. No matter how sincere the declaration, a little skepticism always tints my reaction, perhaps for good reason. In either case, I'm obviously mixed up, an inconsistent product of an inconsistent world.

I roll through the black streets of Portland, the metal studs on my tires biting into wet pavement, spitting long oily sprays at the cars and trucks that chase me. Driving is like living, so I stay ahead of who I can. I know better, but the instinct runs deep.

It's the holiday season and the city is all decked out. For what . . . ? A celebration of peace on earth, good will to "men"? No, for shopping I muse with certain contempt, while wondering on another track what new "toys" I'll be receiving this year. I'm happy to leave that irksome quandary behind and begin the gradual climb through the low rolling foothills outside of town.

Twenty miles east of Portland and I'm well in to the country. The highway rises and falls, passing between raspberry fields with their brittle black vines strung like long dead fingers 'round twine and frames that coaxed their springtime growth. Here and there are stands of fir, but most of this land has been turned over. Fruits, nuts, and berries. A few vegetables. Peaches and pears; filberts or hazelnuts, depending on who's talking; raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, and, if allowed, blackberries wherever

they please; some grain and corn, and occasionally, carrots or rhubarb or lettuce or mint--that sort of thing. But it's all gone now, except for the grisly vines and bare bushes and trees that dot broad gentle slopes. Till spring, only the firs and grasses will stand green.

Gentle rolling hills give way to sharp jutting ridge lines as I climb toward the peaks that separate west-side valley from east-side plain. I wind along the rocky banks of the Sandy River, crossing it often as it slips between ridges drawn tight. It's somber and dim within; the only light comes from slim peeks of pale winter sky directly overhead. The dark winter green of second-growth fir that clothe the sides of tall steep mounts is broken frequently by mile-wide fields of snow, clear-cuts where now only faded gray stumps color the land. Rounding a long open bend that breaks from the forest I look over my shoulder to confirm a childhood memory: Still "intact" is the gaping clear-cut I once thought was the slickest thing in the forest, next to the wild animals, ironically. Shaped remarkably like the United States, and of relative vastness, it even includes a few pockets off its "west coast" that as kids we always figured were intended to represent the Hawaiian Islands. Back then we looked for this every time we went skiing, hoping it would not be under cover of low lingering clouds, and wondering again each time whether the loggers did it on purpose, or if it was just a coincidence. This time I don't wonder. I know what shape logging leaves the forest in.

The drive over the pass is uneventful, though not easy. As is often the case this time of year, Mount Hood--the imposing, majestic, monumental rock itself--is socked in by a mass of clouds of its own device. Not until they lighten their load can the heavy snow clouds rise high and drift eastward. It's

as if they are bound to pay a toll for their crossing. "Empty your pockets that you may pass," the mountainsides insist. "Pay not what you can but what you must to climb our frosty shoulders," which the clouds do, for mountains are patient, and then hurry beyond the arid "rain shadow" where they will spare what snow remains in their purloined coffers on the parched yet undemanding expanse of the Columbia River Plateau.

Visibility, then, is the main problem. But there are deep and uneven ruts too, where tires of all sizes have churned their way through the broken slush and ice. My van lurches from rut to rut, while the snow falls with order, gently padding the forest, deeper and deeper and deeper. Sounds from the highway, of cars and trucks and loose clanging chains don't go far, I reason. The snow is deep, and it swallows up vibrations of any kind. A little boy cries "Help! Help!" but the words stick to his lips, as if in a powerless, prison-like dream. The day is late and he's fallen off a side run, tangling his skis and safety straps in the bare wiry roots of a tree well. He panics and struggles, writhing deeper into the tree's tentacles, afraid he'll freeze to death before they find him. "Help!" is inscribed in every flake of snow within fifty feet, but that's as far as it goes in these heavy, laden woods.

It hits the heart first, this long-forgotten memory, accelerating even more a pulse already elevated by the delicate drive up an icy highway. I'm passing Government Camp, near the summit of the pass, across from "Ski Bowl," where so many years ago I thought I would surely die young at the feet of an ancient tree. My rescuer, as it turned out, was not far away, and after I stopped crying I felt foolish for my panic. Now I feel sad for having felt foolish. It annoys me that at the age of thirty-two I can give myself more

grace than I did when I was eight. But then I was supposed to be the man of the family: strong, responsible--above panic or fear. Now I am just a man. I'm relieved, and freshly bitter.

Prompted by the memory, I weigh a question as I descend the mountain's eastern slope: What is responsibility anyway? Like freedom, is it a privilege or an obligation? Or, does the former assign the latter? It's difficult to imagine it working any other way, and the evidence, it seems, suggests that it cannot. That, however, conflicts with what our culture presumes to be "inalienable," with virtually no strings attached. Like freedom, we favor responsibility when it suits us, and deplore it when it does not. As members of the so-called "entitlement culture" we expect rights without corresponding responsibilities. This conundrum occupies me through the twilight drive off of the mountain and into the open stands of straight Ponderosa Pine that jut like towers from the snowy roadside banks, their stout trunks broad and bare for a hundred feet, their red bark cast in the crusty snow at their base like fossilized remnants of a jigsaw puzzle. These trees grow old and tall and sound, shedding their jigsaw scales along the way, but they never lose direction or need to put old pieces or forms back together. Their past lies beneath them, unchanged for millennia, altered only in what little ways are selected by nature, that they might better perform within it.

What, I wonder, does responsibility mean to a Ponderosa? Unburdened by the cultural entanglements that humans bring to the question, can the Ponderosa shade it from ambiguity? I only dare to answer by observing what the Ponderosa does: it interacts with its environment in a reciprocal way, both drawing from and providing for its surroundings; it

seeks sunlight; and it grows--most of all it grows. That, simply, I decide, is all we need ask of ourselves; all, in general, we need by which to judge our direction as individuals and as a species: like the Ponderosa, are we growing in a way relative to what we are? A panacea for our social ills it is not, and "what we are" depends on who you talk to. But as I siphon fuel and spew forth poison while barreling sixty miles per hour through the simple complexity of this age-old forest, it strikes me that perhaps our cultural and social complexities can be similarly simplified, that perhaps they need to be simplified and contextualized in terms of who we are in order to begin discovering the details that will reveal and comprise the more specific remedies to our distress. If nothing else it is a natural edict, a call for passion as opposed to passivity. In essence, it is not unlike Bowers' criteria for assessing social and educational reforms. His question, do such reforms "mitigate or exacerbate the ecological crisis?" is much like asking whether or not such reforms enhance or diminish future opportunities for growth. Judging an activity by whether or not it contributes to our growth is just the kind of useful simplification I had hoped the Ponderosa might be able to offer.

That, of course, draws the fatalistic aim of people who are ready to give up on people, who think that what we do today is who we are, who separate the product from the process, or ignore it altogether. I think of the bark beneath the Ponderosa, the puzzle pieces of what it once was, and of the shapes still on the tree, and I hear from the gusts against its deformed gnarls and the breeze through its bent and twisted boughs that there is not, nor was there ever, any predetermined shape to those forms. No more so, anyway,

than there was ever any preordained force or direction to the winds that hustled this way. These well-lived trees are the fulfillment of genetics, yes, but they are also the renderings of rain and snow and ice; of insects, birds, and mice; of lightning, fire, bears, and us: of all the things that affect them. And so are we.

The question is whether our intelligence--the edge that brought us to the brink--includes the capacity to understand things different from what we already are or know, in order that we might incorporate them; that is, in order that we might bring them inside and make them a part of us so that may change consciously, but deeply as well. Another question, assuming we have the capacity, is do we also have the inclination, the motivation, the desire? The final question, of course, depends on the answer to the first two: if in both instances the answer is yes, then can we do it fast enough and soon enough?

I think of some of my recent discussions, both with friends and with myself, and one answer becomes frustratingly clear: Certainly not if we believe we cannot.

But I have decided for the time being to discard the things which confuse and muddle the means to an end, which raise so many questions and so few answers that discussions lead to despair, and to assume for the moment just two things: first, that we do have a responsibility, and second, that our sole responsibility, as individuals and as a member species of this planet is, speaking figuratively, to grow. It is no more and no less than the responsibility of a tree or a toad, but it is relative to what we are and thus is considerable, though no more so than it is for any other living thing, relative

to it. Nor for that matter is this responsibility much different from that which we shouldered these past millennia, up until the time that life became less a matter of simply living and more a matter of living for things, for material things. The differences between then and now are only of scale, complexity, and urgency; the fundamental motive--to survive, to proceed, to grow--remains the same. From this perspective it seems clear that there is something for us to do, and that it is realistic, definable, tangible and more important than our usual mundane diversions; more defensible than the lazy arguments for letting "evolution" run its course without resistance (as if, for example, corporate profiteering at the expense of the environment can be equated with evolution); and more important even than the intellectual squabbling and gamesmanship to which our academics and politicians commonly devote their minds. That sort of indulgence is not growth, for nothing--neither human beings nor gods--can simply think growth, which probably explains our existence as well as anything.

Still, growth does begin in the mind, as perhaps, did life. But what begins in the mind is elevated by the uncertainties of performance. Just as deeds surpass intentions, only in performance--in the actual execution of the act--is potential, like a bud that blooms, laid open. There is potential in the mind--the potential of an idea. But the potential of that potential can only be realized when it is coupled with the variables inherent to the act. Predictability diminishes the performance. Evolution with intention is not evolution. Nothing can simply think growth: if it can simply be thought, it is not truly new, not truly growth. As a rule, we've too much self-control, too much consciousness, for that to occur in any meaningful way.

Yet growth, of course, is what this planet, or nature, is all about--growth and change, action and reaction, always proceeding toward unforeseen refinement and balance--though humans jumped the track, a fact that seems to be little-recognized, let alone prioritized, by the mainstream of our culture. This is not a blanket indictment, for there are most certainly exceptions. It is not, in fact, an indictment at all, for one cannot criticize human "progress" any more than one can criticize human evolution, except at the point that it threatens both progress and evolution--or life--itself. But in general most of us act as if we have better things to do, even when we know better, than to follow some inclination toward growth. That instinctual predisposition seems to have been subdued by a culture of convenience and instant gratification. And as I drive these darkened miles off the mountain's flanks, my own guilt in this matter is clear. That, in part, explains my journey to Monkey Face: I am going to serve time, to pay restitution. There I will sit amidst the natural beauty of the place and ponder what life means beyond my television. I will defer my distractions, quiet my consciousness, give myself a chance to grow. It will mean something then, to me, and it may mean more later to others, especially if it yields some form of action, an act that reveals the true potential of the perceived potential. Just as Longinus said of the sublime, that it is that which exceeds, that it is potential, and that it appears where the passion inspired by nature meets the language of consciousness, it is my suggestion (and I suspect Longinus would concur) that growth in itself is sublime, and that it too appears where passion meets consciousness, and, with utmost vigor, where ideas meet actions.

Longinus also said that sublimity is the echo of a noble mind. The echo! Not the thought itself, but the echo, the reverberation, the action of the thought as it spreads beyond its thinker. Seventeen hundred years later, in 1850, Herman Melville wrote that "Genius all over the world stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round."¹ Just two years after that Victor Hugo added this to the fire: "An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come."² These thoughts, these expressions of passion certainly seem to embody something sublime about humanity (if not about biological human nature, then at least about the direction taken by human culture) as each recognizes the beauty intrinsic to the pursuit of growth, the potential of process, and also, the susceptibility of potential to inertia--both static and dynamic. And these examples, while dramatic, are far from isolated. Throughout human history and across human cultures, expressions of altruism and higher ideals are common in religion, philosophy—even in government. What is not so common are actions that reflect these higher ideals consistently and over time. More often than not, inertia has held potential in check. Its flip side, momentum, too often has been either failed by fear or stifled by power. To use the current lingo, we talk the talk but we don't walk the walk.

This comes as no surprise to Wilson, who contends in his discussion of human altruism that it is little more than a mammalian biological trait selected by evolution to enhance the survival and propagation of the in-group. Human nature, he says, bends us to the imperatives of selfishness and tribalism. But, he adds, "a more detached view of the long-range course of evolution should allow us to see beyond the blind decision-making process of

natural selection and to envision the history and future of our own genes against the background of the entire human species."³ In other words, while human altruism was once merely a means to a biological end, we now have the potential, not to mention the motivation, to make altruism a conscious choice or expression, even if it means (heaven forbid) foregoing the transmission of our genes. "A word already in use," Wilson innocently concludes, "intuitively defines this view: nobility."⁴

The word is indeed already in use, as evidenced by Longinus's description nearly two thousand years ago of sublimity as the echo of a noble mind. The words, of course, have long been there. Words that named love, compassion, friendship, fairness, respect, and so on. But they have been more than compensated for by words--and expressions--of their opposites. As emotions and activities more vitally related to our early survival, words like hate, contempt, enemy, greed, and disdain reflect those necessities and inclinations. The problem now is separating the two impulses, understanding them from "beyond the blind decision-making process of natural selection."

"If only it were all so simple!," wrote Alexander Solzhenitsyn in The Gulag Archipelago. "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"⁵ More recently, in a 1992 retrospective referring to "the moral nature of man," editorialist William Pfaff wrote: "The sadistic and capricious individual cruelties, mass rapes and random torture among old neighbors

and acquaintances, arbitrary destruction, loosed in the former Yugoslavia this year sends the case for progress reeling. Or so it seems to me. I do not mean that the combatants in Yugoslavia are uniquely evil. Quite the contrary. I think they have shown what the rest of us are capable of. The demonstration is a deep shock. They have shown us how fragile and provisional are the institutional and cultural defenses we possess against our own capacity for evil."⁶ So, as Solzhenitsyn pointed out, perhaps the problem is more complex than "separating the two impulses," as if we could cut away from us that which we no longer need but have not yet outgrown.

I crack my window as I leave the mountain behind and accelerate down the long straight-aways that lead me to and through the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. The east-side air is cold, dry, and distinctive. The juniper and sage that season its unique and vitalizing scent are sparse compared to the temperate jungle of the Cascade's west side, yet their odor seems much more pervasive. I've been told, however, that the opposite is true, that the west-side woodland is so rich with competing scents--of trees, shrubs, grasses, fungi, moisture, decay, and so on--that they all blend into one overwhelming fragrance which just doesn't catch us by the nose like the sharper east-side combination. The wet side of the state, this theory suggests, does have a distinctive aroma; we are simply prevented from routinely sensing it by a case of olfactory overload.

I'm startled when my headlights suddenly catch an enormous sign on the edge of the highway announcing the turn-off to Kah-Nee-Ta. I thought I had been alert, watchful for the presence of deer on or near the road, but this is not the kind of thing I was expecting. A short distance to the north, on the

Warm Springs River, Kah-Nee-Ta is a resort operated by the confederated tribes of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. It features a naturally heated swimming pool, a golf course and other amenities, but its most compelling attraction is its weather. Situated directly to the east of Mount Hood, it lies in the mountain's rain shadow and thus is able to claim an average of 300 days of sunshine per year. Portlanders and other wetlanders flock here in the winter and spring for a look at the sun. What they also see is an unusual mix of cultural artifacts. At Kah-Nee-Ta visitors can stay overnight either in a typical American hotel room, or, if they prefer, in one of the large teepees erected nearby. The teepees go unoccupied during the winter, but during warmer weather it is not unusual for families to rent both a hotel room and a teepee--the room for the adults and the teepee, of course, for the kids, who are ever-eager for a chance to sleep in a real teepee. I stayed in one myself on a Cub Scout trip when I was ten, and thinking back it was a rather strange experience. The teepees may be genuine, but inside the floors are cement. It's an odd juxtaposition and one which doesn't work. We brought sleeping bags, expecting to sleep on the ground, but instead we froze our bones on concrete chilled by the desert night. We didn't sleep a wink and turned destructive instead, rolling small boulders down the cliff behind us out of frustration, and we left there wondering about the wisdom of Indians.

That though, was an unfortunate experience of an ill-conceived combination of cultural artifacts. Driving through the night with an open sky and stars beaming from infinity I get a different feeling about the potential of other cultures to share their way of knowing the world with the conglomerated tribe that presently dominates the earth. The simple wisdom

that characterizes the lives of many traditional peoples is well-recognized, sought after, syncretized, and even glamorized beyond its due in some instances. But that is not what intrigues me this swift night. I'm more enticed by what the deeper structures of other cultures have to say about humanity in general, and less by the specific instructive practices they may exemplify. What can diverse cultures teach us about the relationship between culture and our biological history, that is, what can they add to the insights of sociobiology. Most importantly, what can they tell us about cultural potential?

This question is of particular importance because included with the dangerous state of anomie that steeps our society is a genuine and understandable sense of uncertainty about our potential to right the ship, to make things work in a satisfying and sustainable way. We recognize that in many ways we may have gone too far, and we truly do not know if it is possible to turn things around. We wonder about human nature, question our neighbors and doubt ourselves; we suspect our leaders, and are generally cautious about getting our hopes up. Living as we do in a world wrought with conflict, confronted day in and day out with examples of unfathomable atrocities and unpardonable corruption, born and blessed under a cloud of what for a time, at least, seemed like imminent nuclear obliteration, it is not difficult to understand why we might feel this way. These sentiments, this feeling, is expressed all around us. I see it in the languor and indifference of my students and behind the stories on the news, in the frustration of my colleagues and the pessimism of my friends. And it is in this area of how we feel, especially, that lessons from other cultures might help us to perceive our

cultural potential and our capacity to deal with modern problems; they might cue us--prompt, nudge, and stir us--so that we may more readily find the means to deal with the demands of an increasingly confusing world. In fact, what other cultures may reveal to us is not that we have gone too far, but that we have not yet gone far enough where culture is concerned.

The Dalai Lama of Tibet has said that although attempting to bring about world peace through the internal transformation of individuals is difficult, it is the only way. Yet even if we accept as truth the notion that change must begin within the individual, that supposition does not diminish the importance of external stimuli to internal transformation. External things affect us all the time--a poem, the words of a friend or teacher, music, religion, Peter Jennings. What few of us have in our society, our culture, is an underlying, overriding, all-encompassing sense of community and connectedness, an external construction that frames an internal way of feeling. The existence of such a framework, and the possibility that it could genuinely alter the way we feel as individuals, and as individuals in relation to a culture or community, is almost frightfully foreign to us; most of us are likely to welcome a sense of belonging, but not if that order or structure constrains our behavior in any way. Yet such frameworks typify traditional cultures, the kind of cultures in which our species grew up and which, until most were perverted by cultural invasion, were generally stable, meaningful, and comparatively free from the kinds of breakdowns that are the cause of so much concern in our society.

A professor I once had in college was fascinated by this notion of what we might learn, or, in the language of Paul Ricoeur, "appropriate" from other

cultures. As Ricoeur put it, "To understand is not to project oneself into the text; it is to receive an enlarged self from the apprehension of proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation."⁷ It was in order that we might "enlarge" our "selves" or at least understand the idea of appropriation and the possibility that the very concept of the person--the experience of the self--varies across cultures, that this professor of cultural anthropology led us through a study of cultures as distinct from one another as they are from our own. And reflecting back on this exposure to other cultures, it is this distinctiveness, more than any particular cultural characteristic, which challenges the lazy presumption that there are givens when it comes to the forms that culture may take.

For example, Clifford Geertz, the anthropologist whose definition of culture was described in the previous chapter, points out in his writing that the Western conception of the person "as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures."⁸ In fact, thinking of ourselves as distinctive wholes somehow unrelated to our social and natural background is a rather peculiar idea even without the context of the world's cultures. That simply ignores the obvious, as the views of both Wilson and Bowers suggested in previous chapters. Yet the illusion persists, and with this cultural oddity so too do the moral and legal foundations of a society that privileges the individual over the group. As we will see, this egocentric

cultural foundation contrasts markedly with the cultures Geertz studied--Javanese, Balinese, and Moroccan--in an effort which, intentionally or not, reveals a contrast that is potentially instructive to modern Western society.

In Java, where he worked in the fifties, Geertz encountered a society disrupted by the encroaching modern world but a culture that remained solidly intact. He studied in a small, shabby, "county-seat sort of place," surrounded by a great half-circle of densely packed "rice-bowl" villages. His description of the setting I have paraphrased; his description of the people, however, I will not compromise:

Land was short, jobs were scarce, politics was unstable, health was poor, prices were rising, and life was altogether far from promising, a kind of agitated stagnancy in which, as I once put it, thinking of the curious mixture of borrowed fragments of modernity and exhausted relics of tradition that characterized the place, the future seemed about as remote as the past. Yet in the midst of this depressing scene there was an absolutely astonishing intellectual vitality, a philosophical passion really, and a popular one besides, to track the riddles of existence right down to the ground. Destitute peasants would discuss questions of freedom of the will, illiterate tradesman discoursed on the properties of God, common laborers had theories about the relations between reason and passion, the nature of time, or the reliability of the senses. And, perhaps most importantly, the problem of the self—its nature, function, and mode of operation—was pursued with the sort of reflective intensity one could find among ourselves in only the most *recherché* settings indeed. (C.T. 126-127)

According to Geertz, the central ideas in terms of which this reflection proceeded, and which defined its boundaries and the Javanese sense of what a person is, were arranged into two sets of contrasts, one between "inside and outside," the other between "refined" and "vulgar." These descriptions, of course, are incomplete and imprecise glosses of the contrasts, and Geertz adds that determining what the terms involved signified--sorting out their shades of meaning--is precisely what all the discussion was about. Nonetheless,

what he says we can be certain of is that together these contrasts "formed a distinctive conception of the self which, far from being merely theoretical, was the one [conception] in terms of which the Javanese in fact perceived one another and, of course, themselves."(C.T. 127)

The "inside"/"outside" words, *lair* and *batin*, refer respectively to the felt realm of human experience and to the observed realm of human behavior. These words, it should be added, cannot in any way be equated with our Western sense of soul and body. *Batin*, the "inside" word, "does not refer to a separate seat of encapsulated spirituality detached or detachable from the body, or indeed to a bounded unit at all, but to the emotional life of human beings taken generally. It consists of the fuzzy, shifting flow of subjective feeling perceived directly in all its phenomenological immediacy, but considered to be, at its roots at least, identical across all individuals."(C.T. 127) Similarly, *lair*, the "outside" word, has nothing to do with the body as an object; rather, it relates specifically to external actions, movements, postures, speech, and so forth. And like *batin*, *lair* is considered in its essence to be invariant from one individual to the next. Thus, taken together, *batin* and *lair* efface or override individuality. The goal, then, is the "proper ordering" of these two independent realms of phenomena--inward feelings and outward actions--an effort which must be undertaken by all people at all times in order to preserve universal order.

This "proper ordering" raises the distinction between "*alus*," the Javanese word meaning pure, refined, polished, civilized, or smooth and "*kasar*," the word meaning impolite, uncivilized, coarse, insensitive, or vulgar. The aim of this proper ordering is to be "*alus*" in respect to both

realms of the self. In the inner realm this is achieved through religious discipline. In the outer realm it is achieved through etiquette, "the rules of which here are not only extraordinarily elaborate but have something of the force of law. Through meditation, the civilized man thins out his emotional life to a kind of constant hum; through etiquette, he both shields that life from external disruptions and regularizes his outer behavior in such a way that it appears to others as a predictable, undisturbing, elegant, and rather vacant set of choreographed motions and settled forms of speech."(C.T. 127-128) The result of this, says Geertz, "is a bifurcate conception of the self, half ungestured feeling and half unfelt gesture. An inner world of stilled emotion and an outer world of shaped behavior confront one another as sharply distinguished realms unto themselves, any particular person being but the momentary locus, so to speak, of that confrontation, a passing expression of their permanent existence, their permanent separation, and their permanent need to be kept in their own order."(C.T. 128)

Clearly, this conception of the self and of the self in relation to the world is indeed "far from being merely theoretical." This cultural structure, this framework for knowing the world not only connects to both an ontology and an aesthetic, it also instills in the individual a distinct sense of what life is, a feeling or experience of life that is completely different from anything anyone not immersed in that culture could ever know. It is not the self or the individual who is important in this scheme, for "batin" and "lair" are the same across individuals and are permanent as well; rather, what is important is the maintenance by the self of "batin" and "lair," those enduring elements of existence, in a state of "alus." This, to the Javanese, is what frames the

image of the self and directs a living effort to properly order these two permanent aspects of reality. The individual, so far as that term applies, lives to preserve an eternal order; order is not preserved for the benefit of the individual.

Geertz also studied the culture of Bali, which he notes is in many ways similar to Java since it shared with Java a common culture until the fifteenth century:

But at a deeper level, having continued Hindu while Java was, nominally at least, Islamized, it is quite different. The intricate, obsessive ritual life, Hindu, Buddhist, and Polynesian in about equal proportions, whose development was more or less cut off in Java, leaving its Indic spirit to turn reflective and even quietistic [as described above], flourished in Bali to reach levels of scale and flamboyance that have startled the world and made the Balinese a much more dramaturgical people with a self to match. What is philosophy in Java is theater in Bali.

As a result, there is in Bali a persistent and systematic attempt to stylize all aspects of personal expression to the point where anything idiosyncratic, anything characteristic of the individual merely because he is who he is physically, psychologically, or biographically, is muted in favor of his assigned place in the continuing, and so it is thought, never-changing pageant that is Balinese life. It is *dramatis personae*, not actors, that endure; indeed, it is *dramatis personae*, not actors, that in the proper sense really exist. (C.T. 128)

Like the "passing expression" of *lair* and *batin* that is the Javanese individual, the Balinese "come and go, mere incidents in a happenstance history, of no genuine importance even to themselves. But the masks they wear, the stage they occupy, the parts they play, and, most importantly, the spectacle they mount remain and comprise not the facade but the substance of things, not least the self." (C.T. 128-129) And like the Javanese conception of the self, which Geertz called "far from being merely theoretical," this Balinese conception is realized not only in terms of "some general mood the

anthropologist in his spiritual versatility somehow captures but through a set of readily observable symbolic forms: an elaborate repertoire of designations and titles."(C.T. 129) There are at least a half-dozen major types of labels, observed Geertz, which the Balinese apply to one another to place them among their fellows. Kinship terms, birth-order markers, caste titles, sex indicators and so forth define a person as a "determinate point in a fixed pattern, as the temporary occupant of a particular, quite untemporary, cultural locus."(C.T. 129) And in both their structure and their mode of operation, "the terminological systems conduce to a view of the human person as an appropriate representative of a generic type, not a unique creature with a private fate."(C.T. 129) Perhaps an example Geertz calls "the simplest further simplified" will help elucidate how the Balinese terminological system creates a view of the person as a representative of a prescribed role, not a unique and autonomous individual in the Western sense, as well as a conception of time that is dramatically different from the linear perception to which we subscribe in the West.

All Balinese receive what might be called birth-order names. There are four of these, "firstborn," "secondborn," "thirdborn," "fourthborn," after which they recycle, so that the fifthborn child is called again "firstborn," the sixth "secondborn," and so on. Further, these fates are bestowed independently of the fates of the children. Dead children, even stillborn ones, count, so that in fact, in this still high-birthrate, high-mortality society, the names don't really tell you anything very reliable about the birth-order relations of concrete individuals. Within a set of living siblings, someone called "firstborn" may actually be first, fifth, or ninth born, or, if somebody is missing, almost anything in between, and someone called "secondborn" may in fact be older. The birth-order naming system does not identify individuals as individuals, nor is it intended to; what it does is to suggest that, for all procreating couples, births form a circular succession of "firsts," "seconds," "thirds," and "fourths," an endless four-stage replication of an imperishable form. Physically men appear and disappear as the ephemerae they are, but

socially the acting figures remain eternally the same as new "firsts," "seconds," and so on emerge from the timeless world of the gods to replace those who, dying, dissolve once more into it.(C.T. 129-130)

All of the other designation and title systems, Geertz argues, function in the same way: "They represent the most time-saturated aspects of the human condition as but ingredients in an eternal, footlight present."(C.T. 130)

"Morocco, Middle Eastern and dry rather than East Asian and wet, extrovert, fluid, activist, masculine, informal to a fault, a Wild West sort of place without the barrooms and the cattle drives, is another kettle of selves altogether,"(C.T. 130) writes Geertz of the place and people he studied in the mid-sixties. Sefrou, the classical Muslim town in which Geertz lived, was founded at least a thousand years ago and is now "filled with a simply astounding variety of very emphatic human beings. Arabs, Berbers, and Jews; tailors, herdsman, and soldiers; people out of offices, people out of markets, people out of tribes; rich, superrich, poor, superpoor, locals, immigrants, mimic Frenchmen, unbending medievalists, and somewhere, according to the official government census for 1960, an unemployed Jewish airline pilot--the town houses one of the finest collection of rugged individualists I, at least, have ever come up against. Next to Sefrou, Manhattan seems almost monotonous."(Ed. 131)

Yet, says Geertz, "no society consists of anonymous eccentrics bouncing off one another like billiard balls, and Moroccans, too, have symbolic means by which to sort people out from one another and form an idea of what it is to be a person."(C.T. 131) This symbolic means in Morocco is the "nisba," a naming system that "renders men relative to their contexts, but as contexts themselves are relative, so too are nisbas, and the whole thing rises, so to

speak, to the second power: relativism squared."(C.T. 132) The whole thing is also very complex, even more so, perhaps, than the Balinese title systems. That said, it may be more useful to bypass a detailed description of how the system functions and instead to impart its results.

As with the Javanese inside/outside, smooth/rough phenomenological sort of reality dividing, and the absolutizing Balinese title systems, the *nisba* way of looking at persons—as though they were outlines waiting to be filled in—is not an isolated custom but part of a total pattern of life. This pattern is, like the others, difficult to characterize succinctly. This is, indeed, the so-called mosaic system of social organization so often held to be characteristic of the Middle East generally: differently shaped and colored chips jammed in irregularly together to generate an intricate overall design within which their individual distinctiveness remains nonetheless intact. Nothing if not diverse, Moroccan society does not cope with its diversity by sealing it into castes, isolating it into tribes, dividing it into ethnic groups, or covering it with some common-denominator concept of nationality, though, fitfully, all have now and then been tried. It copes with it by distinguishing, with elaborate precision, the contexts--marriage, worship, and to an extent diet, law, and education--within which men are separated by their dissimilarities, and those--work, friendship, politics, trade--where, however warily and however conditionally, they are connected by them. Men do not float as bounded psychic entities, detached from their backgrounds and singularly named. As individualistic, even willful, as the Moroccans in fact are, their identity is an attribute they borrow from their setting.(C.T. 132)

The *nisba* system, then, identifies a person in terms of supposedly immanent characteristics--blood, faith, provenance, and so forth--yet minimizes the impact of such characteristics in the area of public relationships, where, by providing only a vacant and shifting contextual sketch, it leaves the rest of who the actors are to be filled in by the interaction itself. "What makes the mosaic work," says Geertz, "is the confidence that one can be as totally pragmatic, adaptive, opportunistic, and generally ad hoc in one's relations

with others--a fox among foxes, a crocodile among crocodiles--as one wants without any risk of losing one's sense of who one is."(C.T. 133-134)

The Deschutes River, one of the few northward-flowing rivers in the United States, marks the eastern boundary of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation and I stop there, at the brink of the Indian mill-town of Warm Springs--a store, gas station, and a couple restaurants saddle the river--for coffee. It's late and I'm getting tired, so I drink my brew on the bridge above the river, letting the brisk upstream breeze clear my head and freshen my senses. I've stood or sat here many times through the years, watching people load rafts or drift boats with food, beer and bedding before they put in for the exhilarating wash through reddish-brown canyons to the quaint and isolated town of Maupin. They enter the river on the east side, the non-Indian side, with their peculiarly "bounded psychic entities, detached from their backgrounds," and float, free from any context, through miles of spellbinding terrain until far downstream they emerge, a bit darker-skinned perhaps, but otherwise as autonomous and unaffected as when they left, or so, unthinkingly, they presume.

It is, of course, unfair for me to make light of them for here in my self I am no different, caught as I am in the same cultural glue that binds my sense of self to a language of separation and an image of individuality; that is, despite what awareness I may have of the illusory nature of personal autonomy or the delusion of the "self-made man" (as the culturally revealing adage goes), I nonetheless live within the myth: the perception of separateness and presumption of uncompromised rationality engrained in preceding generations of Cartesian thinkers is as deeply etched in me. I do

not unconsciously or naturally regard myself as part of an ecology, a community of energy and food chains that includes all forms of life. I have been socialized in a different way: Unlike the original Americans, who could not conceive of themselves apart from the land,⁹ for me recognizing this irrefutable reality requires conscious intent. Yet I would like to be different, and with the recollection of Geertz' disclosures fresh in my mind I feel like I can be. It is not that I want to be like the Javanese, my emotions stilled and my behavior shaped as I try to preserve a proper order; or like the Balinese, my identity that of an inconsequential actor of an important role in a perpetually recycling drama; or like the Moroccans, my identity never fixed, one of context more than consciousness.

But I would like to see myself, and others, more open to the possibilities of what we can be, and thus, by necessity, more aware that we are not who we are simply because we choose to be so, at least not to the extent that we commonly presume. Quite to the contrary, we are, as Wilson suggested, products of certain biological tendencies and constraints, and, as Bowers proposed, certain mind sets passed down to us through language and culture. In other words, we can be other things, as Geertz discovered, yet we are not, as we like to think, already in charge of what that is. To more fully take control of who we are or would like to be requires first that we recognize the extent to which we are slaves to culture unexamined, for so long as we live within the propositions of our taken-for-granted beliefs, that is not only who we are but all we can be. Fortunately, however, the converse is also true: if we recognize the profound influence of culture on who we are, if we overcome our egos enough to accept that culture, more than personal will,

has shaped who we are, then we can begin--by bringing attitudes and beliefs to the explicit level of awareness--to utilize the ubiquity of culture to shape ourselves and the world in which we live in ways we actually choose. Of even greater significance, perhaps, the same propositions and beliefs that either constrain or construct who we are also prescribe how we feel--they prescribe our very experience of living.

This is what frustrates me the most because this is where the best possibility for deep change lies. It is the same frustration I felt as a child when people all around me seemed willing to accept things as they were and expected me to do the same--implied, in fact, that to do otherwise was aberrant behavior. Now, however, I see that the future is in the minds of people who, by recognizing that potential lies first within what they can think and only then within what they can do, within their capacity to see in selected ways more than their propensity to act in directed ways, may be inclined to seize or appropriate with vitality and passion a vision they see as rightfully theirs', as preferably, delightfully theirs'.

It is in this arena of the affective, of what he called the "I feel" or the actual felt experience of life, more than anywhere else, that my cultural anthropology professor was interested. It was important to him that his students understand that propositional worlds--the symbolic worlds of different cultures--produce distinctive realities or ways of knowing. But even more important than that under-appreciated but relatively obvious inference was his belief that these realities include with them not only distinctive concepts of the self but also a distinct array of associated feelings and emotions, an actual experience of life that is as propositional as any custom or

ritual or institution. This, to him, is where the real wonderment in all this study of culture lies: in what other cultures can tell us about how we might feel. It made him excitable, a bit weird some people thought, and very passionate, which is understandable . . . to think that there is a world of potential "I feels" out there is to have a world of lifetimes at one's fingertips, with only the small matter of appropriating elements of other cultural propositions standing between one lifetime and the next. And while my initial and primary purpose for undertaking a discussion of other cultures was to dismiss the notion that there are strong constraints on either culture, society, or the construction of "reality," what is perhaps a more important strategic disclosure--the former, I hope, having been accomplished--involves this wonderment about the affective, about the "tonality" of one's existence, about what it feels like, or can feel like, to be a human being. What else, after all, do people respond to besides the way things make them feel?

Sitting above the bubbling flow of the timeless Deschutes as it plows for the Columbia, my question--the obvious question--is one of how. How do people become more excited about life, more engaged, more interested in the future and taken--even obsessed--with a sense of their role, their stake in a cultural and political procession that is theirs' to sway and theirs' to endure. Any outcome, I realize, will be the product of many things compelling one another, of momentum feeding upon itself in many aspects of culture and society. Yet there is also something else I am beginning to realize, or perhaps more accurately, to know: Any answer to "the big how" will begin with the way we portray our understanding of life to our children; it will begin with what we tell them is important, and with how much power to align the real

world with their values and priorities they believe they have. So what will we tell them is important? Will we emphasize the experience of living and its fluid, undetermined nature? Will we help them to appreciate the omnipresent and penetrating influence of culture, both past and present? Or will we tell them to get a job--to please, if you will, fill this or that specification for the work force of the future?

On my own drifts down the Deschutes I remember peering up at the high straw-colored ridges that outline the drainage of this wheat-growing plateau--the expansive Columbia River Basin--and, without intention, picturing a line of Indians--horseback, spears at their sides--stretching all along the rim of the distant bluff toward which I was floating. The setting is just right, and my imagination simply conjures an image I've seen too many times in old western films: the stolid Indian, great in numbers, disdainfully scrutinizing the oblivious settlers encroaching upon the sacred river valley below.

Tonight, in my wheelchair on the bridge, with gusts driven by eighteen-wheelers buffeting me from both directions, I feel as if I too am at such an edge--the edge of two cultures. In between lies this river, cold and unaffected, numbingly permanent, northbound forever. On either side lie questions, as they always have, and answers too; but while the questions are the same, the answers are conspicuously different.

Chet Bowers has tried in his book to elucidate variations in the way people answer fundamental questions by looking at the different ways we may define the terms. The way we define the terms, after all, determines how we answer the questions, and the terms, of course, are defined by what we

consider important. Bowers considers what he calls "new (and ancient) guiding metaphors for a sustainable culture" against the backdrop of what he names "guiding metaphors for a culture of progress and environmental exploitation." And from this temporary structure of steel and cement on which I sit, facing a flow that has been recycling to the Pacific Ocean the rains and snows of untold millennia, but which now serves as an arbitrary boundary between one culture and another--indigenous and imported, traditional and modern, past and present--Bowers' distinctions seem particularly relevant.

To my right lies the Native American community of the Warm Springs Reservation, a fellowship which admittedly, and to its detriment, has lost some of its cultural grounding but whose spirit nonetheless fittingly represents Bowers' guiding metaphor of "tradition" as it applies to a sustainable culture: "An awareness of continuities with the past. Valuing traditions (cultural patterns) that contribute to long-term sustainability. But redirecting or discarding traditions that threaten survival." On the other side of the river, on the road to Bend, a city that sprawls with each new wave of Portland yuppies, California retirees and other recreation and relaxation types, lies a perfect example of Bowers' alternative to the guiding metaphor of tradition--change: "[The] belief that change is progressive. Being new (in ideas, values, products), is an expression of progress."

And so it goes on down the list. To my right, on the side of traditional cultures, "freedom" as a guiding metaphor might be defined as "Restriction of self for the sake of others" (Alexander Solzhenitsyn). Self as a cultural being whose individualized needs and forms of expression are part of a larger

mental ecology. Interdependence." While to my left, on the road to modernity, freedom is defined as "Choice of ideas and values by the autonomous individual." Again to my right, within the traditional culture, "community" is "An ecology of life forms. Energy and information webs that include humans as dependent members. A source of analogue thinking [understanding things in terms of their relationships]." While to my left, community is "A geographical area, a collection of common interests. Humans only." "Science" as a guiding metaphor to the sustainable culture is understood as "One of many forms of knowing. A way of understanding relationships, patterns, and processes. Observer influences how phenomenon is understood." While to a culture of progress and environmental exploitation science is "The way to explain, predict, and control natural phenomena; the culture-free way of knowing. Associated with progress and rational understanding. Value-free. Mastery of nature." Likewise, "technology" as a metaphor to the sustainable culture is "Sensitive to environmental/cultural context. Contributing to sustainable community development, based on an ecological model of understanding. Built upon traditional technologies. Using local sources of energy and skill. Decentralized." While in contrast, the modern metaphor by which technology is understood goes something like this: "Rationally formulated procedures, designed to be context-free. Concerned with improving efficiency, which must be measurable. Part of a mechanistic mind set. [It is] the expression of progress and modernization, and 'man's' power to control nature. Experimental." Finally, Bowers contrasts the conception of "knowledge" between the two cultural orientations. In cultures of

sustainability, "Thought processes are influenced by the epistemological orientation of cultural groups. [Knowledge has] many forms: tacit, theoretical, critical, technical, folk, encoded (in genes, language, cultural artifacts, plants, animals, etc.), poetic, spiritual, bodily. Continuities with the past. Responsibility for not diminishing future prospects." While in a culture of deluded individualism knowledge comes from "rational thought and observation. [It is] explicit. The basis of generalizations across cultures. Contributes to freeing individual from the hold of tradition. Acquired mainly through books or scientific observation. Elevates 'man' over other forms of life. The basis of human progress. Secular."¹⁰

It's difficult to leave the river, which, for all its complexity and systems within systems, seems remarkably simple in the night, an apt delineator of Bowers' distinctions. The breeze blows upstream and the river flows downstream. Simple, peaceful, perfect. But I roll back to my van anyway; Monkey Face Ranch is still a good hour away and I think the breeze roused me as much as the coffee, so I need to make a run for it. Back behind the wheel I cross the soundless river and trace its eastern shore. The highway winds the river's course for a distance, then diverges and ascends the canyon walls for the dry plateau above. The road is wide and modern, well-paved and secured with guardrails at every turn. But in my headlights I can see remnants of the river even miles from its present passage, formations on the canyon walls that tell me where it once roiled, emblems that tell its story in nature's original symbols.

As the road climbs clear of the river's gorge my mind wanders back to "the big how," which at first feels stifling, oppressive, heavy, smothering: is it

that big? But I remember what I know, that any answers to the big how will begin with the way we portray our understanding of life to our children, with what we tell them is important, and with how much power to align the real world with their values and priorities they believe they have. So I try to think of this in terms of Bowers' distinctions between guiding metaphors, and too, in terms of how people respond most to the way things make them feel.

This gives me some ideas that feel like they make sense, yet when they begin to sink in, that smothering sensation resumes. "Who are you? Who are you?" I tell myself it's okay to let my imagination go, encourage myself, in fact, to follow it wherever. But the insinuation persists. "Who are you? What do you know?" I can't answer the menacing question and roll down my window for some air--it doesn't feel like there is any inside. The wind helps, blows clear my fear, and at least I can breath. But I'm sweating. Perspiration pours inexplicably from my forehead. It's thirty degrees outside and I'm sweating all the world's nervousness.

Then it hits me, like water on the wicked witch--that old dressing down. "Certain things are just this way and there's nothing you can do about it. Sometimes you just have to accept things the way they are. And what the hell makes you think you know so much anyway?" I veer off the road and skid through the shoulder, open my door and gasp. My breathing is forced and shallow as I shrink from the words. How could anyone say that to me just because I questioned one of our sacred institutions? At the time I didn't know it was right to commit war, or that we had that right, or that, despite what I might have heard, there must have been good reasons for military

action or else the men in charge wouldn't have bothered in the first place.

"What the hell do you know about it anyway, kid?"

It's an old echo, a very old echo, but it rings in my ears every time I dare to imagine. I don't really hear the words; until tonight, at least, I hadn't heard them since that first time when I was barely a teenager. I just feel them clench my lungs, squeeze my heart, burn my ears, and flood my brain with fear and blood. They grip me in my dreams, turn my legs to lead and my arms to sand. The words themselves I had pressed to the blackest recess of my consciousness, where they idled benignly so long as I did too. Think for a moment though of something unexplored, try for a spell to imagine, and the words would tarry no more. Down there where I had placed them, away from where I did my customary thinking, they waited for the emotion and magic of imagination--Blake's "divine being in every person"--which they promptly consumed, smothering my dreams in their waste.

I never knew what caused it: the sweating, the pounding, the labored breathing, the fear of my own thoughts, myself, of being alone. But tonight, tonight the words exposed themselves, and behold, they are only words.

The shoulder here is wide--a good thing too, considering the way I skidded off the road--so I turn my car and face the river below. Far down in the canyon, beyond my sight, the Deschutes still runs black and cold, and for a while I simply absorb its timelessness, constancy, consistency: for eons it has flowed, draining from the same mountains, hills, and valleys their excess without pause. Yet the river is as timeful--cyclical--as it is timeless: its volume varies with the seasons and the irrigation demands of the mint and alfalfa farms upstream; the anadromous fish that used to swarm its shallow

tributaries still return like clockwork, though in diminishing sums; and the insect hatches that make it famous to fishermen are not only prolific but predictable. The river, cold and constant, ancient metaphor for time, is relentless but not unaffected. It's alive, and like everything else, it's changing.

The miskept words are hollow now; betrayed their long-forgotten hide-out, they mean little. I didn't know the words had meant so much to me, done so much to me. I didn't know that it was they--or he--who had stifled me so. But they are gone now, vacant symbols once extracted and abstracted. He, however, exists as an entity, an infuser of fears that devour ideas and disable imagination, that deter exploration of the self as it knows the world. I haven't seen him in years, though I'm sure he's still alive here and there. He was never much of a teacher to begin with; now that I really know him, I hate him.

Maybe, maybe now I can consider "the big how" without fear, pain, or artificial barriers.

In a way it is very difficult to understand why we do the things we do. At times we seem utterly ridiculous. We know ourselves so well (we do have a record don't we?) that it seems reasonable to expect some reconciliation, some correspondence between what we know and the way we live, some indication that our consciousness can be utilized in specific, chosen, and fruitful ways. Yet we show few signs of this, or perhaps more generously, there remain many areas where we show no sign of this. I do concede, however, that while this seems ludicrous it is also understandable, and not the one more so than the other. For every useful insight there is

another, often to the contrary. The sheer volume of ideas with some merit makes things confusing. The bounty of our intellect is also an impediment to its implementation. How many times have I read or heard an argument for one course of action and agreed with it completely, only to be amazed that there is an equally supportable case for the opposite? Television courtroom dramas heighten my appreciation of the ambiguous; pro and con editorials frustrate my desire for an opinion. How should I vote? I don't have time, or perhaps even the ability, to understand all this. It can be staggering, overwhelming, even annoying.

The implication is that if we care to address with our knowledge and comprehension the things we consider to be issues, we need to do some simplifying. If we wish to take pride in our prowess, to justifiably revel in it as we already baselessly do, we must also exhibit the ability to order our understanding, to apply the gains of "our" experience (that is, the outstanding instructive experiences--real or imagined--of human history), to the present. Interestingly, it is our interpretation of experience that is largely the cause of our stultifying inertia. Each of us thinks we are the repositories and expressions of an awareness unique to us and developed by us, by our impressive ability to learn and contrive, so our tendency is to believe that there is little to be gained outside of our immediate experience. We think we know everything as it is, as if language and culture do not subjugate our sensibilities. Consumed by this perception of autonomy--no, that is both too forgiving and too academic, too technical and too easy to avoid identifying with; rather, consumed by this uniquely Western belief that knowledge is quantifiable and merely an acquisition, that we are the products of our always

attentive and supremely impartial personal consciousnesses, that nothing could possibly compromise this capacity for rational thought, and that it is forever and everywhere valid--we are ill-adapted for recognizing the obvious, the innate, the simple unifying realities of genuine time-tested experience, realities that dictate whether or not we are successful.

It will be argued, of course, that "success" is an ambiguous, value-dependent word. "Who is he to define success anyway?" a reader might react indignantly.

Yet such paroxysmal offense is unfounded, for success is not ambiguous. We only argue for that because we are so confused, so outright mistaken about what success is. It's understandable, sort of, that we are confused. After all, material objects and activities do in fact have the capacity to inspire happiness. But that is all they have--the capacity. Yet we tend to measure success by material wealth or the potential to obtain it, as opposed to growth and improvement in personal and cultural forms. It's as if we are still looking outside ourselves to satisfy our needs. This made sense when physical survival was our prime concern, "but the drives that now dominate most of our lives are psychological rather than physical, and this approach seldom brings any true or lasting satisfaction."¹¹

In fact, is there anyone out there--do you personally know anyone--who is so genuinely out of touch as to be unaware, at least in their most reflective posture, that enduring happiness is a state of mind made possible only by a state of mind? Whomever does not know that has never experienced true happiness, and it is a stretch for me even to envision the

person who has not: someone who has never felt sunshine, smelled desert or ocean or forest, shared a smile

But sometimes we forget. And surrounded, literally bombarded as we are by images of the illusion, it is easy to see why. Worst of all, by turning to things physical to satisfy our psychological needs, we jeopardize our collective survival and demean our appreciation of life--a very vicious circle. In addition, our alacritous rush to consume leads us to compete against one another for what we see as a limited supply of the things we insist will procure for us abiding happiness (or at times, even recognizably temporary pleasure). As Peter Russell says of the materialist mind set in The White Hole In Time, such competition is not only divisive and destructive, but wasteful:

It leads us to produce things that no one really needs and to do things that are not really necessary. It encourages short cuts in the name of financial expediency. It promotes blinkered thinking and shortsightedness. It causes us to care less for the world than we do for our own well-being. It even puts us in competition with Nature herself--insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides keep other species at bay so that we can more easily, and more profitably, accomplish our own ends.

This basic operating principle also results in an exploitive mode of consciousness. We use--or perhaps we should say 'abuse'--our surroundings, other people, and even our own bodies in our quest for greater satisfaction. This is the root of our exploitation of the world: the attitudes and values that come from believing that inner well-being is dependent upon what we have or do. Money, power, and the other things that people often blame are not the root cause; they are simply symptoms of a deeper underlying error in our thinking.¹²

So, is the conditioning of our culture, the incidental circumstances and influences of a happenstance biological and social progression more convincing, more coercive than the obvious? It's almost amusing the way we attach ourselves to the material, to our own immediate experience,

ignoring the innumerable influences upon it as if it were pure and reliable, a sensate yet dependable oracle for what is important. Almost amusing. But since there is so much suffering, so much failure, and so much at stake, it is not amusing at all, only diverting. What, I wonder, would happen if we made decisions--actually formulated policy--based on our better understanding of what makes us truly happy, of what feels good over time? What if we said the experience of life is what is important?

Saying this, I immediately find myself reminded of the words written by Edward Abbey after he'd laid forth his ideas concerning the rehabilitation and preservation of this country's national parks in the book Desert Solitaire. His plan was bold, audacious, and definitely shameless. Among other things, it prohibited private automobiles and the construction of any new roadways in our national park system, so he expected a similarly irreverent response:

Critics of my program will argue that it is too late for such a radical reformation of a people's approach to the out-of-doors, that the pattern is too deeply set, and that the majority of Americans would not be willing to emerge from the familiar luxury of their automobiles, even briefly, to try the little-known and problematic advantages of the bicycle, the saddle horse, and the footpath. This might be so; but how can we be sure unless we dare the experiment. I, for one, suspect that millions of our citizens, especially the young, are yearning for adventure, difficulty, challenge--they will respond with enthusiasm. What we must do, prodding the Park Service into the forefront of the demonstration, is provide these young people with the opportunity, the assistance, and the necessary encouragement.¹³

Ah Abbey, if only the bureaucrats had listened: "Shuttle buses, shuttle buses, shuttle buses"--what a lovely sound indeed!

So, what if we say the experience of life is important? What, in turn, would this imply?

To begin with, it would suggest the need to preserve the planet in a state that permits a quality experience of life, so ecological concerns-- everything from population to pollution--become an organizing element of our plan. And of course poverty will have to be addressed: We can't expect people to have a positive experience of life if they're constantly scrounging for their very existence.

But that is not the point.

If we really want people to feel good, if we want to emphasize the experience of living in its multifold possibilities, and if we want to address the practical aspects of all this along the way (since the one leads the other leads the other), then the answer to "the big how" (here, as Abbey says, I reveal the secret, the elusive and mysterious key to the whole problem) resides in our commitment to making people, especially young people, believe they have something worth living and striving for. It resides in the sense people can have that things are going to get better, that answers really are blowin' in the wind; that they are important players in a broader effort to fulfill human needs and sustain ecological integrity, that they are part of something worthy of their attention, participation, and dedication.

But the potential for all of this resides in part in the willingness of our "leaders," our people in all levels of government and any other positions of power and responsibility, to lead. That's not the way I'd like to see it happen; I would much prefer to see change effected from the ground up--in spite, quite literally, of the indolent and passionless opportunists who presently mar a conglomeration of bureaucracies that bottom to top are not altogether corrupt, inept, or simply wanting of direction, just a little of each--but the

pressure's on. On us and on the environment. And though I agree with Bowers, who notes that "deep cultural changes, at the level that effect the taken-for-granted reality of everyday life, are not effectively achieved through governmental attempts to engineer social change,"¹⁴ it doesn't make sense to wait for crisis to conjure commitment, which is the only circumstance, most likely, under which change will be effected from the ground up with appropriate haste. As Abbey said, suspecting that millions of citizens are yearning for challenge, we must "prod" (a well-deserved choice of words) our leaders into the forefront of the demonstration and "provide our young people with the opportunity, the assistance, and the necessary encouragement." It is with this in mind that I say simplify things so we can agree on them, so that the people working from the ground up can point to the people and the images at the top, so that we can get to work giving people something to believe in.

Now for the sordid details.

More and more these days we hear references to things global: the global economy, global sanctions, global warming, global ramifications, global suffering, global extinction, global disarmament, global government, and so forth--which is good. But we just hired a president whose promise to the people was to focus on domestic issues, an area his predecessor had presumably neglected, and it was largely because of this agenda that some of us elected him. This focus is not necessarily bad, of course, but it does nonetheless perpetuate the subtle message that what is good for us is what is good period, that what is good for my country, my state, my city, myself is what is important, as opposed to the painful but inevitable reality that in the

long run what is good for the globe is good for us. The new president's assistant, however, is apparently very concerned about global issues as his book, Earth in the Balance, would seem to attest. I own the book but have read only portions of it. I'm not entirely sure why, but I admit experiencing some resistance to indulging the former senator--however noble or enlightened he may be, he's still one of them. But what I have read from the book is clearly on the right track. For example, in his second chapter, "The Shadow Our Future Throws," then-Senator Al Gore states the following:

The most dangerous threat to our global environment may not be the strategic threats themselves but rather our perception of them, for most people do not yet accept the fact that this crisis is extremely grave. Of course, there is always a degree of uncertainty about complex issues, and careful study is always necessary, but it is all too easy to exaggerate the uncertainty and overstudy the problem—and some people do just that—in order to avoid an uncomfortable conclusion.

But research in lieu of action is unconscionable. Those who argue that we should do nothing until we have completed a lot more research are trying to shift the burden of proof even as the crisis deepens. This point is crucial: a choice to "do nothing" in response to the mounting evidence is actually a choice to continue and even accelerate the reckless environmental destruction that is creating the catastrophe at hand.¹⁵

What is admirable about these two paragraphs is their unambiguous acknowledgment of the crisis and their equally explicit call for a timely and tangible response. What they also reveal, however, is the apparent difficulty of translating such awareness and intention into action. While Gore's boss, President Clinton, attempts to make headway into such important land-use issues as forestry, grazing and mining, he is often stymied by special interests, and, perhaps more importantly, the struggle is sustained in regard only to such specific issues as these and primarily at the level of government versus special interest groups. In contrast, Gore notes that "the real solution will be

found in reinventing and finally healing the relationship between civilization and the earth. The transformation of the way we relate to the earth will of course involve new technologies, but the key changes will involve new ways of thinking about the relationship itself."¹⁶

"...the key changes will involve new ways of thinking about the relationship itself." Precisely. Yet awareness and intention need to be translated into action; they need to be supplemented, complemented, encouraged by public policy. We have a vice-president who has written a book called Earth in the Balance, a book that flatly acknowledges extremely pressing ecological concerns as well as an array of associated issues involving poverty and justice, both domestically and globally, and the well-being of the human spirit. Yet almost inexplicably, we do not have any fundamental and overt policy that addresses this and guides us in matters concerning it.

It is my suggestion--no, it is my shameless contention that the government of the United States, which has policy regarding virtually every aspect of human existence, which, administration after administration, has packaged a new set of goals and mandates for public education in response to "crises" in test scores and other such mundane revelations, should at long last formulate basic policy concerning education as it relates to the ecological crisis and to other related and unrelated issues of social justice and human spiritual health (no, I am not referring to God or ghosts but to what feeds and satisfies the human psyche). And I am not talking here about the curriculum, about some superficial attempt at appeasement involving increased funding for classes on environmental or multicultural education. That is important but it is not the point. The point is that if we wish to give our children

something to live and strive for at a time when all around them they see more deterioration and collapse than uplift and hope, it is imperative that we back up our rhetoric with an agenda they can believe in. It is imperative that we pronounce that the primary purpose of education (and for that matter, of government, but one thing at a time), is to seek solutions to the ecological problems and social inequities that are smothering this country's hope and undermining its faith. And it is equally important that we recognize that any failure to address these issues with the vigor born of elevated focus further decays not only the problems themselves but our belief that they can be remedied, our will even to try. It is not necessary that such policy be grounded in science ("research in lieu of action," as Gore said) or in specifics; rather, it should be acknowledged as an attempt, lauded, in fact, for conceding its own evolving, learning, discovering intent. As Bowers states, "reform does not require a master plan before it begins; but it needs to be guided by a clear sense of the direction in which we must move, and a full awareness of the consequences if we fail."¹⁷ This is not policy so specific as to trample upon anyone's beliefs. It is "merely" an acknowledgment of problems, an expression of a commitment, and of utmost importance, an explicit recognition of the fact that on this shrinking planet the only kind of thinking that makes sense is global thinking: The maxim "Think Globally, Act Locally" is more relevant than ever.

It is also my shameless contention that, contrary to what the fad-driven, politically-pressured curriculum specialists often maintain, we will more likely meet the demands of an increasingly sophisticated work place by emphasizing broad and idealistically grounded intentions than by focusing on

the specific skills needed by a twenty-first century work force. The expectation of acquiring marketable job skills is not what motivates the huge majority of teenagers. Indeed, at present nothing seems to motivate the majority of teenagers. This I offer from my experience of the past few years, teaching in schools both rural and urban, small and large. They certainly don't believe in government, and considering the images they receive--the politics of power and obstructionism instead of the politics of constructive compromise and cooperation--why should they? There are of course exceptions to this sense of despondency, particularly in "honors" or "advanced" classes. But for the most part, students in our schools are missing something to work for.

"They just don't give a shit," a veteran teacher responded frankly when I described to her my day as a substitute recently, "and they're getting worse." A year from retirement, she asked me what I did before and why I wanted to go into teaching at such a time. She also offered me the same advice she gave her son--don't! And though I sympathize with "teacher burnout" and appreciate her years of service, I nonetheless I felt betrayed. She's not just abandoning ship, she was suggesting that I do the same, that we give up altogether. What this seasoned teacher apparently does not see is that, with the pertinent focus, we can give students the things that will capture their interest as well as their resolve. In effect, she simply needs what her students need.

It makes perfect sense actually. Using the mess we created to motivate its resolution is the natural next step in a natural process. Life is nothing if not process. Whether we're talking about evolution, the history of "civilization," or the experience of individuals, it is process that explains

product. This is true with few, if any, exceptions. It is sometimes difficult to accept this explanation for such horrors as the Holocaust; as the study mentioned earlier indicates, we would rather tie that to the inexplicable evil of one man or ignore it altogether, but in truth we cannot. Likewise, as much anger as I may hold against anonymous players in my personal horror--the ludicrous war that took my father--I know that anger is absurd: events which led to that war unfolded decades, centuries, even millennia before it actually began. My anguish may be healthy, but there is no single deserving target or group of targets for my anger, and hence no purpose for it. Process, processes propelled the series of events which led to that bungled attempt to stem the "Red Tide." And process has now carried us to the edge of ecological catastrophe (or should I say the midst?), and widespread social anomie (or in its absence, denial). It is only fitting, therefore, that we respond to the multifold challenges confronting us with precisely what created them--our aggressiveness, our single-minded will to live and to live well.

But that will has been fragmented, and to the youngest among us it may even be rather foreign. The young may not have experienced in their lifetimes the emotions that have led us at various times in our history to rally around a person or a cause, not, at least, to the depth or the extent to which they now must be aroused. But if the task seems unfeasible, consider the alternative; besides, how in good conscience can we assume that it is? Indeed, it is precisely because the challenge is so great that the day is so exciting. The old Chinese proverb, "May you live in interesting times," has been interpreted variously as either a blessing or a curse, though to the Chinese it was traditionally applied as the latter. Present circumstances

would seem to suggest both meanings, with the more appropriate one yet to be determined. These are inarguably interesting times in the context of the adage. Yet perhaps all that prevents it from suggesting a blessing upon the present is the absence of focused leadership, of a guiding sensibility that recognizes both the imperative and the concomitant opening. What should be remembered is that challenge breeds passion and crisis opportunity.

Some people might argue that there is nothing about humanity to suggest that the kind of focus, cooperation, and sacrifice necessary to balance life on earth exists within us. They might even point, for example, to the theories of sociobiology I myself cited earlier in this discussion, noting that our tendency to put personal survival before anything else precludes much hope for humankind. With this I firmly disagree. Sociobiology suggests that within the human animal there are a variety of inclinations and constraints, predispositions if you will, for or against certain aspects of our existence as social beings. But sociobiology also tells us that each of these tendencies is the product of process, not of some original nature, and that they are tendencies and nothing more—we are not within their grip. As Wilson says, "we are just one hodgepodge out of many conceivable," so if anything we should hold with great pride those aspects of human nature that have become the precious qualities of human culture: compassion, altruism, fairness, justice, and so on. In addition, at present the influences of the millennia are subject to a kind of informed analysis, interpretation, and discrimination unlike anything that existed during their evolution or even during these past several thousand years of cultural discovery. We have left a trail that tells a tale from which a sharp eye and ardent curiosity can learn a great deal. As

suggested by the widely accepted evolutionary theory of "punctuated equilibrium," in which peripheral populations successfully mutate and only then expand into and subsume the general population with their improvements, a parallel process may propel (or is propelling) our cultural evolution. This is not to say that we haven't been reading the signs and asking the important questions for a very long time, for indeed we have for many thousands of years, often as an elemental aspect of our relation to the cosmos. But until recently we have had neither the opportunity (in the form of worldwide communications, or in Bowers' words, "the awakening [of] people in living rooms around the world") nor the imperative to implement our most courageous ideals on a global scale.

Now, however, we have both, and perhaps the most relevant thing sociobiology can tell us at this time about human nature is our inherent need for purpose, approval, self-respect, and a sense of connectedness to the group. We have before us what could be an immensely satisfying source for meeting these needs, an opportunity to feed our spirits while improving lives, saving lives, and preserving the source of life for future generations. Organizing our society around the intention of solving, securing and providing is the natural next step in a process that brought us to this cusp of opportunity--or of self-defeat.

In a sense we need to see not only individuals but the whole of society as a "personality" which requires purpose and connection in order to be healthy. "Channel One," the newscast aimed at kids to which many school districts subscribe these days, reported recently in a story about American culture that the French believe culture is supposed to be good for its

members, that it is supposed to make them better people. Students usually pay attention only to the commercials on Channel One, but this story, with its rappers and other gaudy examples of American culture, caught the attention of my class. So I asked them, "What is the purpose of culture, is there one, and should there be one?" Apparently they hadn't thought about it much; at first there was no reaction. But I had been trained in my teacher education courses to wait--"response time" is the term I believe--so I did, and they responded.

It was worth the wait.

Another thing I had been taught during my teacher training (or should I say "told," since I didn't really learn it until the experience I am now describing?), is that most kids, despite their wailings to the contrary, actually want structure in their lives. They may say they want independence, but what many really want is some idea of what to do and when to do it. They only rebel because of the way we put it to them. Given a structure which they help to craft and within which they have choices, they possess both what they need and what they want. This became strikingly clear during our discussion of culture. Student after student voiced a desire for something worthwhile to do and resentment about their perceived absence of opportunity. Many felt cheated, as if their time on earth came too late, and they blamed, quite naturally, their predecessors for letting things get out of hand, for not "taking care of business." "Why can't you guys [adults] just make things work?" one girl asked. "I don't see why it's that hard," she added with exasperation. Not all were this way. A couple of boys were intent on "gettin' rich"; one of them said the main thing he wanted was a "sweet house--a giant one." One of the

girls said she planned to be a doctor, knew it was very unlikely that she would have been able to do so a few generations earlier, and felt a great sense of potential for a meaningful life centered around that future. She, however, is an outstanding student--a noticeably exceptional person--and was the only one who voiced such sentiments that enlightening morning.

But she should not--and she need not--be the exception.

I know too of the students I teach that some possess an attitude which will defend itself from any insinuation against its righteousness, however nihilistic or otherwise closed it may be. But most of the kids showed me on that clear and discerning day what I had already intuited, that they are either altogether eager or only a little time and a little trust away from being excited about seizing their future. They need only to be convinced that it's worth the trouble, worth the emotional risk. But many of them are very fragile. They have heard numerous promises from high and low, far and near. And that is truly sad.

I would like to tell them about the source of much which they believe, of what they accept and take for granted without a second thought. I would like to inform them of what they've been proffered, what they have inherited, and where it is taking them. I would like to hear them curse on the day they perceive their subjugation to both culture and politics. And I would like to see them become selfish and overtly discriminating about what they will accept thereafter.

I can see only one way to regain their trust, and with it their interest and effort--which is fine, because it is the right way and now is the right time --and that is for public education as an institution to front itself with a

statement of purpose that goes beyond the niceties that persistently characterize such declarations. I collected some of these "mission statements" at a job fair I attended recently, the Oregon Professional Education Fair, and they are typically wholesome:

The mission of Vancouver Public Schools is to assure that, within a nurturing and stimulating environment, our diverse students and graduates achieve literacy and appropriate core competencies, and become responsible and compassionate citizens.

The mission of the Astoria School District No. 1C, in partnership with the community, is to graduate young men and women who are mentally prepared and socially skilled. Graduates will have an appreciation of lifelong learning and will be contributing participants in a changing world.

The mission of the Evergreen School District is to provide, in concert with the family, a balanced education that challenges and prepares the individual to think, learn, and achieve success in a changing environment.

Clearly, these are neatly-composed, thoughtfully-conceived visions, and they almost actually say something: "responsible and compassionate citizens"; "contributing participants in a changing world"; "achieve success in a changing environment"--yet they don't really get to the crux of the matter, and where they try, they either come up short or miss the point badly. It simply isn't enough to aim for "responsible and compassionate citizens." What does that mean? Those words are so tired that for practical purposes they are empty. Likewise, to what shall these prospective "contributing participants in a changing world" contribute? Taxes? Children? Most kids cannot read between those lines (assuming there's anything there to be read), so they need a more explicit model. And preparing "the individual to think, learn, and achieve success in a changing environment" seems to recognize

privileges the rights of individuals to do anything within the law. That agenda permits greed to be a guiding principle, as opposed to what works for society and the natural systems that support it. And remember, this is just a statement of purpose--broad and idealistic, a means of inducing young people to participate passionately in their world--not a directive or law, so why should any one or any thing feel threatened impaired by it?

Those that do know why.

The suggestion here, of course, is not that the Constitution be abandoned, capitalism discarded, but rather that we recognize that an agenda--a modus operandi--already exists, that the Constitution is not and never has been inviolate (for example: antitrust laws, the organization of labor, civil rights, and so on), and that it is not presently attuned to either the global nature of our imperatives or the social realities of our cultural personality. Like columnist David Broder, who earlier in this discussion questioned the modern application of the "Connecticut Compromise" to democracy, we can allow ourselves the latitude to consider centuries-old precepts in relation to present-day problems. If we remove the lens of our usual ideological and political preconceptions and take a fresh look at the world, if we identify the real issues, the meaningful issues, articulate to students that this is why they are in school and back it up--mean it--we might find that they give a damn too. We might even see an increase from the one percent of top students from elite private colleges who between 1970 and 1990 chose to teach in public schools, or an increase in the same pitiful percentage who chose careers in the federal government.¹⁹ We might see cynicism about politics decrease, quality

in government increase, and hope for the future rise in the hearts of the people in whose hands the future loosely abides.

But I cannot be sure. I am one of the disillusioned, struggling to believe. This is not the message I grew up on, as I've made clear. All I know for certain is that I care anyway (perhaps it was the morning tide pools and evening sunsets my mother shared with me as a child that evoked this mindless nature and life-loving malady) and that most of the kids I'm around act as though they would care too if they thought it would help: if someone asked them to, modeled their commitment, and said they'd help them to make a difference. Thinking again of Hume, I believe many people are anxious for something to rally around, something they can aggressively pursue, something, perhaps, as clear and inoffensive as an educational agenda that is focused on the broader needs of the present and future and on the felt experience of life, not simply upon the achievement of an ill-conceived representation of "success," or on the needs of present and future work forces in the United States of America: Reason, we need to remember, is and ought to be the slave of the passions.

I suppose it should be acknowledged that perhaps none of this really matters, or at least that neither I nor anyone else is in a position to insist that it does. It may be that the accumulated genetic codes, those unparalleled receptacles of information, are Nature's most precious offspring. Elaborating on Eugene Odom's view that "there is more information of a higher order of sophistication and complexity stored in a few square yards of forest than there is in all the libraries of mankind," Gary Snyder notes that this "higher order" of information "is the information of the universe we live in. It is the

information that has been flowing for millions of years. In this total information context, man may not be necessarily the highest or most interesting product."²⁰ Indeed culture, human culture, may be of significance only to humanity. Similarly, I do not wish to suggest in any way that I believe my discussion is based on higher knowledge of any sort. It is in fact my sincere hope that any conception I may have of order, purpose, or design in this world is grossly inadequate. That human beings could understand some immanent reality cheapens the exquisite: it is pure and naked while we are too flawed, too self-centered in our interpretations, I believe, to perceive anything as it simply is. Besides, I do not care to spoil mystery, the challenge, the opportunity--the utter absence of anything that diminishes what is the essence of life: the unknown, the genuinely original, the exploration of the truly unpredicated.

Nonetheless, I am intrigued by what we know about this planet and I feel as well a vague yet compelling appreciation for it about which I can and need say no more than it exists within me. And for right or wrong, whether justified or not, I am unable to appreciate in other people the absence of some such curiosity and base attraction. That omission, when evident, makes them virtually unrecognizable to me: "Do I know you? Are we smelling the same roses?"

Friends of mine whom I love and respect have remarked that a fear that the sky is falling is a regularly occurring human reaction--a seemingly curt dismissal of my concerns. Yet I have never felt personally insulted by the implication; it is not that they count me a fool, a descendant of a tradition of alarmists. Rather, they portray a safe and unremarkable skepticism, and,

knowing me well, entrust the worry to me, confident that if anything should prove immediately perilous and of bona fide concern to them personally, I will alert them to the threat.

Still, it is difficult to grasp why they recoil from the problem. In virtually all other matters these are people with whom gaining consensus is simply a matter of discussion. Open conversation most often reveals in someone a more informed opinion, which, once evidenced, is graciously accepted. We learn from one another. This form, however, inevitably fails when the conversation turns to concerns about ongoing or impending ecological catastrophe, or to the practical means by which we might secure a more just and equitable society. In all truth I do not know why. In every instance I take special care to point out that whatever the particular concern we are addressing, I make no presumption about the details--the scope, for example, or the time frame. Instead I insist only that if the existing information is even remotely valid, then the sooner it is addressed the easier it will be to redress. I do not suggest that I have the answers or that I know who does, only that answers exist: finding them, I offer, is merely a function of focus and priorities. Yet especially where it concerns matters of ecology, their skepticism persists as if any evidence of danger is but purposeful deceit, the willful distortion of a self-serving and fanatical agenda.

In my kindness I view their response as a natural reaction. The issues are so many, so complex, and so seemingly intractable that they do not know where to begin. There is little point, I presume they believe, in even attempting to encounter something so clearly beyond their control. What is remarkable about their reaction is that it comes from people with a great

amount of control, successful professionals in a variety of fields.

Nonetheless, I understand them as I understand the students I teach and as I understand my own inclination to watch television for hours on end. But I also know that neither they, my students, nor myself are as happy or fulfilled as we could be.

I push on toward Monkey Face, the crushed red lava on the shoulder firing from beneath my tires as I regain the highway. Not too many cars on the road at this hour, just trucks. Trucks with trailers that sway unpredictably, the air they push nudging me toward the edge as I pass them on the two-lane road. Pacing the highway day and night they seem as unrelenting as the river. The Deschutes I've left behind, or more accurately, to the side, where it winds and dives its way along the Cascade Range, quietly accepting what a thousand hillsides cannot absorb. On the plain to the river's east my path is straight, with only the occasional rise and fall of the land to alter my course. South through Madras, asleep at this hour, and on to Terrebonne I roll. Here I leave the highway for the last few miles to the "ranch." I make a few turns from memory as much as recognition and in darkness make the last onto a gravel road. The familiar washboard rattles my car but I'm already wide awake. Window down, I inhale the air in a way that exceeds breathing. This is how an Oregonian from the wet-side of the state behaves when he sets his nose on juniper and sage in the cold black freshness of the starlit desert night.

Back at Monkey Face Ranch I gaze across the sparkling frozen yard to the tracks my car made the night before. The snow that fell in recent days lay undisturbed until my arrival. A deep breath brings into my chest air that

bites my unaccustomed lungs. It is very cold, and considering the unspoiled and primitive beauty that surrounds, I surmise it to be very clean as well. The snow too appears unsurpassably pure, but it has filtered the air, so who knows? That, however, has been going on forever; the snowflakes just catch a little more debris on their descent these days.

When we were kids we used to put snow in a bowl, pour real maple syrup over it, and eat it like dessert, like a home-made snow cone--the best I've ever had. But I remember when my mom decided it wasn't such a good idea, that the snow probably wasn't as clean as it looked. That was in Portland, deep in the city, and no doubt she was right. Here, I'll take my chances. One thing that's for sure, if it's not clean enough to eat, it sure looks like it. It looks as clean and pristine as it has, I imagine, for a million years. Last night, watching it settle to the ground in unusually hasteless fashion, seeing it subtract, flake by flake, detail from the long-frozen winter lawn, I could not envision anything more exquisite.

A soft and windless day passes slowly and pallid clouds appear dark above shining ivory snow: contrast creating illusion. But beauty here is undiminished--no illusion there. The snow, compromised or not by the air through which it falls, is still of the purest white. A Ponderosa, tall and straight, stands next to the roadway dressed as it's been for two hundred winters in a cloak of crystalline splendor. To the eye, all is well in the world. Even my tire tracks seem harmless enough: lines that passed to civilization, where I went this morning to be fed a "country breakfast," and then doubled back on themselves through nature's blanket to this spot on the edge. But the passage they mark is not as innocuous as it appears. Carried by the tires that

made those tracks is the weight of human progress, with all its inertia, and it is only fitting that the tracks I made should end here at Monkey Face, this close to nature, yet this close to the edge--a few more revolutions and those tracks would go over the precipice and down the rimrock to the meadow below.

But that kind of crash is no way to return to nature. A better way might be to lean out from the rimrock and grab hold of one of the pines whose crowns peek over the edge, to climb into its structure and rest among its boughs. The top, however, is probably not the place to get comfortable, though that is where we seem to see ourselves, at the top of the tree of life. A better place to get familiar with our life support system might be somewhere down the tree, in the middle perhaps, where the tree of life can better support our weight. It is simply too crowded at the top--we are too many--and a top-heavy tree is a fragile tree. Besides, those at the top rarely know what is going on beneath them. In the middle, in and amongst and a part of what we are in fact a part of, we can see what's going on--around us, not below us--the way it really is in nature. Food or energy chains, after all, are just that--chains that link living things in a cycle of life and death. There isn't really a top and bottom in an energy chain, as we are inclined to perceive it, with the top, of course, being the best or somehow sacrosanct: there are only cycles, and though it may go against our persuasion, we better remember that.

Resting again amidst the eroding beauty of the Smith Rock formations, the crags and spires and clefts and faces of this ancient stone deposit, I am filled now as I was last spring with reverence for the unqualified sublimity of this place, and I feel with utmost certainty that I need it more than it needs

me: the only things upon which its sublimity depends, it already has: the elements. It does not need me to call it what it is.

Change here is slow, imperceptibly so, but constant. Grain by grain, rock gives way to wind and rain, powerless against the substance of its surroundings. As for us, we who traveled these millennia to the present, the same effect applied. The elements caused us too to give in--to caves, forests--wherever we could find shelter. But in those dark retreats we found light within our minds, and in time, ways to repel and manipulate the elements of nature. With a thought we moved to the brink, where little besides weather, geology and the seas now move beyond our control. We've dammed what we want dammed, paved what we want paved, and retired to the sterile security of our cities. The pressures of natural selection are gone; evolution, as it applies to us, is over. Some small variations may await our genes but what remains of consequence is culture, the evolution of culture. Sitting here across from the image of time itself--the eroded walls of a river's gorge, the chiseled cheeks of the Monkey's Face--that prospect strikes me as singularly enthralling. What good fortune to exist at such a cusp in time, to be present when the minute processes of the millennia converge in a struggle between past and present and future. Nature's own is at its throat and at its own as well. Can the process come full circle and find itself at last? Can it repair to the mind, and there find solutions to its earlier "solutions?" As Wilson says in *Biophilia*, "Now we are near the end. The inner voice murmurs 'You went too far,' and disturbed the world, and gave away too much for your control of Nature. Perhaps Hobbes's definition is correct, and this will be the hell we earned for realizing the truth too late." But like

Wilson I demur in all this and suggest otherwise: "the same knowledge that brought the dilemma to its climax contains the solution."²¹ As T. S. Eliot wrote:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.²²

Yet embracing this seemingly optimistic portent with certitude is challenged each day by the momentum of a world which has indeed gone far, and with so much of what we do still motivated by getting ahead rather than getting it right, my faith and hope hinge delicately on leadership: As Eliot also wrote, "unless we have those few men who combine an exceptional sensibility with an exceptional power over words, our own ability, not merely to express, but even to feel any but the crudest emotions, will degenerate."²³ We need visions, but we also need pronouncements, expressions of intent concerning such shaping experiences as education.

Eliot said too that "The great poet, in writing himself, writes his time,"²⁴ yet Eliot was clearly ahead of his time, or, like the great poets, he was, perhaps, beyond time. In either case, in this era of challenge and opportunity a beacon of promise beckons our attention, and it is from the attainable ability to be "ahead of our time" that this glimmer of hope gleams. We are no longer both predator and prey; the many long years of reacting to the world can fade into our shadowy cultural memory. Instead, from our insulated homes in the cities we may at last become preactive instead of reactive, using our intellect to sift through our jumbled and stymieing beliefs, and our passion for life to wade through the inertial matter that impedes us.

"Biophelia," "the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes,"²⁵ as Wilson defines it, will push us. "We are in the fullest sense a biological species and will find little ultimate meaning apart from the remainder of life."²⁶ But most important, "we are the poetic species, the one which can change itself by changing its behavior--and especially its linguistic behavior, the words it uses."²⁷ Language, symbol systems, propositional worlds, taken-for-granted beliefs, values: these are who we are. But when the poet inside us is awakened, they are not who we are but merely elements of what we can be. As Joseph Campbell observed, "People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive."²⁸ What better way, I wonder, is there to "feel the rapture of being alive" than to justify ourselves the poetic species by consciously changing our behavior, by adapting culturally to ecological and moral imperatives, by becoming what we choose to be?

This sense of potential (the healthy suspicion, as Michel Foucault might describe it, that other ways of knowing and feeling are within our reach), and the humility (which grows from an apprehension of culture's enslaving pervasiveness) to perceive that potential, should reside in the psyche of every schoolchild, and it can if we say it can. It encourages the selfishness--the interest in the self--needed to engage young minds, and the selflessness--the open-mindedness and inclination to look outside--that will reveal to them the power of process, their place within it, and the unqualified

connectedness of all things. It is a vague and arguably elusive ideal and one that is foreign to our current concept of curriculum. But it represents the real domain of human freedom, invokes the passion that will elevate the experience of life and preserve the planet, and it may even steer us toward a modestly sociocentric society (relative, at least, to the self-serving egocentrism that currently characterizes our culture).

Moreover, investigating culture and the self is the kind of inquiry that can be done, as Ricoeur suggests, "playfully"; that is, we play with and are played by the inquiry, an experience, quite significantly, in which "subjectivity forgets itself." In other words, play helps us to step outside our taken-for-granted beliefs and "transforms those who participate in it."²⁹ Picture the playground, kids everywhere agog in games--laughing till they cry, then laughing some more--and it is easy to recall the dissolving sense of restriction and emergent feeling of freedom that results from such play. "All play reveals something true," says Ricoeur, "precisely because it is play. In entering a game we hand ourselves over, we abandon ourselves to the space of meaning which holds sway over the reader [or player]."³⁰ Like the primacy of act over thought, performance over conception, the unpredictability of play reveals the new, the old, the unknown. It is not, in fact, unlike the exploration behind this discourse: a playful relationship--one which, like a game, is unpredictable--develops between writer and work as writer forms a presentation of the world. Something true, if only about the self, surely emerges.

Toward such playful and unpredicated explorations of culture and self I would like to see education extend. It certainly need not be constrained

within its current boundaries, where "play" is something relegated to recess. Indeed a playful approach to serious things is precisely what will help us to see them through eyes less predisposed by cultural relics. We can "play" with the realities--the taken-for-granted beliefs or propositional worlds--of other cultures (demystifying them where necessary) in order to expand our own sense of potential, perceive other models for understanding the world, and consciously select and appropriate such models into self and society. Eventually I believe education will move in this direction, as we begin to emphasize the experience of life more, and the need to "do something with your life" less. Though current trends are not encouraging, this would imply an increased emphasis on the arts, the playing field of rapture.

Yet another contest of sensibilities awaits.

That though, is not now, while Monkey Face is, which is why I come here. Being literally on the edge as I am at Monkey Face Ranch does something to my sense of time; it plays with it, with me, and clearly to my benefit. Out here on the deck there is no where else to go but over--the entire house abuts the rimrock. I don't think about it but it makes me stop. When I am here I am now. I can look across the gorge to the haunting formations of stone and yearn for their breathtaking view as I did last spring. I could wish to be among those pillars and upon their dizzied peaks. But things have changed, I have changed, play has changed me, my sense of time. I do not long for the other side, I think, because even here I am there, as close to the edge as I'll ever want to be.

Nonetheless I sometimes look beyond the Smith Rock formations and imagine what lies behind that quiet beauty: the promised land perhaps?

A place, a time, a condition, an afterlife--whatever it is the promised land exists in myth and fable and deep within our psyche. I know, at least, that it roils within mine. Martin Luther King said he might not get there with us, but that he had climbed the mountain and seen it. It has been in our visions since Eden, Atlantis, Shangri La. Yet the promised land has never been further away from us, or we from it, because if there is a promised land it is the very land and sea we compromised while living in its midst. The promised land is not a place, it is this place. The only journey we must take to reach the promised land is one of the mind, of culture. It is a journey of discovery, not of a place, but of our place. And it is a journey that must be undertaken by all who can make it, but more importantly, it must be taken for all--all who live in the promised land. The North will not rediscover the promised land if it does not meet the South halfway; that is, the journey will require sacrifice, economic and otherwise. Still, it is a journey that has teased the human psyche for a very long time, teased it along toward ever-growing levels of prosperity and convenience, teased it to the edge of the promised land and almost irretrievably beyond. But while we are on the edge, we are as close to the promised land as we are to the chasm below. A step in either direction places us in one or the other. A step toward the chasm is easy--sheer momentum might take it for us. A step back from the edge requires thought and determination; like learning to walk again, it is a step by step struggle--a process. That, however, is what life has always been about--process and endeavor. The promised land does not exist, insofar as it is a land without toil. The promised land of the present, therefore, is simply a different kind of struggle. Rather than a fight for sheer survival--food and shelter--the

promised land is that place where necessities are secured but where the quest is for their wise use and distribution. It is the place we are in now; only we do not see it. We need not climb the mountain to see the promised land; rather, the promised land is full of mountains we must climb. But first we must back away from the edge, together, to truly share the dream.

Finally, the Dalai Lama distills to its essence all that I have tried to say, in a pointed and incisive yet very hopeful way: "We have to consider the prospects of global suffering and environmental degradation unlike anything in human history. I think, however, there is good news in that now we will definitely have to find new ways to survive together on this planet."³¹

Epilogue

In the midst of so much that is perplexing, frustrating and outright overwhelming, Monkey Face Ranch has been a haven, and as such, the space and serenity it offers is complemented by the simple truths proclaimed on a small card left by the owner for her guests' meditation. At times I feel that these direct reminders are all a person ever need know to live a genuinely successful life, that perhaps teachers should at all times wear these words on their shirts and bear them in their minds. Could it be that easy? It seems fitting, therefore, that after following me through so much speculation and groping for answers, the reader should be offered the gentle power of these special thoughts:

A. M. CRONIN JR.
1904-1947

TWELVE THINGS TO
REMEMBER

1. THE VALUE OF TIME
2. THE SUCCESS OF PERSEVERANCE
3. THE PLEASURE OF WORKING
4. THE DIGNITY OF SIMPLICITY
5. THE WORTH OF CHARACTER
6. THE POWER OF KINDNESS
7. THE INFLUENCE OF EXAMPLE
8. THE OBLIGATION OF DUTY
9. THE WISDOM OF ECONOMY
10. THE VIRTUE OF PATIENCE
11. THE IMPROVEMENT OF TALENT
12. THE JOY OF ORIGINATING

MONKEY FACE RANCH

A. M. Cronin Jr. was the owner's father. These twelve things were found in his desk after his passing. It is not known whether he composed them or discovered them. In either case, his endearment demonstrates his wisdom.

Notes

¹Herman Melville, Hawthorne and His Mosses, 1850, quoted in John Bartlett, Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, 16th ed., (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 486.

²Victor Hugo, Historie d'un Crime, 1852, conclusion, quoted in John Bartlett, Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, 16th ed., (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 427.

³Edward O. Wilson, On Human Nature, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 197.

⁴Wilson, Human Nature, 197.

⁵Wilson, Human Nature, 165-166.

⁶William Pfaff, "Peace and good will toward all eludes the world again in 1992," Eugene (Ore.) Register-Guard, December 1992. Further documentation unavailable at this time.

⁷Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 182.

⁸Clifford Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View," in Shweder and LeVine (eds.), Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 126.

Further citations are included in the text with the abbreviation (C.T.)

⁹Joseph Epes Brown, The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian, (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 51.

¹⁰C. A. Bowers, Education, Cultural Myths, and the Ecological Crisis: Toward Deep Changes, (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1993), 167.

¹¹Peter Russell, The White Hole in Time: Our Future Evolution and the Meaning of Now, (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 73.

¹²Russell, pp. 73-74.

64. ¹³Edward Abbey, Desert Solitaire, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968),

¹⁴Bowers, 216.

¹⁵Senator Al Gore, Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), 36-37.

¹⁶Gore, 35.

¹⁷Bowers, 217.

¹⁸Robert Ardrey, quoted in Jennifer James, Ph. D., Visions From the Heart, (Seattle: Brown Press, 1991) 43.

¹⁹Derek Bok, The Cost of Talent, quoted in Richard Harwood, "Best and brightest shun public service," Portland Oregonian, 8 February 1994.

²⁰Gary Snyder, Turtle Island, (New York: New Directions, 1974) 107-108, quoted in Bowers, 161-162.

²¹Edward O. Wilson, Biophilia, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 13.

²²T. S. Eliot, Little Gidding, (Four Quartets), quoted in James, p. vi.

²³T. S. Eliot, quoted in Wilson, Biophilia, 79.

²⁴T. S. Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," 1927, quoted in John Bartlett, Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, 16th ed., (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 672.

²⁵Wilson, Biophilia, p. 1.

²⁶Wilson, Biophilia, p. 81.

²⁷Richard Rorty, "Mind As Ineffable," in R. Q. Elvee (ed.), Mind in Nature, (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 60-95, quoted in Wilson, Biophilia, 152.

²⁸Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), quoted in James, 103.

²⁹Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 186.

³⁰Ricoeur, 187.

³¹The Dalai Lama of Tibet, "Thinking Globally: A Universal Task," EPA Journal, (Sept.-Oct., 1991): 52-53.

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