



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

At a dinner party with my girlfriends, recently, I wanted to telephone you about the matter of today's concept of the Philosophy of Education. You will recall that you input your telephone number in my new Motorola mobile telephone so that I would not have to remember the number. As you put it, at the time: 'Just click on my name and, Hail! Presto! the telephone will, automatically, call my number.' Well, I tried to do just that ... without any success. After opening the flappy thing, there, staring at me was a display panel with four pictures on it. I clicked on each one of the pictures, but I could not find your name on any of them. One of my girlfriends called me a silly bumpkin and snatched the telephone out of my hands, saying that she would be able to figure it out in no time. After all of my girlfriends had had a turn in trying to find your name, we, all, gave up. The consensus was that a telephone should be a tool and not a toy; and, that it had a primary function: To send and to receive voice messages. Leave the toys to the youngsters and put the tools in the hands of the mature people, if you please. Today, the youngsters seem to do all, or most, of the inputting of data into computing programmes, installed in modern mobile telephones, as well as applying the latest technological advances to other devices. The more mature people (that does not mean the elderly people, I hasten to add) make use of youngsters' technological knowledge by applying their intellectuality to daily life. The modern electric thermo pot, for instance, uses a small computer chip, which guarantees that the water in the electric pot will, always, be kept on, or near, the boil, day and night, when the device is plugged into the electric power point. This is very different from the time that I was a young girl and had to put the kettle in the electric stove in order to boil water for tea in the mornings. Then, there is Grandpa's electric shaver, which was made in Germany. This shaver, also, has a little computer chip, built into it, so that, when the appropriate button is pressed, the shaver's stand cleans the shaver's head and, at the same time, charges the shaver's battery. Modern life is a far cry from yesteryear to be sure. The electrical and electronic devices, used at one's home, and the electronic devices, installed in the offices of modern businesses, would make many people's eyes, of just thirty years ago, pop out in disbelief. While the modern personal computer is a blessing to the secretaries of Grandpa because these ladies are able to prepare long and involved government documents in a very short space of time, with their computers, checking the spelling and grammar for mistakes as they type, at the same time, modern technology may, also, be an obstruction to creative thinking, it seems to me. Consider the following: Would Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) have written his Leviathan in 1651 if he had had a personal computer in his day? Or would he have written more than he did on the subject of Human Nature? I wonder. How would Socrates (470-390 B.C.) have viewed the Internet of today, with its ability to draw down information from the many tomes of data, stored in the tens of millions of Internet sites? I can go on and on, citing one great thinker after another and try to speculate what those great minds would have thought of the inventions of the Twentieth Century and the Twenty First Century. The poetry of John Milton (1608-1674), the art of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), and the theory of the Rights of Man, as conceived by that Anglo-American writer, Mr Thomas Paine, and perfected to a greater degree by that great American statesman, Mr Thomas Jefferson, their thinking, leading to penning of The Declaration of the Rights of Man and The Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution, both managed to create great works without the benefit of modern machines, electronics, modern modes of transport, etc. But these great minds still managed to create ideas of pith and moment and to plant the type of architecture of intellect, which will stay with man, forever. It is said that, of English poet, Mr William Wordsworth (1770-1850), he created poetic visions in his mind's eye, merely by looking out of his window and noting the changing seasons. Would Mr William Wordsworth have been able to compose such beauty if time had not permitted him the luxury of viewing nature as it, really is?

The education system of today could be described as having been broken down into essentialism and fundamentalism. This is sad, actually, but perhaps very necessary in today's world. It is unlikely that there ever will be another universal genius as was, reportedly, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). It is alleged that all that there was to know about the world, during Aristotle's time, he knew it and could recall it all due to his encyclopedian-developed brain. It is hard to believe, but, that is what history books claim. Because there is so much knowledge to be digested in our time, it is generally held that the youth of today is forced to be guided along a very much narrower path than in days of yore. For the most part, today's youth learns only that which, in his/her later life, she/he is required to know. The concept of laying down a solid academic foundation, comprising the arts as well as science, for a student, first, prior to permitting her/him to specialise in a certain, well-defined discipline, seems to have been forgotten. But the theory of knowledge, once known widely as the study of epistemology, had its good points, too, you know. It would, indeed, be a pity to throw into the waste basket of history, the songs of that gifted songwriter in the late 19th Century, Hugo Wolf, who developed the lied, the German romantic song form, to the fullest extent of expressive subtlety, characterised by the independence of voice and piano parts. Who cannot appreciate the works of Frédéric François Chopin (1810-1849), the Tristan and Isolde of Richard Wilhelm Wagner (1813-1883), or the architecture of Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723)? Shall civilisation discard these geniuses and their contributions to the beauty of the world – theirs, ours, and the future's – along with hundreds of others of bygone times for the sake of sending men into space in order to discover other planets, which may be surveyed for precious minerals and metals? The trouble with enforcing educational essentialism, prior to laying down the groundwork for such specialisation by fundamentalistic concepts, first embodied in a student, is that it tends to create automatons instead of thinkers. These automatons know how to build and fly a spaceship, how to calculate the speed of light, how to build bigger and better weapons of mass destruction, but they may not understand and/or appreciate that lasting civilisations were built on philosophical concepts from whence came such lofty ideas as the world as a plenum; and, that truth may only be found in reason, a concept, disseminated by Parmenides (500 B.C.), which led Plato (428 B.C. – 347 B.C.) on the road to reason. Who would have determined to consider The Theory of Ideas, The Philosophy of Law, The Rights of Man, Ethical Naturalism, Inductive Logic, being distinct from Aristotelian Deductive Logic, and, of course, the Greek concept of democracy, etc, etc, etc? Man's ability to think and to create has distinguished him from all other life forms on this planet of ours. But he is in danger, it seems to me, of losing all, unless we, all, sit down to evaluate what we are creating for future generations. Or, are we intent on leaving nothing behind?

The world has, always, had terrorism, but the terrorists of centuries past were, always, fighting for ideals. They were never fighting for money (the Crusades of the Eleventh Century to the Fourteenth Century, notwithstanding). The popular terrorist organisations of today are not killing for money, also, but because they are diametrically opposed to the philosophy and theosophy of the Western World, generally. The terrorist cells of today contain volcanoes of hatred, which, from time to time, erupt, killing all within the range of their hot lava. Nobody has, yet, tried to cap these volcanoes, but, instead, it is generally believed that the terrorists can be killed. Ideas, right or wrong, cannot die by killing the messenger. No computer or any other electronic device can kill an idea. Only the applications of philosophic thought can counter modern terrorism. If man accepts that, basically, he is good, not evil, then, armed with such a weapon, it should be possible to reason with any terrorist. To kill the leader of a terrorist cell, such as Osama bin Laden, is unlikely to appease his followers, who, today, number in the tens of thousands. The main problem of today's world is the inability of modern man to think and fully to understand the consequences of his actions, not just on today's life forms, but on the progeny that he leaves behind ... if there is to be a tomorrow, that is. Because, sooner or later, unless reason is substituted for military might and jingoism, the terrorists will obtain and learn how to use nuclear weapons of mass destruction. I do not want even to think of such consequences. The intelligent man of today's world, has one weapon that is more powerful than any nuclear device could ever be. It is more far-reaching than ever before thought possible. It can be used to create or destroy, in part or in whole. It is more powerful and more persuasive than anything that ever existed in the world before him. It is his pride; and, it may be his undoing. It is his brain. Pity the man who does not use it!

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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