

October 28, 2002

LEVEL: N/A

[Forematter]

Epigraphs

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“There is no way to peace; peace is the way.”

— A. J. Muste

“Pragmatism, in the most basic sense, is about how we think, not what we think.”

— Louis Menand (1997:xxvi)

“It’s so simple, scarcely anyone can get it.”

— Brad Blanton

"If the dialogue is a real dialogue, if it does not turn into a monologue, then each participant in the conversation preserves his or her difference from the other. But each also listens to, hears, and deals with the principles of the other, and engages them as different. Thus participants in a dialogue acknowledge the other as different without trying to set aside or render inoperative the other's principles. Nor do they try to redefine the difference between them in terms of one participant's scheme. Rather each participant recognizes that the relation is defined not by one participant but by the conversation between them. In the communion of real dialogue, difference exists and operates within the unity of conversation itself."

— Ardis Collins (ed.) *Hegel on the Modern World* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. x-xii.

“What virtuous people perpetually struggle against is not political ideology, for ideology ... is really just a mask for resentment. Marxism is one form of resentment; feminism is another.... [H]appiness is always threatened by abstractions, of whatever time or political tendency.”

— Louis Menand (2002:193)

“Utopianism is evil not only because it countenances real suffering today in the name of abstract justice tomorrow. It is evil because it teaches perfectibility. Part of being happy is knowing how to live with people the way they are, and with yourself, the way you are. If feminism means changing the way men are, rather than dealing with the way they are, then Lessing is not a feminist.”

— Louis Menand (2002:193)

“Like the radicals in the sixties part of the book, ... these are all utopians..., and utopianism, the ‘sweet dream’ of a world without suffering, is the novels great and unmitigated evil.”

— Louis Menand (2002:193) [Place in “Grasping the Nettle”?]

“The man who writes about himself and his own time is the only man who writes about all people and about all time.”

— George Bernard Shaw

POEM : KINDNESS

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.

You must wake up with sorrow.

You must speak to it 'till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense
only kindness that ties your shoes

and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head

from the crowd of the world to say

It is I you have been looking for,

and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

— From Naomi Shihab *Words Under Words* (1995)

“When a contradiction is impossible to resolve except by a lie, then we know that it is really a door.”

— Simone Weil *Notebooks* (1950)

“The opening line [of the Mourner’s Kaddish] is ‘Magnified and sanctified by God’s great name in the world which He has created according to His will.’ This declaration has a particular context: God, it is well understood, is a law-bringer and a society-maker, not a dispenser of personal favors in the name of holiness. Grief comes under the purview of an elaborate, and presumably divine, system; the underlying assumption is that even the most searing loss can be assuaged, slowly, by the assurance that a fundamentally good moral structure will live on after any one person within it is gone.”

— Nicholas Lemann (2001). Letter from Washington: The Options. *The New Yorker*. (October 1):79.

“On Aka, *god* is a word without referent. No capital letters. No creator, only creation. No eternal father to reward and punish, justify injustice, ordain cruelty, offer salvation. Eternity not an endpoint but a continuity. Primal division of being into material and spiritual only as two-as-one, or one in two aspects. No hierarchy of Nature and Supernatural. No binary Dark/Light, Evil/Good, or Body/Soul. No afterlife, no rebirth, no immortal disembodied or reincarnated soul. No heavens, no hells. The Akan system is a spiritual discipline with spiritual goals, but they’re exactly the same goals it seeks for bodily and ethical well-being. Right action is its own end. Dharma without karma” (LeGuin 2000:102).

“I embrace the Bible as an often inspired depository of the wisdom of our spiritual ancestors. And I believe that the church, for all its flaws and tragic errors, is the best hope for preserving the values that I hold dear. ¶ Can I prove any of this to you? No. Can I even, for that matter, prove any of this to myself? No. But is there enough circumstantial evidence in my own experience and the experience of others so I may trust in the propositions I have mentioned, even trust them enough to bet my life on them? Yes. I have bet my life on them. If I were beginning my adult years again, I would bet my life on them again. The thing I would change is that I would try to be more forthright with people from the beginning, as I have tried to be forthright with you, about how religion deals not with certainties but with trust” (Good 2001).

“Certitude is not the test of certainty.” – Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. [Quoted in *The New Yorker*. The original quote is from Holmes’s *Natural Law* (1918).]

“I have learned to trust the processes that take time, to value change that is not sudden or ill-considered but grows out of the ground of experience. Such change is properly defined as conversion, a word that at its root connotes not a change of essence but of perspective, as / turning round; turning back to or returning; turning one’s attention to.”– Quoted in Kathleen Norris *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), pp.145-146.

“A neurotic is someone for whom the reality *has to be* something else.” – Brad Blanton

“My God – what if I’m *not* the main character?” (T-shirt slogan by Horacek)

Agnes Heller has captured an overall problem with Habermas's theorization of the subject-object dialectic: "The sensuous, the needing, the feeling human being never ceased to be one of [Habermas's] main concerns. Habermasian man has, however, no body, no feelings; the 'structure of personality' is identified with cognition, language, and interaction. Although Habermas accepts the Aristotelian differentiation between 'life' and 'the good life,' one gets the impression that the good life consists solely of rational communication and that needs can be argued for without being felt."

Agnes Heller, Habermas and Marxism, p.22 in Thompson and Held, *Habermas: Critical Debates*. [From a Kenneth MacKendrick post to the Habermas e-list, 5/10/02.]