

Another Country

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This article takes the well-known idea that the past is 'another country' and uses it as the basis for a reflection on differing contemporary attitudes to history and to travel. Using 'travel' as a paradigm to look at history, I discuss how the issue of the foreignness of the past reveals the paradoxical nature of civic education in a democracy. My final argument is that the only thing which can serve as the basis of a truly democratic civic education is one that allows us contact with traditions and ideals that are not our own, and have not been tailored to fit any of our contending contemporary orthodoxies.

The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.
L P Hartley, *The Go-Between*.¹

At first glance, this quotation has the rather mothballed dignity of a platitude. Who, after all, needs to be told that the past is distinct from the present—a distinction without which enquiring into history would be like trying to learn a language that we already knew? But Hartley's statement expresses a thought that only time, carelessness and a forgetting of context has let ossify into a cliché.² In order to retrieve this thought, we should try to think about what these words entail: the past as another country in the way America is another country for Henry James' Europeans, as Arabia (a dream country, a hope of a country) is for T E Lawrence and the Arab Revolt, the way East and West Berlin are *other countries* in John Le Carré's Cold War novels.

But does anybody *actually* relate to the past as they would to another country—as we might treat that place over the waters where they speak and rejoice, complain and give thanks in idioms that appear at once familiar and unfathomable? Can the past be another country in which we might seek out an epiphany or a tan; a modicum of pre-lapsarian vitality or an alternative way of symbolising the fundamental experiences of humanity? Do we *really* treat the shifting moments in the history of ideas in a manner that a prevalent travellers' ethos suggests that we should, i.e. as a place where we go (with a degree of respect if not wonder) to learn another language, as a doorway to another way of life?

In what follows I would like to show how thinking about some of the different attitudes to the two different kinds of 'countries'—those from which we are separated by space and those from which we are divided by time—can illuminate some of the assumptions that underlie many debates about the role of history in education. Comparing different modern attitudes to history and travel, I will discuss the question of why we might teach history in the first place, and why we might think it worthwhile to do so. In addition, I will use this comparison to try to show how attempts to *ensure* that teaching achieves certain outcomes (almost irrespective of what those outcomes are) can ironically end up *preventing* students from having any real encounter with the past, by imposing a kind of prophylactic between them and

the historical material upon which they are supposed to be reflecting. In referring to a 'real encounter' I am not naively suggesting that the goal of history should be historical simulations of sufficient verisimilitude to fool a real Cathar or an actual Victorian chimney-sweep.³ The only necessary (although obviously not sufficient) condition for such an encounter to take place is that any confrontation with historical materials is not totally subordinated in advance to the function of flattering one of the prevailing ideologies of the age. Such flattery can be directed at any number of contemporary prejudices, the prejudices of the ostensible left as much as the putative right; the vanity of the students as much as the designers of curricula. But history cannot, I argue, be history without entailing a risk—which can never be completely eliminated without turning teaching into 'management', as the corporate world uses the term. Such a replacement would itself be an unfortunate step towards the substitution of democratic and humanistic ideals for technocratic/managerial ones; a process that may be going a little too smoothly of its own accord without making preemptory concessions.

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Why teach history? The problem with the question is that it seems to fish for answers which are more edifying than explanatory. In what follows, however, I shall try to limit my answers to the latter mode.

First, one of the most prominent reasons given for teaching history is that history is a kind of anthropological constant for which our current pedagogical approaches simply provide a contemporary outlet. All human societies have told stories about the past, often in the form of myths that invoke a distant or even 'immemorial' time. These stories, conceived functionally, play an integral role in making sense of the world of the storytellers and their audience. The stories (*histoire*) and myths thus become part of the world's fabric—a frame for reality that is at the same time a part of the landscape and the action.⁴

Second, there is the idea that we can, in fact, learn something from history; an idea that has sometimes involved the postulation of a kind of interpretative key through which one could separate the lessons of history from the mass of mere detail, but that has its least extravagant and most pithy expression in the saying 'those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it'. However, the idea that we can actually learn

something from history has been considered risible as often as it has been considered respectable.⁵

Third, history has, in the last few centuries, frequently been considered an indispensable and even defining part of ‘civic education’—which in itself is an ambiguous concept. The ambiguities stem from the fact that it is impossible to define it without giving an indication of the kind of society in which the person giving the definition lives. The ‘civic’ in civic education means education pertaining to the ‘city’ (Latin: *civitas*). It harks back to a time when the city was the basic political unit (Greek *polis*, also city); in the way that makes the Peloponnesian War, at its heart, a tale of two cities. Civic education, then, would be that which teaches us to be a citizen, which readies us for public life or, more broadly, the life in common.⁶ But the idea of civic education carries two fundamental ambiguities even in its name. First, by ‘civic education’ do we refer to education *for* the city, or *by* the city? Second (and I mean to use this loosely so that it applies to secular contexts as much as religious ones), to ‘the city of Man’ or the ‘city of God’?

In common usage, civic education means education *for* the ‘city’. It is that aspect of education through which we become citizens: who can, at least in some minimal sense, act for the good and discharge our duties to the city, nation, ‘society’ or community. These duties can require anything from a total subsumption of the whole of one’s life (as in a totalitarian society) to the simultaneously nugatory and subtly strenuous requirements of our own liberal-democratic/capitalist consumerist societies.⁷

But we can also read ‘civic education’ as education ‘*by* the city’: that which we learn by immersion within a political community, whether this is a deliberate component of *formal* education or otherwise.⁸ This brings the idea of civic education closer to the sense of—to use a modern idiom—*socialisation*. Thus de Tocqueville talks constantly about ‘democratic mores’, and means by this the kind of attitudes that prevail in the citizens of a democracy simply *qua* democracy.⁹ This sense of ‘civic education’ does not suggest the existence of mass-conformity (allowing as it does for civic dissension, dissidence and deviance), only of there existing a ‘spirit of the laws’ (Montesquieu) *against which* conformity or non-conformity is to be judged. Hence there is still something that, say, all 20th-century Americans have in common, despite their divisions along lines of class, ideology, life-experience

and opportunity. And this common substance is something that these Americans do *not* share with Socrates, but which he shares even with those of his fellow Athenians with whom he has least in common. This ‘in-common’ is the result of education *by* ‘the city’—the imprint, in the words of Cornelius Castoriadis, of the two different ‘social imaginaries’.¹⁰

The extent to which formal education overlaps with ‘education by the city’ is a subject of contention. Thus, we can imagine people alternately rejoicing or deploring the extent to which our present system of formal (primary and secondary) education is given over to making sure adolescents ‘get along well with their peers’ as a *fons et origo* of their ‘getting on in the world’. At the same time we can imagine parents who want precisely for schools to be refuges from whatever vices or stupidities they perceive as reigning ‘out there’ in the world, such that formal education can be seen as existing to *offset* education ‘by the city’ as much as to complete it.

One of the rare points of agreement for educational doctrines in current, liberal democratic society is that a society that rendered education indistinguishable from ‘civic’ education (as this would have been in, for instance, ancient Sparta)¹¹ would be undesirable because it would constitute a totalitarian nightmare. Thus, even those who vociferously argue that education should be principally directed towards the ‘public interest’, or who would demand an avowedly nationalistic/socialist/‘green’ or neo-liberal centre to the curriculum would surely shudder at the thought that their children would learn ‘liberal democratic’ mathematics, or ‘capitalist metaphysics’ insofar as this could not help but recall such monstrosities as ‘Soviet biology’, ‘Aryan physics’ or ‘The History of the World according to National Socialism’.

The consensus, therefore, holds that some aspects of education are fields in themselves which can only be brought into conformity with ‘civic responsibilities’ (or any values beyond those imminent to the field) by fortunate accident or by predetermining their content in a way that is incommensurable with their freedom. At least, this is virtually undisputed in the case of the *natural* sciences.¹² The case of the humanities (including history) is more complicated and of course more controversial. Here again no one contests that education would be travestied if it became *nothing more* than a conduit for certain ‘values’ or ideals. Were this to happen, education would become, simply, propaganda. At the same time, we often hear people arguing that

because there is no such thing as a neutral or disinterested scholarship, the partisans of different visions of a just society must fight to make sure that *their* interpretation will reign in pedagogical practice, because it is inevitable—in an axiological jungle—that *some* interpretation or set of ‘values’ will dominate the curriculum. This attitude then says: ‘either *we* dominate the curriculum or the other side will, so we had best get moving.’

But if it is legitimate to suspect that claims to universality and objectivity may serve as a mask for particular interests, it is surely just as legitimate to suspect that *denials* of universality or objectivity may exist simply to excuse irrational partisanship by inuring it from rational criticism or reflection. If I proclaim that all courts are corrupt I may be empirically correct, but I have also conveniently excused myself from having to submit to judicial proceedings whose findings may not be in my favour. Between one horn of this dilemma and the next we therefore encounter the issue of how education in the humanities can retain (and be considered in terms of) its explicitly ‘civic’ dimension (say, by showing some obvious connection to the ‘pressing concerns of the present age’), without being obliterated by its *reduction* to such a function.

Insofar as most modern educational ideas are a kind of palimpsest of older ones, it should not be surprising that some of the most important and persistent concepts of education are variants of the idea of education as *cultivation* or *Bildung*.¹³ These concepts still inform contemporary ideas of education despite the fact that the worldview (and specifically the vision of the cosmos from which they emerged and in which they made sense) has been subsequently disavowed. By this loose sense of an idea of *Bildung*, I mean anything that sees the educational process as geared towards the formation of ‘character’, even if this is now looked at as something like the realisation or development of the ‘personality’. The common thread of all these visions of education is that the goal (whether it is autonomy, virtue or self-realisation) is to be achieved through a process of habituation that is less like an imposition or a *moulding* and more like—to use the traditional metaphor—exposing a plant to the sunlight that it requires in order to flourish. One way to see this, which is closest to its roots in Aristotle’s concept of *paideia*, is to see the process of education as drawing out a nature that flourishes under the right conditions, but that atrophies in their absence.

The use of a teleological concept of ‘nature’ (of nature having a fundamental purpose) is almost always rejected in modern educational theory as the relic of an outmoded metaphysics.¹⁴ But an almost equivalent conception can still persist under the auspices of developmental (or dynamic) theories of the psyche, the body or the self. It is here that the issue of the ‘city of God’ enters the question of civic education. In the Stoic conception of education, for example, the drawing out of natural potentials through education takes human beings beyond the contingent city of their birth, and in a sense offers them *dual citizenship*: a student becomes, through her education, not only a member of the political community of her birth but also a citizen of the cosmos—a participant in the underlying reality of all things. The Stoics thought that a life lived according to nature rendered the person who lived it a citizen of the world (or the *cosmopolis*) who could stand above whatever corruptions might be present in the ‘earthly’ city, while still discharging their responsibilities to it.¹⁵ I maintain that these conceptions of education are still with us. However much we might deny the existence of a ‘cosmos’ in the post-Copernican world,¹⁶ we still suggest something like this ‘dual citizenship’ whenever we insist that education is something that cannot (or should not) be exhausted by ‘civic education’ (in the sense of education tailored to fit—without excess—the needs of the ‘secular’ city). Such a sense of ‘dual citizenship’ is also evoked when we assert that we can learn truths which, in transcending our particular society or time, can at least strive to be *universal*. We again presuppose something like this whenever we assume—as, I would argue, we do all the time—that ‘education’ is good for both an individual *and* for her society without having its content predetermined by the good of *either*.

The way we see the connection between the ‘two cities’ depends on the particular philosophical vision we have of the relationship between society, individual and cosmos (or world). Thus, for Plato and Aristotle, there is a connection between the order of the city and the order of the soul—such that the fates of each of these are seen as inextricably interdependent.¹⁷ While this talk of ‘souls’ and ‘orders’ may seem hopelessly archaic or quaint, there are eminently discernible vestiges of these notions in later educational ideas. Thus, for instance, both Rousseau and Marx think of a just society as at once the ultimate goal of all education and in another sense the *conditio sine qua non* for ‘education’ being truly cosmopolitan or ‘humanistic’,

as opposed to merely and tragically (and parochially) Prussian or American, bourgeois or aristocratic. For these two thinkers, education is something that in its true form would be the civic education of a just society—where a just society would require ‘civic education’ and ‘cosmopolitan education’, (the education of a *citizen* in her ‘civic responsibilities’ and the education of a *human being* in those things that best bring out her individual potentials) to overlap to the point of being indistinguishable.¹⁸

If we now think about our own time’s version of the *Bildung* model mentioned above (the idea of education as the cultivating and drawing out of potentials), we can see what I think is a nigh-on ubiquitous vision of how education can be something that is at once good for the individual and good for the community, while still having a content independent from or ‘non-identical’¹⁹ with what the community or the individual *thinks* is good. One common way of thinking about this teaching would be to see education as geared to the community via the drawing out of the individual student’s talents, which will then somehow (at least ultimately) prove useful to the community. Thus, a pervasive neo-liberal ideology argues that everyone’s pursuits of their own goals can lead ultimately to the benefit of society, and even that the prosperity of one society can then flow over to benefit others. Education (in the *Bildung* sense) would then be chiefly about drawing out latent talents which could help the individual pursue her individual goals in a way that would ultimately lead to the greater good. At its most tawdry, such an educational vision could look to history teaching as having little point beyond activating the child’s potential to be (or not to be) a professional historian—a new Simon Schama or Howard Zinn. This at least would be the belief and hope of the obsessive middle-class parent who sees school as an institution for bringing out the musician/actress/sportsman/CEO/best-selling novelist/surgeon lurking in the recesses of their child’s (impeccable) genome.

Of course, we can render a less cynical version of the modern ‘education as *Bildung*’ model. But if we wish to put forward this issue of unleashed ‘potential’ in less crass terms we are left with the question: what kind of potential is supposed to be released from the teaching of history, if it is not something circular like the child’s (potentially remunerative) ability for studying a specific subject? Surely, we would have to refer to some inherent potential for insight or to understanding, the ability to see something, to have certain possible objects of

experience—*historical* objects—come forth into the light. But what kind of things are these? After the manner of phenomenology,²⁰ we could ask: what is the region of being that the study of history illuminates? And how does this illumination relate to the city, or to our broadly speaking political concerns?

In order to answer this, we shall have to revisit the opening quotation and the link between travel and transcendence.

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If the past is another country, we would expect to find an analogy between history and travel. History and travel are linked in that they are both a means of ‘transcending’, in the sense of going beyond or *leaving behind* the everyday. This does not mean, of course, that it is impossible for a history book or a journey to be dull or disappointing. On the contrary, it is precisely because travel, especially, is often proffered as a kind of exemplary provider of transcendence (experience something new!) that it is so possible to have the Wordsworth-in-the-Alps experience of having blinked and missed the sublimity of surroundings by which we were supposed to have been taken outside of ourselves.

If history and travel are pre-eminent opportunities for ‘transcendence of the everyday’, we have to recognise the extent to which the everyday is itself the product of a kind of originary transcendence that subsists at the very heart of the human condition. I would even go so far as to say that what we call ‘experience’ is an endless and endlessly colourful *play* of transcendence and imminence.²¹

But the capacity for our thoughts to transcend (step outside of, partly leave behind) all kinds of ‘environments’ *and then to transcend the subsequent environment that emerges* through ensuing constellations of perception-imagination-memory²² means that every society must constantly try to find a place for—or a way of making sense of—experience as it is marked and constituted by transcendence. Thus, all societies have ways of representing and making sense of experiences of desire, and of dreams, of ecstasy and relief, of symbolising birth, death, rapture, pain, loss, initiation. Similarly, all societies have prohibitions and laws, taboos, markers: ways of ordering and making sense of the ecstatic character of experience.

The need to limit, mark, consecrate and even repudiate certain ‘transcendences’ can be seen when we look at the existence of

rituals that have always surrounded travelling. All societies have ways of marking journeys, crossing thresholds; ritual forms of commemoration or consecrations to do with arrival and departure; and, in particular, of blessing—of transferring some form of social *soul-stuff* on to a person perceived to be undertaking a literal or figurative journey. Because of the oft-remarked tendency for human beings to represent time in terms of space—we can include among ‘odysseys’ crossings of thresholds in *time*. I mean by this things like marriages, funerals and all kinds of initiation rights, from circumcisions to graduations. *These can all be seen as ways of marking, commemorating, and consecrating arrival and departure*. It’s just that here the terminals of our destination are ‘stages on life’s way’; the airport departure lounges of our lives.²³

Many conventional farewells in European languages (*a-dieu*, *good-bye*, *a-dios*) speak of going *to* even more than *with* God. The idea expressed in these terms is thus both an acknowledgement and an attempt to deal with the fact that journeys (in transcending the quotidian) entail *existential* threats: if my secular journey to the market, or to the Hellespont, is ‘interrupted’ in the dramatic form of my untimely death, I will—according to the hope expressed in the ‘goodbye’—at least have reached my ultimate destination safely.

Pre-eminent amongst the phenomena of ‘globalisation’ is the fact that ‘travel’ (at least for the middle and upper classes)²⁴ is often represented as one of the more prominent panaceas for the ills for modern (globalised) life. More respectable than heroin, more revocable than suicide, more chic than any religion lacking the leather jacket of fundamentalism, ‘travel’²⁵ is at once supposed to be compatible with freedom while involving a willing submission to the *experience* of other places and other cultures. It is this openness that is supposed to offer us a transcendence of the everyday, which can be received like a bolt of pure vitality, restoring our sense of life’s wonder and so on.

What is interesting here is the way this attitude plays down a certain kind of existential threat, in order to make the embrace of this threat the point of the exercise of travelling. This is curious, because if we did not know better we could expect the opposite to occur and the sense of existential threat to grow proportionally with the power to travel. Power, after all, allows for control; control brings (or tries to bring about) security; and the inevitable result of *security is anxiety about the security one has* just (often expensively) purchased.²⁶ But if

this is in any way the case, I nonetheless think that this anxiety is a tacitly forbidden expression in modern rituals marking the arrival and the departure of travellers. If we hug the person going to Acapulco or New Zealand, we might wish them luck or a safe journey but we are unlikely, I suspect, to make the avuncular suggestion that they should mind that they do not lose their souls in the untrammelled wilds of the world. One reason for this might be simply that it is, for the most part, simply safer (and thus less scary) to travel these days than it once might have been; there are no ‘here be dragons’ on the Lonely Planet maps of the world. But I think there is another reason why people in talking to departing friends and family do not mention existential threats, at least of the non-literal sort that do not involve us being threatened by guns or disease, but the kind of thing that would have made an Edwardian aunt tell her nephew: ‘Now, remember that you are an Englishman,’ as he set off for the Sudan. This, I think, can be attributed to a concern about *Orientalism* that does not require the speaker to be familiar with the term.

I use ‘Orientalism’ conventionally to mark the simultaneous expression of fear and fascination that has marked attitudes of the West to the East—the Coloniser to the Colonised.²⁷ The Western traveller’s fascinated pursuit of the exotic can look, even to herself, so paradigmatically Orientalist that she is unlikely to admit to the terror that is the other half of the Orientalist equation. The fear I am talking about is the properly existential fear that is suggested by the idea of a ‘Heart of Darkness’. Nothing could be more contrary to the ethos of capital ‘T’—‘Travelling’—than this fear, insofar as it suggests that ‘another country’ might not only be the source of injury or death, but of figuratively losing ourselves; losing our Western, everyday identities. This ‘Victorian’ vision of things is rejected by ‘Travellers’ because the point of ‘Travel’ is to risk that loss; to *soak ourselves* in everything that is different, new, exotic about another country. The antithesis of this ‘traveller’ attitude can be found in the attitudes expressed by Evelyn Waugh in his travels and which are frequently attributed by Australians to American tourists: complaining about service or the weather, irritated by the fact that ‘foreigners’ speak another language, and generally demanding that the place we are visiting blithely and instantaneously conforms to our own desires, rather than giving ourselves up to the new place—the other country.²⁸

The question that this raises is: in the realm of history, is there a comparable attitude to this Orientalism-avoiding, transcendence-seeking attitude towards the ‘other countries’ of the past? Does anyone tell schoolchildren that the point of their learning is first—as people will argue with regards to Travelling, to *dive in*—to get soaked in the past, its customs and ideas, until the language, the ways, the quirks of the place start to suffuse one’s soul? Who thinks about the past the way a self-proclaimed ‘traveller’ thinks of ‘another country’? Does anyone argue that there could be nothing more mortifying than to bring one’s ignorant pre-conceptions about the past to the past as a vehicle for judging preceding understanding?

The answers to these questions are, I think, ‘No’ and ‘Not enough’. And this is revealing of the extent to which we are in danger of neglecting what I am calling the paradox of civic education in democracies. The paradox is this. Every society needs to make some concessions to education ‘for’ the city. In liberal, and especially in *neo*-liberal conceptions of our ‘real existing’ democracies, it is often suggested that ‘civic education’ *per se*, i.e. education ‘for’ the city, should be kept to a minimum (at most a small ‘civics’ class teaching the history of the nation, the functions of parliament and the rudiments of getting a job and filling out tax returns). The bulk of our ‘civic education’ is then supposed to be provided by our education ‘by the city’—our character and decisions fleshed out by our ‘freely chosen’ encounters with other people, with ideas, and with information and entertainment that we somehow stumble across in the lifelong process of pursuing our idiosyncratic interests and goals.

But what role, in this conception, is left for ‘education’ generally, and for an education in the humanities in particular? The question is particularly important, given that an education in the humanities can and should give the student both a series of standpoints from which and the rhetorical tools with which to call into question the reigning orthodoxies of not only government, business or bureaucracy, but also and at the same time the products of the complex movements of money, information and ideas that constitute the present culture and society. Alternatively, the humanities can be seen as simply the matter of an idiosyncratic and rather peculiar career choice or leisure pursuit that is dependent on (while hopefully) contributing to a lucrative education industry. In this vision the humanities do not constitute a dangerous threat to society (as they might aspire to be) but at their

worst are a mere pernicious distraction from the real world. For the most part they are perceived, in this vision, as just another marginal pursuit like motor-racing or phylactery. But the ideal of a free society is surely close to being abandoned altogether when it does not give humanistic education (literature, philosophy, history) pride of place as the only possible contender for providing the *true* (and not simply the minimal) *civic education* of a democratic society. This is *because* and not *despite* the fact that literature, philosophy and history expose the present society to ideas that may be different from those which are currently idolised by either noisy majorities or self-important minorities. In providing society with more than just a mirror of itself, the citizens of our democracies are given the tools to resist indoctrination and sophistry through a multiplicity of ways, symbols, ideas and visions of life and the world, by which they might judge and choose everything from the education system to the ideals which oriented or animated their classes.

It is a hallmark of a truly liberal and genuinely democratic society that it should be willing to come close to losing its life in order to save it. The right to freedom of speech is often conceived along the lines of an assumption that a democracy is strengthened by diversity of opinion, even when that opinion deviates from simply the monotonous praise of the present culture and its idols. This is because a democracy is supposed to be a society in the process of becoming—a society whose laws and forms can be subject to revision, to questioning, to revolutions and restorations. And if democracy requires a vigorous and free public sphere in order to be truly autonomous, that public sphere is itself best preserved by citizens who possess a deep and rich grasp of more ideas than the ones to which they subscribe. This last feature has nothing to do with promoting flakiness or lack of conviction. Instead, it is often the condition of real eloquence as well as a bulwark against rhetorical tricks and propaganda.

To elaborate, everyone knows that education is the arena in which the battle for the future will be decided. All visions of society converge, meet and fight over education. But it is over the teaching of history more than anywhere else that standard ideological warfare has most resembled war. In the ten-year reign of the Howard government, the former Prime Minister and his journalistic apparatchiks argued again and again for the ‘reform’ of history programs, effectively demanding that edifying national myths blot out unedifying national crimes.²⁹

This demand was intriguingly accompanied by denunciations of ‘post-modern history’ and a call for ‘narrative’ history, as if there were *natural* affinities between a given style of historical reportage and a given ideological line.³⁰

One of the hallmarks of the debates of the Howard years was the number of times different partisans saw themselves as debating *which* moral lessons or ‘values’ should be the ones to hold sway over the next generation and thus the future. And, presumably, we cannot avoid teaching children something like ‘values’. But while we will find various values to promote—from the ‘national pride’ beloved of right-wing think-tanks to engendering ‘openness’ and other such modish simulacra of the ability to think—the best sign, I would argue, that what is being taught is *history* and not simply the fashionable ideology of this or that side is the extent to which a given history program has a chance of having its stated goals *confounded by aspects of that same program*.³¹

Therefore, I would argue, the better the history course, the harder it will be to derive any *particular* moral lesson from it; or, more accurately, the less its content will be subordinated by or equivalent to that moral lesson. The better the program, the more it will have that which history records most frequently of all: *unintended consequences*. What I am arguing, in essence, is that the teaching of history should be regarded less along the lines of the inculcation of correct opinions and more along the lines of the handing out of *passports*. Further, that a free society should be one which believes it has an obligation to allow itself to be judged by standards that it had not pre-arranged in advance.

Most people who have talked about history curricula since the 1960s would agree that the emphasis of history courses should be on ideas and, through ideas, the fostering of capacities for ‘critical thinking’. I agree with this, but I think it is important to add the caveat that teaching the *ideas* requires an extraordinary level of sensitivity, caution and skill. This is because while rote-learning a date may have dubious value, rote-learning an idea is always an abomination. And it is precisely the rote-learning of ideas that will occur (whatever those ideas are) if we treat history teaching in a way that does not at least partially replicate something like ‘Traveller’ attitudes, i.e. if we do not treat the past as another country.³² After all, the only evidence that ‘critical thinking’ is going on is the manner in

which we treat the ideas with which we come into contact; it is not an inherent property of *which* ideas we prefer above others. It should be (but seemingly isn’t) obvious that no doctrines or views are inherently ‘critical’; there are only the critical or uncritical attitudes of those who subscribe to them.

Therefore, a History of Australia (for example) is not inherently ‘critical’ just because it irritates the government’s official version of national mythology, even if that official version is widely believed. Conversely, a government’s self-serving attempt at an ‘official history’ hardly deserves the status of an embattled Socratic gadfly just because *it* goes against the consensus of historians. Being ‘critical’ does not attach to given arguments; still less to their ‘majority’ or ‘minority’ status. Otherwise, the flat-earthier who compares herself (in her heterodoxy) to Galileo would have a point. ‘Critical’ can only refer to the way that people behave in reaching the positions they uphold as true and, moreover, how they continue to behave once they have reached these positions. (How open are they to contrary evidence? How interested are they in other perspectives, etcetera?). Suffice it to say, there is a lot of loose talk which suggests that precisely the opposite is the case; as if ‘critical’ status came with being a partisan of one side (one methodology) and not another, the way chips come with pub meals.

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History involves risks. And these are no less than those of going to another country. It is because of this that our attitudes to history should better reflect our ideas of Travel. I have argued that *the true civic education of a democratic community* is one which will expose it to things that are not simply what the current moods of that society find respectable. This is not a new idea, but it is an endangered one.³³

Travellers pride themselves on not trying to ‘manage’ the experience they are about to have; on not determining in advance what they are going to experience. To treat the past as another country is to remember that it, too, is as unruly, unmanageable and wild as the Antarctic or the Sahara. Indeed, wildness and unpredictability are the reasons why we seek history out. This is not to say that we do not need to reflect on pedagogical techniques, or that history programs can be without any kind of structure—this would be insane—or that we do not need constant reflection on the moral and political consequences

of a way of teaching. I only worry that, in trying to win the battle for the future, different ideologues in educational debates will unintentionally end up posing the idea that any travels to the past must be pre-arranged to ensure the safety of some set of ideas/principles or another. But such risk-management stifles a journey to the extent that we may as well never have left the place from which we set out.

'Liberal' education in a democracy involves a paradox. It is the idea that we can at once live in one 'city', or one country, dedicated to a finite (if not homogenous or monochrome) set of ideals (cosmopolitanism, liberty, the expansion of social justice) while yet allowing our bodies and souls to wander the Earth. It is, therefore, an attempt to uphold the ideal that the least constrained and least 'pre-determined' education could, *precisely as such*, be the one most suitable to a free society and its citizens. The dream here, coeval with the idea of democracy, suggests that the civic education of a bounded, finite city could nonetheless converge with something that aimed at being, at the same time, the education of human beings in the panoply of human concerns and not only what is thought to preserve the community or fulfil its functions. This would be education at its most wide-ranging but also at its deepest. A truly liberal, truly democratic society would not suffer from, but thrive from having plumbed such depths. It would not be stifled but sustained by the breadth of these wanderings. ❖

ENDNOTES

- 1 This is the first line of L P Hartley's *The Go-Between*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1971. In quotation the word 'foreign' is often substituted for the more euphonious (or at least more memorable) 'another' which I have used throughout.
- 2 The peculiar beauty of these sentences seems to owe much to the way that the seemingly redundant second sentence is (through the parataxis that links it to the first) somehow redolent with the mystery and 'pathos of distance' to which the first sentence testifies.
- 3 For an excellent discussion of how we can concede the impossibility of leaving behind the 'prejudices' of our own time, and why this nonetheless does not prevent the possibility of an encounter between our prejudices and the past, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall, Continuum, London, 2004, 268–282.
- 4 For a less attenuated discussion of the issue of myth and reality that has nonetheless informed these brief remarks, see, for instance, Mircea

Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1964; J G Gunnell, *Political Philosophy and Time: Plato and the Origins of Political Vision*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, 17–53. On the role of stories in constituting a *world* see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, New York, Double Day Anchor Books, 1959, 164.

- 5 With a cantankerous wit which alternately belies or confirms his reputation, Hegel is reputed to have said that the only thing that we learn from history is that no one ever learns anything from history.
- 6 It is interesting to note that the term 'civic education' is rarely used in Australian public debate, whereas there are classes in 'civics' (often involving history) at both American high schools and French *lycées*. This could arguably be said to be reflective of the fairly minimal role that republican (as opposed to liberal, social-democratic, socialist and Burkean-conservative and neo-liberal) political theory has played in the history of the nation. For an extraordinary treatment of everything to do with 'civic humanism' and 'classical republicanism', see J G A Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Political Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975. The relatively insignificant role played by this set of political ideas in the political history of Australia (and Britain after the ages of Milton and Harrington respectively) can perhaps be explained that, in the 19th century, republican ideas seemed to be integrated into the self-conception of the *aristocracy* (noble houses as the servants of the commonweal) and thus would have been anathema to the democratic agitators of, say, the Labour Movement, with its roots in liberal, social democratic, socialist and Jacobin traditions.
- 7 For an account of the paradox of the minimal 'civic duties' with enormous demands of the 'social', see Arendt 35–45.
- 8 Pierre Hadot speaks of *synousia* in terms very similar to how I describe 'education by the city'. See Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Michael Chase (trans.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, 7.
- 9 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (trans.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000.
- 10 On my use of the concept of 'social imaginary', see Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Kathleen Blamey (trans.), Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997, 135–156.
- 11 The vision of Sparta as a totally integrated polity has numerous sources going back to Thucydides and Plato, but is a constant reference point of Rousseau starting with his *First Discourse*.
- 12 An objection may be raised to this claim that would invoke the sociology of science. Obviously, many sociologists and philosophers have been interested in the role played by everything from moral to metaphysical ideas in the development of the natural sciences. Furthermore, there is considerable interest expressed in many disciplines in questions about how science could be made morally and politically responsible to the community. But while this is the case, few of the people who analyse this intersection tend to speak of *determining the content of science programs* in relation to given social aims. (The spectre of Lysenko, not to mention Creation Science hovers over all such attempts.) Thus, we are more likely to find claims either that science performs its civic duties better by becoming *more scientific* (i.e. by not having its results skewed by this or that present-

- day prejudice) or that scientists study 'ethics' as a kind of supplementary practice that nonetheless is not supposed to *displace* scientific method.
- 13 The heyday of the idea of *Bildung* is probably the late 18th and early 19th century, so perhaps particularly under the influence of Rousseau's ideas of education.
 - 14 On the rejection of teleology and the problem it causes for ideas of virtue (and thus the whole *Bildung* concept), see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Ducksworth, London, 1985.
 - 15 See, for example, Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Martin Hammond (trans.), Penguin, London, 2006.
 - 16 See MacIntyre *op. cit.*
 - 17 For a discussion on this parallel between these thinkers, see Michael P Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 57–80.
 - 18 For Rousseau, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, Or On Education*, Allan Bloom (trans.), Basic Books, New York, 1979, alongside Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract in Rousseau's Political Writings*, Julia Conaway Bondanella (trans.), Allan Ritter (ed.), W W & Norton Company, New York, 1998. For Marx, see the small but telling section in Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, in Lewis S Feuer (ed.), *Marx & Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, Double Day Anchor Books, New York, 25.
 - 19 I use this expression in the sense of Theodor Adorno, where it is not just a pretentious (and inexplicable) substitute for 'different', but suggests that this difference exhibits a resilience, a resistance to being subsumed under an identity.
 - 20 For an excellent introduction to phenomenology, see Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Routledge, New York, 2000.
 - 21 We can see this aspect of our experience most clearly when we look to the invoked phenomena of the imagination. Thus, on the one hand, we know that we can 'transcend' our environment, not insofar as we can defy gravity or leave behind the sub-lunary world, but insofar as we do not encounter simply an *environment*—in which we orient ourselves according to biological programs—but a *world* made up of meanings, symbols, imaginings through and within which the different aspects of our environment emerge as *objects of experience*. Thus, the world presents itself to me not only as a place where I want food, but where I want a *sandwich*, where I do not only see a green-gold blur to which I'm mysteriously compelled; I do not even see 'trees': I see, instead, the poplars in the distance of which that poet spoke so beautifully before the consumption took him. I can try to ignore my hunger because of a diet or a vow, because I am mourning over a lost love, or busy developing my perfect abdomen for the greater glory of whatever. But the existence of something like the imagination (as a kernel of the psyche) is not only the condition of possibility for participating in a universe of forms, symbols, signs and ideas, but also the condition of possibility for these 'symbolic' universes to be themselves *interrupted*, disturbed or called to account by an experience of hunger or desire, by a sudden conflagration of memory or an overwhelming perception (of, say, another person who I find beautiful or mysterious, a landscape that I find sublime). We transcend our 'environment' in order to see a world, but this world is not static, enclosed or homogenous, but something perpetually interrupted by events that

- summon us back from* an enclosure in our own minds and which direct our capacities for apprehension outwards, even as our outward experience can direct us inwards (to meditation, speculation, reflection). We are thus beholden to the exigencies of a reality that subsists outside of us, i.e. *transcends* our own minds. By an act of thought, I transcend my thoughts on the history of Languedoc to stare at the waterfall in front of me, and vice versa. The waterfall is at once transcendent to my thought process (I am not and *can never be* it) and the cause of my mind's self-transcendence its going outwards to apprehend something in the world. It is through a weight of experience under which we can find the symbols through which we make sense of the universe *changing*, in flux, in motion; and with this our apprehension and perception of that universe. In reverie we can, for instance, transcend surroundings both ignoring the tiger in front of us for a daydream, and dreaming of tigers when our immediate surroundings consist of a prison in which we have nothing real to stare at but stone. Experience, then, is—as a venerable philosophical tradition holds—*ecstatic*, meaning that in experiencing we constantly (if never absolutely) *step outside* of ourselves. (My account here owes much to Castoriadis but the account is also inflected by works by Emmanuel Levinas and Eric Voegelin.) See Morrissey, 81–82.
- 22 The triad is from Aristotle's *De Anima*, but see also note 20 above.
 - 23 I would have said 'waystations', but the expression is so conventional that its metaphoric origin is lost—such expressions are the places, as George Orwell often said, where thoughts go to die. See George Orwell, 'Politics and the English language', *Essays*, Penguin, London, 1994, 350.
 - 24 'Travel' conceived of as a somehow 'authentic' encounter with 'another country' (its people and culture) seems to be a pretension of a section of the middle class—namely, whatever section disdains the idea of a mere 'overseas holiday' as crass or exploitative. This attitude usually requires that the kind of tawdry leisure activities indulged in by people on 'holidays' are sufficiently accessible at all times to not constitute an interruption (or transcendence) of one's everyday working life.
 - 25 See note 23 above.
 - 26 On a deeper exploration of some of the paradoxes that arise from the perceived link between anxiety, security and power, see Jason Freddi, 'London, July 2005: A failure of security?', *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, vol. 32, 2007, 45–66; Zygmunt Bauman's discussion of 'Unsicherheit' as uncertainty/insecurity/unsafety [sic] in Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1999, 17.
 - 27 See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin, London, 1995.
 - 28 For an amusing account of Waugh's attitude to 'foreign travel', see Selina Hastings, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography*, Sinclair-Stevenson, London, 1994, 240–241.
 - 29 A good summary of the so-called 'History Wars' during the reign of the Howard government can be found in Stuart MacIntyre's 'The History Wars: the 2003 Russel Ward Lecture, University of New England, Armidale, 1 May 2003', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2002, 1–19.
 - 30 For an excellent account of why this is not the case, see the recent article by John Hirst, 'Australia: The official history', *The Monthly*, Feb 2008. Here Hirst comments on his surprise at finding himself the author of

the ‘official history of Australia, the one that the Howard government distributed to migrants to pass the citizenship test’. But as he goes on to note: ‘Howard’s mistake was to think that narrative [history, of the style advocated by both Hirst and Howard] would give him the history that he wanted contra ‘black armband’ history of the left’. Here, Howard showed himself under the spell of the false idea that right-wing history is likely to be in Nietzsche’s term ‘monumental’, while left-wing history is necessarily ‘critical’. Against this, it is obvious that a work like E P Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* is a work of *monumental history* (dealing as it does with the splendour and misery of a great movement in the context of a stirring narrative), whereas Nazi-hack Alfred Rosenberg’s *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* has many of the hallmarks of ‘critical history’ in that it lays a claim to see through ‘official’ history and recover instead the story of an oppressed group (the ‘Aryans’ [!]) an ‘excluded voice’ in the ruthless world of official history.

- 31 A wonderful example of this is Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton’s description of what happened when ‘English’ was first proposed as a program at Oxford. The old dons, he says, who were mainly classicists, argued that the idea of teaching ‘English’ was a ridiculous piece of jingoism, a way of replacing a knowledge of what was truly human with the inculcation of nationalistic guff. This was, Eagleton says, entirely true. But because the English program succeeded, despite its *goals* in giving its students an actual encounter with English literature, the aims of the course designers were never guaranteed success. On the contrary, the English programs not only produced students who could glorify Britannia and its right to rule the waves with a quote about ‘this sceptred isle’ (*Richard II*); they also created students who were equally capable of criticising the pretensions and the crimes of Empire on the basis of the same play, not to mention the works of Milton, Blake, Dickens etcetera. See Terry Eagleton, ‘The crisis of contemporary culture’, *New Left Review*, no. 196, November–December 1996, 29–41.
- 32 The source of my concern would be, for instance, a history program that paid enormous attention to explaining a given author by historical context (a laudable enterprise), but that consigned the intellectual products of that author’s epoch to mere epiphenomena of current events. But while this might be worrying, it is still not yet at the stage of the ‘rote-learning’ of ideas. For this, we would need a case where students actually tried to achieve good results by imitating their teacher’s line or replicating her moral, political or metaphysical judgements. Faced with such a thing in a tutorial during the 1960s, the historian A J P Taylor is said to have responded: ‘I’ve heard of the dog returning to the vomit, but never the vomit being returned to the dog.’ See Adam Sisman, *A J P Taylor: A Biography*, Mandarin, London, 1995, 271.
- 33 Among the things that endanger this idea, I would also have to add the belief that civic responsibilities are best discharged by *work*. While this may be regarded as a necessary ‘liberal’ concession against ‘republican’ ideas of government (not everyone can spend all their time in Tocquevillian town-hall meetings and not everyone may want to), it is also a convenient way of allowing the capitalist elements of our society to crush the ostensibly democratic ones. For example, if I work for the minimum wage and spend my time being harassed by managers, at what point do I get a chance to

exercise my ‘citizen’ rights? What is humanistic education to me, when my level of participation in the functions of government is so minimal? The disappearance of humanistic education *as civic education* is suggestive of a world which is indifferent to people’s flourishing either as citizens or as human beings, a world where one is anonymous employee number 579, anonymous consumer 4 billion and whatever.