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The War Over the Person
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THE WAR OVER THE PERSON

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The debate over abortion is going nowhere because of the head on clash of two faiths glaring at one another across an abyss of conflicting desires. On the one side stand firmly those who believe human beings just happened, the accidental result of a vast unguided cosmic becoming. So amidst the confusion of the world it is up to the individual to make life as enjoyable as possible by avoiding the unpleasant and by affirming the quest for 'a good life.' Man creates myths about the meaning of life, but truth is ultimately pragmatic-it is about managing impressions in function of what one is really after, perhaps, if all else fails, adapting some kind of Stoic or Buddhist escape from what is unbearable. On the other side stand those who believe that the world was intended, that the Source has a plan for it all, and hence human life should be a cooperation with the divine plan, which in some way has been made known to us. The latter tend to be less leary of the notion of 'sacrifice' (although, as we shall see, the secular humanists often sacrifice more than they are aware-just glance in the window of a health spa at the sweating eager bodies) and generally face the reality of suffering more resolutely. The theists are far less likely to call Dr. Kevorkian.

Of course it is not just the struggle over public policy on 'life issues'-'life versus choice,' as the question has been bizarrely deformed- that is commanded by this clash of faiths, it is the whole unfolding scenario of 'civil rights,' but more: it is the very texture of human relations and indeed the whole structure of society which is being affected. Both sides have agendas for society. The Clinton crisis, tearing at the guts of the Great Republic, reveals the intractable and fundamental nature of the clash, and lays bare the dramatically different beliefs about whether there is any solid foundation for truth, and where we should take the society.

I shall examine here one of the basic dimension of this clash: the different notions of the human person this struggle reveals. At the heart of those visions stand conflicting understandings not just of truth but of freedom and how it should be exercised. The complexity of all this and the stark effects this struggle is having on our society demands that serious people reflect as earnestly as ever in history on personhood and freedom and truth. For this society it is a matter of life or death.

As an introduction to these mysteries¹ I shall first outline sketchily my own faith about the human person and our

¹ 'Mystery' is a term which should be handled with caution. Whenever human beings inquire profoundly enough into anything they discover the ways in which that thing (or person) is rooted in, and opens the inquirer onto the incomprehensible immensity of being itself. Encounter

situation in the world, which will set out a context on one side of the abyss. Then I shall discuss the different understandings of freedom which are lodged at the heart of the conflicting faiths. Thus prepared I shall finish with a few suggestions of what those who believe like me, in the God given dignity of the human person and the centrality of love, think about educating for character and balanced personality. (Not just preparations for the cultural wars but for the life beyond!)

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE PERSON

THE OBJECTIVE DIMENSION

I shall start at the objective beginning, the conception of the individual. Two genetic lines reaching back to the origins of life, meet in one cell, forming a new individual, forever distinct.² Individuals, yes, distinct, yes, but not self-standing, not 'autonomous' (which means literally a law unto itself): each began dependently, dependent on a distinctive line of genetic inheritance, the

with mystery in any thinking worthy of the name should not cause one to throw up his hands and mutter 'We shall never comprehend this.' That is true, we shall never get our prehensors (prendere) around (cum) being, we shall not ever be able 'to put being in our pocket,' or for that matter any thing as it opens down into the ocean of being. But that is all the more reason to continue to research, contemplate, and give praise and thanksgiving to...well, at least to Being.

² Even with 'cloning,' Dolly and her sisters, who may have the same DNA, were conceived differently, in different circumstances, and are forever distinguishable, as are peas in a pod.

effects of which will continue to contribute through given temperament, physique, and basic bodily vigor throughout life.

Each individual begins to lead a personal history in a particular womb. If one mother is HIV infected and another carefully watching her diet, those different little womb worlds will affect the objective being of the little human being differently. And the whole sense of the life that has started to be lived will be definitively affected by how it ends: the one, perhaps, through violent extirpation from the womb, the other maybe dying heroically trying to save another's life. No one will ever write a stirring biography of the tiny human being sacrificed on the altar of convenience, but the facts of both lives can be described. Only the much richer facts of the hero's life are likely to stir admiration. In any event, the facts of those different events are part of the objective being of both persons.

Neither side in the war over the person denies these facts. But they make something different out of them. The theist stresses that like the beginning, the end affects fundamentally the objective sense of that life. As a completed whole it is what it is, although not the best biographer but only the Divine Judge knows what it is, and this sense is all important. The humanist, impressed by the fact that such an objective grasp of the whole is

unattainable to the person himself tends to stress much more the subjective importance of the moment.³

THE SUBJECTIVE BEGINNINGS

When the fact of the individuals's bodily development leads to a further (and momentous) new beginning—that of dawning awareness of himself and of his distinction from others, his objective dependence on others takes on new dimensions. As he increases his ability to discriminate between himself and the others and acquires more control over his interactions with them a new sort of being develops, that of intersubjective relations. This growing ability, through experience and memory to direct and orchestrate one's responses, and to enter into commitments, goes forward through life, until illness may begin to impair it. All animals respond, of course, but only human beings enjoy the large freedom to respond which one finds in the 'responsible' adult.

Only human re-sponse constitutes an answer. Both the words 'response' and 'answer' are pregnant with meaning. The spondeo in re-sponse means 'I commit'—I engage myself⁴, 're-' suggests that it is in answer to an invitation. 'Answer' is a

³ Martin Heidegger stressed the importance for the being of the moment of our thinking forward to the fact that our lives are limited by their beginning and history, at the one end, and at the other by a death we anticipate, knowing not when it will come, but certainly that it will, completing the shape of our lives. This insight can be made good use of by either side in the war. Heidegger is the master of ambiguity.

corruption of the German word 'ant-wort,' 'a word over against the word' that is addressed to me. Only the human being can speak the word. He is called to re-spond responsibly, which now adds the word 'ability.' What determines one's ability to respond? That ability is accumulated as the result of all the responses of his life.

But a word of caution from the theist side: that ability may give the measure of the man, but it is not the foundation of his dignity. At the end the old dying person may not be aware at all of what is going on within or around him, he is no longer able to respond to anything. But the fact, that at the beginning of life we have as yet developed no awareness and at the end may have none remaining, changes nothing about the objective reality of the existence of this unique individual. It is in this objective reality-this esse, this act of existence unique to this individual-that the human being's ability is founded, and which remains the objectively given base of his dignity. No matter how as yet incompetent the newly fertilized egg or how now incapable the dying parchment covered skeleton in coma, this is a child of humans, a bearer of humanity in its least developed or most severely diminished form, and hence an exemplar of the highest creation to be honored even after death. Keep this objective foundation in mind as we turn now for a closer look

4 'to pledge, promise; to put up bond for; to engage, betroth; to wager; to warrant, guarantee' [Follett Latin-English Dictionary, 1969])

at the subject and how he is inserted into the intersubjective worlds which mold his character and personality.

THE CENTER OF A SMALL PERSONAL WORLD

From the first to the last glimmers of awareness and ability to respond, our total personhood is caught up in a network of relationships with other persons who draw us out-educate us-into many worlds. These different worlds-of family, church, work, sports- mold that emerging little personal world through one's interactions with other persons, other things, and all kinds of settings in each of those little worlds. All those relationships have as one of their poles that awareness and ability to respond which is my own, which comes out of my own history, written into my body. As each initiative from beyond me, every confrontation and invitation, comes into the person's awareness and is responded to by an initiative of his own it takes on a stamp from the bodily incarnate history of that person. This ability to respond makes up much of human existence and affects the whole fabric of a person's developing being, and through him affects the fabric of the society. In this ability to respond is centered his freedom.

So while at the objective base I am this body conceived at a given moment, now grown to six feet two and too many pounds, sitting writing at my computer in Toronto on

this day, there is much, much more to me than that physical reality. I am also a son, husband, father, grandfather, uncle and cousin involved in my family, that of my wife, and most massively in our own little family, which owes its beginning to our free responses at the moment of our marriage. Those intricate intimate family involvements have molded who I am, they have drawn out my personhood in particular ways. My responses to all the initiatives of family members has molded my personality and my character, forming a backbone to the ever developing story of my personhood.⁵ One day this will remain in the world only in the memories (and photographs) of a few ancestors who may remember and care. (What remains beyond the world, in a world transcending realm of being, is an issue of supernatural faith, with traditions of revelation differing among the billions who are in some way on the theist side of the great gulf. The present paper is not concerned to defend any given theology.) Much of who I am may already be lost by the time I have suffered several strokes and am lying completely emaciated and comatose on my deathbed.

There is more: I am not just a factor in this knot of personal family relations. I am profoundly marked by the career I have pursued, I am still drawn by its demands to steering much of my capabilities in the direction of its

⁵ on the distinction of person, character, and personality and their different relations to the ability to respond see below.

little world. I am 'in the world' now as emeritus professor of philosophy, active in research. More important to me than that, however, although my character and personality may not be as much marked by it, is my voluntarily living as a Catholic Christian, caught up in another little world, that of the Church.

Each of the many small worlds I am caught up in has a certain degree of autonomy, but, no more than the individual person, is any of these worlds completely isolated in itself. For instance the Church in America is affected by the being of the whole society, by the actions of governments, by the reigning ethos. And all these worlds and all these countries and societies are today caught up in an enveloping planetary scale social phenomenon, with its world-wide institutions which I shall call THE world. Each little world contributes to the being of THE world and in turn is affected by the vast social structures of THE world, its vibrant symbols systems, its great institutions and the immense and often completely new processes of on going change it has unleashed. Think for instance of industrialization, a management ethos, a world wide web propagating new cultures and anti-cultures which undermine and transform old cultures and whole civilizations.⁶

⁶ Understanding better the being of the massive intersubjective planetary scale social phenomenon of our present world is a matter of urgency. With the help of some very well informed 'techies' I have made a contribution to the effort to grasp the essence of what we fell into

THE NATURE OF HUMAN FREEDOM

As I pointed out, every relation in these tangled webs of inter-relating worlds passes through what I shall call the center of awareness and initiative (the CAI) of individual human beings.⁷ Recall that In each of us, each of those relationships takes on our stamp, the weight of our personal, historical being. Only because individuals are affected by them and react to them can these phenomena of interpersonal relationships exist. Let us look for a moment, from the perspective of one individual person, at this fact, that all the intersubjective being of THE world passes through individuals and takes on some of their weight.⁸

The individual's CAI is the recipient of influences of all kinds, from his own body, from things beyond impinging on him, revealing themselves to his senses, the actions of other persons and the institutions which group persons, express symbols which call themselves to his

naming 'the HTX'-the High Tech Whatever, there is no name for this relatively new state of affairs. See HTX: Learning to Survive in Virtual Reality Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999.

⁷ Awareness is more than intellectual, and our initiatives can be more emotional than free and voluntary, hence the wisdom of using these vague terms. And 'center' is more neutral than 'ego' or 'the I.'

⁸ There is much talk these days about the 'weightlessness' of contemporary being, and about the individuals being 'emptied out' by being drawn into such an unprecedented variety of relationships as we are today. These are important matters, but they must be approached carefully and on the basis of a well thought out 'ontology,' a theory of being. For good summaries of these discussions and for some contributions of his own, see Craig M. Gay, The Way of the (Modern) World, Or Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

attention in various ways. Some influences affect his body without his being aware of them at all, but many other influences arouse different sorts and intensities of awareness and response. One's awareness is intricately bound up with how he has previously responded to things, which affects how he is willing to respond at this moment. In who we are as persons we are dependent on these many sorts of influences which get called to our attention, and which we allow, in various ways and degrees, to motivate our concern.

Right there we find the nub of freedom. The individual has some control over what he sees, hears, feels, and over how he reacts to them. Depending on what he really wants, he can go in search of someone or something, refuse to pay much attention to others, and even energetically refuse to give any serious attention to things, persons, and issues which someone may be trying desperately to get him to consider. He can even choose, at the peril of his life sometimes, to ignore needs. Because of what he wants at a certain moment he can elect to give precedence over objective needs—he can override certain impulses coming from the body or obvious social demands.

It is these complex (but limited) degrees and kinds of control which feed the libertarian notion of freedom, dear to those on the other side of the abyss, the 'I can do (largely) as I please' crowd. To some extent that is true,

but one ought not forget the corollary: 'and suffer the consequences.' Those consequences are not just the way obdurate realities 'out there' refuse to yield to or even fight back against one's decisions on whether and how to respond to them. Most important of all these decisions have consequences in building one's character and developing one's personality. They determine much about what is going to be in his own little world, and who that 'I' is who stands at its center.

The secular humanist is probably prepared to admit this. But as he has erected a certain notion of freedom at the center of his faith, he makes his sovereign freedom in molding his character and personality the important consideration. The rest is consigned to a 'calculus of utility'-enlightened self interest suggests the wisdom of accomodating to the way others are developing their selfhood.

THE FAILURE TO RESPOND TO REALITY

No one is forced to acknowledge the extent to which we are not in control either of our own lives or of what goes on 'out there in the world,' no one is forced to admit the extent to which both THE world and all the little worlds I am caught up in and the cosmos as a whole in fact largely escape my control. One thing that does not escape my control is just that destructive freedom of not having to acknowledge the obvious. That fact of denial and avoidance is what makes

the libertarian project even conceivable. One is free to build his own dream world. No one is forced to acknowledge the extent to which our lives are pure gifts, starting from conception and pre-natal development of the body, through all the gifts of love which draw out and develop the person, all the graces of culture and the great traditions which hand us, through the good work of educators, preachers, performers, administrators, curators, etc., etc., much of what we know and love. No one is forced to attend to the evidence that we are the recipients in our lives of many graces of interior illumination and of invitations to love. They can miss the need to cultivate in the young the desire themselves to give. Of course, those on the theist side of the great gulf are eager-or at least should be, if they act in a way consistent with their vision-to improve their sense of gratitude.

To the person who elects to try as hard as he can to see these things, to be open to the gifts and grateful for them, and who struggles to allow these gifts to flow through him to the benefit of others, to him the refusal of others to see, to admit, to thank appears frightening and perverse. The thankful person finds the voluntaristic activists-'the big egos'-scary. The charismatic, forceful leaders with a vision, ready to arouse followers, to drive them forward by the power of willful energy and eloquence, perhaps even to whip them to a frenzy, (and who may use terror, if all else fails) often constitute a path to disaster. Only Christ

would claim to be the truth and the life. But each of us can be a way for ourselves which others may follow, a way which may be leading in the wrong direction.

I see a lack of gratitude to be intertwined with the most serious failures to respond properly. Most such failures take a less dramatic and interesting form than the onslaught of the visionary (and self)-obsessed leader. In less gifted people it takes the form of a refusal to respond to good things adequately, often because such response demands a courage and generosity which they have not developed.

KNOWLEDGE IS MANIPULABLE

What is emerging here, as I seek to show something of how our freedom works, is the acknowledgement of just how manipulable human knowledge really is. While it is hard not to acknowledge the existence of the oak into which I have just crashed, (for once there is absolutely no incentive for engaging in denial!), the alcoholic can suppress for himself all the evidence so obvious to others of his increasingly destructive addiction. On some level of awareness, he knows but he is free to push beyond the horizons of his everyday world the hard evidence. Yes indeed, the human person can do what he wants, including refusing even to get into contact

with areas of possible massive evidence, like the Church, or like...science!

Why is knowledge so manipulable? It is because most of what we know is stored in the memory and is brought into the present through the imagination, providing the greater part of what we are thinking about, far more absorbing usually than what stares me in the face through the senses. So we can manoeuvre the imagination with considerable creativity according to our wants. This opens the way for arbitrary arrangement of what we think and feel about 'reality.'⁹

But if we want to, we can learn to see an ever greater sweep of what counts and ever more faithfully-that is, more responsively, re-ponding more generously to the self-revelation of the thing or the other person.

MANIPULATION VERSUS RE-SPONSE-ABILITY: THE WILL TO CONTROL VERSUS A PURE HEART

The human being is the only re-sponse-able created entity.¹⁰ To clarify the difference between genuine freedom

9 Those who call for making the most of all possible 'reality checks' have a strong point. Unfortunately the 'empiricists' of all stripes tend to impose ideologically narrowed criteria of what counts as reliable contact with reality. Most of reality-and almost all of what is so important for human being- does not lend itself to repeated experimentation to pin down variables. And then there are all the new developments of 'virtual reality.' I study these in HTX: Learning to Survive in Virtual Reality.

10 I have not forgotten the angels, but we do not know in what consists their ability to commit in answer to God's gift or our requests for

and manipulation, consider each of the elements suggested by this important word, 'responsibility': the ability, the commitment; and the 're.'

Ability: Obviously one cannot respond to what he does not know. However, St. Thomas Aquinas called attention to the difference between 'culpable' and 'inculpable' ignorance: there are things one is expected to know, given his state in life, and things he can not be held responsible for not knowing. The trouble, as with many clear distinctions, lies in all the borderline cases, for no one can plead that he has really done all he could to be informed and to tear down all the psychological barriers he will have raised against knowing some things he does not want to hear about. Who among us has 'a pure heart'? It is precisely what is rotten in our hearts which impedes us from knowing what we ought to know.

How does such impurity get installed in our hearts? The devastating kind of ignorance I am referring to is the product, more than anything else, of psychopathological blocks. Everyone has noticed the disastrous distortions which occur when a tender soul is assaulted by acts of egoism and lust. But such blocks do not have to be dramatic and traumatic to be effective. We can become quite 'self centered' from early on, almost by default. Every baby begins

help. It appears from Holy Scripture to be a once and for all act, while human ability develops and declines.

life as the center of the world. Without e-ducation through love to draw him out of that center so that he begins to notice other people exist that (underdeveloped) person will remain largely in a self-centered world. Some go through life without ever 'engaging' because they are so preoccupied with themselves they have never cared too much that other people have rights and needs too.

Such egoism can be so skilfully woven into one's character and personality as to become difficult to distinguish from his personhood, the biophysiological-spiritual core of one's resources. That is why it becomes so hard for many to listen-they are too busy making noise as a clumsy way of commanding the high road, keeping the Other from any possible incursion into the carefully constructed house of cards which is one's fragile personal 'world.' Even the devastating news of a diagnosis of a fatal disease can be rejected. (My brother-in-law stood aghast in a corridor of the Swedish Hospital in Seattle listening to the scream of a wealthy patient who had just been told 'we can do nothing more for you': 'You idiots! I'll pay anything! Get some competent people in here! I am going to sue the hell out of this hospital!' Medical students out in the hall were laughing, and mocking audibly, 'Your millions won't help you now, Old Crud!')

THE ABILITY TO COMMIT (SPONDEO)-A SACRIFICE, A HOLY
GIFT

What is it, in the final analysis, that makes some persons some of the time prepared to listen-really to listen with all their hearts? (Yes, we hear and see with our hearts, not with ears and eyes which are only pathways to the heart.) What can possibly make us want to listen? How do we become convinced there is something out there more important than my defense of my little turf? What can make us 'vulnerable,' in the sense of willing to be challenged to grow, which is always accompanied by the pain of undoing old inadequate structures built to protect our ego-centered world?

I have seen so many flagrant, shocking instances of unwillingness to commit I have been thinking about this a great deal. One thing I have noticed: Everything that has been done to convince people in our society that there is no fundamental, lasting solid truth but only 'how I happen to feel about things' has undermined the reasons for serious, lasting commitment. I have been trying to fend off the temptation to think there is something especially bad in this regard about the young people in my social class and in this civilization. I have no remedy for this state of affairs except to invoke the magic word, 'love,' the gift of love, pure grace. I know, that is no 'answer' but rather an expression of the fundamental mystery of life. (The Christian

can see this only one way: The 'Ant-wort'-the word over against the word can only be total openness, total commitment to the Word which reveals itself. What those who reveal the Love incarnate make of all this is itself for me a troubling part of the mystery. In the greatest of saints, those with the radiantly pure hearts, it is all evident and unproblematic. But the practical atheists who go through the motions of being Christian, and indeed all us mediocre Christians manage such an ambiguity in their lives that all becomes murky.)

But all is not lost: When with whatever little ability we possess we do re-pond to any genuine gift, the meaning of the commitment-the spondeo-is quite clear: I sacrifice my time and my heart-that energy at the very core of my being as a person-to make and sustain a place for the Other. Take a simple example: If I am the recipient of the grace of being brought into contact with the marvels of the expanding universe through someone's exposing some of the wonders known through astronomy and I take fire, if I decide to pursue astronomy further, I must give up to it time and energetic attention I might use for something else. For sure, grace, if I re-pond, can increase power of attention, intensity in the use of my time, but not infinitely: remember those objective biophysiological limits: there are only 24 hours in a day, vital necessities call, and I have only a limited number of years and certainly not unlimited energy.

But what I do elect to devote to astronomy is a sacrifice of much else.

Do not think of sacrifice basically negatively. The word means 'to make holy,' I devote a good part of what I possess to astronomy as a holy cause, because somehow it becomes an important aspect of what is holy for me. (The fact that the sense of the holy has become so obscure for many in our society is a good example of what can happen when we do not want to hear. The sense of the holy in fact lies all about us. What is holy to us is whatever we discover to give ultimate meaning to our lives. The genuiness of the revelation of holiness is another issue. Many pour themselves with utmost devotion into holy causes which bear only bad fruit.)

CHARACTER IS BUILT IN THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

Sustained commitment requires character. And character can be built only where sustained commitment-love-is on going. Whereas the givenness of the body provides the biophysiological foundation of the person, character provides, as I suggested, the backbone. Or put it this way: as a life is dynamic, unfolding over time, projected in pursuit of goals, themselves animated by our basic loves, it would be better to think of character as that which, by directing our acts with consistency, gives the unity of time-the sense-to our myriads of individual acts.

Character is formed of a complex interacting of habits-some virtues, some vices-which arm the person with acquired abilities, some to carry out good projects, others to give in efficiently to bad ones. The alcoholic, for instance, becomes with practice very adept at hiding his habit and in 'conning' others to go along with his sometimes elaborate games.

Because of the still primitive state of knowledge of brain physiology and the murkiness which shrouds our understanding of the interaction of the most spiritual aspects of man and the body, we are limited in our knowledge of what happens physically in the building up of habits. We can however capture reflectively ('phenomenologically') those aspects of character which involve intention: the determination to build up a skill and the way acquired ability facilitates the carrying out of a present intention.

There is no time in this short disquisition to describe the best known virtues and vices and their interactions, both salvific and ruinous.¹¹ Here I want only to point out how virtues give us power (vir=man=power) not only by providing motor skills and familiarity with typical situations (applying 'experience') but also by helping us

11 It is fascinating and fruitful to explore these intertwined pathways of existence as I have in a book in progress, Volume Six of my Truth and Tradition project, entitled Human Being.

acquire a vocabulary of symbols with which to handle the knowledge requisite to sound action.

This building up process, continued until we get so old we can acquire nothing more and so diminish rapidly, is an e-ducative labor of love. One must love the governing goal which animates particular pro-jects: it must attract so that one desires strongly what he wants and so goes after it avidly. He is dependent on others to reveal to him what there is to be loved and then to share with him the necessary vocabulary and to teach him how to hold himself in the presence of the targeted truths. One 'holds oneself' open and directed through forming attitudes.¹² We need help to learn what are the fruitful attitudes and to learn how to maintain them. 'By their fruits you shall know them': It is primarily through the witness of others that we learn what is real, and they teach us how to strive for it. That is what education is all about.

PERSON, CHARACTER, PERSONALITY

A person can exist initially, in fact at the moment of conception does exist, without any character. Later fully indulged bad character can diminish the person's ability to choose and to act, not only as he accumulates enemies but as he weakens his own body. Bad habits interwoven with good

¹² The German word for attitude brings out this willful, habit informed holding (as in 'to hold oneself erect'): Verhaltung (halten=to hold).

ones-characteristic of the character of all but saints-keeps us at cross purposes as we pursue conflicting goals, and hence strike ambiguous and mediocre attitudes. Ambiguity is of the devil. (Christ admonishes us, 'If it is yes, say yes, if no, say no.') One's virtues expand personhood, they increase strength and effectiveness, so long as the foundational biophysiological substrate is not wracked by disease or debilitating old age.

One's character is readable in his personality. But not always right away. A personality can be crafted to deceive about character, but the character, being more fundamental, if it includes some serious vices will fairly quickly reveal itself in perfidious acts. Personality is the face a person turns to the world, but the structure of the person is found in the character, rooted in his biophysiological givenness and truly reflecting, at the deepest level, the life he has been living and the goals to which he is aspiring.

THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT WORLDS IN EDUCATING FOR GOOD CHARACTER AND SOUND PERSONALITY

As we are e-ducated by others, the institutional ways in which we are bound to these rather than those persons plays an immense role in the way we develop and hence in whom we become.

This is so obvious in the family no one can fail to see it. But as we advance in life we are pulled (and often elect to place ourselves) in other institutions each with its own personae dramatis, traditions, symbol systems and vocabularies which we have to learn, and each dealing with processes characteristic of its own little world. We are taught either explicitly or implicitly through imitation the peculiar skills necessary for dealing with those processes, and we are daily called upon to re-pond to the events which drive forward, and often result from the coming together of these processes, these on going consistent courses of change. All of this molds character and personality, and each of us in turn contributes to the further molding of the particular institution through the initiatives we take in response to what is presented to us. Our molding influences will be large or small depending both on where we are placed in the institution-that is with what 'leverage'- and upon the appropriateness (prudence and good judgment) and personal intensity (courage and energy) of our response. Each response further builds (or debilitates) character.

THE EK-SISTENTIAL NATURE OF PERSONHOOD

Each person then is formed from the retention of the good and bad results of a huge number of encounters and responses in the past. I have already pointed out how

malleable that retained past can be in the imagination. I have also suggested the foundational importance of the real loves of the person: what, in faith, he is actually seeking. Mixed goals, ambiguous signals, conflicts of emotions, all of these affect the future. But at the same time they are drawn out in their meaning by the way the individual person holds open the future. It is not just a question of 'attitude' (Verhaltung) but of pro-jection: how, taking his life in his hands, he chooses to carry it forward into the future.¹³

If we mold the given reality of the already given through imaginative pro-jection in a way that lies about or otherwise distorts the 'already having been' then we are building a future on falsehood-and we will suffer the consequences (and others bound to us will suffer too).

13 The human person is ek-sistential, 'ek,' as in 'ec-static,' the step into the not yet, and the sistere, from esse to be. Heidegger announced a profound truth about human ek-sistence when he said in his oracular fashion, 'the past announces itself out of the future.' As so often the case with this poetic philosopher this truth comes out better in the original German: Das Gewesene künftet sich as der Zukunft. In German there are two words for 'past': das Vergangene 'over and done with-forget it!' (yesterday's insignificant mosquito bite) and das Gewesene, past tense of wesen, old form of 'to be,' and also the word for 'essence,' that which is as already having been the past that influences the future (which was already Aristotle's definition of essence, to ti einai estin, literally that which is as already having been) (yesterday's mosquito bite which communicates malaria, which now will affect my whole future.) Not just what that past is in itself but what we are going to make of it and hence how, in the final analysis it is going to affect our future, this is what 'announces itself' (künftet sich) out of the future (Zu-kunft, that which purposefully (zu) announces itself, the future that we open by throwing time forward (pro-jecting)

The only antidote to the lie, I repeat, is love, in this case love of the truth, a willingness to allow the other to reveal him- or itself. That willingness, that ability is a pure grace. The key to authentic personhood-in another word-saintliness-is a mystery.

A LAST WORD ON THE WAR OVER AND WITHIN THE PERSON

Put that way, you will see that the real issue is less the war between the two camps armed with different notions of personhood, freedom and the meaning of life. It is rather a war within each one of us, a struggle between whatever genuine loves there are in our lives and the defensiveness, the lack of courage, kept festering by our unwillingness to accept the graces which will allow old wounds to heal. Paradoxically, it is pride which nurtures self-hatred, and which helps us to lie so that we never see that. It is self-hatred (euphemistically called 'insecurity') which closes one to true loves. To the extent we are closed, the ultimate reality cannot find the right, the total place in our individual world. We cut ourselves off from God just that much, and to that extent remain on the wrong side of the abyss.