



The Accidental Developmentalist

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Storytelling and rights of passage are two elements which are disappearing from our society. In pre-literate cultures storytelling was key to transmitting history, philosophy and much of what was worth knowing and preserving. Rites of passage, beyond celebrating milestones in the life of individuals, are also a central element in binding community members together. These are not relics to be purged, but to be revived as essential parts of being human.

A Farewell Lecture is both a rite of passage and an occasion for a certain measure of storytelling. Despite my over forty years at McGill and another ten or so years as a student or visitor at other universities, I have never attended or even been aware of a farewell lecture being given. As the first of many asides, let me observe that we barely even mark the promotion of a faculty member to the rank of full Professor. In some universities this is the occasion for what is termed an inaugural lecture. Some years ago I proposed a motion to the Faculty of Arts that we should initiate inaugural lectures and that each text should be published as a pamphlet. The motion was defeated. The key

objection, apart from printing being regarded as excessively costly, was, in essence, although these were not the exact words, that our disciplinary silos would make the lecture of a newly-elevated Professor in one department of little interest and even intelligibility to faculty and students in other departments.

My Story

We all fit into one statistical category or another. I am a rural to urban migrant and also an international migrant, some might also classify me as part of the new class of international nomads, although I think that having lived for only one year each in 2 European cities and 2 South American cities hardly puts me into that category.

I was born and grew up on a farm in New Jersey, an American state famous for having given the world Bruce Springsteen and Jon Stewart. If someone had read my palm during those formative years and predicted that I would be teaching at a university and writing footnote-laden scholarly articles, I would have accused them of being a charlatan and not paid for the clearly dubious service that they had rendered.

Yet, here I am, having followed a zig-zag path. As my strong point in high school was mathematics, as my oldest brother was an aeronautical engineer at the time and as the Soviet launch of sputnik provoked a US focus on training engineers, I opted to study engineering. Bad idea. I managed to barely survive academically for two and one-half years, before bailing into Management Engineering. My final 3 semesters were near perfect. In my final year we were required to take one of a newly introduced set of full academic year courses in the humanities and social sciences. The courses on offer were an odd collection. The one that seemed moderately promising to me was called “Political Science, World Affairs and Geography”. As fate would have it, this truly represented my first step toward a specialization in the still infant field of development.

We were each to become ‘experts’ in a region of the world, although our expertise was largely limited to the accounts in a newly published Encyclopedia of Nations, as not only was little yet written, but the social science and humanities holdings in the library of the engineering school where I studied were exceedingly sparse. I was the class expert on North Africa. Most, perhaps all, of what I learned about that region at the time, like much of what we all learn but don’t use, is hopelessly locked in my brain’s most remote archives. Nonetheless, the development bug had bitten me and the consequences would be life-long.

My preliminary job interviews with industry representatives at a campus-based employment fair turned out to be fruitless. My application to the newly formed Peace Corps to be part of the first cohort of volunteers was also rejected. Many of you have heard me remark that our society’s main alternative to youth unemployment is to extend our full-time education, thus keeping us out of the labor force. So, I proceeded on to further studies at the graduate program of my choice, the only one to which I applied: the MBA Program at Columbia Graduate School of Business. In fact, there is a second alternative to unemployment: the military, which at that time could have involved a three year obligation. Here was real life choice situation, with unknown probabilities, although in mid-1961 there were no ongoing hostilities, nor, to the uninformed observer, was there any on the horizon. I opted for the US Army Reserve which required six months of training: 1/2 basic and 1/2 specialist training. My specialist training took me to San Antonio, Texas. It was the first time that I set foot out of the US North-East (other than a visit to Montreal in June 1961).

While in Texas, I took every opportunity to explore the state. I visited every one of San Antonio’s Spanish colonial missions. On a morning bus ride in Fort Worth, I

opened my eyes to discover that the church-going women on the bus, all wearing their Sunday best, were arrayed by skin color, with the blacks in back and the whites in front. I even attended a symposium on the Latin American economy, where I heard a talk on the newly-formed Latin American Free Trade Area given by David H. Pollock, a Canadian economist who was for many years the assistant to Raúl Prebisch, the first head of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America. Then came an arranged weekend outing to Monterrey, Mexico, in which a very small number of us chose to participate. By the time I began my studies at Columbia a couple months later my interest in Latin America had blossomed.

My studies in New York lasted but one semester. Classes had barely started when I saw on a bulletin board an announcement for 3 year scholarships financed by the United States government to complete a Ph.D. in either Economics or Business Administration with a focus on Latin America at the University of Texas in Austin. In fall 1962 I was headed back to Texas, the beneficiary of a grant undoubtedly created as a response to the Cuban Revolution.

While I had visited Austin and the University during my military service, I had done virtually no research to know what I was getting myself into. Luckily, I really could not have chosen better. UT-Austin is one of the leading schools for Latin American Studies. Economics, which I switched into after one semester, was one of a small number of departments noted for what is now called a heterodox approach. It was one of the bastions of American Institutionalism -- the old version, not the new¹ -- which can be summed up in an imperfect caricature as emphasizing the interplay between institutions,

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_institutionalism#Critiques_of_new_institutionalism

which are said to be past-binding and technology, said to be a progressive force. Among the leading pioneers of that school were John R. Commons, author of The Legal Foundations of Capitalism (1924), Wesley Clair Mitchell, founder of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Karl Polanyi, author of The Great Transformation (1944) and Thorstein Veblen, author of The Theory of the Leisure Class, (1899).

In his book on the leisure class, Veblen introduced the concept of ‘conspicuous consumption’, a concept which most recently inspired Hervé Kempf, a journalist for Le Monde, who appeared two nights ago on Radio Canada’s Tout le Monde en Parle and will be speaking tomorrow night at the Université du Québec in Gatineau. In his book Comment les riches détruisent la planète (2007, How the Rich Destroy the Planet), Kempf extends Veblen’s notion of conspicuous consumption to the planetary level. According to Kempf, the hyper-consumption life styles of the super rich are emulated at every level of the income distribution not just in their own country, but world-wide, with disastrous consequences for the future of all life forms on planet Earth.

I and my classmates were surely the only Economics graduate students who were ever required to read anything by John Dewey. His “Theory of Valuation” (1939) instructed us to focus not on value (central to economic thinking), but rather on the process of valuation and to be attentive to avoid confusing means and ends. The patriarch of the Economics Department was Clarence Ayres, whose work synthesizes some of the key insights of Dewey and Veblen.² I remember well his proclaiming in his booming voice what must have been the most important message I heard in all my

² The most well known of the books by Ayres is his Theory of Economic Progress published in 1944, the same year as Karl Polanyi’s The Great Transformation and Friedrich Hayek’s The Road to Serfdom.

schooling. In response to the prospect of a breakfast table electronic referendum invoked in the early-1960s by Ben Higgins, the author of the first widely-used text on Economic Development at our departmental seminar a couple days earlier, Ayres loudly and resolutely advised us: **“DEMOCRACY IS NOT ABOUT ELECTIONS, IT IS ABOUT DISCUSSION”**.

Although, it wasn't conveyed to us directly, we understood as graduate students, that we were to master economic theory, but (at our peril) we were not to believe it. We were to understand the limitations and shortcomings of mainstream theory, particularly as a guide to policy.

Most of the rest is history and best left for an evening around the campfire, as we only have 50 minutes at our disposal this afternoon, except to add that my coming to McGill no doubt owes much to the influence of Ben Higgins, my professor of development, who had taught at McGill in the late 1940s and had as one of his students the late Irving Brecher, the founding Director of McGill's Centre for Developing Area Studies. (Which incidentally brings me back to my being a statistic. I was part of the American invasion of Canadian universities, that eventually led to somewhat ineffective immigration regulations requiring that universities must advertise that the preference for teaching positions be given to Canadian citizens and landed immigrants. In 1967 I was one of 8-10 new faculty members (the exact number escapes me) that were hired by the then combined Department of Economics and Political Science. My guess is that only one of us was a Canadian.)

Becoming a Professor

“Any Ph.D. can teach.” That phrase was proclaimed as a criticism of the practices of universities in The Academic Marketplace (1958) written by Reece McGee and Theodore Caplow. Most of those of my generation have taken no course related to either teaching or learning either prior to or subsequent to taking command of university classes. It is equally likely that we received little if any advice. Indeed, we may have simply assumed that what was done to us by our professors was worthy of being replicated. When John Dewey spoke of “learning by doing”, he surely must have envisioned that one would become a reflective practitioner who would inquire about the range of perceived best practices.

I taught my first class, Introductory Microeconomics, as a graduate student. The only guidance I received was a one page handout which realistically suggested that after lecturing for the first half of the class period, the remainder should be devoted to discovering how little had been understood by the students. I neither received nor sought subsequent guidance from departmental colleagues during the balance of my teaching career, although in my first teaching job, a colleague who had won a teaching award offered me his course notes to guide me through my International Economics course. I declined; I presume respectfully enough. I was determined to pursue my own trial and error path.

Soon after I came to McGill, a Centre for Learning and Development was created to foster educational innovation. My association with that Centre and its successors –

today Teaching and Learning Services³ – has been an important source of encouragement in the initiatives that I have taken with my courses, including introducing e-mail to my students in 1989 and course web pages in 1994, at a time when students had never previously encountered the World-Wide Web and had to be told to click on underlined text and see what would happen.

I generally have a PowerPoint slide or two at the start of each course drawing attention to the main recommendations of the 1998 Boyer Commission on Research-Based Undergraduate Learning.⁴ Quotes about learning through inquiry rather than memory can be traced back to the earliest written record. One of the most famous dates back to Plutarch and has been rendered as “The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.” Returning to the source, produced a more powerful version of the role of education: “For the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for the truth.”⁵

I am happy to report that research-based learning has now been embraced as an objective at McGill. I take no credit for that development. Perhaps my example was noticed, perhaps not. A succession of speakers have come to McGill to extol the virtues of research-based learning, including in early March, Mick Healey, a leading British authority on the topic. We learned from him that Alexander von Humboldt had already observed in the early 19th century that “universities should treat learning as not wholly

³ <http://www.mcgill.ca/tls/>

⁴ <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>

⁵ http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/De_auditu*.html

solved problems and hence always in research mode.” Or as the economist Deirdre McCloskey has suggested, it is about truth with a small t, not with a capital T.

Research-based learning, however important, is only one part of my agenda. The celebration and practice of community and democracy is an element that I wished to incorporate in my classes, often not very successfully. I expressed this wish in the following terms:

Today I have an active learning philosophy centered on the autonomous learner and on the class as a democratic micro-community. The "autonomous" learner exists in a social setting and the learner's self definition is related to social interaction. That interaction should be an essential ingredient in education.

On Power

H.G. Wells is often quoted out of context as having spoken of a race between education and catastrophe. Surely the emphasis in the Millennium Development Goals on attaining universal primary education (after 60 years of development efforts) might hearten Wells, if he were still alive, but I am not so sure. Wells was not pleading for more “education as usual”, to use a wording parallel to the “business as usual” scenarios in atmospheric CO₂ models, but rather for a radical change in the nature of education. His exact words in the 1930s were:

All this experimenting and muddling towards world organization takes time. Meanwhile the old traditions remain very strongly established -- in the legal forms of government, in social habit, in our schools. Particularly in our schools. The armament firms remain. They have not been brought to heel. The press, ignorant and short-sighted, is still very largely on the side of mischief. This search for the methods of a world pax is essentially an intellectual matter, a psychological problem; it is an attempt to save mankind from the insane obsessions of patriotism; it is a race of education to avert another and greater catastrophe. The fundamental thing in human association is and always has been

education; for what education is, that is also our social organization and the quality of our lives.⁶

How much has the situation really changed in the three-quarters of a century since Wells wrote those words? Are we even “muddling toward world organization?” Some would argue that, whatever the rhetoric, we are headed for the greatest catastrophe ever. Nevertheless, few are offering suggestions for world order as radical as the suggestions made during the early 1940s by Lord Keynes and by two economists eventually honored with Nobel Prizes, Jan Tinbergen and James Meade.

Oscar Wilde once remarked that there were two things that were important in life, one was to strike a pose and he could not remember the other. In a like manner, Paul Samuelson said that there are two things missing from economics. One I can't remember, but the other -- “Power” -- is so central that it can hardly be forgotten. It was certainly not forgotten by Friedrich Hayek, one of the deities of free marketers, when he wrote in The Road to Serfdom in 1944 during the final years of the Second World War of the “Totalitarians in Our Midst”:

. . . the impetus of the movement toward totalitarianism comes mainly from the two great vested interests: organized capital and organized labor. . . . They do this through their common, and often concerted, support of the monopolistic organization of industry; and it is this tendency which is the great immediate danger.

That danger is no less today. Many voices have sounded the alarm, In 1998 it was Jagdish Bhagwati, an outspoken supporter of free trade, who wrote about what he called the Wall St. – Treasury – IMF Complex.⁷ Most recently in the May 2009 Atlantic Monthly, not yet in print, but already on the Web, Simon Johnson who was Director of

⁶ H.G. Wells, The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind (London: William Heinemann, 1932), p. 650.

⁷ “The Capital Myth: the Difference between Trade in Widgets and Dollars,” Foreign Affairs, 77 (May/June 1998). 7-12.

the Research Department at the IMF from March 2007-August 2008 and has now returned to the Sloan School of Management at MIT, has written about a Quiet Coup in the United States. In his words:

The American financial industry gained political power by amassing a kind of cultural capital—a belief system. . . . Over the past decade, the attitude took hold that what was good for Wall Street was good for the country. The banking-and-securities industry has become one of the top contributors to political campaigns, but at the peak of its influence, it did not have to buy favors . . . Instead, it benefited from the fact that Washington insiders already believed that large financial institutions and free-flowing capital markets were crucial to America’s position in the world. One channel of influence was, of course, the flow of individuals between Wall Street and Washington.⁸

Concentrated economic power compromises education, compromises democracy, compromises any hopes for equity and social justice and compromises language. We have a very human tendency, indeed a necessary one, to summarize complex messages with a convenient phrase or two. There is considerable merit in returning to sources to see what was said in the original and what has been lost by condensing. Many of you undoubtedly associate Dwight Eisenhower with the cautionary message about the dangers of the military-industrial complex contained in his farewell address as US President on January 17, 1961.⁹ The caution was, in fact, more extensive:

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.

. . . the free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity. For every old blackboard there are now hundreds of new electronic computers. The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by

⁸ <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200905/imf-advice>

⁹ http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Eisenhower%27s_farewell_address

Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present and is gravely to be regarded.

Yet, in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-technological elite.

It is worth mentioning that in a talk at McGill in 1999 sociologist Steve Fuller, without referring to Eisenhower's caution, accused Thomas Kuhn of having tilted his views in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions on progress occurring through the practice of 'normal science' to conform with Harvard's engagement with the "big-science" nuclear research establishment, in which his mentor Harvard President James Conant had been involved.

On Development

Stephen Crane may no longer be a name that is familiar. His most famous work is The Red Badge of Courage (1895). I first encountered his 1905 poem¹⁰ that I am about to read when I did a research paper on Crane for a high school American literature class.

There was one I met upon the road
Who looked at me with kind eyes.
He said, "Show me of your wares."
And this I did,
Holding forth one.
He said, "It is a sin."
Then held I forth another;
He said, "It is a sin."
Then held I forth another;
He said, "It is a sin."
And so to the end;
Always he said, "It is a sin."
And, finally, I cried out,
"But I have none other."

¹⁰http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/stephen_crane/poems/13302

Then did he look at me
 With kinder eyes.
 "Poor soul!" he said.

This past weekend, over 50 years later, I finally arrived at a tentative explanation for “Then did he look at me with kinder eyes” rather than with sadness. The key is well-summed up by a phrase in Une histoire américaine (1986), a novel by the Quebec author Jacques Godbout: “C’est vraiment touchant” -- It is truly touching . . . touching that something that is judged by the stranger to be inadequate, should be so firmly thought sufficient by the bearer of the wares. It is similarly touching how enthusiastically we have embraced a seemingly unending succession of policies, often regarded as veritable magic bullets – to mix metaphors, to unlock the door of development. Among them: Developing planning, Structural Adjustment Programs, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Privatization, Free Markets, Free Trade, Free Capital Movement, Deregulation, Flexible Labor Markets, Land titles, Microcredit, Macroeconomic Stability, Accountability, Transparency and Good Governance, and most recently Conditional Cash Transfers. These may each have their merits, which should neither be overlooked nor exaggerated, but many clearly fit into a common frame of mind regarding policy at home and abroad, which I choose to call NOOMI: Not Out of My Income.

Securing our own income from any threat of what is regarded as predatory redistribution to the unworthy consigns us to rule by what Roberto Mangabeira Unger calls the “Dictatorship of No Alternatives”.¹¹ Many writers can be cited on this point, but I have chosen Stephen Leacock:

Hitherto we have been hampered at every turn by the supposed obstacle of immutable economic laws. The theory of 'natural' wages and prices of a supposed economic order that could not be disturbed, set up a sort of legislative paralysis. The first thing needed is to get away entirely from all such preconceptions, to recognize that the 'natural' order of society, based on the 'natural' liberty, does not correspond with real justice and real liberty at all, but works injustice at every turn. And at every turn intrusive social legislation must seek to prevent such injustice.

¹¹ What Should the Left Propose? (2005).

Leacock went on to note:

People agree to forget that this wonderful freedom of the working child was one part of a "system of natural liberty," of which free trade was another. The two hung together. A convenient forgetfulness has pushed them apart.¹²

There certainly are immutable physical laws, not all of which are fully understood yet, in part because of the incredibly complex interrelationships of biological systems and, in turn, of their subsystems. Economic 'laws' are what we create. As Karl Polanyi taught us 'the economy is an instituted process.'¹³ If we choose to alter those processes, we must shed light on them, understand what ends they serve well and which ends they frustrate and begin the often lengthy and by no means certain educational process of discourse change and the political process of mobilizing support.

Returning to Eisenhower's 1961 address, we find sentiments essential to guide our future national and global steering. I quote again:

we . . . must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. . . .

During the long lane of the history yet to be written, America knows that this world of ours, ever growing smaller, must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be, instead, a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect. Such a confederation must be one of equals. The weakest must come to the conference table with the same confidence as do we, protected as we are by our moral, economic, and military strength. That table, though scarred by many past frustrations, cannot be abandoned for the certain agony of the battlefield. . . .

To all the peoples of the world, I once more give expression to America's prayerful and continuing aspiration:

¹² The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice (1920).

¹³ Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory (1957).

We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings. Those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.

Would that we could move toward much of what Eisenhower hoped for. Yet while he speaks of heavy responsibilities, it remains for us to connect the dots. Is it unfair to see NOOMI – not out of my income -- as a thread runs through these otherwise inspiring words? It may have been appropriate to speak of “learning charity” in 1961. We live in a distinctly different world today, one in which we should be speaking about entitlements and serious income distribution to meet “great human needs” at home and abroad. In the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, “Taxes are what we pay for civilized society.” As society is increasingly globalized, taxes on income and wealth should have a global reach to assure through appropriate expenditure a civilized world society with most of its diversity preserved by ending the uniformity-inducing race to the bottom. The words of another US Supreme Court Justice, Louis Brandeis -- “We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both.” -- apply at all levels of society, from the local to the global.

The old forms of sovereignty where nations compete with one another must in the 21st century be replaced by a world-wide system that is respectful of national uniqueness. Subsidiarity is a term that implies that decisions be taken at the appropriate level, whether at the lowest or the highest. Those of you who have been in my classes or read some of

my articles¹⁴ or from my book on World Democratic Federalism: Peace and Justice Indivisible (2004) know that I am convinced that we are in need of major institutional change and rethinking.

I shall conclude with the closing paragraph of my book. First, however, a prefatory note: Veblen in 1904 spoke of our epoch as being characterized by the cultural impact of the machine process¹⁵ – i.e., everything is subject to being measured and expressed in a number (including now happiness). Today, I believe it essential to consider the cultural impact of the electronic process, well beyond Facebook and Twitter:

The extension of solidarity beyond the face-to-face is required for the construction of what Benedict Anderson calls ‘imagined communities.’¹⁶ Building national communities required ingenuity and sustained effort over lengthy periods. For those of you who have added a European identity to your basket of loyalties, the possibility of adding at least one more allegiance should appear to be a plausible project. For most of the rest of us, this is likely for the moment to seem a giant step. Nonetheless, imagining a world community and building world-scale democratic institutions, including a world currency, world public finance and a planet-wide citizen’s income (PWCI), may be the only peaceful and sustainable way out of our increasingly strife-prone global race to the bottom. When the dust finally appears to have settled, we may realize that the attainment of substantive global democracy, peace, and justice was the cultural impact of the electronic process.

¹⁴ <http://mfrankman.googlepages.com/index.htm>

¹⁵ The Theory of Business Enterprise (1904).

¹⁶ Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (1983).