

interpretation

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interpretation

Volume 10 number 1

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Discussion

Paradoxes of Education In a Republic. By Eva T. H. Brann. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. \$12.95)

CHANINAH MASCHLER

Wonder of wonders, this is an *enchanted* book. To convey its spirit, except by citation, is impossible. For example:

Aristotle makes a distinction of the greatest importance to the educational enterprise. He distinguishes between thinking about truths and ends and deliberating about ways and means. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 1112). My argument will be that the former is the most proper object of education, and it moreover leads to a less floundering practicality, for all ambitions—to affect people, solve problems, change the world—require the most careful formulations of what is desirable. Nothing could be more ill-conceived than a whole curriculum based on urgent social and personal problems. . . . On the contrary, it seems to me that an education is much more likely to prepare for action in the world if it, like the Buxtehude passacaglia in Auden's poem, makes

Our minds a *civitas* of sound
where nothing but assent was found
For art had set in order sense,
And feeling and intelligence,
And from its ideal order grew
Our local understanding too (pp. 29, 30).

What course of study would *teach*, that is, *show* (p. 16) that an assent to the oh-seal-them-so features of the self-evident (p. 21) is the end to which and from which all human seeking leads?

A large portion of the charm and of the good of Miss Brann's book derives from the prosiness of her answer:

I think that the course of education is the course of learning to read, and to have an education is to know how to read. I mean reading in a wide sense, [as exegesis, and as including, for instance, the reading of mathematical sentences, musical scores, diagrams] but I do mean reading. . . . Just as the public obligations of teaching are distinguishable from the private pleasures of learning, so the labor of study is not identical with the activity of thought. The daily life of even the best of schools must be a mundane mastering of other people's reflections—thought itself can be facilitated but not scheduled. . . . Therefore, institutions of education are known by the quality of their book learning, and all attempts to alter that fact end either in a decline of the institution or in a counter-reformation (pp. 16, 17).

Now that the overwhelming question of the true nature of education has been made practical, we can ask the manageable question "What should students learn to read?" Here is her answer:

The books of the West, ancient, medieval, and modern (p. 65).

And why these, and not the Tao-te-ching or the Upanishads? Roughly, for the same reason that ruled her saying that the course of education is that of learning to read, namely, that education is inherently traditional, and tradition, by its very nature, is never tradition in the abstract but *ours*, whoever the “we” are who are perpetuating themselves in the new generation. Now *our* tradition is “bookish.” What Mohammed called the Jews, “the people of the Book,” we in the West must all be called, with this difference, that *the* Book has become *books*.

What sharply defines the bookish Western tradition as a handing down is that it is acquired by study. That is to say, it is appropriated by a set, episodic application of the intellect and the sensibility carried on in distinction from the world’s business. The tradition is not . . . an influence to be atmospherically absorbed but a group of works to be confronted (pp. 65, 66).

This is the idea of education which is imperiled and for the saving of which Miss Brann gives “reasons and ways” (p. 102).

The central chapter’s concluding section (pp. 108–19) gives her plan of action: The poetic, mathematical and scientific, and philosophical works which rank as *monumental* because through them we are reminded how copious the mind’s capacity is, are to be studied; but not as “monuments” in the current sense of the word, not as relics of deceased “cultural epochs”; rather, as winged words whose target is *ourselves*:

most major works [assume] a radical originating power of thought. To offer to explicate them by providing their historical setting is simply to deny the truth of the text before making it read. I dismiss, on the basis of experience, the pedagogical contention that students cannot read books without such preparation, which is largely a way of saying that the teacher does not believe in their intelligibility (p. 115).

“With only slightly less conviction” (p. 116) she pleads, further, for the cultivation of the Liberal Arts, understood in the strict sense of the three trivial (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the four mathematical arts (theory of numbers, geometry, astronomy, and music, the last construed as “the study of bodies executing harmonious motions, that is, physics.”) Thus, quietly, she “composes” more than one battle—that between *artes* and *auctores*,¹ heard music and the music of the mind, and that between philosophy and poetry.²

The restoration of something like the Medieval Arts curriculum is, I believe, chiefly intended to undo division into departments: Whatever else the faculty

1. See Paul O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanist Strain* (Harper Torchbook, 1961), p. 7; Eugenio Garin, *Geschichte und Dokumente* (Rowohlt, 1966), pp. 21f.; Actes du 4e Congrès internationale de philosophie médiévale, *Arts Libéraux et Philosophie au Moyen Age* (J. Vrin: Paris, 1969).

2. See Republic X.

may have studied or be studying, their being at least apprentices in the seven arts entire—with the language arts not fenced off from the mathematical—is a precondition for their being genuinely on speaking terms with one another. And unless they are, isn't it pure miracle for the students to conceive the hope for an integrated education?

The locale and opportunity for such an education is the college:

What goes before is, no matter how strenuously teachers try to “make students think for themselves” mostly and properly a kind of training. . . . What comes after is again, properly, training: namely, professional, graduate, or practical. . . . (pp. 19, 20).

Accordingly, it is the precarious condition of the college, *our* colleges, that is the center of her concern:

It is an ineradicable American tradition that the . . . collegiate episode should not be training but education (p. 20).

The bewildered reader may sputter: “How can this be? A native growth (that the American college *is* such Miss Brann does somewhat document)³ so firmly rooted as to deserve the epithet “ineradicable” would hardly need the support solicited. And how is one to overlook the fact that students head for their B.A.s or B.S.s with “majors” selected with an eye to some future profession? “Ineradicable” is, to use one of the book's favorite words, “brave” talk that will not have things be as they are.

The answer is, I think, that Miss Brann's adjective qualified not a thing but an idea, not a fact but a series of facts and deeds interpreted over time. By placing current debates about the obligations of the college in the context of texts culled from more than two hundred years of discussion of the question, she shows that recrudescing unease at turning colleges into training institutions (whether of the research-oriented university or of the advanced trade school type) has been *as* characteristic of the idea of the American college as pangs of conscience at using it to prepare *aristoi* for their best happiness through artificial “helps.”⁴

Something of the sense of Miss Brann's word “paradox” may now begin to

3. The story is complicated by the fact that in the Founders' days colleges were, apparently, “general schools”; Miss Brann's “age sixteen” fits *them* better than it does our colleges.

4. I regret that Miss Brann does not take up the profoundly important exchange of letters between Jefferson and Adams on the subject of *aristoi* natural and artificial, for instance, Jefferson to Adams, October 28, 1813; Adams to Jefferson, Nov. 15, 1813, in volume 2 of the *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (U. of N.C. Press, 1959). Jefferson wanted, as Miss Brann shows, higher education to equip the *natural aristoi* for their responsibilities. Adams recognized that distinguishing between *them* and their artificial counterparts can become extremely dangerous. I say that the higher education of the upper classes in Europe, and of those whose ambition hopes for assimilation to the ways of life and thought of *aristoi*—natural or artificial—can be, has been, and perhaps even in some measure must be a refining that draws boundaries between “them” and “us.” Many an American movie, novel, or returning soldier's army stories revolves around this theme.

emerge: She means, not a contradiction which calls for our *mending* or *replacing* the foundations, but a tension which constitutes precisely our kind of equilibrium (p. 1). She lists and analyzes a number of such “opposites,” of which being and serving are only one instance—excellence/equality, school/life, citizen/philosopher. I believe she wants to argue that our polity is a “between” thing and that therefore our education lies “between the extremes,” not *only* of ideality and reality (p. 40).

What bearing does this notion of opposites in tension (reminiscent of certain descriptions of our polity’s being born of Declaration of Independence and Constitution, for example, Harry V Jaffa’s *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln–Douglas Debates* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), have on the argument for maintaining the liberal-arts college? In outline, Miss Brann’s reply seems to be three-fold:

The parties to the controversy—what do we owe our intellectual and moral descendants, in the way of education?—must recognize that fitting the college into the polity is unavoidable. Now the polity can remain and become what it was meant to be only through “reactivation” of its origins. Utilitarianism, anti-traditionalism, and rationalism modern style, so Miss Brann shows, primarily through study of Jefferson’s major writings on education, have from the beginning been a threat to the collegiate episode in *her* sense of the word. But those who might, by Jeffersonians, be dubbed the genteel party should remind themselves that these isms are coeval with the polity: accordingly, the school designs of Jefferson should be understood as just (though to be tempered) inevitabilities. The Jeffersonians, on the other hand, should ask themselves whether they do not agree that each of the isms listed draws life from what it rejects. Or rather, if they would be wise, those in Jefferson’s camp would use the colleges as prime instruments for redeeming from decay into ism what once was *choice* and *act* and *idea*. The decision of the “important question whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice” (Federalist 1) was made, and could only be made, by men who held in their midst the likes of Adams, Jefferson, and Madison, men

who had the advantage of self-awareness because they knew that which allowed them to distinguish the new from the old (p. 88).

Our maintaining of what they established is equally a matter of decision, equally in need of self-awareness and its conditions.

Alongside the argument just sketched there is another, more implicit: We are becoming more and more aware that much of human life is not problem-solving or dissolving, not razing and building, but *maintenance*, physical and spiritual.⁵

5. Renaissance philosophic literature—Machiavelli, Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes—is full of architectural imagery. And even Kant’s Critique (hence the section on the Architectonic of Pure Reason) is still shot through with it. That Jefferson’s architectural interests were profound needs no argument. But as far as I know, not even those who substituted for this fascination with building

Is it far-fetched to think that as our young men and women become intimate with works of stature, developing attachments to such as claim to be (and are) one another's rivals, they will begin to harbor the thought that the tradition they inherit may be *sustaining* precisely because the oppositions in it cannot energetically be "set right" without the setting right turning out wrong? The ripening of such a thought (New *and* Old Testament for the Christian; Deuteronomy *and* Job for the Jew; Jew *and* Christian *and* Moslem for all who have become people of books?) would have profound effects on how one lives outside of school.

But the argument dearest to Miss Brann is that we need colleges which study the Western tradition because an education so framed is most likely to lead to philosophy. Philosophy she understands to be as both that *amor fati* which loves its own as revealed through constitutive paradox *and* the resolving of paradox.

Early, in the chapter on Utility, her thesis is that because ours is a republic which "does not attempt to provide happiness but to facilitate its pursuit . . . [where] the public realm is primarily one of means," therefore we need philosophy, as the study of ends (pp. 61ff.).

In the chapter on Tradition, the claim is that as Moderns, living in the midst of the products of reason—"theories, techniques, instruments, and machines"—we need philosophy, so that our environment of artifacts of reason may become intelligible, may lose both its air of spurious naturalness and of ugly gadgetry. Philosophy is here identified as the study of the philosophic works responsible for technological power (p. 115).

Finally, in the chapter on Rationality, through which she brings her book to its end, Miss Brann argues that to regain the kind of integrity of which Auden's poem spoke, to overcome self-diremption⁶ into head and heart (vividly pre-figured in Jefferson, see pp. 135–42), we need philosophy, as the activity of "the best part in us, perhaps our very selves," as the life of intellect.

As is, I hope, sufficiently apparent, to much of what is said, and said so very well, I resonate. But when I called the book enchanting I did not mean this only in its winning sense.

Take, for instance, Miss Brann's use of the word "education." Sure, you

the fascination with gardening (see Goethe's *Elective Affinities*) came around to the thought Eric Hoffer once expressed in a television interview, that the stamina of a nation is shown by how well it provides, not for new projects, but for building, road, train, statue, every sort of physical *maintenance*. Such physical maintenance and spiritual maintenance do not seem to be separate things.

6. I use the Hegelian word not because I fancy such language, but because the author's reflections seem much affected by Hegel. The "document" that figures prominently in Miss Brann's picture of Jefferson and his heirs as souls divided against themselves—Jefferson's letter to Maria Cosway—is also discussed at length by Garry Wills (*Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*, Doubleday: New York, 1978). I learned of Wills's book through William Mullen, upon his reading of this review.

can pay words extra, that is, explain yourself, and offer a part of what they commonly mean as your whole. So there is a sense in which it is silly to quarrel with Miss Brann's reserving "education" for what goes on, or should go on, in colleges. But aren't you paying too much for idiosyncrasy? The rhetorical advantage of the "persuasive definition" is small. The ambiguity due to the old, broader, and the new, narrower sense both clinging to the word "education" is great. I believe Miss Brann's way of contrasting what goes on in schools prior to college with what should be done at college is modeled on the contrast between *Republic*, books II–IV, and the "longer way" of books V–VII, where the former is "training" and the latter "education." But aren't there *tremendous* differences between our youngsters and young Athenians? Our polity and the Athens of Socrates' day? Differences shown by ruminating on Socrates' words in behalf of the *nomoi* at *Crito* 50d,e, coarsely summarized by the words "division of church from state"? Isn't it really very hard, *for us*, to see just how formation of habit and attitude (training) is and ought to be different from and connected with reflection on habit (education)? I shall speak for myself: *I* find it hard to reserve "training" for precollege and "education" for the college years. My difficulties lie deeper than the obvious one that we didn't have to wait for Piaget to tell us that a *young person* of high-school age is of rather different make than a child between, say, six and ten. Our *industrial society* is such (or has, perhaps, been so misunderstood?) as to require that children of high-school age be taught extremely sophisticated scientific theory in groups so large and by teachers so trained as to make it necessary to turn the instruction into something like "basic training" in the army or "on-the-job training" in the factory, although the *subject* taught is at odds with instruction in this mode.

I am disposed to believe, and I doubt that Miss Brann would disagree, that while there are stages of intellectual growth, each stage wants rhythmic alternation between doing or saying and wondering about the doing and the done, the saying and the said. Reflection runs through, if allowed, though it takes different forms, not always of speech.

Had Miss Brann stuck to her guns (bottom p. 4), she would have spoken as a college teacher attempting to articulate the rationale of the teaching upon which she is engaged (middle p. 5). Then she might, or again, might not have found it necessary to speak of education prior to college. If she found it necessary, she might, for example, have warned us that it is advisable to choose subject matter in such a way that "training" in it isn't ludicrous. This might have meant, for example, a strong argument for the study of foreign languages, music, and dance as a required part of the curriculum of the lower schools. But as her book stands, many of the remarks about lower schools being places for training are confusing, at least to me, because when Deweyites or followers of Rousseau take this seriously in *something* like the character-formation sense, she becomes very angry (see especially bottom p. 44, top p.

45), though that *is* the sense of *Republic* II–IV, and she herself wants patriotic music for *our* republic. When, on the other hand, she writes as supporter of “back to basics” in the subject-matter sense, she does not take up the question of how the natural sciences should or could be taught, or what the basics are for those who will *not* attend college, though these are matters directly bearing on education in and for our republic, both in the broader sense of education *and* in her narrower sense. We college teachers do, after all, depend on our high schools.

But her heart is given to the college, and it is as a college teacher that she emulates those “priests and priestesses” in Plato’s *Meno* who try to “give an account” of their station and its duties. It is because of the richness of her understanding of what is entailed by any serious effort to understand *what* one is doing and *why*, that her book, in addition to being a *practical proposal*, is a *miniature history* of the idea of liberal arts and assorted other matters, and a *series of reflections* on the good of a college education and, therefore, by her standards necessarily, eventually on “the good” (*Republic* V–VII; *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 6). Without such perseverance, one cannot claim to have tried to answer the fair question, “What justifies retention of a very expensive, perhaps merely decorative, type of schooling?”

If only I understood better *how* philosophy is all the things it is declared to be—the study of ends, the recovery of “roots in thought” (pp. 1, 148), the life of intellect as an erotic yet intelligent spontaneity (see p. 143, with its reference to the *Symposium*, and p. 137)! *That* it is, one is made to *feel* through citation of or allusion to texts from Plato and Aristotle.

Not surprisingly, in an essay of a mere 167 pages, the texts are for the most part left unexplicated, allowed to “speak for themselves.” Thus readers previously unacquainted with such ideas of human life, philosophy, and intellect are persuaded of their reality for writers of obvious stature. The words are so persuasive that some of these readers may indeed take up the ancient books—one of the things, I suppose, Miss Brann hopes to achieve.

But the readers she chiefly meant to address—fellow teachers at other colleges, college trustees or administrators, and perhaps legislators—how are *they* helped?

Of course, the Introduction’s modest statement of the intent of the inquiry, “to find more telling terms for the debate [about education in America],” makes me feel mean and ungrateful for finding fault. Why not take what is offered, which is a lot, as promise of more to be said in some future piece?

To explain my reservations, I must turn to particulars. The passages in Plato’s *Republic* which explain why a man who has lived on the philosophic heights would go back down into the city to take on civic responsibility are described, or rather, alluded to, in ways which Jefferson would be unable to recognize. Where he would as his eyes went over the Greek read something like:

Will our alumni, then, disobey us when we tell them this and will they refuse to share in the labors of state each in his turn while permitted to dwell the most of the time with one another in the purer world? Impossible, he said, for we shall be imposing just commands on men who are just (520e, Shorey tr.).

In Miss Brann's text he would read that "the leap into the city is made for love" (p. 12).

On p. 85, Miss Brann cites Jefferson as having studied the differences between the pagan philosophers and the Jews and Jesus on matters ethical:

The philosophers' "precepts are related chiefly to ourselves. . . . In this branch of philosophy they were really great," but "in developing our duty to others they were short and defective," for "they taught justice and friendship, but not as did Jesus, benevolence and charity."

According to these words, of which she approves for their perceptiveness, differences between action from justice and self-respect and action from benevolence and charity are important. The least she owes Jefferson and such as are like him is, then, a reference to her long essay on the *Republic* ("The Music of the Republic," *Agon: Journal of Classical Studies*, pp. 1–117, April 1967. See also *Symposium* 208d, *Apology* 30a, *Euthyphro* 3d, *Lysis* 218e–222). And though it is difficult for me to say this, even *as much as that* might not be enough for one who, like Miss Brann, speaks of the self-evident (p. 21) and finds eugenic measures and infanticide self-evidently abhorrent, contrary to benevolence and charity. I am bluntly saying that Jefferson's Christian sensibilities were offended by the *Republic*. See 461c, with James Adams' commentary. When such a passage is compared with Aristotle's on infant exposure, at *Politics* VII, 16, 1355, and with the portions of the *Politics* where Aristotle takes the proposal to eliminate family life literally, the passages in Plutarch, 16.1, fit too well with what Hamilton said about these things. See Harvey Flaumenhaft, "Hamilton on the Foundation of Government," *Political Science Reviewer*, Fall 1976, p. 169.

When love and desire are adumbrated, as in the Platonic dialogues, as ultimately *of* the higher, then such a fusion of self and intellect and love with their object as Miss Brann believes *must* be possible *may* be possible. But in that case, how could the philosopher, who knows that the city (subject to generation, change, decay) is not worthy of such love, leap into the city for love? His best self does not need it, and how his lesser selves are needed by his best self is obscure. That for the Christian love primal is of the lowly has been argued, and I think truly, many times (Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, Harper Torchbook, 1969).

For me, as is plain, the theme of feeling and thought or head and heart is vastly more tortuous and tortured than for Miss Brann, who believes that Socrates at least got it right, as did Buxtehude.

But Buxtehude got it right only *in* the passacaglia. And Socrates had the advantage of instruction by a lady from Prophetsville.

Is it just wilfulness on Jefferson's part that, having apparently become drawn to a married lady, the prospect of gazing on the sea of beauty is no consolation for loss of a friendship that ought not properly to ripen? Jefferson tends to speak of himself with extreme reserve: which is why I agree with Miss Brann that his letter to Maria Cosway, though a *jeu d'esprit*, is also a love letter. This makes it difficult for me to understand that Miss Brann can imagine herself to be speaking to his condition: Jefferson's head plays it safe. His heart is willing to take risks. The head is detached (except from self). The heart attached. The head forecasts. The heart hopes. The head is Stoic or Epicurean. The heart is Christian. To this divided being she is saying, "Heal yourself. Look what lies ahead if you do not: love of the hazy or lurid; the vague, decaying, infinite; the freakishly sub- or superhuman; the shriek of drug-induced or otherwise fabricated ecstasy." At least, I do not know how otherwise to construe Miss Brann's quick linkings of eighteenth-century rationalism with nineteenth-century romanticism with the counter culture of the nineteen-sixties, and all of that with Jefferson's letter to Maria Cosway. But will either threat or evocation of nostalgia for a golden age when the capacity for thought had "its station at the center of human life" heal a man divided against himself?

Thus, I do not believe that it is only because of the extreme brevity of the essay, it is also because I seem to be given incompatible clues as to where an expanded version would lead that I resist the peace of accepting her reasons for doing what I like to do (study and teach much in the way recommended).

For example, when Plato's opinion about the true uses of mathematics is cited (p. 24), it sounds as though the author approves of that opinion. And the allusions to contemplation in Aristotle's sense of the word point in the same direction, toward the eternal. But there are also many passages, those which speak of "origins", "roots", "reactivation", "radical reflection" in what *looks* like a historical context, which seem reminiscent of Heidegger, or at least, of the Husserl who under the influence of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and/or Dilthey and/or political developments in the 1930s wrote the *Krisis d. eur. Wissenschaften*. I make no claim to have understood these books. But provisionally they seem to me to spring from an idea of *originating revelation* which sets us *tasks*. I cannot square such a notion, heavy with Hebraic thought, or with Rilke's angels of annunciation made intellectual, with classical philosophy.⁷

The chief issue between us is, probably, that Miss Brann often speaks as though she had clarified the relationships between history, tradition, and thought, when I do not believe she has, or else I disagree with what seems clearly said.

The beginning of this review cites a passage in which she speaks of the

7. Compare, for instance, Heidegger's *What is Philosophy?* (bilingual ed. by Wm. Kluback and Jean T. Wilde, College and University Press, n.d.), Beilage iii to Husserl's *Krisis*, "Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories" in Gershom Scholem, *Messianic Idea in Judaism* (Schocken, 1971).

“radical originating power of thought.” Because I hold that even if we were to go to heaven we would not become creative (that in heaven we might is the implication of a witticism on p. 7), I doubt that human thought can be radically originating. Therefore, because all human spontaneity seems to me responsive, I believe that if I am to grasp what is meant by another’s words or deeds, I must try to learn who and what were adventitiously addressed; else I risk fabricating a meaning rather than quickening one that lies dormant.

Here is a vivid example: We are told that Jesus dined with sinners and tax-collectors, and that the Pharisees were appalled. How could one grasp what is at issue, how could one feel the burden of choosing sides, or even (as some might be inclined to, though they would have no right to such a leaning unless something like a providential idea of history made sense) say “a blessing on both your houses,” without knowing that the tax-collectors were Jews who bought their office to serve Rome and their own pockets, and that the men to be taught by Jesus’ shocking association were those through whom the people of the book and the synagogue became just that?

It is not true that one who believes that meaning tends to be affected by historical setting denies that words and deeds may justly claim our assent, or claim it unjustly, or with partial justice. Rather, because of hope for an author’s speaking truly even over the gap of ages, I want to grasp the truth he meant.

I agree with Miss Brann that, in a mere four years of college, it is vastly wiser to invite students to read original works minutely, sans secondary literature about the epoch, since it is by dint of such minute reading that, for instance, the differences between our Bureau of Internal Revenue’s officers and the tax-collectors of Judaea in Jesus’ day would be found.⁸ And not only the exercise of judgment with reference to great issues in our past turns on reading, all manner of dailiness becomes charming or manageable or some other good thing for the discerning reader.

I further agree, though this is not something her book dwells on, that authors of books of intellectual size tend to know that a written work, like the cloak that survives its weaver in the *Phaedo*, has a consoling and potentially dangerous sort of permanence, beyond its immediate addressees or immediate occasion. The written word *is* different from the spoken.

But when too much experience of the removability of books from their author and original addressee leads to the removing of letters from their circumstance or to the condemnation of men to whom we owe large debts of gratitude because they wrote some books for the men of their time which we

8. For a nice example, see Plates i and ii in Victor Ehrenberg’s *Man, State, and Deity* (Methuen: London, 1974), where what is to be decided, by reading coins, is “what were Caesar’s final aims?” I offer it to indicate that “reading,” to serve as Miss Brann proposes, may eventually have to spring the confines of *script*. I offer it also to record that where Miss Brann and I may differ is that I believe that *eventually* it may be necessary to look not only to what the author or maker *intended*, a meaning paraded, but also to a meaning *betrayed* when the work is set in its universe of life.

find tedious to read, then I wonder whether the sound classroom principle of interpreting the given book by the given book hasn't become perverted.⁹

On p. 6 the humanists are wittily written off for "living in a world of reference rather than of reason" and on p. 7 "humanist groundlessness" is held responsible for the vacuity of our own educational tracts. Precisely because Miss Brann writes so memorably, such judgments disturb me. One of Erasmus' contemporaries wrote of him:

He is the man that to Isaac may be compared, the which digged up the goodly springing wells that the Philistines destroyed and with dirt and dung overfilled. The clear springs of Holy Scripture that the Philistines had so troubled . . . that no man could drink or have the true taste of the water, they be now by his labor and diligence to their old pureness and clearness . . . restored (Hervet, cited p. 21 of John Olin, ed., *Christian Humanism and the Reformation*, Harper Torchbook, 1965)

For Miss Brann, for me, for most of our contemporaries, the Gospels cannot be the *ground* in which our lives are rooted. But for those whom Erasmus sought to reach through a fresh translation of the Gospels it may have been different. I have no reason to doubt that Erasmus spoke seriously when he wrote:

This doctrine in an equal degree accommodates itself to all, lowers itself to the little ones, adjusts itself to their measure . . . fostering, sustaining them, doing everything until we grow in Christ. Again, not only does it serve the lowliest, but it is also an object of wonder to those at the top . . . Indeed, I disagree very much with those who are unwilling that Holy Scripture, translated into the vulgar tongue, be read by the uneducated, as if Christ taught such intricate doctrines that they could scarcely be understood by very few theologians. . . . (*Paraclesis*, pp. 96ff., *ibid.*)

What I am saying is, of course, that enormous though this fact be—repellent perhaps—recovery of Sacred Scripture *constituted* recovery of their roots for some of our forebears. Does Miss Brann know alternate game-plans for history well enough to bank on Lincoln's having had access to his Bible *without* the work of such as Erasmus?

Since our own access to many of the texts (other than the Bible) which Miss Brann believes we ought to study owes something to the founding and staffing and equipping of schools and faculties like Louvain, where the "three languages" (not just Latin, but Greek and Hebrew as well) were to be studied, and since Erasmus contributed so largely to this enterprise, there is for me something impious in biting the hand that feeds us.

Miss Brann speaks eloquently of the uses of piety, better, "reverence" in the sense of Kant's word "Achtung," meaning "respectful attention." Her remarks

9. I wonder whether reading major books as though they were *all* intended as a "possession for all time" isn't, in a curious way, a modernism. *Bacon* envisages indefinite future generations as addressed by his work. See the Proem to his *Great Instauration*.

on p. 102 (“In a law-based democratic republic, the fostering of scriptural reverence ought to be an essential part of a properly republican education. A secular version of *credo ut intellegam*, something like ‘I trust, so that I may learn,’ is a necessary part of the devotions due to liberty”) are alone worth the price of the book.

This theme is first brought up when she argues that the revolt against being heirs to a bookish tradition was perpetuated on our shores by one who, as founder, had special responsibilities of not indulging in “hasty and hence uncontrolled interpretations” (p. 96). She is speaking of Jefferson. Jefferson’s disrespect for Platonic texts is discussed at some length, presumably because his attitude to *these* (for Miss Brann, exemplary texts) illustrates his overall attitude toward books that would make one reconsider one’s own stance; and because Jefferson, at least on matters educational, exemplifies the nation.¹⁰ No, not the nation, but the educational pace-setters.

Not only did Jefferson, according to Miss Brann, treat “the older texts” (Plato and the Bible represent them!) without piety; she holds that he betrays a general disrespect for “the older language” when, in a letter to Adams, he declares himself a friend of neology. She writes:

I would argue that this untroubled repudiation of the sanctity of grown language, a natural consequence of a depreciation of the word, is the most pregnant of Jefferson’s premonitions. (p. 99)

She adjoins a horrendously opaque description of the role of the legislator (unidentified), implying “*This* is the kind of talk begotten of Jefferson’s irreverence.” And concludes, wickedly, “The precise English rendition of neology is *newspeak* (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Appendix)” (p. 100).

Before retrieving the letter (August 15, 1820, pp. 565f., in *Adams–Jefferson Letters*, ed. J. Cappon, U. of N.C. Press, 1959), I had noticed two things in the fragment quoted: that half the sample words are scientific, so that only if English scientific words had generally been formed on the Dutch (Stevin-originated?) model of consistently using native roots could the newfangled Greek of “oxygen” and “electricity” have been avoided; and that it is the French language that is being talked about: “What a language has the French become since the date of their revolution. . . .” As I was teaching a seventeenth-century French literature class, I was aware that one of the constituents of the Old Regime undone by the Revolution was the French Academy; further, that the Academy, through its “normative” dictionary, intended to “weed out the riotous growths of Renaissance French,” to spread, by royal edict, *le bon usage* of the upper classes (see *Brittanica*, eleventh ed., volume 9, p. 761,

10. Cf Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Genius of American Education*, p. 40: “My interest at this point is in the extent to which American educational debate over the past hundred and fifty years can be viewed as a series of arguments for one aspect of Jefferson’s program as opposed to another: the practical versus the liberal; the individual versus the social; and most important, perhaps, the elitist versus the equalitarian.”

“French Language”). The exceeding sparseness of Racine’s vocabulary as compared to Montaigne’s or Rabelais’s has, I should think, something to do with this. Far be it from me to deny the power of Racine’s French, connected with that sparseness. But it is really impious of Jefferson to rejoice that autocratically imposed bands confining writing have been dissolved?

Upon reading the letter in its entirety, I find my surmises about Jefferson’s intentions amply borne out, and much evidence for Jefferson’s rationally reverent attitude toward the English language.¹¹ The only fault one could find with

11. I cite the passage almost in full because it seems to me to show Jefferson at his sweetest. The words I underline indicate that he is arguing *ad hominem* to begin with; then comes over to the side of the reviewer who breached his own rule while ignorantly measuring Jefferson by it; next, the case that broke the reviewer’s rule is used to enunciate a new rule. And finally, all rules are placed in the over-all context of the life of language and its users.

For this word *location*, see Bailey Johnson, Sheridan, Walker, etc. But if dictionaries are to be the arbiters of language, in which of them shall we find *neologism*? No matter. *It is a good word, well sounding, obvious, and expresses an idea which would otherwise require circumlocution. The reviewer was justifiable, therefore, in using it;* although he noted at the same time, as unauthoritative, *centrality, grade, sparse;* all of which have been long used in common speech and writing. I am a friend to neology. It is the only way to give to a language copiousness and euphony. Without it we should still be held to the vocabulary of Alfred or of Ulphilas; and held to their state of science also: For I am sure they had no words which could have conveyed the ideas of oxygen, cotyledons, zoophytes, magnetism, electricity, hyaline, and thousands of others expressing ideas not then existing or of possible communication in the state of their language. What a language the French has become since the date of their revolution by the free introduction of new words! The most copious and eloquent in the living world; and equal to the Greek, had not that been regularly modifiable almost *ad infinitum*. Their rule was that whenever their language furnished or adopted a root, all its branches, in every part of speech, were legitimated by giving them their appropriate terminations. And this should be the law of every language. Thus, having adopted the adjective *fraternal* it is a root which should legitimate fraternity, fraternation, fraternization, fraternism, to fraternate, fraternise, fraternally. And give the word neologism to our language, as a root, and it should give us its fellow substantives . . . adjectives . . . verb and adverb. Dictionaries are but the depositories of words already legitimated by usage. Society is the workshop in which new ones are elaborated. When an individual uses a new word, if illformed it is rejected in society, if wellformed, adopted and, after due time, laid up in the depository of dictionaries. And if in this process of sound neologisation, our transatlantic brethren shall not choose to accompany us, we may furnish, after the Ionians, a second example of a colonial dialect improving on its primitive.

Jefferson is beyond being offended. I am unable to say why *I* am so offended by false homiletic that comes of taking a man’s words out of their own text and context and placing them in a new one to point a “moral.” Instead I shall add another instance.

Miss Brann is very hard on “moderns” for writing “textbooks.” Nowhere does she sympathetically consider the full title of the *Encyclopaedia*, and its implications. Didn’t Diderot give half his life to preparing that work because he hoped thus to break such illegitimate power as is due to reserving craft or trade secrets for one’s *viva voce* apprentices? Power which, *he* held (and doesn’t Miss Brann think so too?), should be made available to all who desire to know, do, or make.

Lavoisier’s textbook on the elements of chemistry contained an elaborate description of apparatus in part iii for the same reason, because he wanted to teach “fellow workers in the vineyard”, “fellow builders of the edifice of the sciences”, “fellow founders of the Kingdom of Man” (Bacon, *New Organon*, aphorism lxviii and elsewhere) what could not be learned at schools teaching *artes*

him here is that he is too little aware that English is, as though of set purpose, without rules in what coinages it does and doesn't underwrite. But thinking back on some of Johnson's words it occurs to me that this supposed characteristic of English across the ages may be a feature of English as it is now. Surely, the juxtaposition of Orwell's new regime and Jefferson is uncalled-for and is really irresponsible, since not every reader can be expected to procure the letter from which Miss Brann quotes. And if she is joking, her joke is far less obvious than Jefferson's on *neological*.

I cannot help but think that the real source of her animus against Jefferson as author of the cited letter is that he speaks in praise of "their" (the French) revolution, where she would laud ours and condemn theirs.

This is plainly too large a theme for a book review, not to mention my being ill equipped to handle it. Yet I am obliged to touch on it because, although she is a seasoned and I a beginning reader of Jefferson, too often she seems to me tendentious in her interpretation. Thus, in the same letter to Adams, Jefferson speaks of what he calls his "habitual anodyne, 'I feel: therefore I exist.'" When Miss Brann first quotes this (p. 93), she describes it as "sensational materialism" and a "transformed Cartesian formula." The risk of that last description is that it tends to obscure the fact that Jefferson's "I feel" is transitive, like French *sentir*, not intransitive or "middle" as in French *se sentir*. Briefly put, I suspect that Jefferson is speaking in the spirit of the Scottish Common Sensists, men like Thomas Reid. I doubt that this is on the way toward "romanticism"; which is how Miss Brann eventually reads it. Jefferson writes:

Let me turn to your puzzling letter of May 12 on matter, spirit, motion, etc. *Its* croud (ital. added) of scepticisms kept me from sleep. I read it, and laid it down; read it, and laid it down, again and again; and to give rest to my mind, I was obliged to recur ultimately to my habitual anodyne, 'I feel: therefore I exist.' I feel bodies which are not myself: there are other existences then. I call them matter. I feel them changing place. This gives me motion. Where there is absence of matter [to touch] I call it void, or nothing, or immaterial space. On the basis of sensation, of matter and motion, we may erect the fabric of all the certainties we can have or need. I can conceive thought to be an action of a particular organization of matter, formed for that purpose by its creator, as well as that attraction is an

liberales and despising *artes serviles* (the passage about surgeons in the Hippocratic oath is an eye-opener!).

Are *our* textbook writers, especially those who insist that students buy the latest edition, prompted by the same zeal?

The grim "reversal" that Lavoisier was executed by men who shouted "the revolution does not need savants!" is hidden from view by seeing nothing but continuity between *our* textbooks and *enchiridia* such as Diderot's *Encyclopedia* (or Machiavelli's *Prince*, or Zarlino's on the art of counterpoint!)

If, as Miss Brann too believes, human history has a tragic aspect, knuckle-rapping of our predecessors where it is our contemporaries who deserve it, and who could do something about it, is not called for, but truthful fellow-feeling.

action of matter, or magnetism of loadstone. When he who denies to the Creator the power of endowing matter with the mode of action called thinking shall show how He could endow the Sun with the mode of action called attraction, which reins in the planets in the tract of their orbits, or how an absence of matter can have a will, and by that will put matter into motion, then the materialist may be lawfully required to explain the process by which matter exercises the faculty of thinking. When once we quit the basis of sensation, all is in the wind. To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god are immaterial is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise: But I believe I am supported in my creed of materialism by Locke, Tracy, and Stewart. At what age of the Christian church this heresy of immaterialism, this masked atheism, crept in, I do not know. But a heresy it certainly is. Jesus taught nothing of it. . .

I quote beyond what was needed to show that for Jefferson “feeling” is of something, because it is by no means clear to me that Jefferson is pulling Adams’ or our leg when he speaks of immaterialism as a heresy.¹² First, Jefferson is quite right that an immaterial Soul or God is a Greek import, absent from Old Testament and Synoptic Gospels. Second, inadequate as Jefferson’s philosophy may be (unsatisfactory as is *any* philosophy that does not *attend* to contrasts and relations between “nomination” and “signification”), relational notions such as *mode of action of* or particular *organization of* so much deserve a run for their money, and so obviously won’t get it so long as we delude ourselves into thinking that familiar ways of talking precisely fit their theme, that I have a certain sympathy for Jefferson’s trying out some brand of (rather un-Cartesian) materialism.¹³ Last, and this brings me back to *Paradoxes of Education in a Republic*, I find it necessary to accept, provisionally, distinctions that matter to the authors about whose writings I am thinking. Taking people at their word is precisely what Miss Brann wants us to do perseveringly.

The Jefferson-Adams correspondence is full of repeated efforts to discriminate religion from theology and the faithful from the clergy. Charles Peirce continued in this line. The schools of the Brethren of the Common Life (where Erasmus and Luther both received their early education) began there.¹⁴ Allowing these distinctions (however difficult it may *in the end* be to retain them), I have thus far found no reason to hold that when Jefferson elects Jesus as his moral example and rejects his divinity he is, by *his* lights, speaking irreligiously, or even nonreligiously.¹⁵

12. I have not read [Joseph] Priestley. Jefferson is probably using his ideas.

13. Cf. Thomas C. Mark, “Spinoza’s Concept of Mind,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, XVII, 4, pp. 401ff.

14. See P. van Overzee, *Het Humanisme als Levensbeschauwing in de Nederlanden*, Hafkamp: Amsterdam, 1948; Charles S. Peirce, *Letters to Lady Welby*, ed. Irwin C. Lieb (Whitlock’s: New Haven, 1953), Dec. 23, 1908, p. 27.

15. Cf. how Jefferson concludes his narrative of the life and morals of Jesus of Nazareth with the Gospels’ conclusion.

As noted earlier, Miss Brann herself cites with approval sentences from Jefferson where he speaks of Jesus as a moral teacher of nonclassical stripe. To hold that religion is primarily a matter of moral perception, attitude, and conduct and not a matter of theology may be a Judaizing but is not an irreligious streak. To cite Peirce, "The heart too is a perceptive organ," and according to Jefferson God made it so.

Miss Brann's failure to distinguish Jefferson's attitude to church and clergy from his attitudes to religion is all the more puzzling because her chief mentor, de Tocqueville, in *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, knows the distinction full well. I cannot consider this a minor matter because in this respect Jefferson may be comparable to other great Americans—Mark Twain, Melville, Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, even Louisa M. Alcott and Henry and William James. For none of them is religion a dead issue. However different they be, there is in all of them a sense of *being held accountable* which I deem religious. Certainly Jefferson's talk about religion is not scoffing and ranting.

Equally puzzling is that while several pages are given over to showing how hard Jefferson fought to prevent clerical influence over the schools (or to make milder such influence or control as existed), there is only one spot where the *rationale* of his anticlericalism is touched on: On p. 161, note 50, the possibility of "private reasons" (clerical opposition to concubinage) is cited. I know nothing about this.¹⁶ But surely there were large public reasons, *beyond* the one, sufficiently large of itself, that realization of the principle of division of church from state, as urged by Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, was a "first" in America, and was not unreasonably felt to stand in need of constant vigilance.¹⁷ As was said earlier, I suspect that Miss Brann suspects that Jefferson was too close to the French *philosophes* and thereby, in her judgment, to modern "liberals." Suppose he *did* support much of their platform.¹⁸ Is there not a vast difference? Given the situation of their own nation, Diderot and Voltaire must hire themselves out to foreign kings and therefore were much tempted to make do with hatred of lies and "history's verdict" as entire foundation of virtue, withholding from view the fact that loyalty (*pietas* as in Virgil's

16. But see "The Jefferson Scandals" in Douglass Adair, *Fame and the Founding Fathers* (Norton, 1974).

17. See especially ch. xx, for instance, pp. 261f., Dover ed., and consider the full Latin title.

18. There is, I think, far more variety of opinion among the *philosophes* than such talk about a common platform suggests. Note that the man whose writings Jefferson cared about sufficiently to undertake to translate them into English, Destutt de Tracy, differed profoundly from Jefferson on fundamental issues. At least, *Jefferson* thought so, because he writes to Adams:

I gather from his other works that he adopts the principle of Hobbes, that justice is founded in contract solely, and does not result from the construction [by nature or by nature's God] of man. I believe, on the contrary, that it is instinct, and innate, that the moral sense is as much a part of our constitution as that of feeling, seeing, or hearing; as a wise creator must have seen to be necessary in an animal destined to live in society (October 14, 1816).

Aeneid), by its very nature partial, plays a large role in making human life decent and honorable. Jefferson, however, had experience of real power, and of establishing a nation that more nearly than any hitherto met the requirements of Aristotle for a good polity (that there be no conflict between being a good citizen and being a good man; cf the Spinoza quotation in note 16). Consequently, Jefferson speaks in many letters of what he hopes or expects the French or Dutch or South American *nations* to do. The “liberals” whom Miss Brann distrusts are, I think, those who consider themselves primarily as members of a homeless international *intelligentsia* and *as such* the new salt of the earth. Jefferson built a fine home!

He *is* a member of the “republic of letters” that was being established as an alternative to the *ecclesia catholica* by such as Bacon, Harvey, Diderot, Kant. As executor of Bacon’s program of extracting the serpent’s venom—vainglory—by humbling work-science, he *must* be a Socinian. The Gospel of salvation through *work* is not compatible with allowing large influence over education to a church that perpetuates the doctrine of men’s inability to raise themselves, the doctrine of original sin. But my overall impression of Jefferson is that he regards the “new” revulsion at the self-indulgence and idleness of *words without without works as pledges of their truth* as the work, not of chance, but of providence.

Jefferson’s seeming inconsistency—in on the one hand circumscribing the word “republic” as “government by the citizens in mass” and on the other hand offending the sensibilities and wishes of the mass of the citizens who respect churchmen and want religion taught in the schools—should be considered in the context I sketch.

Miss Brann, who gleefully calls Jefferson’s omission of the principle of representation in the letter to Taylor quoted on the word “republic” “not insignificant” (p. 11), seems to see the issue almost as Rousseau saw his former fellow-*philosophes* in the *First Discourse* (pp. 49ff. in Masters’ ed., St. Martins’ Press: New York, 1964). Rousseau condemns them for smiling “disdainfully at the old-fashioned words of fatherland and religion,” not because, as he judiciously points out, “they hate virtue and our dogmas” but because they want to assure themselves of being an elite by setting themselves against public opinion no matter what the public opinion happens to be.¹⁹

19. I wish Miss Brann had undertaken a real critique of Rousseau, instead of writing him off with the unelaborated *bon mot* about iron fist in velvet glove (p. 9). Didn’t Rousseau see with uncanny clarity precisely some of the things that concern Miss Brann? He saw, for example, that the *philosophes* want to be known as men apart. He exposes the entire machinery of serving what Swift in the Letter of Dedication to Prince Posterity affixed to his *Tale of a Tub* (vol. 1, *Prose Works*) called by its right name: The *avant garde* serves Prince Posterity by undermining opinion that is mere opinion. Hatred of lies prompts raising of doubt about warrants for loyalty or love. Restraints upon selfishness which *philia* imposes are thus loosened. The justification for this is that the nihilism fostered by the elite is a merely interim condition which will become a true philanthropy when the members of the larger society themselves have become empowered for truth and

I believe this is the wrong way of seeing it. As Miss Brann amply shows, for instance by her quotations from the Rockfish Gap Report on pp. 55f., Jefferson is not a “populist” but thinks in terms of distinctions between citizens and statesmen/legislators/judges. And in a letter to Adams of the same year as the letter to Taylor, he props up his hope for a better future in Europe despite the “plunge into all depths of human enormity” by saying:

The idea of representative government has taken root and growth among them. Their masters feel it, and are saving themselves by timely offers of this modification of their own powers. Belgium, Prussia, Poland, Lombardy, etc. are now offered a representative organization: illusive probably at first, but it will grow into power in the end. Opinion is power, and that opinion will come. Even France will yet attain representative government. (Jan. 11, 1816 [pp. 458f., Cappon])

Why *shouldn't* a man who holds the beliefs described *try* to lead as did Jefferson?

Readers of this review who have not yet taken up its original may wonder why I dwell at such length on Jefferson, and may chide me for not speaking rather of the book's central proposal, that the fostering of the life of the intellect be taken up *in good conscience* as the “content and substance” of education.

I reply, first: Much of what is said about our republic is “writ large” in Miss Brann's book by saying it of Jefferson. Thus, by her own standards, a misreading of Jefferson should amount to a misreading of the ways of the republic he helped found. I wonder whether she did not misread both in important respects. We hold that men as men are equal. The Athenian *demos* held that (*autochthonous*) Athenians as Athenians are equal. If Athens was a democracy, then what was said by Miss Brann on p. 51, that democracies *as such* fundamentally value “humanity simply” (or on p. 122, where she speaks of democracies as “enfranchising the individual”), is not in the strictest sense true.

Second, I wonder whether our own ideas of equality among men differ from those of the Athenian *demos* (as one constructs them from the arguments against them) because of changes in the human soul so large as to deserve to be called religious: Whether the equality be understood in Hobbes' terms—that vainglory alone would stand in the way of a man's recognizing that “the value of a man, as of anything else, is so much as would be given for the use of his power,” or in Kant's—that the rational agent in his precedent-setting and prece-

recognize that the search for truth is the enterprise that needs an unlimited community of fellow workers (cf. C. S. Peirce on the community of inquirers). But on the other hand, because the passion for distinction cannot be curbed if it is really only Prince Posterity's Governor, *time*, that decides *what has been true*, the elite will be half-hearted about winning the larger society to its views. Or rather, as soon as it has succeeded it will set itself apart again with a new truth. Doesn't this exposé of the malaise of temporalizing truth deserve a respectful hearing? And isn't Rousseau at least worth *arguing* with when he speaks of the demoralizing effects of luxury, what we call “consumerism”?

dent-keeping capacity is *invaluable*, or in the Biblical sense—that man, and not the cosmos, was made in the divine image, or in the Christian sense—that in God's eyes all are sinful: it is as capable of *agency* that men are men and men are equal. This is why the call to *contemplation* has, for us, become a call into *works of art*. It cannot be accident that a citation from *Nietzsche*²⁰ leads to the words that culminate in the Auden *poem* about a *civitas* neither political nor cosmic but musical.

Manifestly, a book on education that prompts such soul and world searching as this review contains should be read and read over again.

20. When I think of the lust for action which continually tickles and spurs all the millions of young Europeans who cannot bear boredom and themselves, then I apprehend that there must be in them lust for suffering in some way, in order to derive from that suffering a probable cause for doing, for a deed. Need is needful! Hence the shouting of the politicians, hence the many made-up, exaggerated 'critical needs' of all possible classes and the blind readiness to believe in them. This young world demands that there should come or become visible *from the outside* not happiness—but unhappiness; and their imagination is busy even beforehand with forming it into a monster, so that they can afterwards fight with a monster. (*The Gay Science*, 1, 56, quoted by Miss Brann on p. 29)