

Robert Anton Wilson

What I Didn't Learn at College

1961

“Teach? At Harvard? It cannot be done.”
— Henry Adams

In my youth, because I was a wicked sinner, God punished me by condemning me to one-and-a-half years in a School of Education. (Never mind which one it was; I have no desire to single it out for special blame. Escapees from other Schools of Education assure me that they are all equally squalid.)

Basically, I learned three things at that institution. The first was that it is possible to sleep all through the average education course (or to bring a book on some interesting subject and read it) and still pass the final examination easily.

The second and third things that I learned were that all modern educators agree that education should consist of, not stuffing the pupil’s mind with miscellaneous information, but actually preparing him for the life he will lead after graduation; and that all modern educators are firmly united against any attempt to live up to this ideal.

In other words, they all verbally approve of “education for life,” and they are all terrified of ever telling the truth to the pupils on any subject whatsoever. What they really aim at is education for “citizenship” (one of their favorite expressions); what this means is education for conformity to the insane conventions of this pathological society.

It is now autumn and thousands of young men and women are departing for college, most of them having the delusional belief that they will find education there. Like all delusions, this is both amusing and pitiful.

They would have greater chances of success if they were looking for chastity in a brothel, truth in the daily newspapers, or entertainment on television. There is more hope for the blind man in a dark room looking for a black hat that isn’t there. Finding education in an American college or university is as possible as finding swimming pools in the Sahara.

It seems to me that, since the *Realist* regularly gets mail from college students, this is a good place to put down the fundamental facts which are never expressed in our official educational system.

I must add a warning, however: I am not responsible for the consequences if anybody is so rash as to quote or paraphrase any of this within hearing distance of a professor. I especially refuse to bear the blame if you are naive enough to use any of it in a term paper. The consequences will be much the same as if you wrote to Fulton Sheen to ask how much homosexuality goes on in the priesthood. You will not get an answer; you will get a malediction. -

The first thing to learn in a good contemporary education (and the one thing you will never learn in a college or university) is that, contrary to Harry S. Truman’s famous words, U.S. foreign policy *is not based on the Sermon on the Mount*.

I know how shocking this must be, but I assure you that you will find nowhere in the words of Jesus a justification of dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or using burning napalm on the babies of North Korea, or sending mercenaries to take away from the Cuban people the government that they want. These things are typical practices of imperialism, and have nothing to do with the philosophy of love taught by Jesus.

Although Truman was the only one dumb enough to say, with his bare face hanging out, that the activities of our State Department and CIA are motivated by the Sermon on the Mount, Eisenhower and Kennedy have made safely vague remarks to give the same general impression.

The only way you can discover how far from the truth these claims are is to look into C. Wright Mills' *The Causes of World War III*, where you will discover, for instance, that John Foster Dulles once said, in so many words, that the U.S. Government will go to war in the Near East if the interests of Standard Oil are imperiled there. There are many interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount, but none of them include defending the Profit Motive with the blood of men.

The blunt truth is (and I apologize again for how shocking this must be, and I warn you again not to say it in a classroom, if you want to pass the course) that U.S. foreign policy is motivated by the economic and power interests of a small group of industrialists and militarists.

Nobody in Nutley, New Jersey or Sandusky, Ohio is being hurt when the Cubans throw off their blood-sucking exploiters and establish a people's government, but several large corporations are being hurt by it. You and I have nothing to gain, and everything to lose, if we are sent down to Cuba to kill men, women and children, in order to force them to take the land away from the peasants and give it back to a few landowners; but certain large corporations have a great deal to gain if you and I are sent down there to do that dirty work for them.

There are several fact-packed books which tell a great deal about the relations of government and economic ruling classes down through history. Two especially good ones are Brooks Adams' *The Law of Civilization and Decay* and Alexander Del Mar's *History of Monetary Systems*. Almost any professor will agree that Brooks Adams was one of America's greatest thinkers and historians; Del Mar was called the greatest historian of the 19th Century, and was frequently consulted as an expert by governments (who often refused to take his advice).

Both books have been out of print for years, and neither is used in a college or university today, as far as I know. Arthur Kitson's testimony before the Macmillan Commission has never been refuted, yet his book (*The Banker's Conspiracy! which unleashed the World War*) is as little-known, in academic circles, as Adams or Del Mar. Read all three of them, and see what you think of the history and economics taught in your school.

Every college economics course contains a built-in refutation of Marx, but how many students who have gone on to take the trouble to read Marx can agree that these “refutations” are honest or even half-way in contact at all with what Marx actually argued? Proudhon pointed out before Marx — and Adams and Del Mar demonstrated exhaustively — that the function of governments has been, throughout history, to exploit the masses in the interests of the few.

Every form of exploitation consists of seizure by a few of some natural power, followed by forcing the rest of us to pay on that the traffic will bear for some share of that natural power. The earth, the actual living-space of the planet, is owned by a small group, and the rest of us have to pay tribute to them (called “rent”) for the right to stay here; otherwise we are in danger, apparently, of being thrown into the ocean or expelled into outer space.

Now, how did these “owners” get to “own” the planet? Did they buy it from God some time in pre-history? If you’re planning to leave school and go out and get an education, ask some professor that question some time. The fact is that the government guarantees with its police and army that these “owners” will have the *right* to own and the rest of us will have the *duty* to pay tribute to them.

The same holds true with all natural powers. The government decides who will own the water-power, the electricity, the ores, etc. of a continent; the rest of us then have to go to the “owners” and pay whatever they ask to get a share of it for ourselves. This is called “freedom” because we have the choice of paying what they ask or starving to death.

The chief type of exploitation in the modern world, and the chief cause of wars, is usury. This practice — condemned by Aristotle, St. Ambrose, the Bible, the Koran, Confucius, Cato the Elder, Shakespeare and almost all of the great thinkers before about the sixteenth century — has become so dominant in the modern world that La Tour de Pin called our epoch “the age of usury” and Brooks Adams said that “since Waterloo, usury has ruled the world.”

The mechanism is the same as that of all other forms of exploitation, the seizure by a few of that which potentially belongs to all. In the case of usury, the natural power that is seized is the accumulated labor of past generations, and this is “rented” just as land is rented.

Since this is a process in time — unlike land, which exists only in space — it is a self-augmenting and increases as an exponential function, a discovery made independently by at least four thinkers in the last 50 years: Henry Adams (“The Rule of Phase Applied to History”); C. H. Douglas (*The Natural Economic Order*); Alfred Korzybski (*Manhood of Humanity*); and Buckminster Fuller (“Comprehensive Designing”).

Man accumulates *power-and-knowledge* (the ability to use natural resources for human purposes) at a rate which increases each generation; this natural function,

belonging to all humanity, becomes *capital*, which is “owned” by a few and rented to the rest of us at usurious rates of interest.

(Proudhon proved over a hundred years ago that 1% interest was all that was justified by the labor expended by the usurer.)

We live, in other words, in a world that is man-made — made by the accumulated effort of 250 generations of *homo sapiens* — and all of the knowledge, techniques, machines, methods of communication (from Roman roads to television), etc., which make this world human, are owned, in the form of capital, and rented to us, in the form of usury. This is made possible by *money*, a *symbol* of wealth, which we have been conditioned to take as wealth itself.

Money bears, the same relation to wealth that a ticket to a seat at a concert bears to that seat. It is the kind of relation which exists between the menu and the meal, or between the map and the territory.

Dostoyevski’s Grand Inquisitor pointed out that every state and church in history have ruled through “miracle, mystery and authority.” Herbert Muller’s *The Loom of History* has taken that phrase as a key-stone: he studies each civilization to ask how much it depended on “miracle, mystery and authority,” and how much it rested upon the natural creative critical powers of the free mind. Since Muller’s standards are basically Square, not Hip, he finds a few civilizations that almost satisfy him, although he is honest enough to condemn most.

From a Hip point of view, which demands the complete absence of “miracle, mystery and authority,” and the absolute freedom of their opposite forces, which are Wilhelm Reich’s trinity of “love, work and knowledge,” all civilizations with governments are sick. A healthy civilization would have no governments. Only “miracle, mystery and authority” need to be administered by a government; love, work and knowledge administrate themselves.

Morgan’s *Ancient Society* and Reich’s *Mass Psychology of Fascism* give several examples of societies without governments — societies of *work-democracy*, as Reich calls it — where love, work and knowledge were set free to administrate themselves. They function for self-regulation naturally, homeostatic ally, in the group as well as in the individual.

(Morgan, like Del Mar and Adams, has been allowed to go out of print; Reich is banned by the U.S. Government — as he was also banned by the Nazi and Soviet governments.)

The “Sturch” — a fine word, coined by Philip Jose Farmer, to signify the mutual activities of State and Church — always rests upon “miracle, mystery and authority,” always acts to prevent the natural self-regulation of love, work and knowledge. The Sturch is the sadistic end of the sado-masochistic neurosis of man; the masses, which accept and even welcome the Sturch, are the masochistic end.

When given a free choice between fascism and social democracy, in 1932, 17 million German workers went out and *voted* for the “miracle, mystery and authority” of fascism against the “love, work and knowledge” of social democracy.

Not that the social democracy available in Germany then wasn't itself sick; I haven't got room to make every necessary distinction in this column. Of course, I am against Fidel Castro's government, but I am more against the attempts of the U.S. Government to create something even worse in Cuba. All governments are evil, but some are more evil than others. The best government is the least government, said Jefferson. The least government, added Benjamin Tucker, is no government.

This is getting rather abstract, I perceive; allow me to bring it back to earth with a concrete example.

During the Civil War, the U.S. Government borrowed from the Rothschilds some 275 million dollars *in paper money*. After the war, poor old Ulysses Grant was hornswaggled into signing a bill ordering the Treasury to repay the debt *in coin*. Now, at that time, one dollar coin was worth two dollars paper; the Rothschilds got back 550 million for 275 million, plus their usual usurious interest. This is not ordinary usury; it is what Pound called *hyper-usura* and Benjamin Tucker called *misusury*. The people of the United States had to make up that additional 275 million dollars out of their earnings, in the form of additional taxes. (See Del Mar's *History of Monetary Systems*, and Overholser's *History of Money in the United States*.)

The same type of swindle was inflicted on the people again under that great democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt, when the “government” bought ten billion of gold which they could have had for six billion before they changed the price of gold. Somebody made four billion in profits, and if the “government” gave it to them it was out of the pockets of the people. (See Ezra Pound's *Impact*.)

The same basic trick, similar to the *okkana borra* of the gypsies (the “gypsy switch” as bunco squads call it – although they are not empowered to prosecute it when the government is involved in it), was behind the famous “Scandal of Assumption” when Alexander Hamilton and some friends bought up the veterans' certificates at 1 cent on the dollar and then persuaded Congress to authorize payment of them at face value. (See Bowers' *Jefferson and Hamilton*.)

A few elderly readers may be yawning at this point, having heard it all before. Patience, fellers: the beginning of this column was not rhetoric. I am really writing it because I have discovered a whole generation of college students who have never heard anything of this sort in their whole lives. I don't mean that they've heard only a little of it; I mean they've heard zero, nothing. *They haven't got a clue*, as my wife says.

The struggle today is not to discover new stuff so much as it is to get the old stuff to the heads of those who have been artificially isolated from it by mendacious miseducation. .

Henry Adams' *Education*, a charming and trivial work that makes a few good points here and there, is recommended reading at several universities. His brother Brook's *Law of Civilization and Decay*, which contains the hard economic facts which inspired Henry's romantic pessimism, might as well have not been written as far as impact on the "groves of academe" is concerned.

The usurocratic system rests upon the same "miracle, mystery and authority" as the slave system from which it is derived; Marx was quite right in calling the modern worker a "wage-slave." Work is the productive application of human energy to the advancement of the human community; only a handful of artists and composers *work* in our system. The rest of us *slave* for wages.

The difference is in the direction of the will, and there must be both, direction and will, for that expression to mean anything.

Toiling for wages is not work. It creates slackers, loafers, etc. precisely because it is not work. Loafing is a pathology; the healthy man needs work. It is because it is so hard to find *work* that will support one, and so easy to submit to *wage-slavery*, that pathological loafing and criminal behavior are pandemic in our society. The natural work-democracy of the Trobriand Islanders, the Bruderhof community, etc. do not create such pathology.

The professor who says that, in a communal economy, the workers will support the loafers, is, of course, talking like a Babbit (which is only to be expected, since the Babbits pay his salary); worse yet, he is showing deplorable ignorance of the natural functioning of energy in the human body, as revealed by Reich in *The Function of the Orgasm* and *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. If you have any doubt about the whole system being based on "miracle, mystery and authority," try this simple experiment. Ask any economics professor: "What determines the *price* of money?" You will hear such a rigmarole of double-talk and metaphysical periphrasticism as has not been concocted by the human brain since the theologians of Rome set out to refute Galileo.

Miracle, mystery and authority all take their power from what Reich called *the emotional plague of mankind*, a perversion of natural functioning that began when the work democratic matriarchies were replaced by authoritarian patriarchies about 6,000 years ago. Government, slavery, usury and warfare have been chronic ever since, bringing with them untold epidemics of psychiatric and psychosomatic illnesses.

The chief of these is what the Scottish psychiatrist Ian Suttie called "the taboo on tenderness" and Paul Ritter calls "the emotional limp of civilized man."

It is well known that the electro-colloidal processes of life take place in a periodic manner. Basically, it seems that the energies of the body move toward the skin surface in pleasure, and move back toward the core in anxiety. (A lie-detector measures the withdrawal of electrical energy from the skin during anxiety.)

Dr. Reich's classic experiments of 1935-36 measured electrical potential during sexual excitation, pain, fear, when sweet candy is placed on the tongue, etc. He showed that energy runs from core-to-surface ("out of the self, toward the world") in all forms of pleasure, and from surface-to-core ("away from the world, back to the self") in all forms of displeasure.

Besides shedding a great deal of light on the problem of cancer (which the AMA still won't admit is basically a psychosomatic disturbance, even though it strikes one out of eight in our society and is completely unknown in some primitive societies), these experiments also have tremendous sociological implications.

Since Freud, or actually since Charcot in the last century, it has been obvious that many disturbances, both psychiatric and psychosomatic, result from the repression of the natural sexuality of infants, children and adolescents.

Yet any attempt to change this situation, to stop the torture of these young ones who cannot protect themselves, to prevent the beginnings of untold pathologies ranging from hysterical blindness to chronic ulcers, to save the children from unnecessary suffering and the adults which they will become from unnecessary irrationalism and neurosis — any such attempt has met with the most vitriolic opposition, not only from the Sturch, but from the medical profession itself.

There is only one reason for this: The emotional plague of mankind (which manifests itself "physically" as chronic headache, chronic improper respiration, chronic drunkenness, chronic feeling of contactlessness, etc., and "psychically" as the taboo on tenderness and the longing for "miracle, mystery and authority") is necessary for the continuation of patriarchal-authoritarian government.

And this emotional plague is *anchored* in each new generation by the sexual repression of infants, children and adolescents. This anchoring is nowhere nearly as metaphysical as Freudian terminology makes it appear. It is simply that the periodic function of pleasure-unpleasure (energy contraction/energy expansion) is not all owed to function naturally. Instead, what Pavlov called *conditioning* and Skinner calls *reinforcement* is used, so that anxiety and contraction become increasingly chronic and pleasure and expansion become increasingly rare.

Seventy years ago, Freud noted that breathing difficulties are present in every neurosis. He made one of his brilliant but inadequate metaphysical guesses: the neurotic is secretly longing for suffocation as a punishment for incestuous desires. Reich makes it abundantly clear that some such irrational thinking may go in the periphery of the mind, but that the improper breathing is a symptom in and of itself, caused by chronic contraction and chronic fear of expansion.

So now you see why sex and economics are the two subjects most clothed with “miracle, mystery and authority” in our sick society, why they are the two subjects about which professors always speak in down-right lies or metaphysical double-talk. It is not a co-incidence: the two are related. People cannot be made submissive to irrational authority unless their natural energy functions are first crippled by sexual repression.

Robert Owen and the other early socialists were quite right in feeling that sexual liberalism and economic advancement were somehow connected and had to be worked on together, and Marx and his followers went completely wrong in ignoring the sexual problem and leaving it in the hands of the psychiatrists, who, like other medical men, are exploiters of a monopoly protected by the Sturch and naturally unwilling to follow any chain of thought likely to lead them into conflict with the Sturch.

The whole story of the collapse of Marxism into futile dogmatic politics and of Freudism into a reactionary tool of the Sturch is contained in that one great blunder.

Only Reich managed to keep the whole man in view, and to see the connection between work-democracy and sexual self-regulation on one hand and authoritarianism and sexual repression on the other hand. Naturally, both Marxists and psychoanalysts quickly disowned Reich.

Looking back over this column, I see that I haven't said nearly enough about “the taboo on tenderness” and how it affects everything from sports to the rate of interest at Household Finance Company, or about the way usury makes wars, and that I haven't gone into sufficient detail about the electro-colloidal functioning of human energies. This cannot be helped. I did not set out to convince anybody of anything, or to “prove” something. Both conviction and proof need much more time and space than I have at my disposal here.

Chiefly, my hope has been to arouse curiosity, by making the reader aware of those vast areas of fact and theory which are never discussed in the “institutions of learning.” I have dragged in the titles of several books, hoping that the curiosity I arouse might send a few people to those books in search of further information.

Everybody who looks into medieval and renaissance history quickly becomes aware that a great deal is omitted from most college courses on those subjects, and that the Catholic Church is responsible for these omissions. I do not know why it is that when people become aware that certain other things are omitted from most college and university courses, and that Church, State and High Finance all have good motives for wishing these things omitted, these people do not form a natural suspicion. This is especially hard to understand when one reflects that we have all heard of cases of professors who lost their jobs for daring to open their mouths about these subjects.

I leave you with one last riddle to plague your professors with (if you have the nerve, and don't care whether you graduate or not). Almost all literature courses present T. S. Eliot as the greatest poet of the Twentieth Century, and yet Eliot has frequently and publicly stated that all he knows about writing poetry he learned from Ezra Pound, who is hardly ever taught and little discussed. Can the reason be that Pound's poetry is full of lines like the following?

These fought in any case,
and some believing, pro domo, in any case . . .
Some quick to arm,
some for adventure,
some from fear of weakness,
some from fear of censure,
some from love of slaughter, in imagination,
learning later . . .
some in fear, learning love of slaughter;
Died some, pro patria, non "dulce" non "et decor" . . .
walked eye-deep in hell
believing in old r.p.en's lies, then unbelieving
came home, home to a lie,
home to many deceits,
home to old lies and new infamy;
usury age-old and age-thick
and liars in public places.

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