

Body and Soul

Amadeo in his mountain kingdom far from war was constantly being chosen as arbiter by one party or the other and he was considered the only one of them all who knew how to give good counsel to himself and others. The folly of others made him seem wise.

POPE PIUS II

I

Festive occasions, when everyone else is more or less obliged by the proprieties to magnify one's accomplishments, do tempt one to believe that there is something to be said for the observation by Samuel Johnson that he "never knew a man of merit neglected; it was generally his own fault

The talk was given on the occasion of a celebration of my fiftieth birthday, which was on November 7, 1975. (Original Title: "Body and Soul: Thoughts at Fifty.") The gathering, which included Malcolm P. Sharp, was made up principally of University of Chicago graduate students in political science. At that time, the expected retirement age in academic life was sixty-five. On Mr. Sharp, see Anastaplo, "Malcolm P. Sharp and the Spirit of '76," *University of Chicago Law Alumni Journal*, Summer 1975, p. 18 (reprinted in 18 *Congressional Record* 40241, December 12, 1975). On Leo Strauss, see "The Thinker as Artist," in Anastaplo, *The Thinker as Artist* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983), pp. 250-71. Mr. Strauss and Mr. Sharp are drawn upon (as are Laurence Berns and Harry V. Jaffa) in the Epigraphs and Preface for this book, *The American Moralists*.

This talk has recently been supplemented by a talk given at a celebration in San Francisco, California, during the American Political Science Association Annual Convention, September 1, 1990: "What Is Going on Here Anyway? Thoughts at Sixty-Five." (That talk is not included here.)

The epigraph is taken from Pope Pius II, *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope*, Florence A. Gragg translation (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 221.

that he failed of success." (*Chicago Tribune, Magazine of Books*, September 13, 1959)

Be that as it may, your remarks and my response may be little more than an extended version of an exchange I once heard on Studs Terkel's radio show, after the illustrious entertainer Bricktop had been regaling him with tales about her quite colorful life (WFMT, Chicago, Illinois, May 7, 1975):

"Bricktop," he said, "you are *sui generis*."

"Oh, no darling," she replied, "I'm just myself."

Be that also as it may, there is something about the half-century mark which naturally stimulates among men the desire to celebrate. An old friend has written me, upon noticing the calendar, "Are congratulations in order? You certainly have made the course more interesting for quite a few people, surely for me." Well, the course has been rather interesting for me too—and I interpret this dinner, to say nothing of what has been suggested to me about making a response to your kind remarks, to be an invitation to say something about what I have learned since I came into the world at St. Louis, Missouri on November 7, 1925.

I put you on notice, however, that my record on after-dinner talks is not a very happy one. One such talk I made in Athens a few years ago when the Colonels were trying to run things, with the help of an American State Department that did not know what it was doing either, got me declared *persona non grata*. And a talk I made a few weeks ago after a quite fancy meal provided by the American Civil Liberties Union was received in a somewhat skeptical manner, since it too followed my rule for such occasions, which is that one should tell one's listeners what they need to hear, not what they believe they want to hear. The A.C.L.U. was told, upon giving me its Harry Kalven Freedom of Expression award, it should consider what needed to be done to insure in the community at large the character that would permit Americans to make proper use of the freedom that organization has so gallantly worked for. That is, I argued for an exhibition by them of a greater measure of concern about corrupting influences among us. (See *Human Being and Citizen*, pp. 3-7; Section IV of Essay No. 34-13, above. See, also, 50 *Southern California Law Review* 370-72 [1977].)

II

I gather that fifty appears much older to you than it does *now* to me. The signs of deference exhibited by some of you toward me from time to

time, as well as what has been said on this occasion, indicate what fiftyness must look like to you. Your attitude, as political science graduate students of a somewhat conservative bent, is not unnatural and licenses me to take myself seriously, if only for a few minutes.

I felt the same way about fiftyness when I was your age, for it was when I was your age that I first met Malcolm Sharp and Leo Strauss, two teachers who have been very important for me and who were then about the age I am now. They did seem to be quite mature, not ancient, mind you, but mature, and consequently men of experience and sagacity. I mention in passing that you can see, in the printed Supreme Court record relating to my "unsuccessful" bar admission appeal, a photograph of me at your present age. (p. 384) I look as serious as some of you must now feel. If, then, my present impressions are of any use to you, you should take to heart my observation that I seem much older, much much older, to you now than you will seem to yourselves when you attain my age.

But perhaps I do not realize what has happened to me, what I have lost in resiliency and acuteness and all the other things we associate with youth, even though I can still read without glasses and my hearing remains good. One can see such loss more easily in others than in oneself, as was evident the other evening at the Field House when my youngest child and I (she is twelve) watched the University of Chicago varsity basketball team in the annual varsity-alumni game run rings around the team of top-flight varsity players of other years. My daughter was saddened to see some of the stars of her youth—some three or four years ago, that is—unable to shine as they once had. The old campaigners were being harried by frisky, young puppies; the good-humored self-restraint of the puppies only accentuated the debility that had set in among the alumni because of spiritual fatigue, lack of practice, and gain of weight.

Fifty was once the threshold to old age. It does not seem to be so at this time. But it *is* the threshold to the old age of the typical academic career. That is, one's academic career usually runs, from the time of entering college to the time of retirement, some forty-five years. The youth of that career is between twenty and thirty-five (a period which included for me, in addition to academic training and some teaching, both military service and the considerable bar admission litigation described in *The Constitutionalist*). The middle age of that career is between thirty-five and fifty (much of which has been devoted on my part to the Basic Program of Liberal Education of Adults here at the University of Chicago and to the political science and philosophy departments out at Rosary College). Heaven only knows what will happen for me between fifty and (if it is fated) sixty-five, the old age of that career. I have in some twenty years of teaching yet to lose a day to illness, but one should not expect such a rec-

ord to be extended much longer. [Fifteen years later, at age 65, this record continues to thrive, less so the abundant hair that is evident in my Supreme Court record photograph.]

To turn fifty in 1975 is particularly instructive, I should add. For to be fifty now means that one has been alive for one-fourth of the two-hundred year history of one's Country. This shows either how old I really am or how young this country is—or perhaps both. Let's say "both," with the qualification that this country is both young and old, for it drew at its birth in 1776 upon an English heritage already five hundred years in the making. To say "both" invests me with the trappings of age and hence with the standing, if only for this occasion, of someone with something sage to convey to you as a result of his years; it also leaves me young enough to be able to speak your language.

The best of what I may have learned has presumably been incorporated in my writings. But perhaps a few of the things I have learned can be refashioned for this occasion, an occasion, as all birthdays are, when the soul can pay appropriate homage to its dependence on the body.

III

What, then, do I know which may be of some use to you? Three things come to mind. The first is that this is not really a threatening world, certainly not as threatening as various talented, but yet timid, people take it to be.

One of you has observed to me, "You walk around Hyde Park at night as if it were an art museum." That is something of an exaggeration, but it is certainly true that I am not intimidated by this place the way some people are. This does not mean, however, that I do not take precautions, nor does it mean that I have not been careful about what I have permitted my wife and children to do and not do in this neighborhood at night. But I have never thought it useful to regard Hyde Park as a jungle. Perhaps I would feel differently if someone were to assault me. I *have* had a gun drawn on me, by a chap who had been chased out of a neighbor's house and whom I had helped follow to the end of the block. I said to him, as he waved his gun at us, something to the effect that he could do neither of us any good with that thing, at which he turned and ran into the hands of the police.

There is in most of us still something of the child which can be very much intimidated by the world around him and which is susceptible to an apocalyptic view of things. When one becomes feeble, or imagines oneself to be quite vulnerable, that childish timidity and a seeming depen-

dence on chance can begin to reassert themselves. The child is often obliged to seek reassurance.

The most trivial things can intimidate him, even, for example, information innocently conveyed to him at the breakfast table. Consider the "Nutrition Information" available on a milk carton these days (I recall similar information on cereal boxes in my youth). Nutrition Information "per serving" is listed in some detail. One is told that there is in one cup of milk 6% of one's "U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance" (U.S. RDA) of Vitamin C, 8% of one's U.S. RDA of Thiamine, 6% of one's U.S. RDA of Zinc and of Vitamin B6. This kind of information was somewhat disconcerting for me as a child: *only* 6% of this or that in one serving! How could one possibly consume enough to supply oneself that magic (perhaps even patriotic) "U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance"? What happens if one does not get enough? When one comes to Niacin and to Iron, the situation becomes truly desperate: for a cup of milk contains, one is told, "less than 2% of the U.S. RDA of these nutrients."

No doubt all this information was provided to point up the goodness of the product; but for me, as for anyone else who could calculate and who also knew the limits of what he could consume in milk or cereal, this information was a repeated source of concern. The same kind of distorted concern, I suspect, came to be seen in those eminent prosecutors and judges in the 1950s who could somehow regard the minuscule (and much-infiltrated) Communist Party of the United States as a threat to the security, if not even to the very existence, of this Country—a concern which had disastrous effects in both our domestic and our foreign policy for at least a decade. An informed clear-sightedness, I am suggesting, is necessary for a sensible assessment of things, for prudent action, and for peace of mind.

One has to leave behind the concerns and grievances of one's childhood, lest one join the legion of those still very much concerned about what did and did not happen to them thirty or forty or fifty years ago. Decisive for me with respect to these matters, I sometimes think, was my youthful service in the Air Corps during the Second World War, service which saw me hold my own with men older and physically stronger than I was and in the course of which I earned my wings and commission and found myself on more than one occasion staring sudden death in the face and finding it all rather interesting, as I find life itself. Or as one of our Southern Illinois "heroes" (Charles Birger) said, looking around as he was about to be hanged, "It is a beautiful world."

It is an interesting world as well; and it is good that human life be preserved, made useful, and spared from gratuitous pain. I was intrigued a

few months ago upon visiting the illustrious Panda bears at a Washington zoo to notice the common sparrows and field mice drawn, along with a multitude of tourists, to those cages to cadge what they could. Or consider the plant life that somehow emerges out of rock crevices wherever the thinnest film of soil may be found. Vital living things do keep trying to preserve and hence to perfect themselves, and from that constant effort much can be expected, perhaps even intelligent life.

But, we are told, the universe is running down, energy is steadily being dissipated, and dark, cold matter is all there is destined to be some day. Yet others say that when a large quantity of that matter collects and presses in upon itself, as it must also some day do if it is to be scattered in a completely fortuitous manner, heat and eventually life may then be generated once again. Put another way, has not all this perhaps happened before?

To say that this is not a threatening world is not to deny that there is in it a considerable amount of folly and even needless cruelty. One learns, however, to expect such failings and to do what one can in one's own precinct to suggest corrections. But one should take care not to permit oneself to be intimidated by what one learns about the disagreeable things that are done to others or even to oneself. In short, congenital timidity has to be overcome. One should grow up and not take oneself too seriously.

IV

The second thing I have learned that may be of special use to you is related to what I have said, in speaking of the limits of timidity, about how interesting life can be, how interesting it is to learn things both practical and theoretical. Only the unimaginative or very tired man need ever be bored with his life. There *is* so much which is worth knowing.

Unless one is singularly gifted, however, one cannot learn much without working hard. The importance here of energy and discipline is hard to overestimate: one must simply sit down *and work*, preferably at a desk, with pencil in hand. When one cannot be at one's desk, one can at least mull over the questions one is currently examining. These should be questions one is interested in oneself, not merely questions assigned by others. After all, there is more to learn than one can ever learn, so why not pursue matters of genuine interest? This also means that one should not permit career or publication considerations to be primary in the determination of what one works on.

But however one goes about learning, there is one caution particularly

appropriate for people who are interested in the things you are interested in and who have been influenced by the people you have been influenced by, especially when much is made among them of guarded writing. You must beware of overinterpretation of the texts you address yourselves to. It is very difficult to simplify, to be simpleminded enough, so as really to see what one is looking at.

V

The third thing I have learned which may be of some use to you draws upon what I believe I have noticed about the limits of what one can reasonably expect to accomplish in the world of affairs. You appreciate, I am sure, the dangers of rising and hence often disappointed expectations, and the related inability to recognize and hence to preserve what is good and is not likely to be much improved upon without serious costs.

The first lesson I sketched this evening with respect to the folly of timidity encourages one to recognize that one is not helpless. Now I am addressing myself to the other extreme: one should recognize that one is not omnipotent, either in one's ability to discern the good or in one's power to act on what one has discerned. It is particularly important for political scientists attracted as you are to old-fashioned natural right, and who want to see the good prevail in this wicked old world of ours, to take care lest they be either swept along by floods of indignation or sucked under in a whirlpool of disillusionment.

One should try, that is, to assume the best in others without becoming either sentimental or suicidal. I have myself found upon examination that there is usually more to "the other side" of an issue than was evident at first glance. Classical political thought, it seems to me, is particularly useful as a moderating influence upon people likely to be caught up by the passions of the day.

One model I can hold up to you of a useful curbing of indignation without sacrificing one's dedication to virtue and the common good may be seen in Mr. Sharp's book, published in 1956 on the *Rosenberg-Sobell* case, *Was Justice Done?* Because of its disciplined examination of the complicated passions of others, it remains the best book written on that disgraceful episode in our history. Great harm was done because of the indignation which blinded our government at that time. But great harm can be done as well because of indignation evoked among the unwary upon learning of the callous deeds generated by the indignation of others.

Indignation, like timidity, should be left to children and to the trainers of children of all ages.

VI

The three things upon which I have presumed to preach on this occasion have to do with excesses: excesses in self-preservation, in scholarship, and in righteousness. They are excesses not unrelated to the kinds of lives the best of you consider yourselves preparing for. Timidity can naturally follow from a complete dedication of oneself to things of the mind as one's vulnerable body is left to fend for itself, so to speak. Pedantry, albeit an inspired pedantry, can naturally follow for one who wants to delve to the very foundations of things, as the surface or common sense of things is left to more prosaic minds. Indignation can naturally follow as one result of a highminded enlistment in the ranks of those in pursuit of virtue, as chance, crossed purposes and the limits of one's information, to say nothing of ordinary human compassion or of a noble generosity, are lost sight of.

I have thought it useful on this occasion to report upon these matters partly because several of the most gifted of our contemporaries in the line of work you happen to be interested in have exhibited in quite interesting forms one or another of these failings. The first and third of these classic failings come from taking oneself too seriously; such failings make true happiness difficult. The second failing, due perhaps to a kind of *mania*, comes from not taking selfness (and hence ordinary experience, if not mortality itself) seriously enough; this may ultimately impede a full understanding of things. Thus the first failing in the catalogue assembled for this occasion has the body exerting an undue influence on the mind; the second has the mind disregarding the body completely; the third has the mind exerting an undue influence on the body.

These are, I suggest, the failings that you too are most likely to be prone to and that you should religiously guard against. There is still another failing, but one that may be unavoidable. It has to do with what more and more serious work will do to the personal relations you will have formed in your less serious days. There is an inevitable tension between the human being and the citizen, between the human being, who is fully dedicated to the life of reason, and the citizen, whether his primary associational allegiance be to a family or to a city or to a faculty.

Why is this? I have already spoken of the discipline necessary if one is to learn. Between those who make themselves work and those who do not, a divergence is quite likely. The one who has been able to work is no longer the person he was. People grow up, or at least grow apart, and their relations change, if only because the one who is working seriously will, if he is any good, come to regard the work he is doing as more important than any conventional or "historical" relations. In addition, the opinions upon which associations depend are apt to be reconsidered by him.

Of course, such a man does recognize certain duties, including duties relating to his very existence and its sources. Even so, the truly gifted should take care not to permit the best in himself to be subverted in deference to the conventional, to the sentimental, or to the allegiances he happens to have.

You will be surprised someday to learn how far you have moved, if you continue with what you are doing, even from those of your fellow students (now as talented and lively and learned as you are) who go into more practical pursuits, whether in academic life or in "the real world." If these ties matter to you—if your temperament is such as to depend on intimacies with the irreplaceable companions of your youth—you should reconsider the kind of life you are pointed toward. But perhaps this advice is superfluous, since such a temperament may be quite able to take care of itself by diverting the threatened student into more congenial pursuits.

Please do not understand me to suggest that you make a deliberate effort to cut off ordinary human contact, but only to anticipate what is likely to happen to certain associations you will have made in your formative years. People truly interested in political philosophy should appreciate what human contact is: it does matter, in the communities that political philosophy studies, whether one's neighbor is a cat or a man and whether one knows which it happens to be.

Certainly, I should be the last to discourage you from exhibiting respect toward those whom you leave behind, but a decent regard for the conventional attachments of mankind may be more likely if one anticipates what often happens to the man seriously interested in a life of inquiry. I have put you on notice.

In any event, I urge upon you a continued respect for the proprieties, and even kindness.

VII

Your kindness toward me may be seen in the meal we have enjoyed together this evening and, in a more enduring form, in the formidable briefcase you have entrusted me with, to say nothing of the challenging things you have said about me.

The last briefcase I was given came from the Air Corps when I got my wings as a nineteen-year-old, and it accompanied me on many instructive flights all over the world. Thus the auspices are favorable, and I am entitled to hope that the briefcase you have so kindly provided me tonight

will prove, for a long time to come, similarly useful in furthering my education.

An even more enduring form of kindness, I presume to suggest as I bring this festive occasion to a close, is that which is traditionally exhibited by one-time students to a would-be teacher. If he is mistaken, they quietly ignore him or, if he is not incorrigible, they correct him (if possible, gently). If he should happen to be correct, they someday do for *their* students what he was privileged to do for them.