(1)

THE VALUE OF BEING YOU NO MATTER WHAT!

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I'm very pleased to be here tonight for some reflective moments along the way in a week that I know has to be filled with dozens of concerns and a hundred thousand details. So I invite you to savor this time with me, g~~ndxgnnnidKKAjmuiE~~ as we consider some of the elusive deeper dimensions of our life together at Wellesley.

I wanted to find a jazzy title for these remarks tonight, and I guess this one is okay: the value of being you no matter what. But on second thought I began to realize that this could well be precisely the MN wrong thing to say, not only in this context, but anywhere.

There are things I know about myself, for example, that I'd just as soon forget. Sure, I want someone to say to me: be yourself; to thine own self be true; be who you are no matter what. But what about my bad habits? What abuut the times whenl'm mean, maybe m even destructive, to others? What about those larger social patterns — racism, sexism, classism and so on -- in which I participate, maybe ~~HJKHHHXIKH~~ unconsciously? Should I be tYMte, for example, to the racism I learned deep in my xHKtxfxnwiiigxxHKixgHKx soul growing up in white suburbia? So you see the problem, why I immediately began to have second thoughts about the announced title.

Let me shift the emphasis a little bit, then, maybe even a quantum leap or two.

Returning from vacation last Friday, I found the latest issue of The ^kwesosne Notes, the newspaper published by the Mohawk Nation, buried in my stack of mail. ~~Also~~, by some impulse which I do not fully understand, I started paging though it, rather than reading the sixty seven memos and the 132 other college communications that te surrounded it. On the back page, the poetry section, I came across these lines by M ~~ccrtain~~ Buffy Sainte-Marie, from a poem entitles "The Civilized People."

> The civilized people exhange lines
> of mouthwords and wonder why ~~they~~
> they don't feel nourished.
>
> The civilized people live on
> cornflakes and human values
> and wonder why they do not
> progress out of the state of war
> in their hearts.
>
> Pity the civilized people who
> ase living on wine when they
> could have Water.

(2)

This suggests the kind of perennial human wisdom that I would like to try to touch on tsstight, if I can: the value of authenticity versus artificiality, the value of being an authentic human being no matter how many pressures, within or without, may be driving gsKxx you to be artificial. If you'll permit me to state a persona prejudice: to me this is the difference between xxwhniKxpKKSHnx whole wheat and Wonder bread. Of, if you will, it's the difference between being a whole person and a wonder person. (Sometimes, when I read our admissions materilas here, I think that the only one who could make is through four years of Wellesley alive would be Wonderwoman.)

Which brings me immediate^ to one of my favorite subjects, Wellesley College. I want to suggest a couple of images, aaricatures as you will see, of this community, for the sake of perspective^^, about what educational authenticity actually is.

The first image is quite familiar and, I believe, justly discredited: the College as ivory-tower. I have lately been reading the best seller that most of you probably read lastyear, Kinflicks, whose author, I understand, attended Wellesley not too long ago, and whose main character, Ginny, spends a whole revealing chapter attending a college called "Wortheley." (I haven't finished it yet, so don t talk to iae about the ~~RthctH~~ ending.) Anyway, for most of her stay at Worthely College Ginny isolates hersUlf with her books, without any friends to speak of, except for a single faculty member, a certain Miss Head. Which is one of the book's many funny figures: Worthely is, as it were, a Head trip.

Notice nowf when the College is an ivery tower, you end up being, more or less, an isolated ~~iinrrnfeaaiiig~~ individual and the world becomesjnerely an object of cognition. So Ginny walks into her bathroom^in what is presumably Tower Court, and finds the student who lives next door overdosed on sleeping pills. Ginny then objectifies that situation by thinking about it, abstracting from the crying human need, pondering the pros and cons of suicide, and so on.

In the ivory-tower you abstract yourself from engagement with human experience. Ultimately, then, instead of understanding -- standing under, participating in that which you seek to know -- you stand apart. Instead ofstruggling passionately with ideas^ 11111 [illegible] you create a kmdof narcissistic xdnaiaiiagyx ideology. ...So much for the College as Ivory Tower.

Another image, a good daal more vulgar than the first, is this, the College as grease-pit. I've discussed this whole topic with a number of you last year, so I will charge ahead with it even though it is a very sensitive areaL, and is^penro xgaiiiy-'tMiJ/ misunderstanding. You will perhaps recall that the word "career" stems from the word for racetrack. Which, if you throw in a little modern technology, might suggest the following picture.

Here is the society in which we live -- dominated, it scarcely needs to be observed, by men and so-called masculine values -- here is our society geared to amassing wealth for the few, which tends, in turn, to fragment middle sag range kinds of human communitiesft/i^Urf^/^ctXJ"*^ **tztzs** ethnic community **family** neighborhood?^the extended family, and so on. Here is our society which always seems to desire and produce higgsxxmx better mousetraps and bigger bombsX, which is full of glutted stomachs in a world where 10,000 people die each

(3)

racing aroudflfcin a destructive circle, going nowhere.

How does this society sustain its course? ML ^ell, how does it work at the Indianapolis Speedway? One of the things the society does is to build educational grease-pits in order to keep the system running, to replace worn out individuals with new ones, to prepare all its citizens, indeed, for what , is euphemistically called "useful careers."

So someone might go to Wellesley^ ~~consciously or not, in order to lami a geed~~ job working for some good servant of human! ~~like~~ 'Exxon, or maybe even the Pentagon. That's the way the society is programmed. That's the function of the academic that individualswhat happens to her or to him, when she or he becomes a part of the race? Maybe you end up, as we used to say in the old days, setting your soul to the ~~system~~ system.

But all tfrj is is so much a caricature, so coarse, so far from the truth that I don't want to spend anymore time on it. XJX I've said enough^about these caricatures -- the images of the ivory-tower and the grease pit — enough&to highlight the perils of those kinds of academic artificiality. In the first case, the ivory-tower, you gain ?ynu yourself, but you lose your world. In the second case, the grease-pit, you gain the world, but you lose yourself.

Now, therefore, to the heart of the matter. I want to talk a little bit now about what I take to be a more authentic image of what our educational experience at Wellesley can be,and often is. Here, by the way, I take it for granted that I am stating some assumptions that all of us hold in common, in one way or another — otherwise none of us would be participating in this training process thss week, trying to figure out how to help make Wellesley a more ~~hte~~ humane place to live and learn. But however common these assumptions may be, I don't regard them, nor do you, as commonplace. They're definitely worth articulating, whenwer we find some congenial contextl^such as this one.

Have you ever been in a relationship -- sure you have — where you finally say to each other: "you know, the reason we play tennis all the time, or go to concerts together,or search through second hand bookstores on rainy Saturday Afternoons in Cambridge, is basically because we like each other and we like to be together. No more, no less than that. Everything else is secondary. ometimes, I think, we don't pause long enough^to make the same kind of statements tog each other in an academic context^ stating the assumptions we share^so we can enjoy and deepen and strengthen our common life all the more. Anyway, I W now want to try to xaxfcE sketch **lrghfcly** some of our common assumptions.

Wellesley College, when it is authentic,is surely nether an ivory-tower nor a grease-pit — rather it is a birthplace. Imagine yourself twenty years from now, say, maybe more, returning to this College with a friend and telling her or him: "I guess I didn't realize it at the time, fully, but this place was a birthplace for me. This is where I really began to come alive as a whole human being. This is where I fniindxBiyKEif^x began to find myself, and the world, too."

Over in our office in Schneider hangs a poster than many of you know, even if you haven't seen it in so many words: "I am a woman, "]^ it says, "giving birth to myself." Is it not true, by the wa^ that the root of education, educare, means"to lead forth,[1] to rear? To go forth? To be abrrthing?

I want to look at,this image of birthing now, by way of concludion, afii.depict afaBferLy ~~whitzy~~ lighted facets of this kind of authentic educational experience, suggested by the metaphor. Surely we could talk about many other facets; but I will dwell on these three only in order to do my part here, in our conversation.

First, the College as birthplace means that pain is an integral part of the dduxakiHiraix authentic educational experience — howevermuch new delivery technigues , wixhxix using Mozart and warm water baths, may make the experience less stressful for both mother and child.

Pain. It's painful to leave home. It's painful to arrive on the scene and have your deepest thoughts graded C plus, with marginal comments such as "trite" or "jumbled." And I suppose that it s painful, at times, to live with w your roomate.

More profoundly, as Ginny discovered at Wrorthely, it's painful to learn about the xMfxnxkHdHXx cold finiitudds of the vast cosmos, about the apparently arbitrary courses of evolution, about the barbarities of human history, about the sometimes demonic pretentions of the best and the brightest.

Still more profoundly, it's painful to learn about your own psychological hang-ups, ab0tf4 your racism perhaps, or maybe about your self-serving middle class assumptions in a hungry world. -Lt ~~and perhaps most shocking of all, its painful to lose a friand through~~ d©aih,^as---th-i-s-"eommuni-ty~ios-t- -two_of. *i* ts , student s - las.t-year.- And then to have to think about it all, and wonder whether anyone else feels it all as deeply as you do.#

Giving birth to yourself, educating youesJJf, clearly and starkly, means pain, sometimes waves of pain, at every level of our lives.

SEcond, the College as birthplace means that enlightenment, however ~~-dasm~~ it may be, is an integral part of the educational experience. The newborn emerges from the dark security of the womb into the ~~rank~~ insecurity of the world -- but how her or his eyese,, open to see, called forth by the light which teaches her or him about reality?

Enlightenment. This obviously is a whole talk, not to say a whole life's experience, in itself. What is enlightenment? Suffice it to say here£ it means understanding, an engaged kind of knowing, the search for wisdom, as well as analysis and so-called rational objectivity.

Third, the College as birthplace means not only pain and enlightenment — and here I think we touch on a motif that ife not always given its due ^afe~~feonjafeen~~ in discussions of the meaning of education -- it also means the experience of friendship. Presumably the infant will die without tangible human contact. Perhaps, likewise, without the experience of han unspoken words of love she or he becomes an aMXhxsx autistic child. In any case, the human creature is conceived and born in community.

5'0, interestingly, in the Hebrew Bible, the word for knowing is the same word for sexual intercourse. The experience Of knowing, in addition to everything else it may be, is the experience of communion with others, past and present. TujJlL sduKaX Xn the precess of education, in other words, you will as a matter of course be in touch with other human beings, not merely as objects of abstract, analytic cognition that's there, but it's only a part of the experience — but as subjects of interpersonal knowing. (If we had more time, we might follow this theme more discursively in terms of the sociology of knowledge, which shows the arbitrariness of Descartes famous, individualizing statement "I think, therefore I am.") Htz»^n thinking,we are already participants in a community of knowledge, which is the matrix for our being as JHUHHX self-conscious creatures.

What a challenge this isj^if it's right, and I think it isg-for a residential system in a College such as this! If knowledge presupposes friendship and SSK vice versa, if learning presupposes — as the classical tradition from Socrates to the present has always said — if learning presupposes dialogue: Wbat a challgnge! Especially if one of our problems in the classroom, on the part of both favulty and students, is too much monologue.

Can you imagine a residential system that offers studemts and others a congenial interpersonal context, a matrix of self-conscious personal knowing,so that they never need to fis wander, out of boredom or by default, off toward some isolated ivory—tower or into some self self-destructive cognitive grease-pit? Can you imagine such a system? It could be you.

But here we have to be very careful because there's a danger, is there not, a danger of being too cozy in the friendship of our knowing; to restrict our circle of knowing just to our own kind, Knowledge to be authentic, after all, as the classical tradition has always recognized, wants to become more and more universal, to comprehend more and more facets of reality. Knowledge to be authentic, wants to be generous, that is, of the genus humanum, generic, of the whole human species, and perhaps beyond.

So the network of human knowing which is established so powerfully, or reestablished, when the infiiat is born and received by the mother in her arms J so this network will naturally want to grow ifl^ever larger circles of community, to encompass, in its maturity a friendship with XkHxkmawingx all peoples aroudnd the globeX, perhaps even with Mr ££<7^the One whom the Jewish philosopher Martin BubBer calls the Eternal. Thou.

Maybe,' this is why our contemporary native poet ends with the universal image of Water, with the word capitalized, at the end of fiate-'poem:

> The civilizq^people exchange lines
> of mouthwords and worker why
> they don't feel nourished.
>
> The civilized people live on
> cornflakes and human values
> and wonder why they do not
> progress out of the state of war
> in their hearts.

Pity the civilized people who
are living on wine when they
could have Water.

This^^fee^ brings this little pilgrimage of thought to an end.
To be authentically you, no matter what, at Wellesley College, I believe, means **skaatdxiaKaR avoiding** the artificiality — the sometimes deadening contrivance — of both the ivory-tower and the grease—pit. It means discovering Wellesley as axkxx your birthplace. It means participating in an engaging process of W finding yourself and your world, neither one without the other, with a depth of understanding.

This kind of authentic educational experience, in turn, presupposes and brings with it in various ways pain, enlightenment, and friendship, all of which are worth conversing about at length, more than we sometimes allow ourselves to do. This, it seems to me, is the value of being authentically you, no matter what, at HSS Wellesley College.