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# The Hocking Primer

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## *Chapter Two:*

### *The Cold War for Men's Minds*

**N**ot all chapters are created equal. I do not walk away from this one inspired and ready to take the field. There are no stories of 200 defenders holding off armies of 6000. Instead, Hocking talks about education, advertising, and fine art. This hardly seems like the right stuff to solve international relations. It seems misplaced and intangible, the kind of attributes that make study difficult.

But I would not be surprised if someday this chapter finds a top place in my esteem. He talks about education needing to be difficult. So is this chapter. The problem is the abstraction and lack of convention. It is easy to see how a country with the largest nuclear arsenal can push people around but harder to see what effect one's world view has, if any. Yet a world view is what we profess to defend. Our problem is that we do not understand our world view, or perhaps even have one. George Bush stated that no other country shall challenge us militarily or economically. Does that mean we stand for hegemony? I do not want to go to war for that.

People formed this nation based on the wish to escape oppression and the need to survive in a new territory. Liberty and responsibility mattered. Thrift, industry, integrity, and community aided survival. Liberty mattered because everything was in flux. Settlers left old systems and entered new land. Liberty keeps open the option for innovation, which is always the product of individual thought rather than government edict. Innovation requires the ability to know one's limits, which leaves open the possibility for improvement. Today we presume to have all the answers and thus need no innovation. Government just needs to enforce their certainty. Hoorah!

The difficulty with this chapter lies in its level of abstraction and its challenge to military hegemony. It states that resolution by force is always precarious and that we have lost our national identity. Benjamin Franklin warned us of the latter, *"We have given you a Republic, if you can keep it."* But we no longer know the difference between a democracy and a republic, nor do we care.

Whether with individuals or nations, identity is an abstraction. We do not observe it; we conclude it. We define ourselves by our actions and beliefs not by the molecules that sustain them. And no one can explain how carbon/hydrogen/nitrogen atoms can result in the recognition that Christmas comes on Tuesday this year. An individual sees himself as the same person today as he was fourteen years ago, although all the atoms in his body have changed twice in that time. The point here is that abstractions are the essence of both individuals and nations. And if we do not think about them we will not see them, since they are not visible.

But who can state what our country's world view is today? Has it changed? Do we live up to it? People no longer consider this important. They are busy with stock options and second houses, or lawsuits and lotteries. Standing for something has got to matter. One has to feel it in his soul. What do we stand for? It appears to have changed since the days of Washington and Jefferson. If so, then we should drop the pretty phrases about liberty and equality and call it what it has become: entitlement and greed.

If people are not guided by principles they will be guided by force. That is the default position. It happens all the time and has taken us to where we are today. Thomas Jefferson said, *"Those who expect to be ignorant and free, expect what never was and never will be"*. He was talking to future generations—i.e., to us. Franklin was talking to us about the Republic, as was Alexander Hamilton when he said, *"If you do not stand for something, you will fall for anything."* These founders of the Republic took this stuff more seriously than we do today. They had to. But so do we, as the process of living has changed little since that time. And we have coasted as long as we can on their coattails. The time has come to either walk the walk, or change the talk. We are no longer honoring our history.

With respect to education Hocking sees ours as being watered down. The

idea of discipline and struggle has been replaced by the idea of painless advance. He should know; he taught for 29 years at Harvard.

*Broadly speaking, the trouble may be traced to a pervasive anemia in our conception of Democracy, inducing false lights of Freedom and Equality. Well-meaning leaders of educational thought have persuaded us that freedom is synonymous with release from discipline, and equality synonymous with a costless right of all to "be educated"—as if education could be bestowed as a commodity or gift—and on a platform on which the easy and the difficult are spread out as equivalent in value for amiable "elective" choice.*

It is pretty simple. Gaining an education is an accomplishment not a right. It cannot be bestowed. And its value is proportional to the effort required to achieve it—no pain, no gain. Teachers now worry more about getting sued in assigning grades than about being honest. All the students are above average. We live at Lake Wobegon. But simply showing up is not good enough to compete in today's world. Freedom is not about taking the courses you choose. It is about choosing the courses you need.

He talks about publicity and advertising. People will always try to sell us things and appeal to emotion to do it. So be it. Falling back on the principle of individual responsibility, it is not the seller who must make sure we don't buy trinkets. That is our job. This takes us back to last chapter where our problem often lies in failure to recognize existential limits. There is no free lunch, even when it is on sale.

More important than advertising is the media. It does appear that our media panders to the crisis de jour. It gets our attention, more for distraction than anything else. So we jump from one crisis to another as though we are watching Lethal Weapon #17. Hocking says:

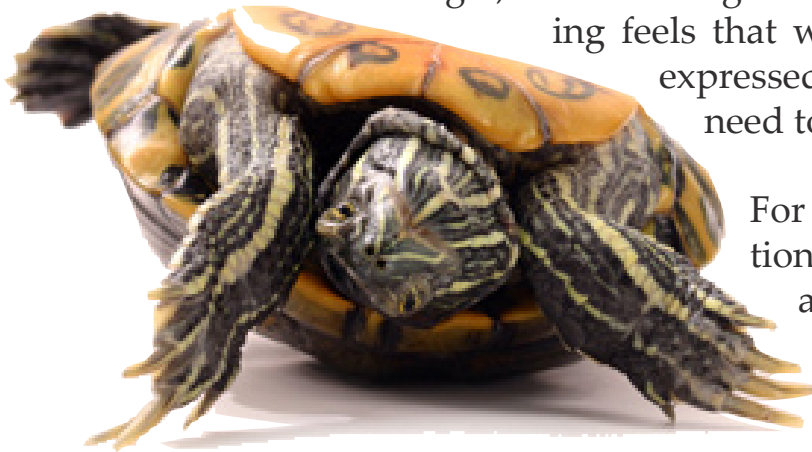
*It is not simply that our news services—and our storytelling services as well—shall speak with a more honest emotional adjustment, but that they shall speak from a background of serenity and moral steadiness, rather than from the sense of frenzy and breathless motion appropriate to a world in which everything is sensed only that everything may be forgotten. Where all is important, nothing is important. Where world peril deepens, only firm quietude can convey its gravity.*

For example, we frequently have discussions in group about offensive drivers. We should know by now that people run yellow lights, tailgate, and cut into lines. Addressing the offenders individually accomplishes little. We need to handle the whole bucketful of them with a strategic plan that emotionally works. “Working” means that it addresses the offense without creating one of our own. And it allows our minds to put the issue down for awhile. This is the concept of Spinoza’s adequate idea.

Finally, Hocking repeats the importance of a culture’s art, not as a means, but as a measure.

*If indeed the battle is for men’s minds, it is for any nation and its ideology a vital question of whether mankind will or will not be drawn to desire, or at least to respect, the qualities visible in that art. Woe to that nation—and its diplomacy—whose art inspires puzzlement, or aversion, or a hostile query as to its status within civilization.*

Art reveals us but does not develop us. Taking art courses will not make us stronger, but not being creative will make us weak. Hocking feels that we all sense intuitively what is expressed in the arts. Someone does not need to tell us.



For those who think world cooperation is only about bigger and better armaments, we need to consider what human beings are essentially about. While we fear and destroy, we also hope and create. Most people probably

love more than they hate. At least they aspire to do so.

Human beings hope, aspire, become, and create. They thrive when given a purpose. But they also fear, hate, and destroy. Which is primary? Erich Fromm feels it is the former and that the latter is a result of frustrated creative purpose. Perhaps not, but that is the way to bet. Violence may incite compliance, but not admiration. It is not a skill position, has all been done before, and produces nothing.

*I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swift-  
ness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend.*  
—J.R. Tolkien

Let us not confuse the two and celebrate the wrong one. Destruction offers nothing, unless it protects that which gives us something. Without that something we all die.

In summary: 1) Our essential nature as individuals and nations is not always clear and we need to constantly assess it. This is not easy to do, since it is abstract, but life is not easy—nor should we expect it to be. 2) Force is always temporary—God does not take sides. 3) Art reveals what we are about. We should pay attention to what it says and strive to be our best.

*In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless,  
but planning is indispensable.*  
—Dwight Eisenhower.