Philosophy of Teaching

Ortega y Gasset and his generation, which included Einstein, Leopold, Jung and Picasso, recovered the ancient wisdom of hunting cultures: life as interdependence. Ortega observed that Descartes was only half-right: yes, my ego/thought is the least deniable fact in the universe; however, Ortega asks us to examine our thoughts. When we do we agree with him that living is problematical at the core, i.e., that my life consists of my ego *and* my circumstances in a mutually interdependent and transcendent relationship, that neither has the luxury of existing without the other. The moral complication of Ortega's philosophy is that if my life consists equally of my self and my circumstances then I am compelled to take care of my circumstances (environment, world) as much as myself. Here is the foundation of Leopold's land ethic and the philosophy for a world in crisis.

The question then must be asked what kind of experience implants the truth of interdependence at a deep emotional level? Abstract knowledge is as insufficient as Cartesianism. My research has revealed that for older males, taking the life of an animal was for them a potent rite of passage and the life event which most opened their hearts and engendered in them compassion, inner peace and humility, universal virtues not ego-values. For women, birthing a child was their great, transformative initiation to life.

I once asked a Western Shoshone elder, "What kind of country would this be if the majority of men in it had been properly initiated to hunting?" He replied, "It would be a totally different world."

Hunters were the original environmental conservationists and they still lead in that field. Leading environmental groups that appear on the surface to be non-hunting organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy and the National Wildlife Federation, were conceived and developed by hunters. The environmental hall of fame is composed largely of hunters: Audubon; Thoreau; Roosevelt; Leopold (who was an avid hunter until he died). Isn't it reasonable to wonder *why* hunters are the leading conservationists? What is it about hunting that motivates men to fiercely protect nature? The answer to that question holds a key to the future of humanity and its relationship to the environment. It also unlocks the mystery of why avid hunters may be exemplary peace-makers, to wit, Nelson Mandela and

Jimmy Carter.

We do need a totally different world. Our youth need to participate directly in the food chain and they would profit much from subsistence survival in wilderness. They could benefit immensely from vision quest, which also was practiced throughout northern Europe for thousands of years.

A university queried me last year about teaching a course on hunting to their

graduate students in wildlife, about half of whom had never hunted or fished. Most of them had been influenced by TV to enter the wildlife field. I recommended that the first portion of the course needed to consist of weekends in the wilderness living off the land (vegetarians could gather roots and nuts). The university lost interest; they wanted the same old same old – more theory.

Philosophy, morality and spirituality converge in the taking of life. Direct participation in the food chain converts it to a love chain. It is where interdependence becomes a fact of life, not merely a concept, and it is what marries us to the environment and awakens us to life as transcendence, which is why I promote hunting for males and have written a book, *From Boys to Men of Heart – Hunting as Rite of Passage*. The Overview of that book is attached.

I would immerse students in what my colleague, Jon Young, terms "coyote mentoring," a proven, popular system he derived from indigenous cultures (his new book is entitled *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature*, foreword by Richard Louv).

These kinds of experiences would open the door for a new level of comprehension of the ways in which our ancestors and other cultures still engage and interpret nature and the environment. The students would have fun learning and they would come out of the courses with a significantly deeper connection with the environment and a sense of the sacredness of life.

While a visiting professor at a college in Wyoming I was roped into teaching

an education course. The 30 students, all women, were in their last term before student teaching; most were in their 30s with children. I asked them

to write an essay on their favorite teacher and why that teacher was their favorite. Every student used exactly the same word to describe their favorite teacher: enthusiasm. The word means, "the God within." Then I asked them to write a paper compiling the content they could recall from their favorite teacher. Not one student could recall a single bit of content! Yet, that favorite teacher had inspired them to enter teaching. The word "inspire" means "to set on fire." I believe that the greatest gift an educator can give is to "set on fire the God within" a student. Education is not about what we "put" into students but rather what we draw out of them.