ONE WORLD - A PARADOX

Address on Retirement From
The American Assembly

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General Eisenhower, Dean Brown, President Nelson, Trustees of the American Assembly, and friends:

I seem to have made a career out of retiring. Let me assure you, however, that the cycle is now complete; I am retired.

Last Friday Clifford Nelson telephoned to give me my instructions for this evening. He wanted more than the polite and heartfelt thanks I was certain—and planned—to express. His demand was that I should say something substantive. Since I am a member of what is, with great solemnity, called the Golden Age group, I must make a conscious effort to be modern and to speak in the modern manner; Therefore I will proceed to discuss The American Assembly by commenting upon a number of other things. What follows, therefore, is a kind of stream of consciousness, expressing what has been in the back of my mind, without time for reorganization and revision.

His call started this chain of reflection. It was further stimulated by receiving—on the same day—invitations to two conferences, each with an enclosed reply card. Among questions to be answered one stood out: "What institution do you represent?" As I wrote "None," a great light dawned. For the first time in 50 years I am myself alone. No institution can suffer from any indiscretion, even if speaking an unpopular truth is an indiscretion. Though I am sure someone expects me to speak of The American Assembly, I do not speak for it, only for myself.

I started my professional life as an historian. This was done despite the fact that Harvard by some unaccountable error—actually by a rudimentary computer (this one had whiskers and was named Robinson)—gave me a degree not in history but in political science—a subject in which I had received virtually no instruction. The error was not serious since it did not differentiate me significantly from other political scientists in that remote era.

Both my real and my pseudonymous studies stressed the universality of paradox in life. Not least among the many evidences of this fact is that as the world learns more, we as individuals know relatively less and less. Paradox I had best tell you—for you would never guess it otherwise—is the general theme about which this stream of consciousness flows.

One World was the title someone (probably the publisher) gave a book by Wendell Willkie. The title alone would have sold it, even

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without the challenging—if occasionally naive—insights of the author. That proclamation of One World was prophecy at its very best. Technology has now demonstrated the reality of One World. The cosmonauts and astronauts have proved what jets evidenced, and man's first flight intimated. Paradox enters upon cue. Now that One World is a reality we reject it. A few people insist they want it, but in the crunch they all, with one consent, begin to make excuses. The evasions are not quite as crude as those of old; no one claims he has bought a yoke of oxen and must go to prove them (if anyone else remembers that passage). But the modern excuses are just as thin.

For example, we divide the world between East and West, though in order to do so we transport Turkey into the North Atlantic and consign Russia to the East. Political geography is so scrambled that no modern Kipling could again utter his old banality: East and West have not merely met; they have overlapped; indeed they are commingled. Nevertheless, our customary language refuses to accept the obvious and we continually use obsolete terms as though they still represented the substance of reality. This is but a random sample. Our folly is not merely geographical, but political, linguistic, artistic. Add adjectives to taste and you will hardly go wrong.

The other day I read a learned article that proved, to the author's complete satisfaction, that nationalism is no longer a viable concept and that sovereignty is merely a nostalgic relic which has no modern relevance. Indeed the distinguished writer exalted his conclusions to the status of axioms. I thought—briefly—of organizing a committee (the first thought to enter the head of any normal American) to induce de Gaulle to read, learn and inwardly digest this profundity which he has curiously neglected to notice.

On second thought I abandoned the idea—though someone else will set up a committee; of that I am certain. I dissociate myself from the proposal partly because Americans can not speak de Gaulle's French, but more importantly because he is only the most conspicuous symbol of a mighty horde who do not want One World. Clearly the Flemings and the Walloons do not; nor do the Quebec nationalists, nor the tribal leaders who are tearing Nigeria apart, nor the Welsh or Scottish nationalists. The list is endless. There are even people who do not want one United States; I have been in many places where the Stars and Bars far outnumbered the Stars and Stripes—and we all saw on national television a state capitol where the national flag flew not at all, but the battle flag of the Confederacy floated from the top of the dome.

Even our great (in the sense of large) political parties have not yet "got the message" of One World. They make seriously divisive appeals to ethnic and other groups—Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Jews, Irish, Negroes—to all except the minority to which I chance to belong.
Technology has made world-wide communication a reality. Already, at least on part time, with television sets we can witness deeply significant episodes abroad—such as sports events—simultaneously with the spectators on the spot. Soon that visual communication will be as continuous as verbal contact already is. World-wide communications could make transnational as well as intercontinental understanding a great deal easier. But do they? Peking, Moscow, Cairo, Hanoi—and many other centers—pour out endless streams of propaganda divisive in character, viciously and intentionally so. They do not want One World, save on their own terms.

Senator Benton raised his persuasive voice a few weeks ago with a proposal to facilitate realization of the full potential of world-wide coverage. He suggested that English should be accepted as the world language. The idea has much, though not quite enough, to commend compliance with it.

One severe barrier is that no one knows this English language of which he speaks so kindly. In the words of the late lamented 'enry 'iggins, “In America they haven’t used it for years.” You do not have to accept the over-learned professor’s prejudiced—not to say jaundiced—view. I can cite the wise words of a distinguished American linguist Red Barber (pronounced as in ba-ba black sheep). In the years I have listened to him in order fully to understand baseball—a point to which I want to invite particular attention in order to certify my 100% Americanism beyond any challenge by that House committee, which, with unflagging zeal and magnificent ineptitude, guards that inestimable treasure. But to get back to Red Barber, I have heard him use colorful language—as when he said he was sitting “in the cat-bird’s seat” (from which he has recently been ejected by the Yankees), but I have never caught him in a grammatical slip. Recently he echoed Henry Higgins, saying: “Radio and television have forgotten all about the most beautiful thing I know next to human love. and that’s the English language.”

How right he is. Television is potentially the most potent educational force ever devised. With some brilliant exceptions it abuses the language. I realize that the networks employ erudite scholars to teach principal newscasters how to pronounce Vietnamese names, and words from what, with magnificent arrogance, we call the “difficult” languages. Ours comes naturally! But Sunday I heard divisive made “devissive.” midwife became “midwiffery.” Instances of barbarous enunciation are endless. We have no Soho Square in which to drop aitches. but we constantly hear the right accent upon the wrong syllable. The innocent letter X has been ruthlessly destroyed—as in “lugg-youry” S’s are turned to Z’s and vice versa. Yet the god-like men with the pear-shaped tones and gleaming hair (some of which is rumored to be their own) are the most ubiquitous instructors of American youth.
I suppose there is only one solution, for, being Americans, we must have things in solution; nothing may ever be left in suspension. Congress must appropriate a billion or two for a crash program in order to liquidate this irritant at once. Appropriations are the cure for all our ills. We loudly reject dialectic materialism and the dogma that the "material life of society" is the source of social ideas, political thought and institutions. But having launched an anathema upon such heresy, we proceed to shape legislation based on the validity of the communist dogma. After we make a "liberal" appropriation, most of the cash will go for offices, equipment, administration, and bureaucrats to draft "guidelines"—the modern euphemism for regulation. None of these things go to the heart of the matter. We perpetually emulate the Scottish preacher who, in his sermon, remarked: "This is a difficult question. We will approach it carefully, then go around it."

An inexpensive, simple—and therefore heretical—suggestion would be for the networks and stations to discharge summarily every announcer who misused plain English. There would be a vast silence for a time, then a revolutionary stress upon correct pronunciation and good grammar, less on the pear-shaped tone and the slick make-up.

The ignorant misuse of English over the air is bad enough. It is mild beside what my friend Higgins called the "cold-blooded murder of the English tongue." His description was not too strong. Take the terrific assault upon and utter demolition of one poor, little, helpless and inoffensive two-letter word—"as." By the deliberate substitution of the inappropriate word "like," vast benefits ensued. First, they descended upon the man who achieved this monumental triumph: he was handsomely rewarded because he had done something "creative"—a magic word among the advertising fraternity. The company which sponsored the "creative" murder of the word "as," and drove the bad grammar ceaselessly into our deep consciousness—to wit, our subconscious—has prospered mightily. More people than ever before have been induced consciously to impair their health.

What shall we do? Abandon the fight for good grammar? All the respirators in the world dispensing pure oxygen can never revive "as." It is dead. But we can—and must—appropriate more money for health education to offset the effect of this phony creativity. Even as we do, we have flaunted before our eyes the utter futility of the proposal. The man responsible for public health administration was smoking a cigarette while on television. He admitted, albeit a little sheepishly, that he had not enough self-discipline to take his own advice and quit smoking. How much good will piles of money and thousands of functionaries do in the face of such a shocking revelation of the heart of the issue—that people care less about health than self-indulgence. You will find it hard to match that for paradox.

I have not forgotten (though you must have, long since) the creative genius who destroyed "as" and exalted "like." Inasmuch as so
much of what passes for creativity is actually imitation or outright plagiarism, this genius’s abuse of the language has now spread like wild fire; in recent weeks I have not heard these two words correctly used in a single public program. This suggests that the “creative” erosion of our speech has so far outrun the educative process that no expenditure of money can halt it. Reforms must begin with an honest definition of the word “creative”—and its divorce from “genius.” What a hope!

Let me make it clear that I do not mind spending money. Foundation executives will offer vocal and unanimous testimony on that point. But I prefer to get something for the expenditure even when it is someone else’s money.

One would suppose that the $5 billion poured into Intermediate School 201 would bring one to the conclusion that money is not the root of all improvement. This plant, said to be the best in New York City, has been boycotted and its work disrupted by people—teachers, parents, school board, administrative supernumeraries, and other groups, each looking after its own supposed interests at the expense of the children. Money is an element, but it is the last essential; the will to accept the reality of One World is the root of the matter.

It has become a tiresome cliché to repeat Mr. Minow’s assertion that television is a vast wasteland. It is well understood that advertising depends on verbal gimmicks and endless iteration rather than sound quality in the product. So I shall flog those horses no more, and glance briefly at newspapers.

The New York Times wishes to be known as a paper of record, a source upon which serious students can rely with reasonable assurance of accuracy and where future historians may look for facts—as well as carefully considered, aptly expressed, opinions. I give it high marks for setting such goals. But as technology has made good printing more readily possible, its typography has become ever more atrocious. I thought, for a while, that living on Cape Cod meant receiving early editions printed before corrections were made. Since I have come back to New York that explanation does not cover the case—late editions are almost as bad, occasionally worse. If you like printer’s pie, take the Times. You will find it in abundance.

On my birthday a few years ago some members of my family made me a gift of replicas of the front page of the Times on four significant dates in my life—the first July 4, 1889. The others I will not mention. On no one of the four pages—selected, so far as the Times was concerned, at random—was there a broken line, a repeated line, a misspelling, a mistake in grammar—all common, all too common, now. In this paper, one of the staff of which wrote that sterling manual, Watch Your Language, you will still find infinitives not only split but shattered. One grammatical gem caught my eye Sunday last: “The man who the driving is left up to.” Not only has “whom” been ban-
ished along with the subjunctive, we must have an illustration of "what not to end a sentence with." It brought to mind the classic story of the child who said: "I want to be read to." The nurse asked: "What do you want to be read to out of?" He said *Swiss Family Robinson,* but she started to read from *Robinson Crusoe,* and the boy complained: "What did you bring that book to read to me out of from for?"

In one edition alone there were errors so crass that if they had appeared when I edited a college paper 56 years ago my own Student Board would have fired me—and there were some bad errors then! Modern printing technology could greatly reduce the number of mechanical errors, but apparently its use is forbidden on the falsely humanitarian ground that no mature person should have to learn a new skill. That fact alone is a hidden and silent, but no less significant, commentary on what we really think of education.

No one seems concerned for the generation of young people who will never see an accurate, grammatical, cleanly printed literate presentation of the news. This deprivation is anti-humanitarian; yet this goes unobserved because it carries no dollar sign and is not part of a union contract. It is the anti-educational effect that I deplore. This is another way to defeat the idea of One World by poor communication.

My stream of consciousness flowed from television to newspapers on to magazines. Here one might find less pressure for production, more time for careful editing. But some of the writing is so esoteric that without a dictionary—a large one—at hand, the going is rough. Much writing offers another illustration of the art of non-communication. Some of it brought to mind Talleyrand's sardonic comment: "Human speech is given us to conceal our thoughts." In recent days in magazines for the general reader I have run across "psycho-metry," "numinous," "chiliasm," "metonymically," "allurophobe," and several others; I did not note them down or list them consciously. Incidentally one of those I could not find in the largest dictionary available to me. This kind of writing is pretentious obscurantism parading in the phony academic costume of a diploma mill. It is to good writing what the cake-walk was to the Viennese waltz.

The gift for non-communication extends to criticism; it often resorts to prose so obscure that only by analysis can one gather the threads—or snarks—of meaning. I quote: "Their word-clusters are like funnels that plunge quickly and narrowly into depths where echo and resonance meet with endlessly receding significations." That luminous comment deals with poetry, in case you are interested, which I hope you are not.

All of which reminds me of Charles McCabe, an ascetic columnist in the *San Francisco Chronicle* who, because he wears a derby, goes, in my house, by the name of "Hard Hat." In one of his softer and more iberic moods he took out after the pseudoscholars who shore up
their “shaky disciplines” with “a comforting and mellifluent vocabu-
lary for either stating the obvious or waving aside the inexplicable”—
which I heard a TV man call inexplicable. McCabe often refers to the
growing use of nonlanguage—and with good reason.

Young students can not learn beautiful English any more even by
reading the new translations of the Bible. I will not challenge their
textual precision—for I have no license to do so. But I can and do
insist that pedants who search for precision in translating doubtful
documents have tin ears. They reveal no feeling for the majestic
rhythms and sonorous resonances of our language at its best. What
shall it profit a man to alter “see through a glass darkly” to “in a
mirror dimly” unless he puts a footnote to the effect that mirrors in
those olden days were not silvered glass but burnished metal? Without
the footnote he has added nothing to clarity—only to pe-
dantry. If he really wants to be modern he should turn to detergent
advertising on television and make the translation “in a plate washed
with Joy, blurrily.” At least the kids would understand it.

We are losing the power, or the patience, or the discrimination to
use simple words. It is said, times without number, that the Negro is
“alienated.” What a word! P. G. Wodehouse would demolish the
fraud tersely: how can a man become disgruntled if he has never been
grunted? “Alienated” implies that there was a time when Negroes
were not aliens or treated as aliens. But no one can tell us when that
halcyon era existed. Negroes were brought here by a combination of
guile, cupidity, and force as aliens in the most extreme sense of that
term. They were kept here against their will by force as chattels; they
were educated (so far as we can properly apply that term to their
treatment) as aliens even after emancipation. “Separate but equal”
said the Supreme Court in the last century. “Separate” in that classic
decision meant alien.

Separate they were, equal they were not; and no honest man can
longer pretend that the education of Negroes was equal. Yet—and
here is another paradox—those who perpetrated and perpetuated the
outrage now appeal to that decision as though it had been pure gospel
according to the Constitution.

At this point in my reflections upon the use of modern jargon—like
“alienation”—to make understanding the Negro problem needlessly
difficult, I deliberately stopped and reread the words of Abraham
Lincoln, in a search for clarity, logic, and profundity of insight. His
language was so plain that any schoolboy could grasp his thought. Carl Sandburg epitomized the self-educated Lincoln’s purpose: “He
would see if he could be as simple as the alphabet, as definite as num-
bers, as sure as a demonstrated proposition in Euclid.”

Lincoln’s homely words were infused with passion; they entered
men’s minds and stirred their hearts as this new pseudopsychiatric,
falsely scientific, fraudulent proliferation of obfuscating terms never
can. In all the hundreds of thousands of words about Harlem, Watts—and other festering sores upon our body politic—are any as clear, as true, as moving as Lincoln’s prophecy uttered well over a century ago: “When [by all these means] you have succeeded in dehumanizing the Negro; when you have put him down and made it impossible for him to be but as the beasts of the field; when you have extinguished his soul, and placed him where the ray of hope is blown out in the darkness that broods over the damned, are you quite sure the demon you have roused will not turn and rend you?” Who, in the last two years, has said it so well?

In our passion for noncommunication we have fallen into another disastrous linguistic habit: we refuse to call things by their right names. We snigger at Victorian prudery that said horses sweat, gentlemen perspire, ladies get in a glow. Such false delicacy is past; we know precisely how long we can be both close and safe. I wonder how many men just home from a hard day in the office really greet their wives with the endearing comment, “My, you smell nice.” The Victorians referred to limbs; now we move in a veritable forest of what are indubitably legs. Sometimes in our passion for four-letter words, in our search for “candor” and “honesty” we substitute lewdness for prudery. In other ways, however, we outdo the Victorians, employing euphemisms in the name of delicacy.

I do not mind being called old; after all, I can count. But my gorge rises when someone calls me a “senior citizen.” Imagine the agonies of a modern Robert Browning setting out to compose a new version of Rabbi Ben Ezra. He would not dare to be so crude as to say: “Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be.” Instead he would have to wrestle with a gaggle of words, such as: “Become a senior citizen with me; the Great Society and Medicare are now with thee.” To my mind that version lacks something; the thing it lacks besides rhythm, and feeling and a few other things is plain honesty.

President Truman, outspoken as he was, was forced by modern Victorianism to use initials in calling a critic an S.O.B. Since then we have grown so much more delicate and have developed such a passion for (if I may ape my younger and betters) “acronymicity” that doubtless Lyndon B. Johnson would call him a sob.

This hyper-niceness is humbug. Take, for instance, Guyana (formerly British Guiana). It is not called poverty-stricken, which it is; not backward, though that is obvious; not ignorant, though overwhelmingly illiterate. It can no longer be called undeveloped, or even underdeveloped; those terms would grate harshly upon native sensibilities. Instead, with barefaced mendacity, we call it a “developing” state. Thereupon all the scholars and other wise men (though scholars deny there are any others) flock to Washington with briefcases, (ah! I am showing my age!—with attaché cases) stuffed with proofs that it is not developing, that, as in many other new states, the gap between our
affluence and their need is widening, not narrowing. It is proved by statistics—the modern substitute for divine revelation—that people who have never had enough to eat are not growing food as fast as the growing population. People who had never heard of Malthus have become ardent, if uninformed, disciples. Computers turn out horrendous pictures of the situation in the year 2000. I remember hearing a British statistician with a very famous name and an absolutely straight face tell a vast audience that soon after 2000 the world would be so crowded that there would be standing room only, not even space to sit down.

Clearly intelligent control of population is vital. Do we promote it? No, it is too delicate a matter for the neo-Victorians. It might offend some religious group in the country with lots of voters. Moreover, it may run counter to taboos of whatever religion these hungry people profess, even if they do not practice it. Governments which exalt planning, politicians who take credit for prosperity, men who are ready to remake society shun this basic issue. They make the Victorians look bold in their discussion of sex. Their skittishness in dealing with a matter more pressing than war would be laughable if it were not tragic.

Do the alarmists suggest reliance upon local responsibility? No. Nor do they insist upon conditions for receiving aid. I should pause to make clear that from the beginning of the Marshall Plan to this moment I have been in favor of foreign aid, but not to appease any guilt complex, or on any sentimental basis. Much less would I see foreign aid used as a political weapon against Russia or China or anyone else. Under those circumstances it would not be aid but attempted bribery.

We should give assistance because we are convinced that this is One World and that sickness, famine, and ignorance anywhere affect us adversely—if not visibly in the short run, at least vitally in the long run. In making our plans we should recall that the great success of the Marshall Plan arose not from our wisdom alone—though it is folly to discount that element. Much less did success arise from money alone. The Marshall Plan succeeded because of the recipients' imagination and responsible use of the resources we made available. It was an exercise in mutual responsibility; on the part of the United States there was a mixture of motives—that is true of all action. But the central core of the enterprise was a moral decision to act; it was met abroad by a sense of moral responsibility.

So it should be now. Of course we should try to feed the hungry, be they friend or foe, to clothe the naked, to heal the sick, to teach the ignorant. But we do not achieve any worthwhile purpose if we let ourselves be bullied by demagogues in new nations, or if we offer money in a bid for favor against the Russians or the Chinese, or engage in gaudy enterprises such as a great stadium for the glorification of Sukarno's ego.
There is one string—and one string only—we should attach to our aid. That is the loyalty of each government with which we deal to its own people. We have an obligation, however unpopular it makes us, to see that they act responsibly in providing education and information on birth control as well as that the food, the clothing, the medical supplies do not follow too direct, too clearly charted a path to the black market, where the people we seek to help must buy them at extortionate cost in money, toil, misery, degradation. We have a right and an obligation to watch whether there are sudden riches in the hands of the “leaders”—and to choke off the flow of funds to Zurich. Until the pipelines are cleansed everything that passes through them will be defiled. We ought to summon courage to say so, and to act when necessary.

I am not so naive as to think decisions will be easy, nor will I be frustrated that foreign aid is no lever such as Archimedes sought to move the world, no sovereign remedy for all the tyranny, arrogance and other assorted political ills. We should be as chary of expecting too much as of demanding too little. It is true that “the time is out of joint.” We should beware of Hamlet’s frustration: “O cursed spite That ever I was born to set it right.”

But I must remember that I am an academic—even if unemployed. And the academics are the great experts in splitting the One World into smithereens. Sir Charles Snow wrote a sensational book, The Two Cultures. Like most significant works it made its greatest impression upon those who did not read it. From my point of view he was not only wrong—but by a wide margin. His root error lay not in stressing the gulf of nonunderstanding that separates the sciences from other disciplines. This is a context in which the word alienation is relevant. Much of the rift was conscious and intentional.

No, his basic error was statistical. The learned world has not two cultures, but two thousand. Lest I be accused of extravagance (God forbid!) I concede that 2000 was chosen more for purposes of alliteration than upon strictly cybernetic grounds.

The vastness of academic cultural multiplicity was borne in upon me one day over thirty years ago. There was a young, attractive man, whom students seemed to regard as an adequate teacher of mathematics. The problem was whether to give him tenure or let him seek another institution. So I asked the other mathematicians in his department to tell me about the quality of his scholarship. Each said he could give me no useful report because none of them “worked in his field” and none could read his papers with understanding. I was gravely informed that the nearest scholar competent to render a responsible judgment was in a university 500 miles distant. I suggest that when sections of a basic and ancient academic discipline have become so esoteric that colleagues in the same department do not know what one of their number is talking about, my estimate of the number of cultures so widely at variance with Sir Charles Snow’s is not without some validity.
What is true of mathematics applies across the board. Robert Maynard Hutchins, while he was at the University of Chicago, used to complain that all the faculty members could talk about at the faculty club, and be understood by colleagues, was the weather and sports. The remark, like most of his extravagances, had a root in important truth. If any group should know we have One World it is the academic. But they reject it and each professor is his own de Gaulle—seeking to pretend that oneness is not real, that the reality is his own private sector.

All that I have said leads me back to The American Assembly, and to its founder, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Like many another who has had a great career in one field of endeavor he suddenly found himself in a new—and in many respects a surprisingly alien environment. I say surprisingly, for as a soldier he knew that the government is served by honest, able, and industrious men. He knew that the universities were vital to society and he believed in and defended academic freedom. He knew that business supplied the essential goods for his former occupation and paid the taxes (directly and indirectly) that made the mare go. He knew that the University was heavily dependent upon private philanthropy. He saw all three, government, education, business as component parts, and essentials—not the only ones but vital—to the One World in which we live.

He had endured all the severe strains and participated in the brilliant triumphs of the grand alliance. As a university president he was astonished at the wide scope and the depths of suspicion within and among the elements of his new constituency. He perceived that false emphasis upon the negative forces that set one section of the body politic against others was destructive of the democratic ideal. His instinctive—and sound—reaction was to get the three groups together to discuss public policy on the basis of expert exposition of critical issues. The Assembly was not designed as a research institute but as a place to pursue an earnest search for a consensus.

Thus The American Assembly was intended to be—and became—an active protest against the divisive forces which were tending to make the citizen, ostensibly the dominant force, an impotent factor in our democracy. At the root of this protest was an idea, the soundness of which is too often forgotten, that in a democracy the processes are as valid—indeed, as essential—as the result.

He did not pretend that the Assembly was the only useful form of protest against the division of our One World. He hoped—and I believe that hope has been measurably fulfilled—that the Assembly would be modestly successful in knitting together different strands in our society. That is one reason for my affectionate respect for President Eisenhower. It is the basis of my gratitude for the opportunity to be associated for a decade with a great University, with a great school within that University, with a distinguished board of trustees and a wonderful staff. It gives me faith to believe that the next ten years under Clifford Nelson's able guidance will be yet more successful.