

TO: John Burton
FR: Gary Heartsill
SU: Quinn's Book
DA: 24 December 2018

RE: Quinn, Gary J. (2004). *Moral education in America: Its future in an age of personal autonomy and multiculturalism*. New York, NY: iUniverse.

Key words: *education, American schools, morality, Eckhart, authority, reason, intuition, Dante, soul, will, silence, Blakeny, nothingness, quantum leap, Progoff, time, moments.*

Intro

This memo is not a book report or even a reflection of my thoughts on Quinn's writings but it is to say thanks for suggesting the reading; for sure, I wanted to write a profound piece to send to family and some riflemen but I cannot do justice. Hence, an interested learner – actually it will take an interested “educator” to grind through the book to have the appreciation you and I have. I am not being short on the suggested audience but will say it would enable a reader to have had time spent in history, natural science, great books, ethics, theology, and social studies. Oh, I forgot a civics class – one must have an appreciation for “from whence we have come.” Having a letter in one of the high school sports would add. It wouldn't hurt to be a flag waver either. Course, all should be carrying a gun(s).

Having gone to Sunday School classes like you and I did in Ardmore will be the backbone in seeing where Quinn is going in his book. A person who is a card carrying democrat will not be of interest in reading this as it would be like throwing seeds “to fall on stony places...no deepness of earth” (Matt 13:5). A responsible citizen would be helped by reading this book but again being an education major will sure help with the note taking, appreciation, and guidance. It is a must for raising children...

So, just a few words with some favorite quotes to tout – maybe a comment here and there – but I will spend a moment on his lesson on silence and stillness. Maybe this is a short cut to reading the book?

Problem

Was watching the news where a referee told a wrestling contestant he must cut his dreadlocks off or not wrestle. Then all I heard was the community complaining about the boy's rights had been violated and the referee had been suspended. Wonder if Guinn would agree with me saying the problem was either the father mother or the coach, for letting him show up not ready to compete. My coach (Ralph Cornelius) used to carry a paddle around for ‘error violations in physical fitness training.’ The moral issue was bending over and grabbing your ankles...and don't forget: “There ain't no crying in baseball!”

Quinn says we may be able to go back and reteach some of the morals by reconstituting our classes to teach the standards, ethics, and love we had ‘just a few years ago.’ I will not make a judgment on whether or not it would work but my guess is we are past the half way mark in going down the tubes. As succinctly as I can put it “If I had known before about all this shit, I would have picked my own cotton.”

Quinn's answer is to NOT exclude religious moral instruction “...we need to re-establish a priority...by incorporating moral teaching into education in such a way that skills learned are understood in a moral context” (p. 16). My book is marked up just like yours, well I marked my starting with your highlights and then added my marks so I can quickly find the areas of most interest, importance, and imperative.

Somewhere (I cannot find it again...) he says a group of kids 'protested' their lunch menus by storming out of the cafeteria to complain about not having better food and suggested they have 'open' meals like down town. He said the administration let them take a half day off to complain and then the part I like best was they had to come back on Saturday and make up the time lost while they were protesting.

Quinn uses the examples we see everyday in the news or hear from the parents about children who cry and moan about the self-serving child of the day and the times where everyone gets a trophy for playing.

Lessons

Tip of the hat to his moral, ethic, and historical review of the psychology of life. He really does well with the soul and the will but I will just mention his read on The Moral Life-Cycles (Authority, Reason, Intuition) using all the great Greek and Latin terms like *Psyche* and *Pneuma* that dwarfs over into his Biblical direction with *Nephesh* and continues with the Seven Capital Sins.

One will have to read the book to see/appreciate/comprehend/justify and realize his works – maybe just mentioning will encourage someone to read this, but I will not review them here – except to pick out a couple worth discussing from my side of life (or my side of reality).

In his Lesson Three I was intrigued with his simple explanations of Dante and the Seven Capital Sins. This was good reading. This one chapter alone would be worth the few minutes to review ole Alighieri's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. He starts his poem based on the Ptolemaic universe (more or less three levels – sun and moon revolve around earth). Or sin, he calls "separation from God" (Paul Tillich picked up on this for the rest of us neo-reformed, dialectical, or neo-orthodox theologians).

In each level he explains what he learned from his side or from his learning about life as he saw it. "In *Purgatorio*, Dante depicts life as we know it, not to make a fatalistic declaration, but to point out the road to enlightenment...Dante shows how the soul gets free of what encumbers it" (p. 58).

Then the quote on the next page. It is worth buying the whole book (emphasis mine): (Red font mine.)

**The plight of the soul is determined, not by fate
or an angry God who punishes, but by the
decision-making power of the human will.**

This is Dante's lesson. In another way he says on page 63 to close out the chapter – breath taking as it is:

A choice must be made. The course the soul takes,
either toward the lower world or toward the spirit,
is not charted by fate or God's intervention,
but by the will and desire of each person.

Lesson Four – The Soul: *anima, animus, spiritus, mens, intellectus, voluntas...*(p. 76).

Lesson Five – The Will: Will power, moral acts, Aquinas, Proffoff, Aristotle, reason and love, Bible choice.

Lesson Six – On Intuition: The Place of Silence and Stillness.

This chapter made the book come alive for me and stems from Meister Eckhart: The Path to Inner Silence where he defined theologian: *If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian* (p. 105).

The Path to Inner Silence

“Discovering the soul by working with the imagination, intellect, or other agents is insufficient if it fails to recognize the silent inner soul and the fact that the agents do not necessarily reflect or express the essence of this soul center..

The inner soul knows what its agents bring to it, but the agents do not know the inner soul...the inner soul can express spiritual truth through the agents if the conditions are right. This knowledge does not come from the agents into the soul, but comes directly from the spirit (my underline). When this is the case, the imagination and other agents reveal what the inner soul experiences spiritually. Eckhart believed that this knowledge, like knowledge of God, can be appreciated only by silencing the soul’s agents. It is then that truth can be found in the soul.

But perhaps you will say: “Alas, sir, what is the point of my mind existing if it is to be quite empty and with-out function?... Is it my place to be in darkness?”
Yes, truly. You could not do better than to go where it is dark, that is, unconsciousness....You may be sure that perfect quiet and idleness is the best you can do. (Blakney, pp. 119-21).

The paradox in Eckhart’s statement here is that quiet and darkness gives rise to knowledge. Eckhart says that Augustine understood this when he said many people fail to find the truth because they look for it outside themselves. It is found not outside, but at the core of the soul. (Blakney, p. 105). (U line mine.) “We have no concept or picture of the inner soul, so Eckhart says it is found in darkness, emptiness or pure nothingness. (U line mine.) It cannot be known simply as an idea of the intellect...It is just that we have a difficult time dealing with notions that are not categorical, logical and easily grasped by the intellect. But stranger still is the fact that whereas we hard-headed Americans cannot seem to ‘get’ anything that is not concrete, we are beginning to appreciate the non-rational aspects of Asian thought” (p. 109).

Nothingness is Something

Quinn calls this next frame of mind ‘perception’ or a way of seeing things saying “it is possible to gain an understanding of nothingness by observing your mind at work” (p. 110).

He says to close your eyes and look into yourself, past thoughts and feelings to the stillness within:

Your stomach is empty.

Do not breath any differently.

Imagine your breath being inhaled through your mouth, lungs directly into your empty stomach.

Think of this as pervading emptiness or your whole insides – like a balloon or a bellows.

The air gives you life, but it has no form.

You can’t see it or find it if you look.

The air is all around you in this dark and empty space. (my paraphrasing next)

“Now take this thought a step farther. Forget the air and the breathing and just focus on the space within. What do you see?...you will see nothing. It is black inside and it will seem empty and still...- are chock full, yet empty. If you dwell on this a little while, it is possible to feel a sensation of stillness that does not seem weak or useless, but full of potential vitality. And this can be the beginning of understanding the somethingness of nothingness.”

Winding this truncated memo down

“If we put any of the passionate moral issues of the day – racism, sexism, abortion, war, poverty, political corruption, etc. – into the context of teachings on the soul, they take on an entirely different character. They cease to be viewed as separate, behavioral problems only, and become signs of the condition of the soul of the community...teaching children and adults about the soul and its requirements would be immensely more effective than the current practices of examining emotions and imagination without adequate reference to the triune nature of the soul...”

The argument over individual ‘rights’, i.e., *your* obligation to respect *my* rights, creates a rhetoric of divisiveness that defeats the goals of freedom” (p. 137).

The other book

Progoff, Ira (1957). *The cloud of unknowing*. New York, NY: Dell. [This book is on contemplation in which a soul is united with God.]

Quinn quotes Ira Progoff and there are two I especially want to highlight (yellow/bold mine):

3. It is this time of which it has been written: **of the time that has been given to you, you shall be asked how you have spent it.**

And it is certainly reasonable that you give an account of it; for it is neither longer nor shorter, but varies according to only one stirring within the principal working power of your soul, namely your will (p. 63).

9. Pay close attention to time, therefore, and consider how you spend it; **for nothing is more precious than time. In one little moment, as small as it may be, heaven may be won or lost.**

Here is a token of the fact that time is precious: **God, who is the giver of time, never gives two moments together**, but only separately, each one after the other. He does this because He does not wish to reverse the ordered course of His creation” (pp. 65-66).

Finally this memo ends...

Ah, Quinn and Dante – the soul and light – I can’t believe how much of this goes along with the Fourth Gospel; course, a good reason to spend time reading these two books. Thanks again John for suggesting them to me. We probably won’t change much in the education of America but we can both work on the flight of our souls!

Quinn says on page 61 “The unshackled soul moves like the wind toward the light above, engaging in a joyful journey of love.” May we continue to teach this poetic imagery – for the good of the cause.

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