

Letters to the Editor

The Editor
Self & Society

Dear Vivian,

Following in the Anti-Hero's Footsteps?

In the August/September issue of Self and Society Donald Ellison writes about his reactions to Paul Rebillot's *The Hero's Journey* saying that he found himself wondering who this hero was and what the itinerary of his journey. I have read the rest of Mr. Ellison's article and I think he could profitably have gone on wondering.

I read Paul Rebillot's article with growing incredulity. At first it struck me as quibbling and bitchy - for instance the criticism in the second paragraph is valid but not constructive. Then I found Ellison considering the suggestion of going to India or Paris as suggestions for a package holiday. To me, the point was that these invitations often seem of no great significance at the time and yet they may contain intimations of a challenge to abandon the familiar patterns of thought and behaviour, the safe situations, and to try new ways of living and growing. This entails risks, mental and physical. (St. Paul wasn't afraid on the road to Damascus and look what happened to him.) I think this is what the nurse in Rebillot's article was talking about. She wanted the integration, the psychic rebirth, but as yet could not let herself risk 'going crazy'.

Rebillot's "journey" can be interpreted on many levels and they are not mutually exclusive. Ellison prefers to interpret only on one level, the birth of the foetus, and that is his privilege. But I cannot understand why he should go to so much trouble to "prove" that Rebillot is talking about this and nothing else. One would surely expect the pattern of psychic events to parallel the pattern of physical events, and that the physical birth that we have all experienced should contain the pattern for future experiences without thereby invalidating them.

Ellison has gone to some trouble too to solve the puzzle of the hero's bisexuality, though I must admit that I took the interchangeable he/she to be shorthand for a statement that women were not excluded from the experience. I wonder if Ellison would admit that possibility.

The comments about the nurse's feelings I do not go along with. Anything anyone says is open to a number of interpretations, But I do not see why Ellison wants Rebillot to assume that the nurse was propositioning him sexually. If she was, it was up to her to say so directly - isn't that what growth is all about? If she seriously wanted to become a psychiatric patient then she was in an ideal position to arrange it and presumably in her own time she would if her fear was not too inhibiting. What I find disturbing is that Ellison seems pretty sure that he knows better than Rebillot and better than the nurse what either of them wanted to say, and his assumption that a woman groping towards growth and integration is "really" wanting a baby I find offensive. (We do not in fact

know that the nurse was not already a mother.) And does he mean in his penultimate paragraph that Rebillot had "what it takes" to "make" (Ellison's word) the nurse **pregnant**, or (also as Ellison phrases it) to "make her a baby" i.e. reduce her to the status of an infant incapable of saying what she wants. One can be aware of many levels of meaning and many possible interpretations in the give and take of any conversation, but for Rebillot to have "let her see that her message had been received and understood" (i.e. Ellison's message) would have been presumptuous and potentially damaging outside of an analytic situation. In any case, Rebillot does not say that he "just walked away" and there is no justification for assuming that he did unless thinking about what someone has implies that you must stop the conversation and leave their presence.

I do not know if I sound as bitchy about Ellison as he does about Rebillot. I feel stung into replying because I think highly of Rebillot's article which to me calls for study in depth rather than belittlement and reduction to absurdity. Also I was offended by Ellison's male chauvinist treatment of the nurse episode, though admittedly where the status of women is concerned I do have to watch it. My own childbearing days are long and fruitfully over. So that wasn't a blind spot, I hope. What I do find exasperating is that Ellison accuses Rebillot of not listening when he himself doesn't even seem to **hear** what is outside his own mind. For me any deafness and insensitivity are in Mr. Ellison, not in Mr. Rebillot, on the evidence of these two articles.

Yours sincerely,
**Irene Morgan
Slough**

Dear Vivian,

I am writing to express my appreciation of the article by John Rowan in the November issue titled 'Hegel and Self-Actualisation'. It is one of the most insightful articles I have read and was both mature and honest. I think John Rowan deserves more recognition than he often gets.

There is however one point which did not seem to be stressed but which, in my mind at least, follows from the Hegelian viewpoint. The issue is to do with apparent opposites which tend to be seen as a confrontation area. Our education and cultural framework tends toward the either/or viewpoint whereas in fact there is no need for absolutes.

It seems to me that in many respects we can explore the best of both worlds and that such a view can produce very substantial benefits. For example in education there is a continual battle between the disciplinarians and the advocates of free expression. There is no reason at all why some classes should not be highly disciplined and others conducted on the basis of pupil interest.

My own experience of life is that I am continually being pressured into choices which are not real in an absolute sense but seem real within our cultural patterns. While I accept Rowan's point concerning the need for confrontation I think he failed to emphasise enough the fact that while we cannot have our cake and eat it we can, if wise, eat some of it and keep some of it.

Yours sincerely,

**Mark Matthews
London NW1**