The Magician’s Trick

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THE MAGICIAN’S TRICK is not so much “sleight of hand” as it is misdirection—the drawing of the audience’s attention away from illusions being crafted. My grandfather would have simply said, “When you’re being dazzled by footwork you need to remember to look at what the hands are up to.” It seems to me that we often forget about the misdirections in life—we are conditioned to focus on that which commands our attention and to forget about what is going on outside the spotlight’s glare. We might be well advised to wonder what it is that we hear little about—what information is conspicuous by its absence. We may forget to ask whose voices and views and perspectives are being ignored. In any class on public policy, we struggle with the problem of how to contend with having no public recognition of issues. In this “information age” we are swamped with data but may rightly wonder why only certain social and political perspectives are heard and why some social and other issues seem invisible. Is there a political and economic safeness and social “correctness” to the shaping of reality as we come to know it? Have those with power so shaped our issues that what we know is only a small portion of what we should know? My point is this: After 9/11, more than ever, I am curious about what it is that we are not readily privy to. I wonder what influences our lives both socially and morally—by both omission and commission. Social justice also includes a right to awareness of what is being done to and for all people, and an awareness of how others frame issues.

Victims of the terrorist attacks did nothing personally to bring about the events that led to their deaths. The innocents killed in the fighting in Afghanistan did nothing to bring about theirs. Still, though, they died as the result of social, economic, political, and religious events, and hatreds not of their own making, and most likely beyond the scope of their awareness. They are the victims of violence as well as the victims of ignorance. Whose actions or what events took place that evoked both such hatred and such ignorance of it? We need to be vigilant, we need to mend fences, and we need mature and responsible explanations for how we got into this mess, and more than ever we need to know how the actions of a relative few come to affect the lives of everyone. We need the fullness of reality (regardless of how unpleasant it might be) rather than efforts to shape events into visions deemed acceptable to us. How can we understand or solve or prevent anything if we can’t have access to an honest and full accounting of what goes on in our world? Healthy relationships cannot be forged out of ignorance. I want to be privy to many voices and points of view, not spoon-fed a select few. I wonder whether our media has become mediocre—too often it seems that the main concern is not offending the hand that feeds them and continuing to serve as a vehicle for consumerism rather than information. Is the primary purpose of our media to dispense inane bits of safe or “dumbed-down” news, simply because it serves as a vehicle on which to hang advertisements (Klinkenborg, 2002)?

A case in point: In February 2002, in New York City, another World Economic Summit was held. We know...
that previous meetings by political and economic elites have evoked considerable protest but know few details about the reasons for the passions behind the protests. We were provided little insight into the probability that the common motivator among protestors was their fear of the erosion of democracy. In the popular press there was, again, some news about demonstrations in opposition to that most recent meeting, still less information about the views of those opposed to such meetings, and practically nothing about the agreements and deals being made behind closed doors. Such meetings are not exemplars of democracy in process or intent. It is clear that such meetings of economic elites evoke considerable anger and fear around the world though little light is shed on why. We hear few details of how some corporations and moneyed interests shape and remake social and cultural environments. Concurrent with the meeting in New York, there was another held in southern Brazil, a large World Social Forum, though it commanded very little attention in the U.S. media. Why? Was it that those attending that meeting were critical of the power of global corporatization and environmental destruction, and discussed fear that democracy is being eroded? Why is it that so many people from so many countries are so distressed by what they feel is being done to the environment, democracy, and their cultures, yet we are poorly informed about it? Why are we insulated from the passions of others?

In my curmudgeonly way, I also find that I’m tired of hearing simplistic, pat explanations for why things occur. Or Darwinian excuses about why some people get ahead in life and others don’t, or why some people have a right to be involved in decision making but the common person does not. I miss not having a moral discussion of the effects of the growing gap between the have’s and the have not’s in our nation and in the world. I tire of hearing the myth that the “market” explains everything—it doesn’t. I’m beginning to wonder why it’s alright to hear conservative commentators and ambiguous “centrist” commentary, but find a liberal or leftist voice strangely absent from public discourse. There are uncommonly decent and responsible people from both ends of the social and political spectrum who simply see the world differently but whose intentions are equally good. We need to hear both ends of the political spectrum to know where the ill-defined and amorphous middle truly is. There is a scene in the movie “The Wizard of Oz” where we hear the instruction to “pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.” I suspect we should all begin to pay better attention to what’s going on “behind the curtain” and ask what is real and what is illusion, what is substantial and what is pap. We need to strive for diversity in opinion and perspective and hear all sides of issues. Without that, we lose our ability to discover what we really stand for. Without that, there is no social justice and no freedom (Polanyi, 1944).

**This Issue**

In various ways, the first several pieces in this issue address the aftermath of the terrorism we all experienced last September. Associate Editor Susan Robbins provides an editorial opinion on a type of counseling that was widely used near the sites of the terrorist attacks. Robbins critiques this popular form of crisis counseling and her thoughtful commentary suggests that we need to think more about how we help people and whether our efforts truly work.

Our “Call For Papers” on the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks yielded several brief commentaries from readers and reviewers. I must acknowledge the valuable work of Families in Society board member Marilyn Austin, who helped shepherd this section of the issue. The resulting papers are stimulating reading. The contributors saw precisely the same wording in the “Call,” yet wrote remarkably differing responses. It is a reminder that events evoke different responses in all of us and we are as diverse in our reactions to events as we are...
in other ways. The authors of these pieces are: David Derezotes, Robert Fischer, Paul Newcomb, Suzanne McDevitt, Patricia O’Brien, Ellen Bogolub, Josephine Méndez-Negrete, Fernando Cheung, and Ming-sum Tsui. Please read these commentaries with care.

Just days after the terrorist attacks, Andrew Malekoff submitted a commentary, Zero Degrees of Separation, on provision of social services in New York City a few days after the terrible events of September 11. This piece provides a window on the experience of people close to the attacks. This article concludes the focus on the aftereffects of terrorism in this issue.

Zvi Eisikovits, Zeev Winstock, and Richard Gelles offer a pair of unique articles: Structure and Dynamics of Escalation From the Batterer’s Perspective, and Structure and Dynamics of Escalation From the Victim’s Perspective. The authors closely examine domestic violence from two very distinct viewpoints. These thought-provoking and intriguing articles provide a better understanding of the process of escalation and how it is perceived by those involved.

Next, in Key Determinants of a Mother’s Decision to File for Child Support, Janice Laakso offers a unique and insightful examination of the needs, thoughts, and reasons that influence mothers’ decisions on whether to file and how they bear on practice. Another frequent contributor, Robert Fischer, helps us better understand how visitation programs for noncustodial parents help address issues that are common in such environments. The insights Fischer provides in Gaining Access to One’s Children: Findings From an Evaluation of a Visitation Program for Noncustodial Parents, can benefit all practitioners working with children and families. From Houston, Susan Mapp, in Enduring Ties: The Value of Family Connection to Children in Foster Care, examines a similar but distinct topic: family visitations for children in long-term foster care. As with the Fischer article, visitations are the prime focus, but here the environment and circumstances are entirely different. Mapp provides information that is helpful to the practitioner on this important and often awkward issue.

In The Homeless Need More Than Just a Pillow, They Need a Pillar: An Evaluation of a Transitional Housing Program, Thomas Alex Washington examines the life and worlds of the homeless and ways that they too can exit homelessness. Washington’s view is sympathetic and incorporates the perspective of the client. This article is followed by “Enlisting the Supervisor’s Pregnancy to Facilitate the Supervisory Process” from Haya Itzhaky. Here, the author examines the issue of supervision in practice and he suggests that issues such as a pregnancy can be used as an asset in building productive and worthwhile supervisory relationships.

Liat Kulik contributes an interesting piece that provides a better understanding of life satisfaction among older men and women. More specifically, “Equality in Marriage, Marital Satisfaction, and Life Satisfaction: A Comparative Analysis of Preretired and Retired Men and Women in Israel,” examines the effects of retirement on husbands’ and wives’ satisfaction with marriage and life at a later stage of the life course.

The articles in this edition of the journal are an extraordinary lot. We have reactions to the terrorist attacks of September 11, information about spousal abuse, homelessness, child visitation, supervision, marital satisfaction, child support, etc. Having such varied, insightful, and thoughtful material to read is a good thing, and having full access to knowledge is something we should all safeguard.

References