Distributive Justice, Part II: A Rationale by Curt Hillstrom

Thomas Peacock’s Ojibwe: We Look in All Directions
reviewed by Helen Watkins
Editorial Notes

"Time and Space" is the title of the second chapter of John L. Gaddis's new book The Landscape of History (Oxford University Press: 2002). In this chapter, Gaddis says that historians, like "poets, playwrights, novelists, and filmmakers" (and I would add, philosophers) are able to manipulate time and space. Historians, says Gaddis, use the tools of selectivity, scale, and simultaneity to help us see things in new ways. Historians can choose what they consider to be the important aspects of an era to create a view that would not have been available to a contemporary (selectivity); they can juxtapose events or localities whose connections would not have been evident in real time (simultaneity); or they can zoom in—or out—on historical events (scale) in a way that is impossible for the person living through the event. In a witty chapter, Gaddis likens historians to time travelers.

Without carrying this analogy too far, I suggest that Curt Hillstrom and Helen Watkins in their well-crafted articles are our guides in space and time exploration in this issue of the Forum. Hillstrom has thought deeply on the subject of Distributive Justice—the system of wealth distribution that he outlined in the Fall issue. In this issue of the Forum he presents the rationale for his point of view. In so doing he brings together philosophical insights from several sources and compresses them into one ordered point of view. From the vantage point of philosophy he is able to illuminate some of the inequities in the current distribution of wealth and power in our country and to suggest a more just way to organize society.

At first, it seems that the life story of Thomas Peacock, author of Ojibwe: We Look in Both Directions, refutes Hillstrom’s thesis that those who grow up without advantage cannot succeed. Peacock has risen from mean beginnings to become a professor at UMD. On the other hand, his book, as Helen Watkins makes clear in her review, documents the same abuse of wealth and power at a governmental level that Hillstrom decries in his article. Watkins is uncomfortable with the message of the book and has in effect juxtaposed her reaction to the book with her review of it. Thus, she gives us a double lens for viewing Peacock’s work.

Other writers invite us to view other landscapes: Tom Abeles and Mary Kay Stranik encourage readers to attend Voices of Concern, the MISF-sponsored forum on the future of democracy. Shirley Whiting points out that without history, there is only “now.” In these times, when “now” is often overwhelming, these are wise words.

To return to my original analogy, each of these authors in effect has flown a time-machine over our mental landscape. They bring us the benefit of a wider vision. Whether it is a vision of a disturbing past or of a better, and more just, future, it is a vision we would not have without the hard work of their thinking and writing.

§ The next issue of the Forum, in late May, will feature the Annual Meeting—at which we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of MISF. We will print the speech given by Cheryl Dickson and a poem read by Morgan Grayce Willow. We will also include thoughts by several longtime scholars on the importance of MISF—then and now—in their scholarly pursuits. The deadline for this issue is May 10.

Lucy Brusic

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Distributive Justice, Part II: A Rationale
by Curt Hillstrom

In the previous issue of The Forum I made the case for a fair distribution of wealth and power based on two ideas.

1. A minimum amount which meets the basic needs of an individual as a human being and as a citizen in a democratic country, and a maximum amount which prevents any individual or group from accumulating so much wealth and power that it gives them undue influence in national affairs.

2. A separation of the processes and values of the three forces of organization within a society as articulated by Kenneth Boulding. These are the threat system, such as the armed forces and the coercive powers of government; the exchange system, such as corporations and markets; and the integrity, the human support groups such as families and schools.

In part II I wish to dispute some of the arguments that those with wealth and power deserve what they have. And I want to advocate a communitarian perspective to strengthen integrity organizations.

Success and Merit

Most successful people, especially those who have attained significant wealth, attribute their success to hard work, intelligence, business savvy, or similar reasons. Much as kings used to justify their power by claiming that the very fact that they held such power was sufficient proof that it was due to divine intervention, apologists for the wealthy argue that the very fact wealthy people are wealthy means that they are harder working and/or smarter than those less successful.

I do not dispute that most wealthy people are hard working and intelligent. I think they are. However, other facts are worth noting. Most wealthy people were raised by intact families in middle-class or better neighborhoods with parents who were also successful and financially well-off. Private schools and the best colleges are by no means unusual. And for the wealthy who came from more modest beginnings, extended families, strong churches, sensitive teachers, and similar factors fostered the undoubted intelligence of the ultimately successful person. None of them emerged from impoverished backgrounds with no innate advantages, incompetent parenting, poor schools, dangerous neighborhoods, and a lack of mentors.

Clearly not everyone comes to the starting line with the same assets. Looks, intelligence, energy, and athletic ability are parceled out unevenly. We do not get to choose our sex, our potential for a good IQ, our natural appearance, our skin color, or our predisposition to genetic disease. Like all other living organisms, our genetic being is largely set at conception and, for all practical purposes, our DNA program plays itself out over our lifetime, from pre-natal existence to our ultimate death. Nor do we choose the environment into which we are born. We do not select our care-givers, our neighborhood, our initial religion, our relatives, our language, our society.

None of this argument is to imply, of course, that no effort ever bears any fruit. People do make good decisions. But decisions are determined by what has come before: intelligence, experience, knowledge, and support. If one can't recognize an opportunity, or has known only the sordid side of life, or has no one to turn to for advice, then the chances of making a bad decision are high.

Determinism

Perhaps this scenario seems like too much determinism. I am giving short shrift to people's initiative, recognition of opportunities, and sense of timing. But I allege that the popular conception of free will is one of the major reasons that our country's wealth is so unevenly distributed.

Determinism, at its most fundamental, simply means that for every event there is a cause. In fact, this belief is part of our cultural system. We don't think fires start because of magic; instead we call in the arson investigator. When a government or corporate boondoggle occurs, people wonder what went wrong and an inquiry is initiated. But when it comes to humans making choices, most people insist that we make decisions freely on the relevant merits of the choices. We may get it wrong sometimes, but we are the ones doing the heavy pondering.

For supporters of free will, the key phrase is, "I (or he or she) could have done otherwise." But in what way could they have done otherwise? First we would agree that what could have been done needed to be physically possible. You don't say to someone, "You could have avoided that fight by spreading your arms and flying away." But what if you didn't have some key information? "I would never have married John if I had known he was so abusive." And what about emotions? "If I hadn't been so angry at Joe I would not have struck Chris." When we weigh our options we consider all the factors we feel are important. Where do these factors come from? From our experience--what we have learned over the years, from knowledge that was given to us by teachers and books and speakers, from awareness of our own abilities and desires. Sometimes we consider how others will react, what other players in the decision might be thinking, different objectives and goals, conflicts within ourselves and with others, and various other things. We use our intelligence, our decision-making experience, our intuition, our desires, our emotional attachment to other people and places to make a decision. In addition, therapists have convincingly demonstrated that unconscious psychological forces--like fears, prejudices,
Distributive Justice, continued from page 3

and unresolved conflicts—can have profound effects on our decisions. All these elements are part of our internal make-up, mostly in our brain, that have been put there by genetic fiat and modified by interactions with other people and groups through the years. All these factors have been determined by causes over which, ultimately, we have no control.

At this point many people strenuously object. Perhaps, they say, I started with genes and parents I didn’t choose, but I have chosen to expose myself to most of the experiences I have had during my adult life. Even if I had used all the factors you mentioned in making my decisions, there is still a point at the crux of the decision-making process which is free and is mine. It is not random.

I would like for us to take a look at this word random. Lexicographically it means something unplanned, haphazard, accidental. Using this definition I would agree with the objections. But we sometimes also use random to mean “uncaused,” and on this count I would disagree. A computer program producing random numbers generates numbers that are unpredictable and haphazard, each number having an equal chance of appearing. But no one would ever say that it is uncaused. I contend that although human decisions are not random, that does not mean they are uncaused. Would we want it any other way? When we vote for a candidate, would we want to say that we never considered what any of the contenders said, or that we never looked at the issues? Of course not. We voted for the candidate for a reason, and we condemn the voter who chose on a whim. These factors determined our vote, even though we may have felt free when we were casting it.

We are not talking about the sort of fatalism here in which our lives are predetermined no matter what we do. We are still players in our futures. Nor should this way of looking at the world keep us from enjoying our lives. When we go to a movie we know that what we see on the screen has been scripted, acted, and committed to film. If we see the movie seven times, the same actions will happen seven times. And yet we enjoy the movie. In life we are the actors in a great movie with an unknown, seemingly ad-libbed script in which we don’t know the ending. There is no reason to not enjoy it.

Soft Determinism

Many people object to determinism not only because it eliminates free will, but because it also eliminates personal responsibility. After all, they say, how can you hold someone accountable for their actions when they can point to their genes and their upbringing as an excuse for doing what they did? But abdication of responsibility need not be the case. Freedom and responsibility are quite compatible with determinism. William James called this soft determinism, also referred to as compatibilism. As with many philosophical arguments, compatibilism turns on our definitions.

Freedom, to me, does not involve the origination of the decision. Nor is it being able to say or do a wide variety of things with the protection of a liberal government. Rather, freedom is the number of realistic options a person has. Someone who is wealthy enough to hop on a plane to have lunch in Paris has a lot more freedom than most of us. Someone who has a gun to their head and has been given the order, “Your money or your life,” has very few options, at least in the short term.

Responsibility has to do with the consequences of our actions. The circumstances resulting from an act are the responsibility of the person who committed the act. It doesn’t matter that there were causes leading to the act that caused the circumstances or that there were causes of the causes of the causes. The initial actor, or actors, are still primarily responsible. And those who caused these actors to act as they did also bear some responsibility. With this I am sure those opposed to determinism will agree.

But the objectors to determinism want to go further. They say that moral responsibility is not possible if people can point to their genes or poor upbringing and use it as an excuse for their behavior. Therefore, according to this line of reasoning, the poor and unsuccessful are responsible for their condition, and it is also their responsibility to change it. It is admirable if someone chooses to try to help them, but any failure to accomplish this change falls directly on the shoulders of the poor. A determinist would counter that there were causes which led to a poor person’s being poor, and if the poor person is to achieve a decent living, then events must be applied to this situation which will become the causes which lead to the success of the poor person. Simply waiting for someone to rise from poverty by an act of will is largely futile. In other words, these folks need help that should not be denied.

This argument does not, I will admit, prove the case for determinism. What I hope for is that you will agree with me that most, if not all, of what happens to an individual, successful or not, is not really fair. While general consensus exists that not everyone comes to the same starting line, I contend that the lanes of the successful are intact and tidy with supporters offering aid at numerous points, while those of the unsuccessful are pitted and obstacle-strewn with little or no support—and few even care.

Individuals and Communities

These arguments for determinism in human affairs challenge the claims that wealthy people deserve their wealth simply because they are harder working, smarter, and more prescient individuals. True, the successful person may be all these things. But these attributes are not ones that the individual can claim credit for. In every case there were people and institutions involved in fostering these characteristics in the successful person. We’ve always known that good parenting produces good people, that inspiring teachers create inspired learners, that caring adults can pave the way to success.

Libertarians respond by saying that while this wisdom is
accepted, it does not mean that the individual is owned by any of these other people or groups. The individual belongs to no one but him or herself. Therefore, following John Locke, they claim that the fruit of their labor is their property and should be fully under their control. Some people reflect this sort of attitude when they defend risky behavior: “I’m not endangering anyone but myself, so it’s no one’s business but mine.” I would point out that it is our business. Society has spent thousands of dollars on the risk-taker’s education and health care; they are someone’s son or sister or friend; they are someone’s employee or colleague or customer; they have a role to play in all the numerous communities they are a part of. And so it is for the wealthy, also. None of us can or would be who we are if it were not for the communities which nurtured and sustain us. We are, all of us, social beings who are continually tuning our behavior and beliefs and attitudes based on the information and feedback we get from the small and large communities in which we exist.

Western societies have been founded on a Lockean conception of the primacy of the individual. In most political theories supporting this concept the individual forms an implicit contract with the society’s government, binding each side to certain social obligations and claims to social benefits. While these social contracts are largely philosophical devices, they have been historically useful in justifying governments as existing with the consent of the governed. Nonetheless, what these contracts consist of is open to interpretation. Wealthy individuals use them to rationalize claims to the vast bulk of their money, arguing that government has an obligation to allow them to keep that which they see as a benefit of their legitimate efforts. We could as well, and with more justification, argue that we also have implicit contracts with all the important communities in our lives, not just our polities, and that there are obligations and benefits between the individuals and all these communities that must be honored. Furthermore, all these contracts have a feature that is different from the ones found in the marketplace. In social contracts a person has an interest on both sides of the agreement. We not only agree to certain responsibilities and benefits for ourselves as individuals, but as members of the contracting community we also obligate ourselves to see that the community carries out its part of the agreement. Those who use social contracts to consume wealth from communities without giving back or contributing to the other side of the agreement weaken the community for all.

Communitarianism

Communitarianism is an attempt to balance the rights, responsibilities, and needs of the individual and of the community. Communitarianism does not disregard the individual, but tries to place the individual in a proper social perspective within all the communities to which he or she belongs. Communitarianism does not threaten individual human rights. Most human rights, and all of the most basic and important ones, are compatible with communitarianism. The distinction comes when individual rights conflict with the needs of the community. In most situations communitarians would support whatever action benefits the community over the asserted rights of the individual. While specific instances must be considered on a case-by-case basis, these conflicts could arise in issues concerning, for example, security, censorship, or the right to privacy.

Rights and responsibilities, it is said, are two sides of the same coin. While libertarians argue that responsibility inheres through the individual, communities also bear significant responsibility. To provide service to its members, to any subordinate communities, and to the larger communities to which it belongs, a community needs to be responsive to all without undue discrimination. In the same vein, individuals who have accumulated wealth with the help of their communities have a responsibility to support these communities so that others can also succeed. A successful businessperson, for example, uses public highways to ship goods, public airways to advertise them, employees who were trained in public schools, court systems that are supported by public money, protection by local police, security from seizure by national armed forces, and centuries of men and women arguing for ideals to make all this possible. It is only just and fair that much of the wealth accumulated by the successful should also be returned to communities that helped make it possible.

Communities are universal in human affairs. These communities are interrelated in complex ways—superior, subordinate, ancillary, overlapping, interlocking—with diverse goals and import. Communities also reach across national boundaries, and countries themselves are a community of nations. The communities that fall under Boulding’s first two organizing forces, the threat system and the exchange system, have a great deal of political power in Western democracies. Communitarianism advocates giving communities from Boulding’s third organizing force, the integrity, a comparable amount of power. These communities are the ones which nurture, sustain, and educate individuals. Without strong families, schools, and religious institutions any society will suffer significantly.

Communitarianism is not seeking an overthrow of any government. It is not anti-democratic and it is not communist. It aspires rather to bring about a moral change, a recognition of our interdependency, of the value of individual commitments to the important communities in our lives, of the significance of the larger communities on the smaller-and on the individual.

Distributive justice means that the wealth and power of a society needs to be dispersed in a manner that does not neglect the least of us, keeps a limit on excessive accumulation while not removing rewards for honest effort, and provides adequate support for the most important communities of our society.

Strong communities make strong people.

A bibliography for this article is available from the editor or from the author at curthillstrom@hotmail.com.
Ojibwe: We Look In all Directions
Book review by Helen Watkins

Ojibwe: We Look in All Directions, by Thomas Peacock (Aflon Historical Society Press, 2002), is a strange book. I mean this literally: I am a stranger to it. After reading and re-reading the text, what I finally came up with was not a book review, but a complete re-writing of the book. But in reconstructing it according to my understanding, I realized that I had totally destroyed what I held in my hands. And so I backed off, and decided to focus not on what the book is about, but on what it is.

At my age I feel lucky finally to have felt the tension of cultural difference challenge my ability to write. I had to admit my own deafness to language used in unfamiliar ways, to let go and simply listen. For the central meaning of this book lies not in what can be ferreted out by rational, logical outlining of themes and arguments. Instead, to use a famous line from my own culture, Thomas Peacock attempts to lay bare the "truth" of his text in a way similar to that of Hamlet: "by indirections, to find directions out."

What follows is a description of the process I followed in struggling to meet the man behind the work, pushing aside first and second impressions which turned out to be literal dead ends. Those impressions were not, on the surface, "unreasonable." I have read and reviewed Aflon Historical Society Press books before. They are always physically beautiful objects, and this one was no exception. For months I hardly dared read it, because the photographs and illustrations (by Marlene Wisuri) are a work of art in themselves, and too powerful aesthetically to absorb at once. It is also expensive ($39.00 hard cover), and in size and layout looks just like another gorgeous "coffee table" book. More important, the author appears superficially to be "like me," so I anticipated no interior struggle with the text. Associate Professor of Education at the University of Minnesota Duluth, Thomas Peacock has both an M.A. and a Ph. D. from Harvard. Although somewhat younger, he survived and thrived in institutions similar to the ones I came through. Why would he not think and "speak" like me?

Because he is not like me. Not descended from generations of Boston sea captains, he carries the pure and ancient blood of the Fond du Lac Superior Chippewa (Ojibwe). His childhood was spent in one of the poorest families of his tribe, living in shacks abandoned by others as uninhabitable, until at last his family found a real "house" with glass on the downstairs windows and flapping plastic only on the second floor. Somehow from this personal history he has tapped into his deepest reserves and brought to fruition the vision that he was endowed with at his naming ceremony: that he would eventually tell the story of his people, and in the telling actually mold the shape of future chapters as yet unlived.

This is not a pretty story, despite the book's external appeal. I hope the physical beauty of the book is not a marketing strategy; if you listen to what Peacock says, it is not. Harmony and balance, the peace and beauty of the natural world, the integrity of the human spirit which expresses itself in art and music, and can never be "owned" by another, have together under-girded the Ojibwe world view since time immemorial.

But interwoven with the celebration of this life-giving and mentally and physically healthy faith, are both intense anger and a long drawn-out grieving. The book, as Peacock makes clear in his first paragraph, is a story of genocide—a genocide as horror-filled as that produced in Nazi-occupied Europe, but a genocide that has killed not just bodies but souls, through the psychological, institutional, emotional, and linguistic destruction of a whole way of knowing who one is. The Center for Victims of Torture, in Minneapolis, is based on the knowledge that killing the "self," while leaving the body alive, is a powerful and effective means of wiping out a whole people. Peacock is testifying to the reality of such an experience.

And yet he never stops believing that change is possible, partly because change for the better has happened in the past, and more importantly because change, or growth, is an integral part of the Ojibwe world view. Based on the goodness of "mother" earth and of the great creator, change is made manifest in the replenishment of resources according to the circle of the seasons.

The circle is a sacred icon for the Ojibwe. And Peacock writes in circles, which is one of the reasons I could not appreciate his book on first reading. The style is purposely redundant, with every chapter seeming to tell the same story.

The Story of the Ojibwe

The Ojibwe were once part of a much larger "indigenous" population that arrived on this continent thousands of years ago and traveled from California to Canada and Newfoundland. They were always hunters, fishers, and gatherers, and limited farmers. The notion of property was notably absent from their culture. The earth did not belong to anyone; it was created for the shared sustenance of all creatures animate and inanimate. Its resources were a gift, not something whose access could be controlled, and therefore potentially infinite through time. Animals were one's "brothers," to be respected, dignified before being slain as a self-sacrifice.

The coming of white Europeans changed everything. Their eventual desire for land, purchased and owned as property, their introduction of alcohol and firearms, their commodification of native animals such as beaver, and the death they inflicted by war, starvation, and smallpox,
eventually decimated the "native" populations by as much as 90%. But Peacock is more interested in the cultural mayhem and the destruction of spiritual resources.

The fur trade with the French seemed to begin innocuously enough. Suddenly the Ojibwe had resources they had never imagined. They could trade beaver pelts for wool blankets, metal utensils, including guns, and alcohol. There were frequent inter-marriages, and Ojibwe became the language of trade and thus was preserved. The French were followed by the British and the Americans until both the supply of, and demand for, pelts suddenly ceased, and the Ojibwe found their resources gone. Not only had they murdered their "brothers" for material gain; they had, by buying into the concept of commerce, indentured themselves to the white man forever. Suddenly they were dependent on these foreigners for sustenance and even survival: they had nothing more to sell but their own identity as a free, self-determining people.

The fur trade was followed by an aggressive attempt to "civlize" these non-Christian "barbarians." No longer the idiom of commercial transaction, the Ojibwe language was banned or "translated" by missionaries like Father Baraga on Lake Superior. The federal government (under the notion of Indian "sovereign" but "separate," and therefore subordinate, "states") began to isolate native Indian communities on "reservations" and then systematically to destroy their civilization. Children were taken, at a heart-breakingly early age, from their families and sent away to boarding schools where they were re-acculturated, or "assimilated," forbidden to speak any language but English. Rules and regimentation combined with hopelessness and loneliness to turn these children literally into "orphans" of the state. Parents on the reservations eventually forgot how to parent, and the boarding school children could not even "parent" themselves, let alone anyone else. One of the saddest pictures in the book is a photograph of a letter sent by the author's great-grandmother in 1916 to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington. In it she begs for permission to keep her two sons in local schools, as she is a widow in ill health and unable to survive alone, to say nothing of running her farm. The letter, in perfect English and penned in proper epistolary form to a government official, was flatly denied without a reason. Three months later she died.

**Modern Ojibwe Culture**

The situation of the modern day Ojibwe is complex and filled with contradiction. Long-term abuse can destroy a whole people as well as individuals. Anger, particularly in a culture that considers it a private emotion—to be hidden and not expressed—can turn inwards and lead to self-destructive behavior on a large scale. As Peacock says, the Ojibwe people must confront "our greatest enemy—ourselves," in order to overcome the alienation resulting from internalizing the European definition of "outsider." Otherwise, they are doomed forever to low self-esteem and personal powerlessness,

manifest in depression, high drop-out rates in school, low academic achievement, adolescent pregnancy, family violence, chemical dependency, and suicide. Although power, authority, and control are concepts foreign to traditional Ojibwe philosophy, they must be learned and exercised in order to survive in today's world. But, as Peacock warns, they must come in the "Ojibwe way," from within, guided by the ancient concepts of equality and community which caused Benjamin Franklin to see Indian self-determination as a model for his new country's democracy.

Originally the Ojibwe concept of leadership had more in common with a burden than with a reward; it was a response to an immediate and temporary need of the community for those who had the skills to resolve a specific problem. A leader spoke not for himself but for the people, and his words were followed out of choice not regulation. Causing and compromise were the traditional forms of decision-making. But such leadership becomes impotent in a world of limited rather than shared resources. Psychologists have developed the image of a closed circle—like a pie that can be cut into a limited number of pieces—to illustrate the way members of an abusive, dysfunctional family view available resources like love. More for one means less for another. Peacock suggests that the same concept may lie behind the self-destructive battles often waged over leadership in the now politicized and factionalized Ojibwe clan groups.

The book goes on to outline the painfully gradual re-enfranchisement of Ojibwe communities through federal and state legislation, culminating in the **Indian Self-Determination and Assistance Act of 1975**, which gave Indian tribes the power to contract for services formerly provided by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, and to create out of their local tribal units the infrastructure necessary to support and implement the delivery of such services. Similar self-determination in education and the creation of Indian schools and community colleges, institutionalizing Indian curricula from the elementary schools up through the universities, was accomplished by the **Indian Education Act of 1972**. As with other minority groups, the results were sometimes explosive, as the new powers clashed with those of the established culture. Traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering rights were restored in ceded territories as legal "casements" on the land: rights that have always been there, not new permissions. But it took government intervention to control the resulting conflict, most intense over the restoration of Indian spear-fishing in northern Michigan.

But perhaps the most controversial effects of all have come from the **Indian Regulatory Gaming Act of 1988**, which gave native American communities the exclusive right to establish gambling casinos on reservation land and control over all resulting economic benefits. To someone like Peacock the Act represents a paradigm not unlike that of the original fur trade, and the irony does not escape him, nor his anxieties lest

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Book review: Ojibwe... (concluded)

history repeat itself. Money means more jobs, food, housing, medical services, and improved family structures. At long last the Ojibwe seem to have control again of their destiny and of the way their communities are governed. But with control always comes power, and he worries as he sees instances of intra-tribal political fighting.

The message of Peacock’s book is that if power is a necessary reality of the post-modern age, for all peoples (as he recognizes it to be), then he wishes that his people could find that power inside themselves, re-learning the old values and philosophy of their culture as a counter-balance to the corrupting influences of a society based on the limitation of resources. The Ojibwe language, he asserts over and over, is a highly “compressed” one, in which meanings are multifaceted and complex, conveyed by “indirection” and by the context in which words are placed. It is more than a language; it is a form of “knowledge” that can only be heard by those who “listen” for all its overtones. It is over 1600 years old. The Ojibwe must pick up their own narrative again, reach way back in history to find the thread that, in the process of reweaving, will lead them into the present and on to the future: it will be “a story of our own weaving, a story in which we are both the storytellers and the characters of the story.” It is, in his final sentence, his “responsibility ... to put our story into words, to teach.”

Helen Watkins is the former editor of the Forum.

Voices of Concern (concluded from page 10)

and the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis.

Experience has led us to a two-hour semi-structured format using a knowledgeable individual as a thought leader for a half-hour and a subsequent hour and a half discussion. Starting with the Winter 2003 explorations we will add a virtual group for pre- and post-meeting discussions along with selected, web-accessible, readings. Our desire is to create individual issues of concern, ones which stand alone while providing a thematic connection with other topics in the series.

In the Winter-Spring of 2003, Voices of Concern’s theme will be Democracy in Contemporary Society. We will explore concerns about individual rights and freedoms versus restrictions on those privileges needed to provide security. We will also look at the privileges commanded versus the responsibilities expected in a democracy.

Participants in the Winter-Spring session will provide ideas and direction for the 2003-2004 sessions and establish support for those ideas that need more in-depth explorations.

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New Board Members

Terrence Dinovo has degrees in English History & Literature and theology. He served as a parish pastor for five years, and at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, for over ten years as Curator of Special Collections. Currently, he is contracted with the Minneapolis Athenaeum as Director of Program and Development. His interests include collecting frontier literature, especially the works of Willa Cather, Maria Sandoz and John G. Neihardt. He sees the MISF serving an important place among researchers and scholarship as the economic and political climates change over the years.

Roger Hammer is publisher of The Place In The Woods, which features books with multi-cultural and diversity themes. He is currently developing a new imprint, “Different Books,” featuring children’s stories with main characters who have a disability and who overcome adversity. Hammer specializes in first-time authors and illustrators. His background is in writing for newspapers, magazines, and the wire service (UPI); assignments included the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s in Alabama, and Honeywell public relations. He has won numerous writing awards and has authored five books, including book of the year nominee American Woman—Hidden In History, Forging the Future.

Suzanne Mahmoodi spent twenty-two years as a Library Consultant for the State of Minnesota, specializing in the area of Staff Development and Continuing Education. She has a long-standing interest in scholarship and how libraries can aid independent scholars.

These people were elected to the board at the annual meeting, November 16, 2002. Continuing on the Board are David Juncker, Alice Schroeder, Dale Schwie, and Shirley Whiting. Schwie is the new treasurer. Whiting will continue as president.

Retiring from the board are Marilyn Chiat, Lionel Davis, and Brien Mulhern. We thank them for their service.

The board meets in the evening the first Thursday of each month. Visitors are welcome. Call Shirley Whiting 952-938-7446 or e-mail her at Shirleyg608@msn.com.

Member News and Notes

Morgan Grayce Willow has been awarded a two-week residency at New York Mills Artist Retreat for the last half of June, 2003. Willow, who read some of her poetry at the Annual Meeting, plans to work on “the barn poems.”
President’s Column

Politics is the applied form of Democracy
Richard Reich

Still basking in the glow of a successful twentieth anniversary and annual meeting, the new board met and received both a pep talk and a take-home assignment. I’m hoping that the assignment will yield results that deepen our sense of commitment to MISF, to each other, and to our efforts to encourage new avenues of interest.

I’m one of those people who likes to live my life while vicariously enjoying that of others. Knowing I’ll never hang glide, fish for marlin, or make a hole-in-one doesn’t lessen my curiosity about how others experience such events. Many of our members may have similar attitudes and wish for more opportunities to share with and partake of the experiences of others. We hope to increase the chances to do just that.

And knowing that our fragile planet is beset by strife hooks my guilt for nurturing others’ aspirations, especially when building community is possible. At present, my most effective opportunities are provided by the three organizations that have supported my own fragile sense of scholarship. It is no accident that each of the three is designed to provide support and community while personal exploration takes place.

MACAE, the Minnesota Association of Continuing Adult Education, offers an avenue into the world of higher education, community education, adult basic education, distance learning, human resources, as well as organizational development and training. One can find a rich cross section of interests and activities among the MACAE members, as well as support for interdisciplinary projects and ideas.

MISF is ideally suited to encourage the individual pursuit of scholarship and avocation. I’ve broadcast the benefits of MISF membership to my MACAE friends with the intention of promoting the complementary aspirations of each, which includes partnering in activities such as Forums in Greater Minnesota.

MJA, the Minnesota Jung Association, attuned as it is to the symbolic and psychological aspects of our nature, continues to teach me the importance of dreams and the unconscious as the wellsprings of awareness and creativity in our lives. If we recognize our shadow elements in our dreams, we become less likely to project those elements onto persons in the outer world. We are less likely to see enemies and more likely to experience empathy for the struggles of others, both within our circle of influence and in the wider world.

Building across boundaries is the work of an effective democracy. As Richard Reich said, Politics is the applied form of Democracy. What he didn’t say, or said elsewhere, is that sometimes it’s confusing, sometimes one-sided, sometimes didactic, but all voices want to be heard. As Carl Jung said, our Collective Unconscious is filled with all our voices—we ignore them at our peril. In many cases, people simply want to be acknowledged. It is not too much to ask of a great power such as the United States that it stop and listen to voices less strident than its own. Those voices, too, may contain some of the world’s truth.

In these times, scholarship may seem timid as wariness increases. With luck, it is our sense of history, of time, that may save us. Time, for scholars, has many dimensions. For others, it is often only ‘now.’

Is it any wonder, then, that I see so many connections among the various aspects of these organizations? I invite all our MISF members to explore similar possibilities within the groups to which they belong.

As we go forward into the next decade of MISF activity, we know we’re facing economic stringency. Like other non-profits, we’ll have to make-do with less. But less will be more if we continue to make the effort to gather new members who’ll bring their ideas and insights to strengthen our community. May our efforts bear fruit.

My best to you all in the New Year.

Shirley Whiting

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