

Children & the Great Blur - On the Initiation of Childhood Innocence, by Guido Mina di Sospiro

All children suffer when they are born to varying degrees,. This is no pessimistic life-is-an-illness-with-a-terrible-prognosis-because-its-outcome-cannot-be-but-fatal rigmarole. Far from it; however, only occasionally childbirth is an entirely smooth process, and psychologists of all schools cannot stop telling parents how important it is to reassure the newborn immediately, to establish the “bond” with the mother, etc., etc. It must be owned that there is a sharp contrast between the liquid womb environment and the outer, dry world of sharp lights and loud sounds. Childbirth can indeed be seen as, or actually be, a trauma.



At any rate, after a successful delivery—let us assume it is a vaginal one, the labor has been brief and the pregnancy as devoid as the delivery of any complications— the infant is in a state which could be defined, if somebody cared to be frank about it, catatonic. It will take months for the infant to start crawling. Later on, the upright posture will be a hard-won conquest. The first vaguely articulated words will send the elated parents into ecstasy, especially when it is their first child who utters his/her first words. But the fact is, it takes an infant about three years, give or take, depending on how “precocious” he might be, to start to come out of the BLUR.

This “blur” designation not only sounds remarkably unscientific and unpoetic, but patronizing, which is the opposite of what I mean.

Natural sciences tell us that only humans are helpless for so prolonged a period after their birth. Mammals specifically are all quicker in getting out of the unconscious, or “blurred” state. It is a necessity of nature, lest they should fall prey to all sorts of dangers. The human child, on the other hand, is... stoned, or “blurred,” for a frightfully long period. Most parents the world over rejoice when she starts giving signs of her coming into her own, by which they mean, her conscious state. An ancient Tamil love poem recites:

... Now that our child has learnt to play,
I feel like one who has virtues attained.

Westerners in particular seem obsessed not only by the notion of extracting the infant from the blur like a bad tooth, which is naturally understandable for in life one does need to have his wits about him—and the sooner the better—but by the far more epigenetic notion of instilling into him the largest possible dose of collective consciousness. By age

eighteen, the child, now a girl or boy, will be steeped into the stagnant waters of her/his society's canons—moral, aesthetic, religious, intellectual or otherwise. Her/his unconscious, the “blur” (s)he was born into, will have been forgotten.

Language is a great ally in this amnesiac process. In monolingual environments in particular, those in which the concept of translation, with all its implicit ambiguities, is an entirely foreign one, a language directs and defines the boundaries of the child's mind. He is faced with rules at every moment, and a rational, causal approach is impressed upon him. Simply put, be it arithmetic, or English, or whatever: From A, follows B; From B, C, and so on.

Yet, it is no easy chore for the child to emerge from the blur. The blur seems to linger, with its blurring effects which the rational, modern-day medicine (wo)man (the elementary school teacher) must get rid of.²

A child's logic—inundated by lower-order referential processes, and by a (refreshingly) “butterflylike” non sequitur structuring—bears a striking resemblance to that of some dreams.³ So does his (highly tentative) geometry, by which I mean, spatial sense. Very little Euclid to be found there to be sure. His cerebral syntax appears as though it has gone through a total immersion in Dadaism, while his temporal perception has very little to do with time intended as mere duration—no concept of the past or of the future, for one thing.

The child is blurred! will comment the rationalist. Let's help him out of the blur. That is the primary, if undeclared, aim of schooling.

The child knows the secret! will utter the mystic, wondering at the seemingly uncanny prescience of the little one.

A few years ago I was fascinated by logics and, at the same time, was a happy father for the first time in my life. I couldn't help writing down some of my child's rejoinders, which at the time struck me as eminently illogical. Similar things were said, later on, by our other two sons, at about the same age. Also, having been for two seasons the soccer coach of two different teams belonging to two different age-groups—6-7 and 8-9—my observations might claim to be a bit more than parochial. (The teams numbered 17 and 13 players, respectively. Ethnically, the children were of diverse backgrounds. There were mainland-Chinese players, Brazilian, Cuban, Cuban-American, WASP, Italian, Mexican, etc.)

There follow some examples:

My son at 2 years, 8 months. An instance of semantic interpolation, in the guise of a song. I sing:

“I love you dear, oh yes I do / when you're not near me, I feel so blue...”

He replies, singing the same melody:

“I love you daddy, oh yes I do / when you’re not near me, I feel so... yellow!”

2 years, 10 months, at a restaurant. I say:

“They make wonderful fried fish here.”

My wife adds: “Their mashed potatoes are good too.”⁴

Our toddler, after having gulped down plain tap-water, holding the glass adds:

“They make wonderful water, here!”

Same age, early morning, our bedroom. I ask T. to brighten the room by opening the curtains. He pulls the rope connected to them downwards, but the curtains close up even more tightly. Then, instead of pulling the parallel rope so as to open them—which rope, *nota bene*, is the same one, looped around a pulley—he pulls the same one, but this time upwards, and gets, if awkwardly, the desired result.

His logic was actually right on target: it is illogical to presume that (in the elementary mechanistic world) one might get the opposite effect by doing the same movement. If one kicks a ball forward, such a ball goes forward. To make it go backwards, one must kick it backwards, certainly not forward. Likewise, if one has to pull downwards to shut the curtains, then one must pull upwards to open them.

2 years, 11 months. He shows me a model car of a Ferrari in 1/24 scale.

“Look daddy: if you turn the front wheels, inside the steering wheel turns too!”

3 years. T. has been pestering us for a bit too long. I ask him:

“T., please, go play in your room.” To no avail. Then I try: “T., I invite you to go play in your room.” Now, that works! (It only worked once, naturally, but the point is: the verb to invite brought pleasant associations to his mind, from the many parties he had been invited to.)

I could go on, but I think I have illustrated the point sufficiently. Some of the above could belong to an updated Sufi repertoire of anecdotes and stories meant to extricate the would-be Sufi from the prison of linear- and pattern-thinking.

That is, roughly, what I call the blur. The blur is an inborn, endogenetic capacity we all have when just born and, although on the wane, through childhood, for a truly “other” *forma mentis*.

Many great sages have spent their lives trying to remember. Offhand, I can think of the

Sufis' Dhikr⁵, whose ultimate goal is a remembering of a very profound sort; Giordano Bruno's *De Memoria*, his most esoteric work; Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*; Rupert Sheldrake's *The Presence of the Past*; etc.

On the other hand, we all rejoice when children acquire their awareness, our collective consciousness, and the capacity for thinking rationally. They are out of fairyland, into the real world. But how real can it really be?

My contention is that the spirit, ostracized from the Drunken Universe—the Great Blur, or Overmind, or Other-ness or, from an Eastern perspective, the Tao—when suddenly confined in a fetus, and then in a child, suffers. That may account for all the crying that accompanies early childhood, more or less pronounced according to the individual child's personality. A newborn is a maladapted wretch, a spirit who, having long partaken of the Great Blur, is now involuntarily forced to forget and forego its very nature, and conform to the asinine pedantry of life in the real world.

By extension, a man's whole life (a man's more than a woman's, for in my opinion a woman is less divorced from her former state of excellence, although she may be entirely forgetful of it) is one of misguided convulsions, unless he tries to remember. The Great Blur, the Overmind, is not only behind us. It runs a parallel life, it is with us, if only we open up to it. When death will come, if we shall by then have remembered (albeit as incompletely as circumstances will allow), the transition back to the Great Blur will be presumably far less painful than its opposite was, i.e., the inception of our life on earth.

Is there a connection between the whirling dervishes' incantatory dance and the children's delight in merry-go-rounds? There is indeed. While adult mystics engage in such a circular dance so as to enter an altered state and "remember," children can ride on a merry-go-round for hours without any dizziness.

From personal experience, I know that, at my age, I cannot endure much more than a few minutes of merry-go-round without feeling the symptoms of motion sickness.

As for children, oughtn't we consider them as little people? After all, they are little indeed and, as they grow in size, their Otherness diminishes, their blur is forgotten, and we are delighted to welcome one or many more stolid representatives of this species gone astray.

Our thirdborn, 2 and ½ years old, is remarkably "aware." It is no wonder: with an extroverted personality, the eagerness to emulate his two older brothers, and a multilingual household where English, Italian and Spanish are spoken interchangeably, he is rapidly acquiring consciousness. Our *niñera*, a sweet 50-year-old woman from the Dominican Republic, is from time to time amazed by his remarks, and exclaims: "¡Como sabe ese niño!" (Literally: How much does this child know!). From the Great Blur's standpoint, however, her interjection could be paraphrased thus: "This child is unlearning (or forgetting) at a very sustained pace!"

At the end of teenagehood, the child-adolescent “comes of age.” Thanks to the completed assimilation of the collective consciousness, (s)he becomes a rational idiot, for his/her painstakingly acquired ratiocination is but full-fledged asininity. The more idiotic the adolescent proves to have become, the more delighted his teachers are, displaying all the *misérable vanité des (idiots) savants*.

But children, our God-given little people, children, aren't they pretty... gnomes? “Gnome” from the Greek *gnómê*: judgment, opinion, purpose. Their early utterances—the “alien” ones, the ones we deem nonsensical—might be recognized as a gnomology, an anthology of aphorisms emanating directly from the Great Blur. Their sweet, miniature physio-gnomy does tell us something, just like the gnomon, the pin of a sundial, tells us quite straightforwardly the hour of day—provided the sundial be aligned correctly, of course.

Shouldn't we revere the gnosis of our adorable little people? I do not invoke the renunciation of the body and things terrestrial, far from it. I am simply at variance with this frenetic deletion of everything apparently irrational and “other” that our society forces upon our offspring. Let them indeed learn geometry and grammar and what have you. But let's keep the door, or Portal, open. Let it be clear that Euclidean geometry is wonderfully practical for architects and engineers, not for anything profound; that grammar tackles language, not the Logos; that religion is (at very best) the butter, not the milk it originally came from.⁶

Doctrine will impoverish and eventually falsify any sort of gnosis, no matter how transcendently truthful. There probably is no predetermined path leading back to inner knowledge. What should be stressed, though, is that *Sapientia*, *Sophia*, the Logos, are, and we all knew them when we were part of the Great Blur. Why forget all that that, and then even repudiate something that we do not even vaguely remember anymore?

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1. I wonder how Piaget, to name but one illustrious child psychologist, would jump at it?
2. Even the child's chronic state of wonderment at everything new she/he comes to know may be interpreted in a rather unusual way: It is really her/his “blurred” unconscious that is appalled by the pedantries and cheap thrills it is going to have to put up with during this brief interlude of terrestrial captivity.
3. It is no surprise that the newborn child sleeps 16 to 18 hours, at least half of which is D-sleep. Conversely, the young adult human spends 16 to 17 hours awake and 7 to 8 hours asleep, of which perhaps 6 hours are spent in S-sleep and 1.5 hours in D-sleep. Both S- and D-sleep, on the average, decrease slightly with increasing age.
4. Incidentally, this dialogue is awful! It sounds like a TV commercial! Also, I don't like either fish or meat!

5. Is there a connection between the whirling dervishes' incantatory dance and the children's delight in merry-go-rounds? There is indeed. While adult mystics engage in such a circular dance so as to enter an altered state and "remember," children can ride on a merry-go-round for hours without any dizziness.

6. Naughty me—I am so tempted to write, rather than "butter", "rancid, mouse-eaten cheese"!