

# ~ From One Inquiring Mind to Another ~

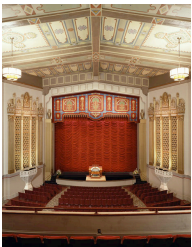
"Unity without diversity is conformity; diversity without unity is chaos." - Fr. Ron Chocol\* #5 August 20, 2011

NEW FEATURE: In a effort to present more information and call on more qualified sources I have added clickable (blue) internet links. -jb

## MOVING MOVIES (OF SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE)

[The Visitor](#) - really brought home to me the tremendous hardships suffered by very real people who were caught up in the Homeland Security dragnet, and one man's effort to help. PG-rated

*Waltz with Bashir* (2008) Award-winning film of an former Israeli infantry soldier trying to piece together memories in his experiences in the 1981 Lebanon War. Very powerful and graphic with some explicit sexual content and disturbing war images. Most powerful reminder to me how demoralizing war is both for the victor and the vanquished. R-rated ([more](#))



FAVE CLASSIC MOVIE: [Strangers on the Train](#) A Hitchcock classic seen at the beautifully restored [Stanford Theater](#). Followed up with a treat with friends at [The Peninsula Creamery](#), both in Palo Alto.

## A PROBLEM SOLVING TOOL

One of the most useful concepts I came across in my study of philosophy in college was that of a German philosopher who lived in the 1700's. His named was Georg Hegel, and his concept was that of **the dialectic**. Though the Greeks first came up with the term to refer to various methods of reasoning and discussion to discover truth, I have found Hegel's theory more interesting and useful, especially in dealing with social issues.

Basically, the Hegelian dialectic asserts that there are two opposing points of view which make up a social problem. (He also applies it to the evolution of social change in history.) The first part is called the **thesis** (the status quo). The second is all that opposes the thesis, and it is referred to as the **antithesis** (dissatisfaction). Each side of a

proposition, (the thesis) and its opposing view (the antithesis), has its own set of beliefs and rationale which are perfectly valid in their own right. When the pros and cons of each (and their ramifications) are discussed by skilled, open-minded, and patient people, the best of both worlds, a compromise or a **synthesis** has a chance to emerge. It is a win-win process. Anyway, that's the theory and the ideal.

Being aware of the dynamic of this construct allows the participants to see and value all the components of the process. Each has its own truth, and it is through the process of debate with the intent on reaching a compromise, that every part is respected as a component of change.

Hegel's dialectic was, for me, the holy trinity of rational problem solving, not only in college but also in "the real world" thereafter. I have tried to employ its use in raising our children when they were old enough to reason and capable of a compromise--*when* it was a negotiable item.

The same principles were used when dealing with my students, setting up at the start of every new semester a Class Constitution. It was really just a pre-arranged agreement which we would discuss and modify, and agree to sign. It could be amended if necessary. [Rights and Responsibilities](#) were clearly defined, and all (teacher included) were held accountable to upholding our mini-constitution.

Also, working with teachers and administrators on grievances and negotiations was much easier when each understood and respected the truths and rationale the other held near and dear. Certainly, anyone in a relationship knows, or should know, about the art and wisdom of compromise.

Could any less be expected of our law makers?

When the respect for this process breaks down (when one side has won too much over time, feels taken advantaged of, etc.) a state of conflict erupts, where winning,



Georg Hegel 1770-1831

\*Father Chocol SS was my first philosophy teacher in college. He tried to have us think critically and creatively rather than memorize and recite. It was a challenge to us since we had so little life experience at that age and were used to the latter. Thanks, Fr. C. -jb

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and often winning at any cost, takes over. Ugly arguments, *ad hominem* attacks, lies, exaggerations, fights, strikes, riots, and, the ultimate failure to communicate, war and self-destruction can be the choice of the uncompromising mind set--at any or all levels, from interpersonal to global.

Recognizing the nature of debate and compromise may be had by understanding and agreeing to the dialectic process. The current oath of office for congresspersons does not include a pledge to honor the process of fair and respectful debate with the intention of seeking the common good of all concerned. It does pledge allegiance to the Constitution, but I wonder if ways of behavior such as kindness, patience, and respect are explicitly stated there. Might this be a consideration in the future, especially when some are pledging not to give an inch, i.e, not to compromise, even before listening to debates. How lock-step is that?

### EXEMPLARS IN OUR HISTORY

Two of the most impressive books I have ever read about ongoing debates in history were David McCullough's *John Adams* and Doris Kerns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals: the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*.

The first book alluded to the differences between Adams and Jefferson, two of the most educated, cultured, and refined men of their times. True, they did at one time have a bitter falling out, but fortunately they were brought together by a mutual [friend](#), and for the remainder of their lives (Goodwin says) their letters gave the world the greatest literary exchange of opposing philosophies of governance the world has known. [\(Check this link for some great examples of these letters.\)](#)

Those truths are still with us today, and are in constant dynamic tension with each other: Individual rights vs. the common good, states vs. federal government, *laissez faire* (unrestricted) business vs. need for regulation, etc. When one side (thesis) dominates, abuses emerge, and then the pendulum must swing back to counter (antithesis) the imbalance--seeking the mean, the homeostasis,

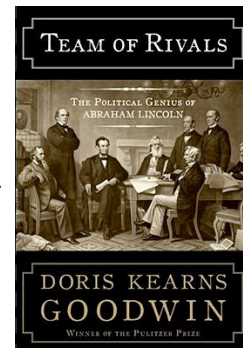


John Adams 1735-1826

the balance, (the synthesis) needed for the common good.

Lincoln, according to Ms. Goodwin, took great pains to surround himself with those best representing the microcosm of the fragmented nation in order to understand, debate, and come to a higher synthesis for the preservation of the nation and its gradual birth into a slave-free society. Unfortunately, the Civil War became a part of this process. Lincoln is still revered as a man of insight, patience, compassion, and the ability to include and embrace all in his process.

If only we and our countrymen could learn from these great men and how they dealt with their challenging times, and could rise to the occasion "with malice toward none and charity for all." That President Obama had read and was "strongly influenced" by a *Team of Rivals* tells me much about his character. Patience, Barack, Patience. You, too, Speaker of the House John Boehner, and all legislators and leaders of our country, citizens: Patience, kindness, perseverance.



### AN ONLINE POLITICAL COMPASS

I am trying not to take sides in the great debates before us, but trying to concentrate more on the process rather than the outcome. I see myself as a centrist, but others see me as liberal. I was happy to take an online test which gave me a more objective view of my biases. It was a very fascinating experience with some great questions. I highly recommend you try it at [www.politicalcompass.org/test](http://www.politicalcompass.org/test). I was surprised to be grouped with Gandhi.

MEANWHILE, continue to toss me an occasional bone of encouragement, my only payment for this effort. It's difficult trying to write for such a diverse and talented group of people. I'm just a generalist trying to find some meaning and fit the pieces together. Sometimes that's a gift, sometimes not.

Finally, I would ask prayers and/or compassionate thoughts for one of our readers who is in stage IV cancer. He emailed me about his life and illness, and we spoke on the phone. We discovered mutual friends, and hope to meet soon. - *Pax vobiscum.* -Joe