A Prefatory Note

With the publication below of Professor Irving Louis Horowitz’s essay on “Aaron Wildavsky: Facts, Policies, Morals,” the editors of Modern Age are pleased to introduce a new series of essays, “Great Teachers in Our Lives.” The addition of this feature, it is hoped, will be as fully successful as that of the “Reconsiderations” that have been appearing regularly in these pages during the past nine years and have elicited the thanks of our readers.

A re-estimation of the work and thought of an important and influential conservative thinker has as its basic purpose that of bringing a reader into contact with the essential contribution and the value of a scholar and writer in the general area of life, literature, and thought, and in the particular context of ideas that have compelling consequences and impact on intellectual and cultural discourse and directions. The evaluative element as a given, hence, is the underlying critical property of a reconsideration in the common pursuit of standards of discrimination.

“Great Teachers in Our Lives,” on the other hand, is in form and content intended as a testamentary statement, one that pays special tribute to a memorable teacher who not only exemplifies the art of teaching and instruction, but also provides guiding lessons for the mind and life of the taught. “A teacher,” an American man of letters, Henry Brooks Adams, reminds us, “affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.” Undeniably, there is the contrary view as evidenced in the often quoted cynical opinion regarding teaching like that expressed by George Bernard Shaw, “He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.”

Particularly in an era of disenchantment directly following the Great War of 1914-1918, cynicism was to set in and has been a constant benchmark mark of the modern temper and of those forces and tendencies that lead to relativism and disorder in the community and in the soul. It is to be hoped that the ongoing essays celebrating “Great Teachers in Our Lives” will not only help resist the “enemies of the permanent things” who advocate impiety but also, and at the same time, affirm faith in the possibility of one’s “growing wings to overcome gravity.” The intrinsic value of a true teacher is ultimately measured by commitment to and continuance of this distinctive possibility.

From time immemorial estimations of the teacher’s calling have appeared in plenty, which says something about its profound importance and enduring influence. No one can easily forget a great teacher, even as the absence of a great teacher in one’s life is a mark of loss and
incompleteness. One's formative education is a key to the future character of the self, as well as of the educated self in its larger place and role in the transmission of culture through the ages. The connections here, visible and invisible, are inescapably tied to the beneficences of the teaching process, when, as Ralph Waldo Emerson states, “a transfusion takes place,” when teacher and pupil are joined in “the same state or principle.”

The present and future essays on “Great Teachers in Our Lives” will serve to attest to the character and effects of this “transfusion.” Clearly the greater a teacher is the greater is the legacy acquired by the taught. In a corollary sense, then, the new series of essays will require from each of the contributors a careful inspection of what exactly defines and exemplifies greatness in a teacher and the reasons for gratefulness on the part of the student. In this respect, it should become apparent to a reader that both the ongoing series, “Great Teachers in Our Lives,” and “Reconsiderations,” inevitably revolve around the principle of measuring and defining the quality of excellence.

Professor Horowitz’s essay identifies and illumines the virtue of excellence in his valuation of Aaron Wildavsky as a scholar and a teacher of political science whose legacy continues to this day with the same brilliance and inspiration and sincerity that once touched his students, auditors, and readers. Equally revealing in this essay is Horowitz’s commemoration of Wildavsky’s “larger moral vision” in his work and thought that demands attention if his accomplishment is to be more fully appreciated in “an age given over to technical solutions to manageable problems.” This is certainly a courageous claim to make in a time of obsessively relativistic habits of thought and opinion, as they are expressed and advanced by the academic community.

In his astute discussion of Wildavsky’s famous book, *The Revolt Against the Masses*, Horowitz underlines the components of his high judgment of Wildavsky’s significant contribution when he writes: “It is assuredly wiser to read his essays in a way that enables us to adopt his multi-tracked approach: first the facts, then the policies, and finally, the moral consequences.” We live in times when, alas, terms like “larger moral vision” and “moral consequences” are largely ignored or, more often, scorned.

To be able to state as emphatically as Horowitz does that Wildavsky “spoke and wrote with a frankness and freshness that unmistakably set him apart from other political scientists and pundits” is a statement that also relates to a scholar-teacher’s “moral call” and how, in turn, this call exacts from one an answer to a central and critical question: “What are the human consequences of events and then of policies?” The essential and singular worth of a teacher is ultimately tied to how, in fine, the moral demands a teacher makes of his students, his readers, is invariably dependent on and circumscribed by a teacher’s own moral bearings. Wildavsky’s place and role as a teacher, indeed his most responsible and honest aims and efforts, centered on his “heightened sense of culture in the formation of a nation.”

Confluent with this major facet of Wildavsky’s achievement, and one that not only defined his purposes as a teacher, but also impelled the first principles of his calling, was his overarching cultural concern. As Horowitz writes: “Culture was [for Wildavsky] ... a peculiar transmission bolt in which an older generation bestows on a younger generation the wisdom of the past, without enveloping that wisdom in mysticism or dogmatism.” Wildavsky’s loyalty to his vocation as a teacher of political science must also be discerned, Horowitz reminds us, in his disdain for dogmatic ideologies and “ideological argumentation,” and in his affirmation of “the need for political sci-
ence and the faith in the common culture." In its whole and in its parts, then, Horowitz's essay thoughtfully steers our attention to and inspires our veneration for the office of a great teacher.

Here, in this issue of *Modern Age*, Horowitz's tribute to Aaron Wildavsky as a teacher who instinctively and consistently defends his "moral preferences and concerns" takes its rightful place among the most estimable testaments of devotion in modern times. Insofar as we live "in a world gone instrumental and electronic," Horowitz reflects, the likelihood "of a human past informing a human present" is uncertain in the way experienced by Aaron Wildavsky. Which makes it all the more imperative to include in *Modern Age* a series, "Great Teachers in Our Lives," as a salute to our sacred patrimony in the face of the fury of its modern and postmodern denigrators.

The sacral and sapiential character of a great teacher must be insisted on in our predominantly secular society, when the need to distinguish between "true and false shepherds" is particularly urgent. In this respect, Wildavsky's commitment is especially praiseworthy insofar as the holy ground of his teaching was rooted in his Jewish heritage, or as Horowitz notes: "In the larger sphere, his belief in the Jewish tradition and religion in which he was reared governed his moral sensibility and informed his political judgments." The "enemies of the permanent things," as we see to our horror all around us, are zealously working to expunge the religious element at every opportunity and in every way, thus endangering those formative influences that determine the character and culture envisioned by a great teacher like Aaron Wildavsky, and the moral and the ethical life that he sought to promote as a teacher.

Today, to observe the brutalizing efforts of secular superstructures seeking to extinguish the religious element ultimately must alarm those of us who esteem a teacher's labors to foster a humane civilization. This is akin to the moral alarm that Wildavsky felt, as Horowitz cogently reminds his reader: "The anomaly of people writing [or speaking] about democracy without the least interest in observing its canons never ceased to amaze him."

It is altogether appropriate to conclude these prefatory remarks by turning our attention to the renowned Jewish philosopher of religious existence, Martin Buber (1878-1965), and specifically to his reflective essay, "Of Teaching and Learning," in *Israel and the World* (1948). Equally appropriate is the fact that Will Herberg (1909-1977) includes this piece as the concluding selection in his useful anthology, *The Writings of Martin Buber* (1956). (Herberg, it will be remembered, was a distinguished contributor to the pages of *Modern Age from the time of its inception in 1957.* What Buber has to say about teaching and the life of the spirit, and how "a teaching generation transmits it to a learning generation," further underlines the rationale for featuring essays on "Great Teachers in Our Lives," beginning with Irving Louis Horowitz's "Aaron Wildavsky: Facts, Policies, Morals."

For the true and authentic teacher the "very act of transmission" is a consonant act of renewal; it is also the yield of a learning process in "life that realizes the teachings in the changing potentialities of every hour," as Buber declares. To achieve genuine greatness a teacher must be finally aware that imparting knowledge for the sake of knowledge is hardly enough; that teaching must have a unifying spiritual center—and power—linked "to the holy origin and the holy destination." Nor does a great teacher in one's life ever forget that he is "pointing the way," that his calling has a "power strong enough to overcome all corroding forces," of which decadence is now our most serious affliction.

The last lesson to be learned from
“Great Teachers in Our Lives” is a lesson in reverence that no generation can ever ignore or dishonor, one that binds and unites teacher and pupil, teaching and learning, “teaching and deed.” This lesson is embodied in the poignant final sentence of Martin Buber’s essay: “The spark that leaps from him who teaches to him who learns rekindles a spark of that fire which lifted the mountain of revelation to the very heart of heaven.”

—George A. Panichas