

THE IMPLICATIONS OF PAGELESS DOCUMENTATION  
(3: 1939-1979)

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The recent shift in documenting research, whereby a writer merely alludes to a particular document without indicating the numbers of the pages where the data may be found, has profound implications for the human race. For instance, if one quotes from Carl Rogers's *On Personal Power*, which was published in 1977, and the book is the sixth item in the bibliography, one need only note "(6: 1977)" after the citation, and the reader knows to which book the author is referring.

When I first encountered this "new" kind of documentation, I was incensed. After all, I frequently want to refer to a quotation or see it in context in the original source. Or a quote may whet my appetite for more of an author's insights. Then, too, working with graduate students over the past couple of decades, I have sometimes needed to check citations that sounded strange, phony, or even plagiarized. So I was unhappy at no longer being

able to find a reference—at least not with any degree of ease, efficiency, or accuracy.

But, upon second thought, I must admit how wrong I was. It seems that there are reasons "as plentiful as blackberries" (6: d. 1616) to applaud the practice. Perhaps the reasons can be stated succinctly:

First, of course, it makes for cleaner manuscripts and publications, and eliminates the need for long, cumbersome footnotes (8: 1981), which may or may not be read. In the long run, it should save incalculable secretarial time, research money, duplicating expenses, and acres of forests. Hence, it clearly has economic and environmental implications while humanizing work.

Equally important, it is an interesting application of Occam's Razor or the law of parsimony (4: d. 1349). In the long run, this may have profound implications for both scholars and learners. Dwight Eisenhower once de-

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defined a philosopher as a person taking "more words than he needs to say less than he knows" (1: ?). Surely, it would be a step forward for humanity if researchers and professors were to say things more simply. Plato once remarked that they who lie become liars (5: II d. 348 B.C.). Perhaps those who apply the law of parsimony become linguistically parsimonious? In a society that is increasingly conscious of leisure, it is important to devise interesting ways for both scholars and the general public to spend their time. One day I ran across a reference of the kind that precipitated this discussion, wanted to check it, and spent half a day thumbing through a three-volume work trying to locate it. While my Anger Index increased (*cf.* next item), at one point that afternoon I finally concluded that there were only two ways to find the reference: Read all three volumes or write the author. So there is obviously value in the system of pageless documentation, especially for people who are looking for ways to spend their time.

Psychologists tell us that suppressed anger is like a boiling pot with no safety valve. Hence, it may be argued that the more occasions one has to vent one's anger, the more psychologically healthy one will be. And what better way for a scholar to contribute to human health than to get a better sense of his or her Anger Index? In fact, such people might very well work in cooperation with clinical psychologists to develop new projective tests to determine such indexes, tests that could conceivably be useful to insurance actuaries as well as to the medical and mortuary sciences.

While it might be argued that hunting for citations that can't be easily found is a lonely business, there is a contrary way of looking at it. Ample documentation exists on the lonely aspects of researching (3: 1939-1979). If, however, one had to resort to writing the author, as mentioned above, more communication might occur between researchers and authors, teachers and learners—both by

phone and by letter. Hence, pageless documentation would induce social interaction that otherwise would be impossible, or at least unlikely. And any author with a sense of responsibility and collegiality would be obligated to respond or be thought odd, uncommunicative, antisocial, or even unscholarly and unprofessional. Also, by responding, he or she might possibly reap an occasional fringe benefit in the form of a dinner or a cocktail party.

We know from experience that both "truth" and "falsehood" are frequently discovered to be myth. Theodore H. White says that his reports from the front in the Chinese-Japanese war in the early 1940's were really believed only when they became enshrined in print (7: 1978). My own research (2: 1961) indicates that one analytical error after another was repeated in edition after edition of *The Federalist* because the writers and researchers didn't return to the original materials to check the accuracy of quotations or the context for the interpretations. In fact, much revisionist history results from just such failure to check. But if the scaffolding by means of which one may conveniently check another's scholarship is eliminated entirely, it will almost inevitably lead to new and perhaps more inventive methodologies. For instance, research could become more intuitive, and future generations might have more respect for the educated hunch or the bolt from the blue. Of course, it could also produce generations of parrots (although I am certainly not anti-ornithological), and, somewhere down the road, a greater crop of cynics, when some future generation discovers that the emperor is truly unclothed (2: 1961).

On balance, then, one must conclude that pageless documentation seems to lead in generally hopeful directions. It also speaks to the inventiveness of a new generation of researchers. And it may relate to the quantity of advanced degrees now produced in the United States.

#### NOTES

1. Eisenhower, Dwight David. *New York Times*, date not known.
2. Fairfield, Roy P., ed., *The Federalist Papers*. Garden City, Doubleday, 1961, 1965.
3. -----, Archives, 1939-1979. (My files are full of such notations.)
4. Occam, William of (d. 1349). *Dialogus*. (See any encyclopedia.)
5. Plato (d. 348 B.C.). *The Complete Works*.
6. Shakespeare, William (d. 1616). *King Henry IV, Part I*.
7. White, Theodore H. *In Search of History*. New York, Harper & Row, 1978.
8. Zerby, Charles L. "Endangered Species Is Now Incarcerated At the End of the Book." *New York Times*, August 23, 1981.

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