

Our Disposable Past: A Protest

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OUR PREOCCUPATION with youth is marked by mixed feelings. Perhaps more than any other people we permissive Americans protect and indulge our children. Surely we provide them with opportunities that would have astounded our own grandparents. So, when the young are ungrateful, we are hurt and angered. And we are baffled, if not outraged, when the most privileged of all, the youngsters in college, erupt into protest highjinks. Newsmen of course focus on the obvious drama, student clashes with police and academic administrators. But the third party remains, somehow, obscure: the faculty. Conservatives sometimes fancy that it is the radicalism of activist professors which does the unsettling. This simplistic search for a scapegoat is understandable but wide, wide of the mark. So seldom do so few such professors have any effect that anxiety about them is a waste. The whole business is far more complicated. Our collegiate young feel alienated for numerous likely reasons. I want to single out one of these because it has been generally ignored and because it does bear directly on the responsibility of us college teachers. In brief, my argument is this: that our campus population is disoriented because it is increasingly cut off from any sense of the past.

Evidently, in the now generation, people concerned about such a subject are just not with it. Bring it up in some circles, and you will be called a square. After all, we are swamped by so many problems calling for immediate attention—taxes, inflation, war, Pentagon, pollution, the pill, population explosion, inner-city decay, suburban sprawl, draining of natural resources, ecological foul-ups, radical feminism, violence, crime, credibility gaps, racism, drug addiction, terrifying medical costs—that for a university creature to prate about past history looks like indulgence in an academic luxury. The past, we say in effect, is not usable, is disposable, dead, and therefore nonsense.

And yet our impatient dismissal of the past is a peculiarly American thing. The attitude is well documented: from, say, our greatest Phi Beta Kappa speaker, Emerson, in some of his moods; to Henry Ford's dictum "History is bunk"; to the sophomore's demand that every quarter hour in the classroom or over his books have immediate relevance; to the haste with which educational leaders take bold, new, innovative approaches to the challenges of our changing campuses—*i.e.*, in the parlance their public relations staffs release to the mass media.

Against this current I paddle my own canoe. The leaky little thing is jammed to the gunwales with my pet prejudices. To itemize the cargo, I admit to this list of partial truisms:

1. History repeats itself—rather, those ignorant of history are condemned to repeat it.

2. We cannot know where we are unless we know where we have been.

3. Much that appears new to us is really not new.

4. All fruitful radicalism, all productive revolutions, were started by persons grounded in some solid tradition.

5. All innovations in art, all gains in thought, have come from those who were masters of what had been achieved before them.

6. Perhaps in science the study of past methods, discoveries, and blunders is small help in tackling some specific problem; but this likelihood has no bearing on the extra-laboratory messiness of most human endeavors in, say, politics, marriage, city-making and city-breaking, education, religion, institutional existence, private life.

7. Without a view of the past we lack perspective; without perspective we can have no common-sense foresight; without foresight we have no vision; and, as the prophet said, "Without vision the people perish."

8. Finally, "Human history," declared one savant after he had survived the First World War, "becomes more and more a race between education and disaster."

So ends my list, but not my prejudices. In honesty, I must admit some more, those of a superfluous academic. For instance, my outmoded notion of what a university should be. It is no longer, in the Latin sense of that word, a university, a one-turning about some center. The up-to-date label is

multiversity: a many-turning. Sometimes it looks like a carnival of merry-go-rounds, with every rider snatching for his own brass ring. More kindly viewed, the university today is a huge, intricate and expensive social service station, trying to meet all the multifarious and ever-increasing demands society puts upon it. As to the millions now on our campuses, most students attend to better their lot—which is an item in the American credo—by preparing for some specialized job—which is an item our economy calls for, or used to. Some students come for a liberal education, hopefully, for at least a start on one before they narrow down to the workaday careers life will demand of them. Ideally, such students might become our leaders of opinion. Potentially, they form our "natural aristocracy," the phrase bequeathed on their sort by the equalitarian democrat who founded the University of Virginia. Black or white, rich or poor, personable or otherwise, they are a minority. I intend to speak up in behalf of their minority rights. At least my prejudice about what a university ought to be has some bearing on their predicament. In brief, I am committed to this idea of a university: Whatever else our institutions of higher learning have or will become, the essence of their function in a free society is to foster, in John Jay Chapman's words, "a reverence for intellect and a feeling of unity with the history of mankind." So far as we neglect, cheapen, chip at, or give only commencement rhetoric to this idea, so far do we betray our main reason for existence.

This and other prejudices of mine limit me. One bias I cannot shake is that I am a teacher of the humanities. I work amid the ruins of an antique curriculum. The humanities, since the morning time of Western history, have of course centered on the study of history, letters, philosophy, and the arts. Today we speak of our vast

educational enterprises as the Knowledge Industry. By contrast, to acquire and propagate knowledge merely has never been the educational purpose of humanistic study. Rather, it was and is to lead the student into an experience, a disciplined experience stirring the senses and emotions, the conscience and imagination, as well as the intellect. For in the great books and works of art, past and present, lives the compendium of mankind's experience—what the race of man has somehow lived through since civilization has dawned.

Civilization, we are coming to see, is a precarious arrangement. In fact, about one hundred years ago (when mass schooling was in its infancy) a great critic worried about this very precariousness. He argued that if the aim of education is to know ourselves and the world around us, we need culture as a bulwark against the anarchy perennially threatening. And culture, for Matthew Arnold, meant acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and thought and said. On this humanistic base some of us have found our prescription for liberal education: that we teachers should try to develop the critical-minded yet also well-rounded person, one whose schooling has developed his intellect and character.

Though all this sounds moralistic and Victorian, we cannot dismiss Matthew Arnold. But since his day historical events have shown us that there are two things wrong with his view.

First, to acquire the finest liberal education conceivable is no guarantee that one is civilized. We of the twentieth century know that some of those who perpetrated the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps were, by any ordinary definition of the phrase, devotees of culture. The truth is, such traits of personality and character as sensitivity, conscience, rigor and subtlety of intellect, largeness and warmth

of heart cannot be guaranteed by any system of schooling. These gifts a person has, potentially, before he encounters either science or humane letters in a classroom. Without them, though a person may be loaded with degrees, honorary or otherwise, from the world's greatest universities, he remains a barbarian and a potential ally of anarchy. Thus far, I submit, Matthew Arnold has been both right and wrong.

His second error—or was it ours in reading him?—was his emphasis on the best that has been thought and said. By ivory tower dwellers that word *best* can give to culture connotations of the cold, chaste, serene marble of the museums. The truth is, the arts and humanities have never proffered us easy samples of beauty or simple and reassuring models of moral excellence. They have in fact dealt just as fully and freely with the human worst. I do not mean they teach these sorts of things—any more than the Bible does—but the classics are full of crime, violence, treachery, greed, madness, folly, and downright pettiness. This is why they should initiate us into awareness that we human beings are terribly mixed and complicated creatures: and why, for one thing, we have never behaved like specimens in the laboratory—and pray God, never will. One corollary is that, to gain a sense of the past and to profit by a liberal education, is to be moved, not only by mankind's noblest achievements and aspirations, but also by the active presence of evil, all the destructive forces working within us and around us. If a liberal education once meant a preparation for living in this world more than for a livelihood, then to the sweetness and light of culture we need an admixture of this strong and bitter stuff. We are careless readers of, say, the *Iliad* if we glean from it only Homer's wonder at the iron-hearted valor of his epic heroes and his compassion for human suffering. After all,

the central squabble among his heroes is over the banalities of money and sex. Jacques Barzun was both wise and witty when he recommended a new label for the humanities: "the misbehavioral sciences."

The sense of the past, as I have been groping for it here, has been described by Herbert J. Muller this way:

It is the story of a "rational animal" who thereby lacks the sureness of instinct, is a prey to irrational desires, and of all animals leads the least sensible life; who alone is free to choose and aspire, and so is forever torn by doubt and discontent, from which spring at once his loftiest values and his ugliest hates and fears; who alone can know truth and virtue, and by the same token is prone to error and evil, capable of folly and brutality. . . . At all times it is the story of the inescapable hazards that man brought upon himself when he took to playing with fire and then, without forethought, set out on the extraordinarily bold adventure of making over his world; while ever since he began to reflect he has been seeking a repose that he can find only in the death he fears.¹

This historian sees in the past both high tragedy and comedy—and a theme whose spirit is "at once ironic, compassionate, and reverential." To lead our students toward something like this spirit is—or once was—the responsibility of the humanities teacher. This lively, felt, disciplined sense of the past they cannot get for themselves. As we fail our students here we deny them their right to their past. We make them provincials in time. We trap them within their own era. What is dreadful about the protagonist of Orwell's novel *1984* is that the dictator and his establishment have cut Winston Smith off from all but the dimmest, most propagandized impressions of past history. Until by cunning and ac-

cident he learns something of the real past, he has no standards, no basis for comparison, no way to judge the totalitarianism that negates his humanity. He endures the unexamined life—which Socrates said was not fit to live. The totalitarian state must impose on its cog-citizens a rigid ideology, demands conditioned reflexes. It wants no critical spirit. It strangles all philosophizing. It cannot tolerate philosophy as the guide to life.

Consider a few symptoms of our indifference to the past. We are lonely, we Americans, a perennial motif in our literature from its colonial beginnings down to *Black Humor*. In the ever-accelerating pace of these times, no one stays put for long. Americans are most at home when wheels are speeding beneath them. We are too much on the move to form lasting relationships or even to become acquainted with our own selves. We exist and encounter one another in snippets. Coherence is gone, and continuity. Instead of community, we have dehumanized disconnectedness. For community comes out of some bonds with the past, out of common and shared experiences and memories.

Who, for instance, would pretend that any university faculty is a community of scholars? We professors communicate with one another only in bits and fragments. Each has his own little bailiwick. None can count on having with his colleagues anything like a common pursuit, a critical spirit, a shared cultural past. To be sure, specialization is unavoidable and necessary. No denying that. But what troubles me is that I meet so few academicians even brooding over anything to countervail the increasing fragmentation we have all witnessed in the past quarter century. We seem content enough to instruct in our own subject only. We have no comprehensive purpose, hold to no general view of education. Except in the sciences we are unable to

agree on anything like standards, requirements, curriculum. We are guided not by our own thinking but by trends and fashions. No longer can an English teacher meet a new class and assume that his students have read certain books, or even one book, in common. As educators we are more alert to followship than committed to leadership, leadership even in our own profession. In the name of freedom and of the watch-word do-your-thing—an expression, incidentally, as old as Chaucer—we incline now to let students pick and choose what courses they wish. Does anyone recall that a president of Harvard tried that experiment about a century ago and that it did not work? Or maybe a commercial ethic operates here: students are our customers, meet the market demand, give them what they want—or think they want.

But what exactly do our students want? Who knows? I only know I am sympathetic toward them, because they have reason to feel frustrated and rebellious. Compare them with the college youngsters of the 1950's, the so-called "silent generation," and they look rich in promise. They appear better motivated to study, less taken up with collegiate frivolity, more concerned about social problems, with livelier consciences and quicker hearts.

If their teachers comprise nothing like a community, we might wonder: have the students found one? Some have tried to. There is something which has been named the counterculture of the young—call it Hippiedom, if you prefer. It is a curious, many-faceted development almost unique in history. It is so complex that anything I might say about even a few of its features is sadly inadequate. Yet to glance for a moment, not at the externals—the manners, lingo, beards, hairstyles, blue jeans and such—but at the intellectual furnishings is to agree with the youngsters' most sympathetic historian, Theodore Roszack, that

their chief shortcoming is in education. Their bright new ideas are tatters of old ideas.

For the chronicler of thought, Hippiedom provides a rag-bag of tag-ends. Reach in, and out comes a frayed flyer: "Make Love, Not War"; this is crumpled around a plaster-of-paris thingamabob which turns out to be a figurine of Aristophanes, he who gave to war-tormented Athens the glorious bawdy of his sex comedy, *Lysistrata*, the original women's strike for peace. Squeezed against him is a rag-doll: unkempt Diogenes of ancient Corinth, flaunting from his tub of a "pad" his scorn of society's polite frauds. In close proximity are some oddments, facsimile relics of primitive Christianity. Next is a strange-looking, sweat-stained headpiece: it must be what some boy wore when he set off on the Children's Crusade in the Middle Ages. Down in one corner is a notebook, with scribblings garnered from some sort of disquisition on hyper-democracy by one of the more sanguine theorists of the Enlightenment. In another is a biggish bundle, hefted with enthusiasm from the Romantics, quite full of items on self-expression, freedom from constraints, naturalness, and "gut-reaction,"—this last evidently a revised version of Keats' "holiness of the heart's affections." Then appears an odd-shaped container, an import from nineteenth century European Bohemianism, with the venerable message shock-the-bourgeoisie. (And fastened on this container with a rubber-band is some freakishness from the wonderlands of California.) Alongside it is a neatly crafted leather bag; but no one remembers it is a memento of Victorian William Morris whose heart sickened at the shoddiness of factory-made commodities. The sogginess in the plastic sack just underneath is, almost certainly, a serving portion of John Dewey's pragmatism. And over here, this bulge turns out

to be the vague yearnings for the Ineffable All—or is it Nirvana?—of the Orient with, sometimes, impatience to achieve the mystical state by way of drugs.

The catalogue is of course unfair. I may smile a little, but I am not laughing at the young. They have done the best they could, with small help from their teachers, to create out of these patches a past and a tradition which seem to meet their immediate needs. But no wonder their radicalism is naive, their innocence sometimes arrogant, their programs abortive. In sum, their moralism, angry or angelic, has never been shaped into a thought. They are not to blame for their muddle. There is pathos in this clutter, in their search for authority, in their fumbblings toward standards.

Is it surprising, then, that our students now ask to participate in such decision-making processes as the hiring and firing and tenuring of professors or that they try to tell their teachers what courses should be offered and how these should be taught? With the cart motorized, why shouldn't the horse trot along behind? So, one finds in a perfectly respectable journal the proposal that, at the end of a semester, student and teacher should confer to arrive at, *cooperatively*, the mark the student deserves! And the dream of turning a class hour into a rap session, where anyone's opinion is as good as anyone else's and where the nice-guy prof sits in, as needed, only as an informational source on some minutiae. And then those who would reform the grading procedure into either pass-fail or into oblivion, a blessed relief from the pangs of discriminating and judging. As if life beyond the ivied walls does not daily, silently, in one way or another, grade each and every one of us! So I am guilty of another prejudice: whenever I drive across a bridge, consult a lawyer or get a prescription, I fervently pray that the engineers, attorneys, and pharmacists I rely on did not

in school earn pass grades only a hairline above failure.

Capers like these do not put me into a fault-finding mood with our young people. Such stuff was not born by miraculous conception of the adolescent brain. It is breathed in from our prevailing climate of opinion. I call it a breakdown in standards. "Whenever the older generation has lost its bearings, the younger generation is lost with it." So remarked Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, a teacher-psychiatrist who has long worked with the young—and who was himself scarred by the Nazis.

Like their professors, the students have found, not a community, but only an aggregation. The generation gap, the don't-trust-anyone-over-thirty attitude, the restiveness of the young, their filial ingratitude—these should be looked into. Something is going wrong. To go no farther than our campuses, too many of us are more frustrated, anxious, and confused than, somehow, we should be. Since this malaise and muddle are tangled up with millions of persons and billions of dollars, the causes and consequences are more serious than the broken windows and broken bones of those newsworthy disturbances which so anger and discomfit Middle America. My private diagnosis is that we are suffering from a nearly tragic failure—at least from a farcical misdirection—in our philosophy of education. In their mushy permissiveness, in their flabby culture liberalism, too many intellectuals have indulged the appetites of immaturity, including their own. More to the point, I call to account myself and my academic colleagues. We are not facing up to the issues that confront us. Our students storm the administration building—because they have not yet come upon the open secret: that by and large a faculty gets the sort of administrators it deserves, for better or worse. If the house of intellect has become disorderly, we professors are, very

considerably, at fault. As to the gap between preachment and practice, we are neither more reprehensible nor admirable than our fellows in other professions. We take our specialties seriously and are afflicted by the occupational disease of near-sightedness.

In this matter of vision I am not at all pretending that professordom is the Mind of America. And yet, on our various campuses we are so many conglomerates of talent and mind-power; enmeshed in our big institutions, we have become, so to speak, the organized brain of society. And all too readily this organized brain has adapted itself to the environment, to external pressures and passing trends. One of its lobes, the scientific-technical, with its useful, humanitarian, and profitable applications, has grown superbly. Another lobe is softening, sickening, maybe dying. In academe the two lobes no longer work together. The first lobe gives us R & D, research and development, and so opens the Pandora's box of all the seeming goods that promise to help us survive with greater ease and wealth on this planet. This is the lobe of knowledge, and knowledge is power. But power is, merely, power, to be used for good or ill, depending on the motives and enlightenment of the users. The other lobe of the brain—may I call it the wisdom-moral part?—was meant to guide and control us toward using constructively the gifts and curses science has brought us: make it possible not merely to survive but to maintain lives humanly livable and worth while. But by and large we academicians no longer put any confidence in this lobe.

And it is we humanities professors who have let it atrophy. We no longer really believe in our work, because we suspect it does not deal with or get at reality. Though our subject is the living past and though we are allegedly keepers of that past, we are without any past ourselves. We have for-

gotten that, for the Greeks, Memory was the mother of the muses—which is to say, the ground of all inspirations. We humanists lack manly pride because we no longer feel in ourselves any vital and viable link with tradition. We gain no strength from regarding ourselves as, say, buck privates in the company of the great spirits who have marched through history from blind Homer to the lonely, harassed Solzhenitsyn. We no longer struggle to comprehend the human mind and spirit. We have lost our nerve.

Now, I have a partial and prejudiced theory to explain what went wrong. It goes about like this:

Sometime after World War II—the fifties were a crucial decade—all of us professors were oppressed by low salaries in an inflationary economy, discouraged by being of no social consequence, disheartened by the anti-intellectualism long endemic to this nation, then further intimidated and demoralized by the virulent form that anti-intellectualism took in the hey-day of Joe McCarthy and the loyalty oaths. Then all at once something happened. Across the night sky we watched the eerie trajectory of Sputnik. America, the leader of the world's technology, shivered down its spine. Crash program: put to work—and train more and more of them—every scientist and technician available lest the Soviets outdistance us and imperil our survival as a nation. Promptly the universities felt the impact of the new terror. Professors whom no one had heard of emerged as national oracles. Washington turned to the campuses; professors made their way to Washington.

As federal funds poured in, the universities began to compete with one another. Now the game was: lure to your campus the Great Man, Nobel Prize winner, if possible. Make the bait ever more tempting as to salaries, grants, benefits privileges, and with fewer and fewer onerous details—de-

tails like, say, teaching. Research was what counted. And because professors were becoming useful and even necessary, their public image metamorphosed from the caricature of absent-minded doddiness to figures of respectability. And since in the public mind the words professor and college teacher were synonyms, a wondrous paradox burgeoned: the greater you were as a teacher, the less teaching you did. (To be sure, I can only sketch my theory here.) But pulled along by the affluence of our colleagues in the sciences, the rest of us professors began in the 1960's to do better financially. That part of it was all to the good.

Yet, in the long run, the consequences of these developments in the American economy as they affected the backwaters of academe have not been wholly beneficial for those who teach and study the liberal arts. In their more modest way and perhaps by accident or even unconsciously, humanities professors took cues from the scientists. Research, with the capital R, was the thing. Get a grant, and you may be on the way to becoming a made man. (Pun intended.) The rewards were the American dream come true: affluence and status. So we tried to master the techniques of grantsmanship. It was dazzling and flattering to make it. More of us began to feel quite at ease within the system, even to like it. When the game was not grants, we began to learn how to wheel and deal for positions, promotions, and plumes. Opportunism paid off. The operator-type appeared among us in larger numbers. Loyalties became more and more centered, not on teaching, nor on our departments and schools, nor even on our discipline, but on our specialty and, in particular, on the extra-mural acclaim we might win through it. Graduate students whom we trained for the doctorate in the 1960's might have learned from us more about how to

maneuver in the corridors of power than to respect real scholarship. Competition within the academic ranks became rougher and trickier for everyone. One breathed an atmosphere of double-talk: lip service to humanistic values; in practice, what's-in-it-for-me?

Research in the humanities often meant publish or perish. The only way to escape that assistant professorship in Mudville's North Central A & M College was to place an article in a so-called reputable journal. So, articles and journals multiplied to deluge proportions. The astonishing busyness and quantity of it all! The scientists spoke of a knowledge explosion. The humanists tried to pretend we had the same thing. In fact, we had only an explosion of printed matter—about eighty percent of it dispensable, stuff for recycling. The worry was to lengthen one's bibliography by measurable inches. Too many adepts mastered the tricks of turning out semi-books, quasi-books, pseudo-books, and non-books. Or if one had small knack at the typewriter, another road to promotion was in being "professionally active": *i.e.*, running off to meetings, serving on committees, and what-not. Here the techniques were politicking toward making connections with whoever had the wherewithal to hand out the prizes.

More and more to emerge as the overriding value in academe was, in one word: prestige. Now, prestige is not genuine fame nor lasting reputation. Prestige is only what other people happen to think of one at a certain time, their quick impression, their rule-of-thumb assessment. To gain prestige is to know how to manipulate mirrors, to make and multiply images and reflected images—and, for those aspiring to celebrity, a public image. All of this is perfectly acceptable in business and advertising. But for an academician to seek prestige rather than what was once a

legitimate ambition in which he could take honest professional pride, is to be a lost soul, more or less. As to the heights where the lights and the dollars shine, have we not all, at one time or another, met a dean or department head who, with his elevation to such post, changed even his style of speech and began to make pronouncements in a deanly voice? Listen, and you hear the phony note. It is the sound of pretended authority, authority wangled from an addled system, not authority earned by academic achievement or even administrative accomplishment. Those without genuine dignity need the mask of pompousness. These sorts of foibles, misdemeanors, and sins can, I dare say, be gotten away with more readily among humanists and social scientists than among scientists. But this may be only one more of my prejudices.

Doubtless I am a victim of the school-masterish tendency to take too seriously one's role in society. If so, we can be sure that beyond the ivied walls most people are in small danger of exaggerating our importance. Yet these citizens and taxpayers do take seriously what is going on among our students. Exactly here I believe the troubles with our college teachers and the troubles with the students may be closely entangled. I suggest that the alienation, the restiveness, maybe even the riots, of the students have something to do with their disappointment and disillusionment in their college teachers. The students themselves have almost never put this into words. For, given their limited experience, the whole teacher-student relationship is too complex and subliminal for them to articulate fully and precisely. But they do, I suspect, too often sense something pretentious and unreal about their courses and instructors. Sooner or later most of them will intuit such dishonesty. Their feeling comes from the likelihood that seldom does the professor strike them as a real authority.

Emotionally, intellectually, young people want and need authority, are asking for it in the very act of denying it. By authority I do not mean authoritarianism, nor a professor's knowing his field, nor parietal regulations, nor nagging parent-figures. By authority I mean human beings older than themselves whom the young can look up to, or at least look at, with a modicum of unforced respect. Consciously or not, most adolescents are hero-worshippers. Heaven knows I am not recommending any such silliness as students making heroes out of their professors. Yet if some ingredient of this youthful emotion were there, the classroom might be a livelier, more meaningful experience. Somewhere youth needs to find exemplars of conduct. Not finding them among their academic elders, they look elsewhere. For a fruitful learning context, the young need to feel that the professor is not merely a nice guy with competence in his subject; they need also to feel that he has "been there," gone through some human experiences at least a little like their own. They need authority figures, to test their own mettle: someone solid and definite enough that they can count on him and know where he stands, even as they disagree or buck him in the normal process of maturing and becoming independent. Without this sort of thing they feel somehow cheated.

At any rate, my own conviction is that young people—not all but enough of them on our campuses—will respond positively to real and earned authority. And the generation gap, plus our grand muddle over the ends and means of higher education, would have become less costly and anguished had we college teachers, especially humanists, remained true to our better selves. That means true to what was supposed to be our profession, vocation, function, in a free society. Instead, we undermined our authority as we cut ourselves

away, willy-nilly, from our common past: the cultural tradition that could have given to our students, yes, even the relevance they call for. We could have conveyed to them at least a little more of reality, hints and clues to the experience of being human. If only we had allowed the great voices of the past to speak through us, as best as we could, however haltingly, so long as we did not distort them hopelessly by careerist self-concern. No, I am not, in my evangelical mood, wishing that we professors had been saints or heroes: only that enough of us had had a touch of the spunk of the broken-down vaudeville performer who stuck to the tradition of his tinsel trade—the show must go on.

What might have been! I have shifted into the past tense. I am elegiac, frankly. I fear that humanistic studies, as part of our American multiversities, are moribund; that, in spite of their numerical expansion, they are fated to go the same way the once powerful professordom of Grecians and Latinists has gone. And go in the same blind way: by default.

No, I am not prescribing that one and all be drilled in Latin paradigms. But I am ending with two quotations, one of which is in that language. *Sunt lacrimae rerum; et mentem mortalia tangunt*. It is a line spoken by Roman Virgil's hero, Aeneas, re-

membering the fall of a city. His civilization destroyed and himself a displaced person, the hero and his band of war refugees find temporary shelter in ancient Carthage. There in a temple—so fast did bad news travel even in antiquity!—he sees murals depicting the battles and agonies of his compatriots. Stirred and saddened, he muses: "There are tears for these things, and human concerns do touch the soul." The other quotation is from a Sunday supplement item on a course in comic books offered for credit at Indiana University, a course so popular that a hundred students are waiting to enroll. Those admitted are studying Superman and Flash Gordon. Evidently the course is not a sociologist's investigation into contemporary popular culture. An assistant liberal arts dean explains it this way: "In this experiment, we throw away tradition and say that just about everything in the world around us is an appropriate subject for study and scrutiny." No doubt everything is. But I wonder what a Phi Beta Kappa audience prefers.

Maybe we can still make the choice. Maybe it is not too late. For myself, I know where my hopes lie. Still as a prudent fellow I know where I am placing my money. But as a humanities teacher—well, this is one bet I want to lose.*

*Herbert J. Muller, *The Uses of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), Mentor Book reprint, p. 30.

*This article is based on a paper given as the presidential address at the initiation ceremonies of the Phi Beta Kappa Chapter at the University of Maryland, College Park, on June 2, 1972.

Preserving and Expanding the Open Society

DAVID BRUDNOY

I

"DEMOCRACY" may be, as H. L. Mencken wryly noted a half-century ago, "the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard." In which case, efforts to expand democracy would be futile, unless one wished as well to expand the influence of Mencken's "booboisie." Although the Baltimore sage often came up with the *mot juste*, his little aphorism of 1917 offers scant hope to a generation committed to realizing the dream of democracy. A more useful view, certainly, is that of Sidney Hook: democracy, Dr. Hook observed, is the rule of government "by virtue of the freely given consent of the governed. . . . It is the fairest and most peaceful method that has been found to resolve the conflicts of interests underlying the conflicts of freedoms."¹

Democracy, of course, is a word like love, or peace, or brotherhood. Everybody is for it; every government maintains that it is democratic; everyone says he is a dem-

ocrat. Democracy is a Good Thing, we insist, but so have most of the fiercest despots of the twentieth century. In a vacuum, without specific definition, without, indeed, examples of what we mean, the word is of little real use. Yet we hold that, if properly defined and justly realized, democracy is preferable to any other governmental system yet created; it is, in Churchill's phrase, the worst system of governance yet devised—except all the others.

We come to consider democracy at the start of an investigation of the open society not because the two concepts are identical, but because at present democratic societies are those which make possible open societies, and because the term "open society," like "democracy," is of no real meaning in the abstract, but rather one which everyone claims to be for, just like democracy. The term "open society" in contradistinction to "closed society," which was first used by Bergson in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, gained far wider currency in 1954 in a two-volume study by Karl Pop-