

Truth Values and Cultural Pluralism

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The past 50 years have witnessed a revolution in human affairs, a “change of phase” inaugurating a global community unprecedented in numbers and extent, literally encompassing all men and the earth’s entire surface. There is a sense of expectation, the emergence of a global culture and society to be characterized by new interaction patterns that will replace the interstate system created at Westphalia and the political and ideological “cold war” following World War II that ended with the collapse of Leninism, a temporary American global hegemony and widespread weakening of the older mechanisms of social control.

Historically the major cultures and their attendant civilizations have largely been tied to the shared *Weltanschauung* and values provided by a shared religion. Some element of the transcendent, a reality beyond and giving meaning to sensory perception and experience, has been called upon to validate, authenticate, and ultimately to sanction human institutions and human behavior (both individual and corporate). In more primitive societies the civic and religious cultures fuse; the gods of the vanquished are destroyed or incorporated into the victor’s pantheon. Defeated Israel’s continued devotion to a transcendent yet personal God, Yahweh, marked a universalization of the notion of deity and provided a basis for continued group identity in exile—and ultimately in diaspora while this universalized, transcendent yet personal God became the foundation of the societies emerging from Greco-Roman, Syrian and Irano-Arabic antecedents. The Indic-Buddhist, Sinic, and pre-Columbian American societies developed identifiable civilizations whose integrity was assured for millennia by the relative physical, intellectual and spiritual isolation of these major cultural components of the human family.

Five hundred years ago, with maritime technology, industrial produc-

tion, printing, and the breakup of Western Christendom there emerged the forces leading to the ecumenical society, the "one world" coming into being in our lifetime. Sheer power, the ability effectively to assert directed will, emerged in Western Europe in new combinations that submerged the Western Hemisphere and over the centuries imposed a colonial hegemony over Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific. The centralized, rationalized, bureaucratic state, disciplined military forces with a new weapons technology and logistic support, commerce, banking and credit—all combined to create the systemic interdependencies that would result in global unity. The products, technologies and institutions of Western society proved extremely attractive; they not only compelled, they seduced. Building upon the systematized knowledge of antiquity, Western Christendom institutionalized the preservation, extension and diffusion of learning in the cathedral schools, in monastic and courtly libraries, and above all in the universities with faculties dedicated to Medicine, Law, Theology, the Liberal Arts and Natural Philosophy. Experimental methods took root, particularly in the knowledge based craft guilds (including the fine arts), mining and civil engineering. These eventually also found a home in the modern university.

Knowledge and skill complemented and enhanced the dynamism of modernity, and were made self-aware, systematized and taught in the universities. With the development of institutionalized research in the nineteenth century, the university became the nodal institution of modernity and has proved universally attractive. With such disciplines as Cultural Anthropology and the Sociology of Knowledge, culture, *Weltanschauungen*, values and science itself have now become objects of systematic knowledge; historical cultures become the message (or part of the message) of the new ecumenical culture.

The curriculum and objects of knowledge and instruction vary little from country to country in modern universities. They vary least in the physical sciences, life sciences, and mathematics. They vary most in the social sciences and humanities where the values and political, ideological, cultural and religious commitments of nations and sponsoring groups receive expression and even sponsorship. But even in these disciplines the consensually-accepted critical approaches and methodologies are largely those developed in the West during the past five hundred years.

In brief a loosely unified global culture has emerged, secular and scientific in orientation, whose characteristic institution is the modern university. This culture did not arise in a vacuum; political, cultural, attitudinal, technological, commercial and military factors combined over the centuries to bring about a compression and coerced interaction of nations and cultures,

compelling mutual adjustive and adaptive responses. First it should be noted that this global culture rises out of the West, Europe and its cultural dependencies. It arises out of a tradition of classical, Greco-Roman civilization including technologies, arts and literature, law, war, religion, and a humanistic formation. Secondly, it has begun to come to maturity at the ending of an epoch characterized by the absolute, omniscient state as a quasi-divinity capable of the social construction of reality through the identification, formation and instrumentalization of its most intelligent and creative minds. Let me elaborate.

Prior to the Enlightenment political authorities were largely concerned with the material bases of state power: population, territory, institutionalized agricultural and industrial productivity, mercantilist controls designed to keep foreign trade in balance or produce an export surplus paid for in bullion. The intellectual dimension of state power was largely associated in Europe with civil law and with the national churches, Protestant or Catholic, whose parish organization (especially in rural areas) provided a convenient geographic base for local government and care for the orphan, the aged and the incompetent. *Cujus regio, ejus religio* assured a high degree of cultural and moral consensus in the vast bulk of the population. Elite intellectuality was focused in the universities, academies (like those of the Crusca or the Lincei) and newly formed royal academies of the Fine Arts and of the Sciences, and in technical schools (e.g. des Ponts et Chaussees) for industrial, civil and military engineering knowledge and skills that had outgrown the moribund guild-apprentice structure and had not yet been accepted into the rarefied intellectual atmosphere of the older universities.

Illuminism arose as a secular alternative to religion; the *philosophes*, basing themselves both on the new empirical science and the pseudo-scientific hermeticism and gnosticism re-emergent in the Renaissance, had a strong appeal to a literate, monied "new class" of professionals (lawyers, government administrators, etc.), successful and socially aspiring commercial farmers, bankers, merchants and manufacturers (and their wives), as well as survivors of the older feudal aristocracy in their new roles as leisured military officers, higher clergy and rentiers/courtiers. The Enlightenment appeal to an ethic of cosmopolitan compassion and openness, the repudiation of tyranny and injustice, of superstition and bigotry, of vulgar piety, and any religious or secular interference with freedom of expression produced the political tidal wave of the French Revolution and the modern national state as the ultimate arbiter of good and evil, truth and falsity, the well-being or misery, the life and death of its citizens. It has been suggested

that even professors and the content of higher studies in Philosophy and Religion were often given preference in state universities (e.g. in Prussia) as instruments of state policy and a national *Kultur*.

Based universally on classical studies, a shared foundation in the classical canon, nineteenth-century European and Anglo-American institutions of higher learning possessed a compatible *forma mentalis* as the foundation of literary and critical research, the study of history and the fine arts and the elaboration of philosophical issues. By the end of the nineteenth century the physical and life sciences had evolved their basic emphases and institutional structures, including an open-endedness and willingness to accept revolutionary scientific paradigm shifts. In part the modern sciences grew out of the speculative natural philosophy of the late Middle Ages, seeking descriptive concepts and models that might be related to real-world observations. Late medieval builders found their pre-scientific empirical approaches to structural design inadequate to the complexities of buildings like the Milan cathedral. University trained scholars like Alberti learned to work with artists and artisans who, in turn, came to feel comfortable with the contributions of geometry and natural philosophy. Research facilities and laboratories on the Italian, English and German models were coupled with the German university seminar system institutionalizing the monographic original research contribution prepared under a master's tutelage and critically reviewed to become the professional foundation of a higher scientific and university career.

Global consensus at the university level on the models, interpretations and methods of the sciences raises the issue of those disciplines less amenable to consensus based on quantification, empirical observation and logical demonstration. What of philosophy and theology, literature and the arts, the learned and serving professions in such areas as medicine, law, engineering and architecture? To the extent that these rest in "hard science" there is a consensus in such areas as medicine and engineering. Much of the world has relied on English or continental European precedents for their legal codes while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights continues to reflect some degree of global consensus.

In some sense the philosophic enterprise parallels the scientific. It, too, is directed at modeling reality, identifying modes of being, entities, elements, categories and relations in the universe as knowing and known. The level of abstraction in these models is less proximate; the terms normally do not have an immediate, direct and measurable existential correlate, and proof is largely tested by coherence, existential consequences for men (singly, in groups, as a species and as one of an actual or possible family of

moral entities that can know and choose in self-awareness and other-awareness), and not least by their compatibility with the truth of individual and culturally-shared experiences and the findings of the empirical sciences. One area of contact between the empirical sciences and philosophy can be found in contemporary General Systems Theory and Cybernetics with their emphases on analogy, hierarchy and order, decision making, and information. Often the overall philosophic enterprise seems kaleidoscopic as individual thinkers and schools represent diverse patterns of perceived significance and relevance, frequently complementary, always less than comprehensive. It is a truism that philosophers are more likely to be correct in what they affirm than in what they deny.

In this view there is, perhaps, a *philosophia perennis* that is cumulative and like the sciences grows by accretion and correction. Its method is critical; its counters conceptual; its correlates the realities of mind and experience viewed as objects to be known and when in correspondence with perceived externality, correspondent to that objectively apprehended (or, for internal experience, consciously apprehended as object). Owing to the development of the natural, mathematical, and social (positive) sciences what were once unresolved (perhaps irresolvable) philosophical issues are now the subjects of consensual accord. The revolution of the earth and its circuit around the sun were finally demonstrated in the last century. Aristotle's hylomorphic universe is the contemporary universe of matter-energy and information made measurable by the insight of Shannon. Philosophically irresolvable issues about the eternity of the material universe are at least partially answered by the "big bang" with which time, space and matter-energy as we know it began.

In many respects theology, too, is amenable to consideration in terms of "model building," the selection of significant concepts representing entities, events and relationships that form a logically coherent and reasonable symmetrical system that purports to reflect "reality" in certain humanly significant, indeed, existentially crucial dimensions needed by most men to make sense of the human experience, to motivate, to govern moral decision-making, to account for the reality and experience of evil and malice, the sense of sin and also of experienced transcendence, creativity, altruism, beauty, goodness and grace in all of its many meanings. Constructs are created that would give meaning to life, promise immortality, assure a supernal order of justice, motivate, inspire, give meaning to human life and history.

Clearly the figurative arts model the world: representative painting and sculpture abstract, reflect, idealize what is seen by men—reproduce the

form and semblance of what is. The surreal associates forms disassociated in reality yet meaningfully related and so creates another order of perception while the abstract arts like music, architecture, expressionist painting, sculpture and cinema make an appeal in depth to some "sense of order" deeply imbedded in the neural structure of the percipient creative artist and percipient subject mutually attuned. To create is to make new patterns of order. To know is to apprehend patterns of order in the circumambient universe. Art and science are our truly human activities and intimately associated with appreciation, affective response and a shared mutuality reflecting a culture and broadly human solidarity.

As one looks at the universe of knowledge beyond the properly scientific as categorized by the National Science Foundation, one is struck by the range of skills taught in our universities: knowledge and practice in the making of things, art as the *recta ratio factibilium*. Beyond that the curriculum is dedicated to the truly human activities implied in the terms loving, serving, appreciating. Educators, nurses, physicians, counsellors, vocational guides obviously require a formation designed to maximize their skills and opportunities for professional service. So do foresters and peace officers, agronomists and engineers—and all engaged in constructive human activity.

Although inherently an elite institution where cognitive skills (unequally distributed) are valued, nurtured and constructively focused, all benefit from the university as the principal institutional conserver, promulgator, developer and critic of the cumulative scientific and cultural heritage of mankind in all its manifestations. It is appropriate that within this emerging noösphere various nations and peoples, institutions and interests, civilizations and cultures find a special reflection in their own university-level institutions, open to and in dialogue with the global intellectual community. The core intellectual values of critical objectivity, dedication to truth, and a correlative act of faith in the "givenness," persistence in existence, coherence, integrity and identity of the real reflected in cognition would appear to underly this enterprise.

Commercially or politically inspired distortions of fact or of canonical texts or works of art pose real and continuing challenges to the conscience and consciousness of civilization. Only by having multiple loci and foci of that consciousness in an institutionally plural ecumenical community can we be reasonably assured that we shall not revert to a "dark ages," or worse, a malevolent deconstruction into permanent intellectual and cultural chaos—but rather continue in the incremental construction of a *cultura*

perennis that encompasses and enhances the sum of human achievement in art and science, mutuality and appreciation.

The development of the university as the characteristic institution of the emerging global culture has been very much advanced and hastened by the ever increasing ease and speed of communications. Books and learned journals, conferences, symposia and professional meetings—all in a forum of intellectual transparency, subject to critical review, have created a noö-sphere with a definable but ever changing (in detail) canonical structure of consensually-accepted sources, methods and conclusions. The paradigmatic structure of each discipline and subdiscipline is subject at every level of generality to critical review and modification as evidence accumulates, anomalies are apprehended, logical flaws are discovered, predictions are verified or proven false.

It must be recognized that this intellectual universe is amazingly strong yet possessed of certain limitations and some fragility. Its universality results, in part, not only from an assent to the truths and truth-values affirmed but from its origin (now to some degree transcended) in the Western European university tradition and its principal expression in the great culture languages: Italian, Spanish, French, German, Russian, and especially English—all possessed of analogous structures and inter-translatable meanings.

Political power in any given country or locality may assert itself in educational curricula, ideological emphases, selection of “relevant” facts, models and interpretations—to the extent such “power” controls cultural, scientific and educational institutions and resources. The relativization of the “canon,” deconstruction of texts, the introduction of ascriptive critical norms based on ethnicity, revisionist views of social history and cultural institutions—all of these leave the humanities and social sciences a global battleground. Every modern state since the eighteenth century has viewed education as the catalyst of social control; in France the Ecole Normale Supérieure was viewed as the very soul of a new consciousness. Totalitarian mass cultures of the twentieth century tried to create “new men” altruistically dedicated to the community whether defined by national, racial or class/functional categories; American liberals dedicate themselves to an ideology of equality and its enforced institutionalization.

In literature, the humanities and the fine arts state subsidies, direct and indirect, interact with a market-oriented *Zeitgeist* pushed by critics, galleries and connoisseurs, hype and media attention in a high stakes game of prestige, public and private funding, tax deductions, jobs and influence.

It is in the “soft” disciplines that the modern university plays a particular role as critic and sifter of orthodoxies. In Italy in the 1930s, courses were

taught in *Mistica Fascista*—and laid aside in 1944–45. What has become of Dialectical Materialism in Eastern Europe? In American secular universities religious studies, once taught by professors profoundly committed to their faith, have become objects of study by “detached” scholars. The university itself becomes the meeting ground and fighting platform of religious, political, cultural and ideological currents—some of which make an exclusive, proprietary claim to legitimacy. This is clearly the case now with “political correctness” in the United States, reflecting a secular humanist orientation alert to minority claims, environmental issues, and characterized by moral relativism and an emphasis on the omniscient welfare state.

A certain ethnocentricity may be expected and is appropriate to the various national universities and university systems while institutions under private group and/or religious sponsorship may be expected to sustain or at least not overtly counter the commitments and institutional interests of their sponsors. The critical climate, openness to the historical success or failure of policies and institutions, and continuing dialogue between and among intellectuals and institutions globally provide the conditions for an emerging global debate and developing commitments (individual and institutional) to visions of the good and true.

But even in the “hard,” empirically-based sciences it would be naive to ignore the role of the modern state in determining the research emphases, focus, consequences and applications of scientific knowledge—in mathematics and the physical sciences, in the life sciences, the social and behavioral sciences, in communications and applied science. World War II brought “big science” to all the major belligerents, especially the United States, Britain and Germany: the Manhattan Project to make nuclear weapons, M.I.T.’s Radiation Laboratory for radar, institutional research on gas turbines and reactor engines, supersonic aircraft and rockets, advanced computing machinery both digital and analog, and many other fields. Chemistry was organized to create new materials ranging from synthetic rubber to a vast array of new plastics, silicones, coatings and lubricants. The social and behavioral sciences were mobilized in laboratories for military human factors research to help identify perceptual and motor skills, select and train aircrews and ground personnel, for intelligence research and the conduct of special operations by OSS, to track domestic and foreign opinion and identify psychological and cultural strengths and vulnerabilities whose exploitation by artfully designed communications, tactical and strategic, might speed victory. Part of the competitive advantage possessed by the “free world” both before and after World War II lay in the synergic

relation between government and private-industry-exploitable science and engineering, the social and behavioral sciences, the commercial exploitation of art through such methods as Motivational Research.

This confidence in science, the momentum of its wartime successes and institutions, the domestic employment possibilities inherent in the Promethean vision of "Science the Endless Frontier," the emergence of the "cold war" and a global adversarial system, the vast enlargement of the university-trained population in America through the GI Bill of Rights—all in some way contributed to the emerging global intellectual community. Greater ease of communication and transport, tourism, and increasing homogenization of global popular culture based on movies, syndicated American TV and popular music, the rise of English as *the* dominant culture language in part as a result of the conscious cultural proselytization through U.S. military and developmental assistance, educational and cultural exchange programs, increasingly dense international business relations, American sponsored international and transnational corporate and associational groupings—all contributed to and helped define the focus and content of the emergent ecumenical culture.

In the Socialist/Communist societies emerging from more or less violent class-based revolutions or from Soviet takeover, a conscious effort was made to deprive the offspring of former elite elements of the university formation producing the communications and symbol-management skills characteristic of modern social and political leadership. Even cognitively-gifted youth of incorrect class provenance were relegated to the acquisition of productive technical skills while the increasingly university-trained "New Class" identified by Djilas assumed the managerial and symbol-manipulative elite status of their Anglo-American and Western European "bourgeois" counterparts.

For both Marxist and liberal intellectuals the state is the preferred instrument of self-formation-and-affirmation, for the realization of the will to power: directly through control of ministries, planning agencies, state corporations, public media, education, regulatory agencies—particularly in the all-encompassing realm of environmental controls. Secondly, even when private capital predominates, control of that capital is largely relegated to a new stratum of professionals: money managers, mutual fund directors, pension fund controllers, union investors, insurance and annuity fund trustees, all university trained and, as A. A. Berle put it, exercising "power without property." Members of this new class are often capable of protecting themselves and their interest by externalizing the costs of their errors of judgment (to put the matter in the best light) both tactical and strategic. Ameri-

can Savings and Loan organizations unload some \$500 billion in bad loans on to the U.S. Treasury and ultimately the taxpayer; Mexican money managers cover the losses resulting from overvaluation of the peso by arbitrarily dropping the exchange rate and persuading U.S. and international banking authorities to underwrite their treasury bonds. Few countries can resist the populist appeal of massive redistribution to be covered by devalued currency printed by some future government.

In practice clever symbolic load-shifting to those who are productive but weak, to future generations, or to other social groups seems to assure these elite elements privileged access to wealth, power and well-being indefinitely. So-called "neocolonialism" in the "free world" was but a reflection of the symbol games played by Gosplan, the Communist party elites and the entrenched bureaucracies of the socialist world.

The failure of Peronism, the collapse of the Axis Powers in World War II, the implosion of Communism in Eastern Europe all suggest that reality will have the last word. If the cynical manipulation of symbols by a cognitive elite is crucial to modern politics, the persistent and free expression of the university-based "culture of critical discourse" is necessary to restore contact with reality, from within or from outside any given political system.

The principal challenges to the emerging global culture lie in the intellectuals' capacity to define social situations, create crises, and propose solutions. In theory, at least, out of the infinitude of events characterizing any social process any set may be extracted and mentally associated to produce a "model" of the social process or historical period. This is the *jeu d'esprit* of Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*. And precisely this lies at the basis of historical revisionism, the rewriting of the past by each generation, each group, each interest to reflect the outlook and values of the author/scholar/critic. Since only the literate, the cognitively capable and trained, can perform this task, history must inevitably reflect not so much an economic elite as a cognitive elite. These have often been combined. To some degree winners (or their flacks) write history.

Increasingly the liquidation or impairment of an adversary's capacity for effective decision-making has become characteristic of intergroup conflict. Tampering with or sabotage of databases and critical communications, disinformation, selective deletion or impairment (temporary or permanent) of decision-makers or their critical support structures, selective impairment or destruction of command and control facilities—become instruments of intergroup conflict. And these critical elements in cultural, educational and scientific institutions are also subject to interference, control or sabotage. One recalls the battle for control of the Newspaper Guild in the late 1940's.

Every one in academia has witnessed discrediting operations aimed at academic administrators or faculty members with the "wrong ideas." And who has not been "victimized" (or perhaps "helped") on occasion by the "down" computer, the delayed mail delivery or the misplaced memo?

To my mind a real danger lies in the widespread, increasingly universal early identification of very high ability persons and the possibility of their "acquisition" and formation (or perversion) by those having resources and access—a situation envisaged by John Hersey in his book *The Child Buyer*. Cognitive data is now often combined with psychometric data on personality, interests and aptitude. Centralized talent databases such as that of the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, coupled with a recognition of talent as a strategic resource and the will and ability to use it for cultural, scientific, and political ends must present a great temptation to public authorities and/or those having privileged access to such information. Only self-conscious communities, benevolent with a sense of the common good, aware of their ethnic and cultural identities will be able to cope with this challenge. They must remain mindful of the unspoken contractual responsibilities linking the generations, be willing to accept relative deprivation, and intent to preserve some degree of moral autonomy through appropriate system boundary controls including even military defense when required.

The principal challenges to the emerging global culture are essentially political. The intellectual and institutional commitment to truth may be subordinated to interest or the will to power. In practice this may range from the selection or preferment of intellectual incompetents to avoid competition to the increasingly costly academico-political rationalization of failed economic and social policies for reasons of party and ideology. Limited cultural, religious or ethnic loyalties may affirm an unwarranted universality. The localized and ever-changing deconstruction and reconstruction of the symbolic universe could bring about a Babel of idiosyncratic "meanings" that partition the emerging, ecumenical culture of increasingly shared meanings, paradigmatic structures, empirically verifiable models describing or explaining aspects of the physical, social and mental universes. This emerging shared vision, in turn, enhances the capacity for synergetic intellectual effort at the global level extending human knowledge, understanding and capacity to cope through constructive action possibilities ranging from improved housing and nutrition for the bulk of men to the ever more profound investigation of the cosmos.

This suggests that a multiplication of institutionally independent centers of scientific and cultural achievement is desirable. In multiplicity there is an enhanced capacity for survival and exercising the critical function essen-

tial to both the sciences and humanistic studies. As supranational political and economic communities emerge there is increasing emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity, relegating to smaller communities and functional, specialized groupings (whether economic or cultural) a decision-making autonomy within the realm of their own competencies. In this context the ideal of the free university takes on ever greater significance.

In a period of superpower confrontation backed by weapons of mass destruction, cataclysmic threats gave substance to the vision of moral and intellectual nihilism, a wiping clean of the cultural slate presumably reflecting millennia of human oppression. In the 1950's I recommended USIA's providing a copy of the contents of the Library of Congress in microform to each country of the world; not only to make that cultural and intellectual resource more generally available but to preclude what seemed the imminent cultural tragedy prefigured by the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, nuclear destruction of the world's major libraries and museums.

While avoiding the pseudo-universalization of the parochial, it behooves identifiable groups, nations and localities, functional groupings, religious and cultural bodies to study and analyze themselves, their characteristics, and their past to the degree possible and in context. The conservation and affirmation of all that is valid and constructive in human experience is to advance civilization, the essential unity and integrity of the species as a manifestation of this creature's creative consciousness in this little corner of the universe.

Inevitably conflicting visions emerge and seek to affirm themselves. Among the basic values of the university are certain core elements that can help assure a reasonably serene future to the emerging ecumenical culture. First, a concern for truth—in terms not only of the instrumental effectiveness and coherence of models of reality, but also their adequacy to the objective situation they would portray. Second, a continued critical review and reassessment of the content, interpretation and evaluation of the body of human knowledge. Third, a desire for and systematic expansion of the range of knowing and valuing. Last, an atmosphere of civility in which both moral and physical violence are eschewed, where the *disinterested* pursuit of truth is encouraged by providing an assured tenor of life to those engaged in it. Perhaps the greatest threat to this emerging global culture is its politicization as a source of power, and the use of force, fraud, moral coercion, blackmail and deprivation—all the forms of persecution—to assure intellectual and moral conformity to whatever is deemed true and good this year in this place by this particular authority.