The Canadian Journal of Higher Education, Vol. XIV-1, 1984
La revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur, Vol. XIV-1, 1984

The Humanities and Higher Education

STEPHEN DUGUID*

ABSTRACT

After a long period of decline the humanities seem to be undergoing a kind of renaissance, with specialized institutes, a renewed rhetoric and talk of an academic core curriculum being the chief indications. The causes of the decline are seen as springing from a sustained intellectual attack by the sciences and social sciences, the disillusioning impact of fascism developing in the heart of Western humanism, and the dramatic social and economic changes of the past 200 years. Contemporary advocates of the humanities are seen as falling into three groups: the traditionalists who argue for an implicit worth of the humanities; pragmatists who see the humanities as having real use-value in terms of contemporary social issues; and radicals who see the humanities as a force for social change. Examples are offered of each of these approaches and their strengths and weaknesses analyzed.

RÉSUMÉ

Après une longue période de déclin, les humanités semblent connaître une sorte de renaissance. Celle-ci se manifeste par l'ouverture d'instituts spécialisés, le renouvellement de la rhétorique et les discussions concernant les programmes académiques. Ce sont des attaques venues des milieux scientifiques et des spécialistes des sciences sociales qui ont été les raisons du déclin des humanités, la perversion de l'humanisme occidental par l'idéologie fasciste et, d'une manière plus lointaine, les spectaculaires changements économiques et sociaux des 200 dernières années. Les défenseurs actuels des humanités représentent trois groupes de pensées : les traditionalistes qui plaident le mérite tacite des humanités; les pragmatistes qui considèrent que les humanités peuvent vraiment influencer les questions sociales contemporaines; et les radicaux qui considèrent que les humanités peuvent provoquer un changement social. Des exemples de chacune de ces approches sont présentés et leurs forces et faiblesses analysées.

* Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University

There appears to be a renaissance of sorts in North American higher education, a re-awakening of interest in the humanities. In the midst of pervasive cynicism, relativism, and vocationalism there is an active discussion of the state of the humanities, talk of returning to a core curriculum, and the formation of humanities institutes and centers across the United States and Canada. Upon close examination this renaissance suffers from being largely self-proclaimed, less a response to demand than a desperate surge for relevance, even a circling of wagons to fend off the philistines. My own university has recently joined this movement and established an Institute for the Humanities, a structure for relating the traditions of the humanities to contemporary social and cultural issues and concerns. The process of creating this Institute has led to considerable introspection about the humanities and this paper is a part of that process.

In trying to define and assess the humanities one must, of course, start with the Greeks of 2500 years ago. The fact that the humanities are currently seen as being in decline or facing a crisis stems in large part from our obsession with this and other 'golden ages'. For most humanists the apogee of their world view was in the 5th century B.C. and it has been a long, bumpy downhill slide ever since. The Greek intellectual and educational ideal came to be embodied in what we call liberal education, with the humanities as the core. For the Greeks who counted, education was the essential preparation for participation as free men in affairs of state, ". . .to become effective as a speaker of words and a doer of deeds in the polity of one's peers" (McClintock, 1979).

The Greek humanistic ideal was aristocratic and elitist, based on the notion of the free man with sovereign detachment from practical activities – thought ". . . freed from the passions and troubles of the soul" (Thevanez, 1983). A humanities so conceived centered on contemplative impartiality, tolerant rationality, and individualism – what we recognize as the basis for contemporary liberalism. For over two millenia various Western societies have tried to re-create their memory of this Greek utopia, generally producing instead corrupt or vapid imitations. The last great occasion for the humanities seeming to characterize an age in the sense of being the essential attribute of those who 'count' was the closing decades of the 18th century in Western Europe. T.H. White (1950) offers a none too flattering glimpse into a society exulting in mastery of the humanities:

> It was astonishing how much the upper classes knew. Fox was an authority on Cassandra of Lycophron, known to scholars as the 'obscure': Walpole could read a blazon or print a fine edition or write about the history of Richard III: the classics had been flogged into everybody: . . .Greek was spouted in the House of Commons, though with no great success: . . .all society went nightly to hear Handel or the opera: . . .Selwyn, who was an ignoramus, wrote his unimpressive letters instinctively in a mixture of English, French and Italian: . . .and the scandalous Wilkes, who had belonged to a Hellfire Club and who had set all Britain by the ears in Parliament, retired gracefully to edit Theophrastus.

Such acquaintance with, indeed dependence on the humanities cannot be said to characterize our age, and that would appear to be no great loss. We may rightly

miss the Jean-Jacques Rousseaus and Thomas Jeffersons of the era, but 'society' of the 1780's deserves neither our admiration nor emulation. Indeed, many would argue that 5th century Athens is likewise undeserving. Both were ages of great accomplishment but were also guilty of using the many ". . .as a manured soil in which to grow a few graceful flowers of refined culture" (T. Dobzhansky, cited in Braudel, 1967).

Still, it may be worth our while to separate the ideals, the humanistic impetus, from the foibles and patterns of historical social organizations. The great claim of the humanities on our imagination is its claim to universality, its insistence that there is a right way to reason, a morality or moral process that transcends the vagaries of time and culture, and an aesthetic sensibility that is distinctly human. Our museums, our universities and aspects of our popular culture pay lip service to such ideals and the dominant ideologies of liberalism and Marxism claim a common descent from them. Yet, in practical affairs the humanities and the ideals they embody seem little with us. Instead, it seems as though ". . .this great intellectual ideal of the West is about to go the way of the ocean liner and the country estate – comfortable, full of happy memories, extravagant, expensive to staff, and hopelessly out of date" (Winter, 1981).*

What Has Gone Wrong?

The humanist, inextricably tied to history, must first discover what has gone wrong before launching a renaissance in earnest. Assuming the worth and validity of the ideal itself, three disasters would appear to account for the current 'problem' of the humanities: a sustained intellectual attack on the humanities which has persisted for over 300 years; a record of extreme barbarism at the centre of Western culture in the 20th century; and the dramatic social, economic and technological changes of the past 200 years.

In the 17th century, Francis Bacon accused the humanists of being too much concerned with words rather than things, too oriented to the past rather than the future, and too preoccupied with learning and judgment and therefore unable to produce new inventions or discoveries for the understanding of nature or for use by men. The humanities were, in his words, ". . . mere ornaments of discourse" (Bullock, 1980). The attack from the sciences was especially bitter for the humani-

* This sense of crisis pervades the formal institutions of the humanities such as museums and universities, but that may in fact say very little about the humanities *per se*. As Eric Rabkin (1978) notes: "The current wisdom is that the humanities are under assault, that they are enervated, that they are missionless. This wisdom reflects a truth, but it is not the truth it states. Books are now read by more people than ever before; more of our fellow citizens indulge in painting and poetry than has been the case since the emergence of commercial radio; and movies really are better than ever. . . The 'humanities' are thriving. . . What suffers enervation is not the 'humanities' but academic humanities departments – institutions for study and appreciation which have confused themselves with the materials they study and appreciate."

ties since both shared a common and fundamental perception of the role of reason in human affairs, forged in the long struggle against ecclesiastic dominance.

In the 19th century, Thomas Huxley made the case for science rather than the humanities being at the core of the educative process and Herbert Spencer provided the seal to the argument, placing the humanities fifth in his five categories of knowledge, the one which served to fill our leisure time interestingly (Jarrett, 1979). From the 19th century on we have been obsessed, rightly or wrongly, with the 'practical'. The humanities accordingly have suffered from an inability to make anything explode or travel faster in a world where little else matters to those in positions of influence (Hough, in Plumb, 1964). For the universal and recurrent humanist issues such as death, love, justice, tragedy, suffering and living with our divided natures, the new positivists claimed that science would either break long-standing barriers and provide answers or declare the questions meaningless because the answers did not conform to the criteria of scientific knowledge.

The humanities were also attacked from another direction, one which they were more familiar with but were also vulnerable to. This attack came from outside the paradigm of rational man. Choosing carefully from the corpus of classical thought, the modern humanities had come to accept a rationalist view of man. In its extreme form, held by Marx for instance, this rationalism claimed that men could obtain objective knowledge about the world and, on the basis of this knowledge and in free association, control society and history. The scientific and positivist attack on the humanities was in fact born of this extension of rationalism and belief in transformation.

For those who came to question such a view of man, this rationalism became the Achilles heel of the humanities. Schopenhauer attacked its progressivist assumptions and its faith in the essential 'goodness' of men. Dostoevsky insisted that reason and knowledge have always played a secondary, subordinate, auxiliary role in the life of peoples, and this will always be the case. Freud (1961) described history, the sum of all men's activities, as a struggle between ". . . Eros and Death, between the instinct for life and the instinct of destruction".

The moral issues which had for so long haunted the humanities were thus swept away in either a hardened scientific rationalism or a celebratory cult of the irrational. Thus, a contemporary psychologist can argue that it is pointless to ask why people behave in selfish, immoral or aggressive ways because ". . . such behavior is clearly reinforcing in that it gives the person or organism acting in such a fashion immediate satisfaction (Eysenck, 1976). Likewise, we are assured that where concentration camps are established and where torture becomes a matter of policy, ". . . there will be no lack of torturers. It is not too much reality that humankind is unable to bear, but too much freedom" (Symons, 1983). Denied access to an audience interested in these kinds of issues, the humanities was being relegated to matters of taste, tolerance, and entertainment. In higher education, the old notion of the liberal arts has become dichotomized between social sciences and humanities, with the latter increasingly pushed toward the fine arts and the former toward the sciences.

Clearly much of the debate swirling about the humanities in the 19th century was a domestic affair, a righting of the balance tipped either too far toward rationalism or too far toward the literary classics. Such debates can be constructive while at the same time exhaustive, thus weakening a tradition for more important external challenges. The challenges offered the humanities in the 20th century were not ones to be approached from such a weakened condition.

The First World War provided the first blow to the 19th century faith in reason and progress, attacking both humanistic and scientific adherents. The centers of high culture seemed bent on destruction, thus lending credence to Freud's dismal cycle. Asians, Africans, even Eastern Europeans could engage in such behaviour, but centuries of humanism were supposed to act as a check on barbarism in the West. More traumatic yet was the subsequent immersion in fascism. This was in many ways the seminal disillusionment, especially when paraded before the world at the Nuremburg trails. George Steiner (1971) has eloquently highlighted the horrible truth that the most intense submersion in the humanities provides no protection from barbarism:

> We now know that the libraries, museums, theatres, universities, research centers, in and through which the transmission of the humanities and the sciences takes place, can prosper next to the concentration camps. . .We know also. . .that obvious qualities of literate response, of aesthetic feeling, can coexist with barbaric, politically sadistic behavior in the same individual. Men such as Hans Frank who administered the 'final solution' in eastern Europe were avid connoisseurs and, in some instances, performers of Bach and Mozart. We know of personnel in the bureaucracy of the torturers and the ovens who cultivated a knowledge of Goethe, a love of Rilke.

Steiner (1967) raises an even more disturbing notion in another essay, suggesting that a commitment to the life of the printed word, a capacity to identify deeply and critically with imaginary personages and sentiments may in fact tend to diminish the immediacy, the hard edge of actual circumstance. "We come to respond more acutely to the literary sorrows than to the misery next door". One thinks of the passions aroused by the fate of Julie in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloise* among the European aristocracy as they passed daily through the squalor of their times and of Rousseau's despair that knowledge seemed never to lead to virtue in acts. What more dismal judgment on the humanities than that they may in fact be causative of such dissonance between thought and deed?*

---

* It is surely one of life's more twisted ironies that the man who bore such a high degree of personal responsibility for the inhuman aspects of fascism, Adolf Hitler, should also be an ardent supporter of a humanities-based system of education. The following is from *Mein Kampf* (1971):

> It is the characteristic of our present materialized epoch that our scientific education is turning more and more toward practical subjects – in other words mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc. Necessary as this is for a period in which technology and chemistry rule. . .it is equally dangerous when the general education of a nation is more and more exclusively directed toward them. This education on the contrary must always be ideal. It must be more in keeping with the humanistic subjects and offer only the foundations for a subsequent

Fascism, genocide, and the development of nuclear weapons and their links with the 'best and the brightest' added to the doubts concerning the relationship between a humanistic tradition and human behaviour. Psychologists developed a plethora of theories to explain the distance between thought and deed (Stanley Milgram's electric shock experiments were especially unnerving) and philosophers and historians probed the humanism of Central Europe looking for the fatal flaw, much as they were to probe the United States in the 1960's looking for the flaws that led to My Lai. The humanities as a guide to action in the world had been found wanting.

Finally, the dramatic social, economic and technological changes of the past 200 years have taken their toll on the humanities. Even in the 19th century, the great 'age of the machine', liberal education rooted in classical literature and history was still seen as essential background for a 'gentleman', the modernized version of the Greek 'free man' (King, 1977). The liberally educated gentlemen of the 19th century were trained in the classroom, the playing fields and the chapel to exercise effective political and moral leadership and the training generally led to the expected rewards.

This aristocratic era ended in the 20th century with the humanistic 'rite of passage' being replaced by one based on science or commerce. Henry Ford's conclusion that history was "bunk" was no idle banter – he was making an important point for a generation of students. High culture, to which the humanities had become tied, was no longer perceived as an essential attribute for attaining social status. The new wave of students in higher education, primarily from middle and working class backgrounds, wished to acquire immediate skills, information, and credentials in order to gain a specific job at the end of their education. High culture was increasingly seen as a luxury, something that could be picked up later if necessary, perhaps via television or other forms of mass media (Stanton, 1976; Hurn, 1979). Not only Greek, Latin, and Classics, but also history, literature and philosophy were now adornments, useful only as adjuncts to a more practical course of study (except, of course, to the humanities para-professionals and the army of teachers-to-be).

The Rhetoric of the Humanities

The humanities did not disappear, of course, and in fact were required disciplines in many educational institutions. This in part reflected the bias of those still devising curricula and in part was a political response to the problems posed by

---

additional education in a special field. Otherwise we renounce the forces which are still more important for the preservation of the nation than all technical or other ability. Especially in historical instruction we must not be deterred from the study of antiquity. Roman history correctly conceived in extremely broad outlines is and remains the best mentor, not only for today, but probably for all time. The Hellenic ideal of culture should also remain preserved for us in its exemplary beauty."

the new popularity of education. Christopher Lasch (1978) argues that beginning in the 19th century American authorities used the liberal arts to bring about a "democratization of culture", a necessary response to the growing gap between elite and masses. The new generation of students were introduced to their culture via a new, non-critical humanities – ". . .an agent for the production of knowledge for mass consumption", a vehicle for breaking down provincial, familial, and ethnic loyalties and thus creating the ideal product for a modern, corporate society: ". . .a person with no roots, without prejudices, enlightened in the sense of having no settled convictions, tolerant, able to move about freely, to mix freely with his co-workers, and to adapt easily to new places and living conditions". Lasch argues that just as the 19th century needed self-reliant, autonomous, sober, pious and industrious citizens, so the 20th century requires this new adaptive and relativist man. In both cases the humanities have been marshalled into service to address the need.

The humanities as prostitute is not a pleasant picture. Whether servicing the career aspirations of students or the cultural and political needs of the state, either way it is not the role which the rhetoric of the humanities proclaims for itself. The rhetoric is impressive in volume, range and goals. If we are to launch a renaissance, this rhetoric provides a hint of the objectives to which we may choose to strive. Paul Kristeller (1981), for instance, stresses the civilizing mission of the humanities, the ability of these subjects to give individuals a ". . .broader and less provincial perspective, a better judgment and taste, and a greater insight and intellectual discipline based on the accurate grasp of facts and the acquired habit of precise and critical thinking". Watson Kirkconnel (1976) echos these sentiments, referring to a humanizing process implicit in ". . .projecting ourselves imaginatively into the environment, the problems and the characters created for us by the great masters. . .", in gaining perspective and the power of reflective and critical judgment in philosophy. Alan Bullock (1980) sees the humanities as the guardian of the unique and particular in human affairs and the only field of inquiry free of the restrictions of empiricism. Simone Reagor (1978) shares this concern with values and couples it with the mission to nurture and train ". . .those aspects of being and personality that are our highest attributes: reason, imagination, and the ability to communicate".

There is another feature of the rhetoric which commands our attention and that is its central concern for the issue of human freedom. If the humanities focus on the qualities of being human such as reason, imagination and critical abilities, the quality of freedom seems paramount. Ralph Perry (1939) makes this the centerpiece of his definition: ". . .to embrace whatever influences conduce to freedom. . .". By freedom he means ". . .enlightened choice. . .the action in which habit, reflex, or suggestion are superseded by an individual's judgments of good and evil; the action whose premises are explicit; the action which proceeds from reflection and integration". Since freedom is proportional to the range of options, the first condition of Perry's freedom is learning. This anti-deterministic quality is shared by Hardison (1972) who insists that the world and the self are

indeterminate – they are but what we individually and collectively make of them. This is a long way from Freud's emphasis on instinct, Eysenck's hedonistic biologism, Dostoevsky's pessimism, and Symon's willing brute.

Three Approaches to the Humanities

According to these humanists, then, the agenda for a renaissance in the humanities would necessarily focus on the provision to individuals and collectivities of the intellectual and imaginative tools necessary to better make enlightened decisions. A straight-forward vision and one firmly embedded in the humanistic tradition, but one which also leads to a variety of responses. In reviewing current writing and organization around the humanities, I can discern three fundamental approaches and several sub-sets.

The first approach I would characterize as traditionalist, the defence of the humanities being based on a notion of intrinsic value, coupled with a sense of faith that through reason society will eventually come to see this value. The study of literature, history, philosophy, art and language are valuable because they are valuable. Some supporters of this approach, recognizing that this is an age of proofs and that reason may not in fact prevail, have sought to define that value in terms of personal growth and citizenship and as well have sought to offer evidence that the humanities does engender these qualities.

A second approach to characterizing this renaissance leaps further into the world of proofs and pragmatism and attempts to build a case for the humanities on very utilitarian grounds. The focus here is on 'use-value' – the social and vocational uses or value of the humanities. Many of the recently established humanities institutes would fit into this category. Finally, the third approach ties the humanities to issues of social change and liberation.

The Traditionalist Approach

The mere fact of having survived as a field of study for 2500 years is justification enough for many in the humanities to feel confident of the worth of their discipline. Ever conscious of the past, not as a weight but as a living tradition, many scholars reject any imperative to change, to prove, or to in any other way concede to transitory conditions. There is a kind of aristocratic paternalism at work here, a belief that the humanities should be central to education because of some inner logic beyond explanation. There is also a rather humble appreciation of the effect of the subject matter itself, independent of the machinations of the teacher:

> We are not in control of what happens with any of the material that we teach and any pretence that we are is muddleheaded. My job in teaching Chaucer is to expose the text and clear away the blocks, to cope with what has happened to language in 500 years, but in teaching undergraduates my job is to let Chaucer work, and over that I am not in control. . .The work itself does what it ought to do, and it does it with a curious kind of individual tailoring to each individual student. My 'authority' over what the effect of that work must be upon the individual human being with whom I am dealing is an

> assumption of authority which has no justification, either in the traditions of my trade or in my own skill in learning. (Healy, 1975)

Healy has certainly addressed the key issue, that of effects. To defend, justify or advance the position of the humanities in modern education seems to call for a concern with effects, the more pragmatic the better. The traditionalist approach rejects this gambit, indeed probably rejects the very basis of the exercise, the idea that such proofs exist. The difficulty, of course, is that discussions of the humanities must then assume an almost mystical or religious tone where ". . .the tone and style of the celebrant override the proof of the scientist" (Winter, 1981).

There is a compelling reality to this faith in the power of the humanities, just as there is a compelling reality to religious faith. Steiner (1967) is no doubt correct when he says that a reading of *Anna Karenina* or Proust must affect the very core of our sexual feelings and that Kafka's *Metamorphosis* must forever alter the occasions when we view our image in a mirror. E.F. Schumacher (1973) is persuasive when he argues that by not knowing Shakespeare or its ilk, one simply "misses life". Northrop Frye (1964), echoing Matthew Arnold, celebrates the essential role of the humanities in developing the imagination which, indirectly, is crucial to making us 'human', providing ". . .the kind of standards and values we need if we're to do anything better than adjust". Persuasive, but maddeningly 'soft' and elitist. In an age of accountability, democratization, and vocationalism such an approach may work at only those institutions sufficiently insulated from society to ignore these pressures. The inner directed, quality of life explanation of the humanities demands from the student a suspension of vocationalism and a leisurely approach to learning which is practical for only a few.

Healy (1975), in his discussion of teaching Chaucer cited above, concludes his thoughts on the subject of the humanities by crediting them with the ". . .creation of citizenship under the wide heading of reasoning". Citizenship, while an old fashioned phrase to some, is certainly a general enough effect to be accepted by some as a reasonable goal and reasoning is almost universally seen as a central component of the study of the humanities. More important for those humanists who wish to go beyond the narrow strictures of the traditionalist approach, citizenship and reasoning appear to lend themselves to some kind of measurement and thus open the door to the production of proofs.

In major studies of the impact of higher education and the liberal arts in particular, Chickering (1969) and Heath (1968) have argued that there are a range of effects related to personal development, reasoning and, ultimately, citizenship. In the burgeoning field of research on individual moral and cognitive development, Lawrence Kohlberg and others have argued that the humanities are uniquely suited to bringing about such development. By far the most impressive work of this genre, however, is the recent study by David Winter and his colleagues (1981), *A New Case for the Liberal Arts.* Comparing students attending a small liberal arts college with those at a large university and several other colleges, and doing so through an elaborate series of tests and longitudinal studies, the authors conclude that the effects of the liberal arts experience are real and are qualitatively superior to the other educational experiences.

The research conducted by Winter contains few surprises for those already committed to the humanities, but it does make the move from faith to evidence. Effects were found in three major areas:

1. Cognition: The students were better able to form and articulate complex concepts and arrange confusing impressions and data. They were more intellectually flexible and consistent, able to deal in a rational and sophisticated way with conflicting arguments on both sides of controversial issues.
2. Motivation: The students were better able to discipline and temper their power drives "...so they can mobilize resources and work for the goals of the larger society rather than pursue a profligate path of individual potency".
3. Self-knowledge: The students had developed a more realistic, differentiated sense of their own strengths and weaknesses.

One of the more interesting and impressive attributes to emerge from the research is essentially political, related to the ideal of citizenship. Speaking of the growth of maturity, the authors conclude that one of the greatest impacts of a liberal arts education is that students learn to "...adapt to the environment in more mature ways – learning the limits of authority, dealing consciously with ambivalent feelings, and taking pleasure in work and other people". This is essentially a process of socialization, or perhaps the homogenization that Lasch was referring to, and what the study demonstrates is that the liberal arts do it best.

It is with these paeans to citizenship that the traditional humanists come closest to a utilitarian ideal; forging a national community through a shared culture. Germany, France and the United States are notorious for using the humanities to such an end, but Canada provides an equally interesting though perhaps more benign case study. The role of classical education in Quebec in the 19th and well into the 20th century is an illustration of the power of the humanities when harnessed to political, national or ecclesiastic ends. Likewise the more contemporary rise of a nationalist literature and history in both English and French Canada is clearly linked to deliberate attempts to foster or even impose a sense of nationhood. The state-sponsored rise of Canadian Studies, Canadian music, drama and art, and the re-creation of a national culture in Quebec are powerful testimony to the regard for the humanities outside the academy.

The link with politics and with the qualities of good citizenship provide a good beginning for defining a 'use' for the humanities. The process can be exhilerating for humanists impatient with attacks on their faith. It can also lead to overconfidence. One advocate, ascribing to the humanities the development of tolerance, imagination, reasoning power, communicative abilities, and an appreciation of human complexity, asserts that "If a society's educational system is properly devoted to the humanities, these attributes will come to characterize the society itself (Reagor, 1978). George Steiner's caveat is a useful thing to keep in mind on these occasions.

My own experience with the humanities lends considerable credence to an emphasis on attitudinal and socialization effects. For six years I taught history

to adult prisoners who were involved in a humanities-based university program in a Federal prison. The program had as its goal the development of cognitive and moral reasoning, attitude change, and subsequent change in behaviour. In a follow-up study of 75 released prisoners and a control group, we found a dramatic reduction in recidivism, consistent employment records, and evidence of very real attitude and social change (Ayers, 1980). It was tempting to ascribe this success to the humanities curriculum, but the story is probably more complex, involving peer pressure, the impact of a tightly-knit educational community in the prison, and the economic impact of higher education on subsequent employment. Nonetheless, the humanities courses obviously had an impact on attitudes and behaviour – a measurable impact.

Once into the world of psychological testing, theories of attitude change and cognitive-moral development, the humanist is on essentially enemy ground and must tread carefully. The issues are complex, the instruments unreliable, and the whole field subject to a great deal of deliberate mystification. What appears so complex and perversely enticing may in fact be quite simple. My favourite anecdote concerning the impact of the humanities on attitudes and behaviour comes from an evaluation of a humanities project for early school leavers in Great Britain. When asked to describe the kind of effects they thought the program had had, one student replied:

> What I think about Humanities is that it widens your vocabulary and the way I think, tremendously I mean. Geoff's girl-friend was mucking about and calling me all sorts of insulting names, and so on, and I just told her to stop making superfluous remarks – and she didn't know where to put herself. A normal everyday sort of person just doesn't use words like that; they've got no answer if you say something like that to them, you know. And I found it the same way, well, in the street, or arguments with teachers, you don't have to revert to violence, but to vocabulary, and if you come up with a lot of linked up, very long words that mean very small things – but they've never heard them before – they get all upset and don't know what to say and sort of reel about, you know. (MacDonald, 1978)

This 'Pygmalion effect' of a humanities education may be the most obvious and powerful contribution we make to individual development. We impart a complex and flexible yet still vernacular language which individuals may use to better interpret their reality and relate to their society.

The Humanities As Utilitarian

Some advocates of the humanities have not been content to rest their case on mere personal development or good citizenship. The focus instead is on the issue of 'use' rather than effect – use for both the individual and for society as a whole. The rise of ethics institutes concerned with medical ethics, the environment, business, ethics in science and so forth are prime examples of the new entrepreneurial strain among humanists. The potential for a practical application of moral

philosophy to social issues ranges from the profound (e.g., Justice Berger's impact on the development of the North) to the token (e.g., the 'house pacifist' at Herman Kahn's Hudson Institute).

Again, the arguments for this approach are persuasive. We have little right, Keeney (1969) argues, to criticize scientists who pursue their research without sufficient attention to consequences if as humanists we do not try to use our knowledge in some social way. The humanities are seen as pivotal in making decisions about the use of the technologies of science and the information of the social sciences because such uses involve questions of value and value questions are the special domain of the humanities (Hoffman, 1982). Beyond that, the quite extraordinary crises and dilemmas which we must confront, from nuclear war to euthanasia to chronic unemployment would seem to demand that the humanities take more than a detached or passive role in our collective search for answers.

There are, of course, dangers to this approach, this active involvement with contemporary society. The entrepreneurial humanities, promising answers in return for money and influence is no more attractive a concept than the entrepreneurial university which so many decry. Ultimately the real danger is one of promising more than can be delivered. We have the example before us of the social sciences, disciplines which promised much and delivered not enough. Poverty, racism, underdevelopment and a host of other social problems remain with us 30 years after their premature burial by many overly optimistic and entrepreneurial social scientists. The humanities are in enough trouble already and do not need to bear the additional cross of unfulfilled expectations.

The utilitarian approach to the humanities also pervades the world of higher education, especially at the community college level. Some see the present crisis as a blessing, one which will force the humanities to abandon its defensive 'you don't know it, but it's good for you' rationale and move instead toward more practical justifications. Thus, William Saunders (1982) talks of literary and historical studies as imparting "...life-enhancing skills with connections...between the lives we are living and the cultural traditions we have inherited". The humanities in this vision must emphasize communicative abilities, problem solving skills, and the techniques of making moral choices – all attributes with obvious vocational applications.

In fact, as Lewis Solomon (1983) points out in a scathing attack on current euphoria surrounding humanities PhD's in business, it is virtually impossible to make a strong case for the purely vocational worth of the humanities. One can argue, as demonstrated above, that these disciplines improve reasoning in some very specific ways, promote leadership abilities, enhance oral and written communication and impart problem solving skills, but in this age of specialization these qualities do not have obvious or immediate vocational applications. They do, nonetheless, complement a more narrow scientific or vocational education. Faced with this dilemma, many humanists, sometimes in desperation, have been forced into 'service' roles in higher education to save jobs and/or the very existence of their discipline. Thus we witness a proliferation of 'humanities' programs

across North America with titles such as: Life Studies; Technology, Contemporary Society, and Human Values; Literature for Technicians; and Ethical Issues in Business (Beckwith, 1981). Each science, social science and professional discipline is generating its own humanities component, providing a historical, ethical, literary or linguistic perspective on the particular problems and issues of that discipline.

In the past year, I have attended two conferences which focused on this utilitarian quest; one at the University of Chicago and the other at Sonoma State University in California. Both were besieged with registrants, most of them college and university teachers of liberal arts subjects who were looking for a way to protect their jobs, looking for a rationale or proof of the worth of their vocation. The Chicago conference, "Developmental Theory, Liberal Learning and Critical Thinking", focused on several analytical schemes which could be employed to demonstrate the effectiveness of the liberal arts, most notably the work of William Perry and that of Jane Loevinger. Much in the tradition of the Winter study, these schemes provided a way to measure, to evaluate, and thus to demonstrate worth to sceptical administrators. Well over 200 historians, philosophers and teachers of literature spent a week grappling with the terminological and philosophical maze of the social sciences, learning about stage theory, developmental psychology, psychoanalytic approaches, and statistics.

The conference at Sonoma State, "Critical Thinking, Education, and the Rational Person", drew the same kind of audience and was even more entrepreneurial in its approach. 'Critical Thinking' was the product and the 'Informal Logic Movement' the delivery system. The conference had as its central assumption that critical thinking was the central aim of education and that it was not in fact being taught at all. Speakers acknowledged that critical thinking could be imparted through the traditional disciplines of knowledge, but since this was not occurring (as proven by various measurement devices), the task at hand was to teach it directly. Various means of doing this were paraded before the participants from DeBono's lateral thinking system to the Practical Reasoning program of the AVER group at the University of British Columbia. In all, at least ten separate critical thinking programs or packages were being marketed at the conference, each with its own set of proofs and statistical evidence.

In Chicago the developmental psychologists were the gurus for the humanities while at Sonoma State it was the philosophers of the Informal Logic 'Movement'. Both meetings were characterized by a notable absence of discussion of the subject matter of the humanities or liberal arts, and an easy willingness to abstract, even reify, critical thinking into something which could and perhaps should be taught directly. At both meetings I had the impression of humanists who were confused, alarmed, and not a little naive being descended upon by yet another group of academic hucksters. The disciplines of knowledge the participants represented were being perceived as a means to an end that was demonstrable.

The transformation of the humanities from core to ancillary service is obviously full of implications for the disciplines involved. On the one hand, it can be merely

a survival technique, a short-term tactic. On the other hand, it may serve to break down the sometimes petrified walls between the humanities disciplines and force a more holistic look at what the humanities can offer. Or, conversely, it could lead to even more compartmentalization among and within the disciplines as some become more 'vocationally relevant' than others. What happens to philosophy, for instance, if ethics is the only branch of the discipline seen as useful? Or literature if only novels concerned with commerce are acceptable? The utilitarian road is fraught with dangers.

Humanists can take some comfort from the fact that their dilemma is not a new one. Even at its birth the humanities were in contention with the more practical arts. Aristotle notes in his *Politics* that ". . .confusing questions arise out of the education that actually prevails, and it is not at all clear whether the pupils should practice pursuits that are practically useful, or morally edifying, or higher accomplishments. . ." (cited in King and Brownell, 1966).

Humanities and Social Change

The approaches to the humanities outlined so far have all had as their central focus maintaining, integrating or re-integrating the humanities with existing institutions and norms. Inevitably, there is another approach which chooses to see the humanities as a force for social transformation. Because the humanities have always had such a profound focus on tradition, on the development of the inner self, and a decidedly anti-deterministic stance, they have not generally been identified with forces and movements of social change.

Much of the modern heritage of the humanities, on the other hand, is mired in revolutionary tradition. Secular humanism in the 18th century was a powerful pre-condition of revolutionary change and the scientific and industrial revolutions had their origins in the speculative tradition in the humanities. In our time, many of the challenges to militarism and technicism have their base in a moral critique as well as in a competing sense of what it means to be human. Hardison (1972) expresses this humanistic critique in the following:

> . . .it has opposed the values of modern society on the grounds that their abject surrender to things and abstractions denies man his freedom, strips him of his dignity, and leaves him an alien in his own world. The failure of modern society – its dehumanization of the working classes, its over-reliance on technology, its corresponding indifference to traditional human values, and its use of overt and covert force as substitutes for the organic social forms once sustained by these values – are the evidence on which the humanistic critique of modern society rests.

The critique is all the more powerful in the latter decades of the 20th century as science and technology, along with the social sciences, have not only created problems seemingly beyond our control, but offer no ready solutions.

The humanities offer more than a critique, though they stay clear of a blueprint. For humanists like Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci, education in the humanities provides insight for empowerment. For Freire the task of education is

to go beyond concern for access to and distribution of knowledge and toward the definition, creation, and legitimation of knowledge. Critical thinking, a key concept in the idea of the humanities, is more than good reasoning, it is a political act. "Critical thinking as a political act means that human beings must emerge from their own submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled. Not only does this indicate that they must act with others to intervene in the shaping of history, it also means that they must 'escape' from their own history, i.e., that which society has made of them" (Giroux, 1980). In this sense we return to the notion of use, but not a use for adaptation or integration but rather one of change and transformation. Taught and perceived in this way, all of the effects of the humanities such as reasoning, insight, and imagination become tools for a 'critical consciousness'.

One of the most powerful spokesmen for this view of the humanities is Antonio Gramsci. Speaking on behalf of the proletariat, he called for their conquest of intellectual power as an essential first step in challenging bourgeois hegemony. To accomplish this he said the proletariat must critically assimilate traditional humanistic knowledge:

> To create a new culture does not mean to make original discoveries on an individual basis. It also and especially means to critically popularize already discovered truths, to make them, so to speak, social, therefore give them the consistency of basis for vital action, make them coordinating elements of intellectual and social relevance. That masses of men be led to evaluate in a coordinated way the present reality is, philosophically speaking, a much more important and original fact than the isolated philosophical genius' discovery of a certain truth, which is left in heritage to small intellectual groups. (cited in Welton, 1982)

Gramsci's educational ideas were firmly rooted in traditional, mainstream humanistic culture. The problem was the enforced isolation of this common culture from the mass of the population or, in Lasch's sense, the homogenization of that culture as it was translated to that population. From Gramsci's perspective folklore and mysticism were the bane of the working classes and both were most efficiently negated by a traditional education in the humanities which taught that "...there exist social and state laws which are the product of human activity, which are established by men and can be altered by men in the interests of their collective development" (Entwhistle, 1978).

CONCLUSION

Academic journals are full of articles by humanists and their peers, all dissecting the humanities, lamenting their condition, and prescribing a variety of cures. Is this mere sound and fury, an imploding debate ignored by the very real forces of science and technology which are actively re-shaping the world? Or has the wave of material progress crested in the minds of men and the world awaiting a humanism which will bring order and humanity back to the social order? Or, more likely,

is it still a struggle, still a contest between a social vision based on individual worth and dignity and one based on the movement of forces and interests beyond the range of such individuals?

If the latter is the case and a renaissance of the humanities therefore worth fighting for, where does one begin and in which direction should one go? Clearly, there is no consensus here. Humanists would find it contradictory to their calling to be forced into schools of thought, to be made structural-functionalists or conflict theorists to use current paradigms from the social sciences. What has impressed me in this review is the breadth of the debate, the agreements on fundamentals and the tolerance of differences. Indeed, the debates among humanists would seem to bear out the findings of the Winter study that the humanities are anathema to authoritarian models and are productive of tolerance and the ability to entertain conflicting points of view.

Each perspective discussed in this paper is an integral part of the struggle to make the humanities a vital force in the lives of individuals and societies in the late 20th century. The traditionalists, be they high priests or dinosaurs, serve to keep the rest of us honest by their cautionary scepticism. The worst move for the humanities would be to promise too much to a public already jaded and wary of academics bearing gifts. Those who stress the qualities of personal development and try to prove their point act as the crucial bridge to colleagues in the social sciences, many of whom have come to realize the limitations of their own disciplines and see linkage with the humanities as a potential synthesis. The ultilitarians occupy the most dangerous ground in that they offer a facile kind of relevance, but they do keep the humanities in the public eye, probing the boundaries of social utility. While seen by many as dangerous and regrettably irresistible, such efforts to 'sell' the humanities may be an essential step in maintaining strength within existing institutions. Finally, those who advocate linking the humanities to social and cultural change keep these disciplines at the forefront of the debates which characterize our times. To a world bereft of answers to questions that cannot be ignored, they offer a 'way of seeing' that transcends the ideological and politicized traps that have locked us in sterile paradigms.

REFERENCES

Ayers, J.D., et. al. *Effects of University of Victoria program: a post-release study.* Prepared under contract with the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada, May, 1980.

Beckwith, Miriam. Integrating the humanities and occupational programs. *Community College Review,* 1981, *9,* 57-64.

Braudel, Fernand. *Capitalism and material life.* New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Broderick, Francis. A checklist for the humanities. *Liberal Education,* 1981, *67*(2), 166-176.

Bullock, Alan. The future of humanistic studies. *Teachers College Record,* 1980, *82*(2), 173-189.

Chickering, Arthur. *Education and identity.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969.

Entwhistle, Harold. Antonio Gramsci and the school as hegemonic. *Educational Theory,* 1978, *28* (1), 23-33.

Eysenck, H.J. The biology of morality. In Thomas Lickona, *Moral development and behavior.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its discontents.* New York: Norton, 1961.

Frye, Northrop. *The educated imagination.* Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1964.

Giroux, Henry. Schooling and the culture of positivism: Notes on the death of history. *Educational Theory,* 1980, *24* (4), 263-284.

Hardison, O.B. *Toward freedom and dignity: The humanities and the idea of humanity.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972.

Healy, Timothy. The state of the humanities: A symposium. *Change,* 1975, *7* (6), 40-69.

Heath, Douglas. *Growing up in college: Liberal education and maturity.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1968.

Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971.

Hoffman, Robert. Of what use are the humanities? *Academe,* 1982, May, 25-27.

Hough, Graham. The crisis in literary education. In J. Plumb, *Crisis in the humanities.* Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1964.

Hurn, Christopher. Prospects for liberal education. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 1979, *60* (9), 630-632.

Jarrett, James. Toward elitist schools. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 1979, *60* (9), 647-649.

Keeney, B. The humanities: Episode or continuum? *Educational Record,* 1969, *50* (3), 256-260.

King, John. Purposes, myths and higher education in the age of adversity. *Journal of General Education,* 1977, *29,* 1-12.

King, Arthur and John Brownell. *The Curriculum and the disciplines of knowledge.* New York: John Wiley, 1966.

Kirkconnell, Watson. The humanities. *Humanities Association Review,* 1976, *27* (4), 323-330.

Kristeller, Paul. The humanities. *Humanities Report,* 1981, *3* (5), 2-3.

Lasch, Christopher. Democratization of culture. *Change,* 1975, *7* (6), 14-23.

MacDonald, Barry. *The experience of innovation.* Occasional Publication #6, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, Norwich, 1978.

McClintock, Robert. Dynamics of decline. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 1979, *60* (9), 636-640.

Perry, Ralph. A definition of the humanities. In T. Greene, *The meaning of the humanities.* Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1969 (1939).

Plumb, J.H. *Crisis in the humanities.* Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1964.

Rabkin, Eric. Ways of knowing of the humanities. *Journal of Aesthetic Education,* 1978, *12,* 105-107.

Reagor, A.S. The state of the humanities. *Educational Record,* 1978, *59* (2), 148-155.

Saunders, William. The humanities vs. careerism. *Improving College and University Teaching,* 1982, *30* (4), 149-151.

Schumacher, E.F. *Small is beautiful.* New York: Harper, 1973.

Solomon, Lewis. The humanist as business executive: Wishful thinking? *Educational Record,* 1983, *64* (1), 32-37.

Stanton, Charles. Reflections on vocationalized liberal education. *Educational Forum,* 1976, *60* (3), 297-302.

Steiner, George. Humane literacy. In *Language and Silence.* New York: Atheneum, 1967.

Steiner, George. *In Bluebeard's castle.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.

Symons, Julian. In *Times Literary Supplement,* 4 March 1983.

Thevanez, Pierre. The presence of the past. *Western Humanities Review,* 1983, *37*(1), 1-21.

Welton, Michael. Gramsci's contribution to the analysis of public education knowledge. *Journal of Educational Thought,* 1982, *16* (3), 140-149.

White, T.H. *The age of scandal.* Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1950.

Winter, David, et. al. *A New case for the liberal arts.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981.