The Embattled Humanities: Another View

By Edward H. Rosenberry

I'm going to try to say something useful about the humanities—lit- erature, philosophy, history, the arts—in a college education. Some of the rumblings of discord in this once peaceful field may already have caught your attention. Several months ago on network TV, William Bennett, then secretary of education, engaged the president of Stanford University in heated debate over curriculum revision, expressly in the humanities. Last fall, the Philadelphia Inquirer ran a similar exchange between representatives of the same polarized views at the University of Pennsylvania. The New York Times, in describing a recent hate session on this subject at Chapel Hill, illustrated its report with a cartoon of two knights in armor brandishing pens. At the University of Delaware Frank B. Dilley has just entered the lists with a lively defense of this university's thriving humanities program against spokesmen such as the chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, who see humanistic education threatened or in decline. The battle lines are drawn. The outcome does matter to all of us who are concerned with the health and welfare of higher education. Therefore a few minutes of our time may be well spent in taking another look at the issues and stakes in what may all too easily be dismissed as a tempest in a teapot.

The Essence of the Quarrel

The current quarrel over the nature and prospects of liberal education, particularly those studies focusing on people rather than things, resembles a familiar religious or political conflict in that the same code words, "liberal" and "conservative," are used to rally the troops and vitify the opposing forces. As you would expect, "liberals" are perceived as rushing about changing things, while "conservatives" are seen as digging in their heels and crying, "Back to the basics!" It's an age-old animosity, always smoldering, whatever the controversy, and ignited from time to time by some charismatic spokesman for one persuasion or the other. In the case of the humanities, the spark for our time was struck by an erudite philosopher professor at the University of Chicago named Allan Bloom, in a book that is both hard to read and hard to ignore. If so subtle and learned a work, running to nearly 400 pages, can be said to have a "bottom line," it is that the heart of a liberal education is (or should be) Plato's Republic, and that, thus anchored, the proper curriculum consists of a program of reading and discussion that gained fame in Bloom's youth and mine. (continued on page 2)

Greene to Retire October 1, Search Committee Named

Kenneth M. Greene, who has served as secretary of Phi Beta Kappa since 1975, has announced his retirement as of October 1, 1989. Phi Beta Kappa President Otis A. Singletary has appointed Catherine S. Sims, a recent past president of the Society, to head a search committee to find a successor. The other members of the committee are Joan M. Ferrante, vice president of the Society, and two other Phi Beta Kappa senators, Charles Blitzer and Frederick J. Crosson.

Members who wish to suggest candidates for the position of Phi Beta Kappa secretary should communicate with Chairman Sims at The Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, DC 20009.

Phi Beta Kappa Names 1989-90 Visiting Scholars

Thirteen Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholars have been selected for 1989-90. This is the 33rd year of the program, under which noted scholars visit some 100 college and university campuses for public lectures and informal classroom and seminar discussions with undergraduates. The new Visiting Scholars are as follows:

- R. Stephen Berry, professor of chemistry, University of Chicago. A member of the National Academy of Sciences and a fellow of the American Physical Society, he was chosen a MacArthur fellow in 1983. He is the coauthor of The Total Social Cost of Fossil and Nuclear Power and Physical Chemistry.
- Alexander Dallin, Raymond A. Spruance Professor of International History and Political Science, Stanford University. He also serves as director of the Center for Russian and East European Studies and is the author of German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945, The Soviet Union and Disarmament, Soviet Conduct in World Affairs, The Gorbachev Era, and Soviet Scholarship under Gorbachev.
- Peter Davison, poet, editor, Boston, Massachusetts. His eight volumes of poetry include The Breaking of the Day, (continued on back cover)

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as "The Great Books." This agenda, long settled into a tradition and still honored at St. John's, Annapolis, and perhaps elsewhere, could hardly be thought incidental, except for the truculence with which it is advanced.

To reread a book like Mark Van Doren's Liberal Education, which made the same case 40-odd years ago, is to see how radically an argument can be transformed by the author's tone of voice. Whereas Van Doren's effort was to revive our spirits in the debilitating thores of World War II, Bloom comes on armed for battle with domestic enemies he sees as Vandal's of the Left, bred in the Terrible '60s and threatening our annihilation in the Unregenerate '80s. Today's campus, as Bloom pictures it, is not greatly different from T.S. Eliot's Waste Land or from Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach."

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Appropriately, Bloom calls his book The Closing of the American Mind, by which he means the narrowing—even the nullifying—of higher education by programs of study so lacking in rigor and so exposed to every wandering wind as to compound the very ignorance they propose to dispel. He is very hard on courses born of contemporary political and social concerns or dealing with popular questions falling under the basket justification of "relevance," that great battle cry of the era that traumatized him. He is hard on teachers who purvey and defend this educational menu. And he is especially hard on students: Students come to college (in his word) "unfurnished," that is, empty-headed, superficial, ill-motivated, and self-centered. They come from schools that provide mere technical "sugar coating," and they come from homes that have (again in his words) "hardly any intellectual life at all." These starved and decadent young, as he portrays them, are dead to the traditions of their culture and (most damning of all) addicted to rock music, which deadens the ear and deadens the soul.

Now we have all heard a great deal about modern students' wofe ignorance of geography, biography, foreign languages, English grammar, basic mathematics—the list goes on; and no doubt there is some fire beneath all that smoke, especially in the ranks of marginal students. But Bloom's broadbrush portrait of the species reminds me of Oscar Wilde's picture of Dorian Gray, full of the lines and shadows of cynical dissipation, while all those fresh young faces confront us in the classroom of America, looking alert, intelligent, responsive, and not even wholly lost to virtue and good taste.

The accuracy of such a black portrait everyone must assess for himself; I must say it does not much resemble the students I taught in the '70s—apart, of course, from that barbarous penchant for rock and roll, and I have known even that to give way, in time, to a decent appreciation of Mozart.

I take some comfort not only from my own experience, but from the broader perspective of historians like Richard Hofstadter, who points out that "something has always been missing in our educational performance," and that, therefore, the "educational jeremiad" with an "undercurrent of something close to despair" has been "a feature of our literature" from the earliest days of the Republic. Somehow the sky has not yet fallen.

Why This Jeremiad?

Education, it seems, is one of the subjects on which Americans are masochistic. We know we make a mess of it despite our pretensions to excellence, and so we are always ready for some Savonarola to denounce our sins and order out our hair shirts. A harsh critic administers a spiritual catharsis. We take a bath in all the nasty things he says about us and come out feeling refreshed, even though we reject his reforms and keep on doing what we were doing before. It's the usual drama of the confessional.

In the case of Savonarola, there was a severe backlash; he got burned at the stake. That will not happen to Allan Bloom, but already his heresies are being defined and enumerated by those who judge him reactionary, elitist, antidemocratic, subversive, and impractical. Interestingly, these are the same crimes that were imputed to his exemplar, Socrates, by the Athenian society at whose hands the famous cup of hemlock was administered.

But that will not happen to Allan Bloom either, for the simple reason that his opinions are published in the free air of a more tolerant democracy that stands open to conflicting values. Yet it is to this very openness that Bloom attributes the "closing" of the American mind. His devil is "relativism" in thought, word, and deed, and, unfortunately, relativism is a necessary condition of viable democracy. In a society in which each individual is respected equally with his neighbor—never mind of what sex, color, or faith—a certain latitude attaches to what he thinks, says, and does. We risk violation of that latitude if we tell him that one dominant culture is in sole possession of Truth and Beauty. The house of man, like the house of God, has many mansions, and the humanities, to be worthy the name, must take unbiased account of them all.

Shorn of its contemporary allusions and applications, Bloom's quarrel is strongly reminiscent of what Jonathan Swift, nearly 300 years ago, called "The Battle of the Books," and it declares the same hypothetical victory of the Ancients over the Moderns. But, such a debate can never be categorically decisive, partly because good and bad books are produced in all times and places, partly because the evaluation of what the human imagination creates is not an act of mathematical precision. To believe otherwise is to fall into what seems to me the sin of absolutism.

How revealing this theological terminology is! Relativism is one man's "devil"; absolutism is another man's "sin." I suppose I fall into that language because the tone of Bloom's argument reminds me of what Herman Melville said after hearing a lecture by Ralph Waldo Emerson. He admired the depth and range of Emerson's mind, he said, but there was, in his manner, "the insinuation that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions."

Platonists in an Aristotelian World

In attempting to account for Bloom's peculiar assumption of rectitude, I found a clue in his remark that every European is born a follower of Descartes or Pascal—roughly, of science or religion. This formulation brought back to mind a similar observation of Coleridge, that "every man is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist"; and it struck me with a shock of recognition that what troubles me about Allan Bloom and his cohorts of the Right is that they are Platonists in an Aristotelian world. If that sounds like a terribly abstruse critique, bear with me while I bring it down-to-earth and up-to-date.

Start with a picture. There is a well-known painting by Raphael called The School of Athens, which shows Plato and Aristotle discoursing in the midst of their disciples. What is immediately apparent in this stagy scene is that Plato is gesturing upward as if in appeal to some supernal aim or authority, while Aristotle gestures horizontally, as if calling to witness the evidences of this Earth.

Or, to take a literary equivalent, readers of Moby Dick will recall the lofty masthead of the whaling ship where Melville pictures a dreamy Platonist on watch who may, in his abstraction, not only miss his whale but perhaps even lose his footing and plunge to his death. Below on the mundane deck, in contrast, it is the spirit of Aristotle that reigns over the classification and dissection of actual whales.

THE KEY REPORTER
To take one more example a little closer to home, our new commissioner of major league baseball, A. Bartlett Giamatti, a Renaissance scholar and former president of Yale University, appreciates both Platonic and Aristotelian baseball, that is (in his words), "an idealized version which may only exist in our imagination" and "each game as it unfolds in the present." He comes down, as I would do, on the side of Aristotle: "You don't love baseball in the abstract," he says, "but you love it in its particularities." Whether my old college philosophy professor was a baseball fan or a golfer I no longer remember, but he used to say, "Aristotle kept his eye on the ball." In contrast, Allan Bloom and the educational reformers of the Right are what some wag has termed "high priori thinkers." For them, Truth is a monument of immemorial design, not made for modification or movement.

Don't be scandalized. My opposition to that mentality may not be so relativistic as it sounds. The stance that I have loosely called Aristotelian, while admittedly pragmatic, is not a denial of idealism as we commonly use that word to reflect our adherence to principles and approximation to goals. It is a rejection of purely theoretical models in favor of experimentation and experiential criteria. It is neither drift nor surrender to the tides of fashion, but it is a commitment (again quoting Bart Giamatti) "to take reality as it comes." It does not erode our obligation to hold fast that which is good — including the challenge of Plato — but it does require accommodation of that which is to be learned to the mind of the prospective learner. Above all, my approach calls for a willingness to believe that the half-filled vessels occupying the classrooms of America are receptive containers and not half-empty cartons precipitately leaking away what little they hold.

The common ground I share with Bloom and Company is that humanistic studies should focus on what Matthew Arnold called "the best that has been thought and said." The question between us is whether that best is the sole province of the Western classics or an ongoing venturesome process in which each age and each segment of the population that feels an identity expresses its own character and aspirations. Vision, which is as close as any of us can come to Truth, is a human universal, dynamic, not static. Even Samuel Johnson, who as a lexicographer was a model Aristotelian, fell into a Platonic trap when he imagined that his great dictionary could fix the English language, pure and immutable, for all time to come. We know now that each generation must write its own dictionary as the language evolves, just as it must produce its own art and technology, building on the past but not dwelling in it. The universe of knowledge and imagination is generating new data at an exponential rate and presenting the learning mind with a constantly growing agenda. The judgment of Ecclesiastes that "there is nothing new under the sun" may tell us something about our moral nature but not about our intellectual perspective.

A Note to Students

I am quick to concede that excellence in education must be the product, in part, of its content; nothing can come of nothing. But it is only the students that can keep their minds open, and they cannot do that by prescription. It is less important that students be told what to read than that they be shown how to make connections and distinctions between the things they read. Knowledge of the good entails some knowledge of the bad. Education in the end is not indoctrination but challenge, if I may fall back on a badly overused word; and the challenge to each student today is not greatly different from the one Henry James set to the artist: to be "one of the people on whom nothing is lost."

The task for intellectual leaders, like you men and women of Phi Beta Kappa, is to realize the best that is in you, which will always encompass and then go beyond admiration or imitation of the best in someone else — even your own cultural icons. If there is a place for idealism in education, it is in each individual's standards of performance. Being the best you can be not only fulfills yourself but sets new goals for everyone. It may be said of a university as has been said of a nation: A rising tide lifts all boats. You of Phi Beta Kappa represent that rising tide at your institution.

This article is adapted from remarks by Edward H. Rosenberry, professor emeritus of English at the University of Delaware, who spoke at a dinner meeting in November 1988 marking the Phi Beta Kappa chapter's first third of a century at that university. The celebration was sponsored in part by the Delaware Humanities Forum.
Recommended Reading

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one in Boston in 1976. The two central concepts being explored are examined not only psychologically but also in terms of their ethical, political, social, and legal ramifications. The analysis reveals modal tendencies among Americans as well as promising individual deviations. Although possible ways to cope with obedience are provided, the challenge here exploring is both terrifying and bewildering and strikes a central core of modern living.


A timely, informally styled, scholarly account of the mass media in South Africa that support apartheid and of the less massive media that oppose the current regime. The parties and persons reporting, defending, or attacking the statements are quoted, with emphasis on the laws, practices, and goals that govern their expression. The book is written for American readers, and hence carefully selected references to similar and different customs and events in the United States frequently appear into the stated opposition. The facts, the author believes, support his unabashed message that the “power of the press, both high tech and humble,” forces “respect for freedom on those who would crush it” and thus contributes to the “moral growth of the world.” Could he be right?


Yet another effort, a valiant one, by a historian to synthesize Freud by considering psychoanalysis “a theory of history” and then by attempting to demonstrate that the concepts and methods of this history of the individual can be applied to the history of society with which history is usually concerned. Life history thus resembles what we ordinarily call history and vice versa. Freud himself, we are reminded, considered the myth in society to be “the analogue to the dream at the group level.” Such a tightly reasoned analysis of psychoanalysis provides new insights for social scientists and perhaps psychiatrists; conceivably it can impress and stimulate historians.

Frederick J. Crosson


Imagine a contemporary liberal journalist assigned to get the real story on the famous prosecution of 399 B.C.: not graphic descriptions of the proceedings, although we do follow the stops of the trial, but careful analyses of the political background, legal issues, arguments, and justice of the verdict. (Because he thinks the condemnation to death was legal but might have been avoided, Stone also describes how Socrates should have argued his case.) Adroitly written, as one would expect, carefully researched, and, not surprisingly, reflecting a civil libertarian perspective, informative and a pleasure to read.


Everyone knows that in the late Roman Empire, paganism slowly yielded to the spread of Christianity. But what was everyday life for the pagan and the Christian really like?

Drawing together an extraordinary variety and number of sources—including writings, oracles, coins, archaeology, letters, diaries, wills, and burial inscriptions—this fascinating and illuminating synthesis of recent and older discoveries gives a vivid sense of how it was.


A clearly written argument that a core experience common to Buddhism, Vedanta, and Taoism underlies the bifurcation of ordinary consciousness into subject and object. Much Western writing about the Asian traditions never escapes from the languages, leaving the reader with a baggage of terms and a feeling of puzzlement. Loy presents a careful analysis of perception, action, and thinking that conveys what such a core experience of nonduality could be, and he justifies it by constant reference to relevant Western philosophies. Accessible and interesting.


Metaphysics has increasingly perjorative connotations: the search for ultimate foundations seems inconsistent with the finitude of our knowledge. Loy explores the ambiguity of the assertion that the quest is impossible, that philosophy in the grand sense is at an end, can itself not claim to be founded on any transcendent access to truth. Kolakowski contends that the desire to know what is true without qualifications cannot reasonably be eradicated from the human mind, and it would be undesirable to eradicate this desire even if we could. A thoughtful and thought-provoking reflection on the human condition.


This book is a judicious analysis of the position of women in the early Christian communities as reflected in the Pauline epistles, Luke, the other evangelists, and the post-New Testament churches. The author argues that, in contrast to the surrounding society (Roman and eastern Mediterranean), the church and the Christian community offered new roles and a new status for women. Overall, however, the attitude of early Christianity was not a rejection of the patriarchal structure of society but a reformation or transformation of it, in line with the general teaching that the task of Christians was the restoration, not the abolition, of God’s creative plan. The notes give ample attention to the current debate.


It is now generally agreed that Giordano Bruno was condemned not for his cosmological theories but for his unorthodox religious views. This book attempts to make a similar case about Galileo, on the basis of Redondi’s discovery of a previously unknown document in the Vatican archives accusing Galileo’s Assayer The Assayer’s advocacy of an astronomical doctrine incompatible with the orthodox conception of the Eucharist. Redondi tries to show that this accusation was the unacknowledged basis of Galileo’s trial 10 years later. I found the case he makes unconvincing (the authorship of the document is questionable), but I did not see no mention of the mere holding of such a ground, and there is ample motive for the trial in the grounds alleged, namely, the publication of a defense of the truth of Copernicanism in the Two World Systems. But the narrative reads like an intellectual detective story, and the milieu of 17th-century Italy comes dramatically alive.

Robert B. Heilman


Ellmann traces Wilde’s life almost week by week, but the reader’s interest is always held by Ellmann’s urbane writing style, often gently ironic, and his talent for finding the gifted writer and talker tempted from college days by the out-of-bounds and drawn to the self-destructive.


This Spanish tetralogy (1889–95) thoroughly and ironically records Madrid life through the career of an uncool suzerainer and financially on-the-upswing aristocratic family through marriage, used them for social glory, promoted into political conspicuity, and, in a long dying, besieged by a priest trying, with uncertain results, to save his soul.


Gordon executes pleasingly his “purpose,” to record how James Joyce’s book in the order of their occurrence, and to describe as accurately as possible the place and the people involved in the action. He assumes that Joyce remained “realistic” and “mimetic.”


This guide to sound English, written by an Englishman attacking vagueness and bloated government language, will appeal to Americans. Like the original author, the revisers seek a sensible middle ground between pedantic rules and any-thing-goes permissiveness. Their style is plain, forceful, often witty.


Keene amably and lucidly explains, for Western readers, Japanese aesthetics (the basic principles are suggestion, irregularity, simplicity, and perishability) (25 pp.), the principles and history of the poetry (50 pp.), the workings of the fiction (25 pp.) and of Nō, Kabuki, and other theatrical styles (25 pp.).

In the Green Morning: Memories of Federico Garcia Lorca. Francisco Garcia Lorca. Tr. by Christopher Maurer. New Directions, 1986. $23.50; paper, $12.95.

Fourteen sections contain a brother’s somewhat random reminiscences of the dramatist and poet—home life, childhood, school days, friends, law school, artistic development. Ten later sections deal with Lorca’s plays—origins, influences, productions, and stage history. The translator’s English sometimes slumps.


Prater’s biography is encyclopedically inclusive, descriptive rather than analytical; it is virtually a reference work. It follows faithfully Rilke’s numerous changes of scene and lovers.


A good guide to Anglo-Indian fiction, with a summary of pre-1947 writing and a full treatment of post-1947 works. For many writers, the old clichés and stereotypes still hold. The notable exceptions are Paul Scott and Kamala Markandaya, who, along with Ruth Jhabvala, are treated at length.

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This Norwegian novel of 1885 is partly an ib- sesque portrayal of rigid conventionalities and the double standard of sexual conduct, but more interestingly a study of a neuritic femme fatale who cannot endure human imperfections and makes three men as unhappy as she is.


In its candor, wit, ruthless comments on family, friends, other figures, and indeed the author himself, and in an arrangement of materials that often ignores chronology, Stendhal’s famous work seems less an autobiography than an almost random collection of memories and opinions. It is spontaneous, vivacious, unpretentious, and shrewd.


“Pure” biographies—such as those by Plutarch, Aelfric, Vasari, Holinshed, Samuel Johnson—are records of public lives, edifying by example or error. Boswell, the author’s final figure, belongs to the modern trend, whose concern is with the “self” whose shaping Whittemore’s style is engaging, fresh, and lively.


Striving successfully to write for a general as well as a professional audience, Winn describes the “world” or worlds—familial, educational, political, literary—in which Dryden wrote, and Dryden’s writings and life as they are illuminated by these relationships.

Robert P. Sonkowski


Cantarella’s book was originally published in Italian in 1981 but was updated to 1984 for this translation. The author views the life of ancient Greek and Roman women in archaeology, myth, history, literature, politics, and law. She draws pessimistic conclusions and lessons concerning the limitations on women and their inferior status. She also finds against the hypothesis of a prehistoric matriarchy. She warns of the reversibility of women’s emancipation.

Lefkowitz also has high regard for the evidence and emphasizes her unwillingness to read 20th-century concerns into it. Within the context of Greek culture, for example, she sees Greek men not as misogynists but as pioneers in understanding and valuing women’s roles; even Helen of Troy is portrayed by Homer and Euripides as a woman who appeal to men derives not from her sexiness but from her intelligence. Women in myth are viewed as exemplifying not the feminine but the human condition.

Rawson and her collaborators study various aspects of the Roman family, including the roles and positions of women, children, wet-nurses, slaves, and so on, for the purpose of showing the limits of the evidence and the frontiers of scholarship on familial and interpersonal relations. The eight contributors offer certain unifying strands, which are summed up by Rawson. A central chapter by W. K. Lacey suggests that Roman family structure, based on the famous institution of patria potestas, is replicated in the Roman state. Bibliographies for further study of the Roman family are provided.

Bluestone also deals rigorously with her topic, Plato’s dialogue The Republic and its implications for women in later times, especially in academic today and in ancient feminism. She suggests that Plato’s idea that both men and women might participate in the ruling class of his ideal state as revolutionary. She disagrees with feminists who downplay reason. She disparages of scholars who have missed the significance of the “Philosopher Queen” and praises those few who see women as qualified to use intelligence as a rule.


Brown’s book is a masterpiece, Aline Rousselle, a fascinating, older study published in French in 1983. Rousselle gathers and analyzes information from sources such as ancient Greek and Latin medical treatises, inscriptions, and medieval monastic writings to discern ideas about sex and everyday sexual behavior, including the relations of women and men with each other and with their own bodies; chastity; purity; and sacrifice of babies; and the struggle for salvation by continence and castration. Her book is an attempt at a kind of intellectual history of the body, pointing more generally toward the powerful influence of these ideas and practices on culture and its transformations.

Brown, who limits his focus to early Christianity, from Paul to Augustine, examines in illuminating ways the development of the theory and practice of permanent sexual continence. He studies Tertullian, Marcion, the Gnostic Valentianus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, as well as the Christian ascetics, and Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, and others. Brown’s deeply sympathetic account succeeds in giving life to important and ordinary Christians alike in their struggles with their sexuality in relation to one another and to God. The epilogue constructed these great texts in late antique Christianity with the very different world of early medieval Christianity.


Elkins focuses on English religious women in the 12th century but includes background from the time of the Norman Conquest and some comment on the 13th century. Her sources are mainly documents written by men. From these she draws convincing insights about the structure of female monasticism and hermeneutics, with insights into the daily lives and the spirituality of the holy women themselves. She traces a development, especially among the nuns, from close, mutually supportive relations between monks and nuns to more regulated, distant, “invisible” relations.

The rest of the book in this review contain translated documents concerning women and religion. Brock and Harvey’s exquisite anthology of “Women’s Writings in the 12th and 13th centuries A.D.” opens with a substantial introduction, and each life is preceded by a short prose giving relevant facts and emphasizing significant points. The purpose of the book is to redress the imbalances in Christian church history favoring the male religious and emphasizing Western Christianity. The ancient Syriac churches at the eastern end of the Mediterranean and inland into Persia form one such slighted, but vital heritage, replete with texts, varying from accounts based on eyewitness reports to romantic legend. The editors emphasize that these female saints and martyrs rebelled against the patriarchal gender environs but not from some internal “assertiveness” but from a higher and overarching purpose.

Kramer has provided a useful, diverse collection of translations of excerpts on women in religion from ancient Greek, Roman, Aryan, Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic sources, especially with the focus on Judaism and Christianity in the West, chiefly from the 4th century B.C. to the early 5th century A.D. Kramer has organized the sections somewhat chronologically and by themes in six sections, each of which has a couple of pages of commentary.

Bonfante and Bonfante-Warren introduce their work richly by a few pages of notes, so the book’s chief virtue is, again, the usefulness of availability. Glosses have been incorporated into the text of the translation. These plays of Hrotsvitha, the 10th-century Saxon poet and canoness of the Benedictine Abbey at Gander- sheim, are important in medieval Latin drama for the range of characters and ambiguous and monastic context.


This volume walks us along the ancient Greek road to, through, and beyond death. Garland uses literature (the tragedians, Homer, Plato, etc.), archaeology (27 plates), and some comparative anthropological and psychological studies. He explores the stages of dying, the laying out of the body, the procession to interment, interment, the 30-day transition from burial to integration in the spirit world, and life in Hades. The tour starts with a discussion of the power and status of the dead; includes thorough commentary on the reactions of the living. He underlines the survivors’ distinctions between the ordinary dead and special categories such as dead heroes, the untimely dead, the murdered and murderers, and suicides; and it ends with the tending of the tomb and the eschatology of the tomb visit.


This is an incisive study of the story of (continued on page 6)
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Rape of Persephone as told by Ovid in the Metamorphoses and in the Fasti. Hinds subjects the differences and similarities between the two versions to the keenest analysis to date and places them in the spectrum of literary genres, the former with more affinity to epic, the latter to elegiac. He emphasizes that neither version can claim an origin in ancient Greece and he sees Ovid as playing with paradoxical overlaps between the two genres, in an endless tease. Clearly and delightfully written.


This highly deserved reprinting of the 1978 book on Athenian law remains a marvelously introduced introduction in beautifully plain English to a complex subject: its scope in the social, economic, and religious structures, especially of Athens, and its procedures.


This book is a genuine contribution to knowledge where that might no longer seem possible, in understanding Sophocles’ Antigonoe, Oedipus the King, and Oedipus at Colonus. Bushnell clarifies the relationship between heroes and prophets and between the use of prophecy in politics and literature. She makes use of modern theory of discourse while using a clear and compelling style.


May persuasively demonstrates the pivotal importance of social status, personal character, and what might be loosely termed rhetorical “image” in Roman—that is, Ciceroan—oratory and in the social and political structure shaping rhetorical technique and audience response. He analyzes Cicero’s speeches, demonstrating the course of Cicero’s career and the development of his image. Although this proved not to be teflon-coated, he used it, along with techniques of attacking his opponents’ characters, with brilliant effectiveness.

Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century. Ed. by Charles Martindale. Cambridge Univ. 1988. $49.50.

This is a collection of papers by various scholars showing how writers and artists from the 12th to the 20th century used and reused, imitated and emulated, undermined and improved Ovid’s poetry. The splendid variety of responses to Ovid demonstrated will interest students of Classical traditions in literature, art, and music.


This skillful translation of Gentili’s 1985 book in Italian is an expansion and unification of several of his studies of archaic Greek poetry from the point of view of its social function and the audiences for which it was performed. Gentilti’s valuable analyses of Sappho, Alcaeus, Simonides, Pindar, and other lyric poets brilliantly show the relationships among original text, different occasions for performance, and interpretation. Especially valuable are his synthesis of, and demonstration of respect toward, many previous scholars and theorists such as Havelock, Parry, McLuhan, and Nietzsche.

Russell Stevens


These are very different books: they are paired here only to the extent that each addresses—the first throughout, the second only here and there—an issue critical to the awareness of the educated public of the way in which science really works.

Hull’s approach is to examine the history of systematic biology and the interplay of persons and ideas during that history. Obviously, these details will be more meaningful to those who happen also to know of the events first-hand, but a careful reading of the account will suffice for most who undertake it. From this history, the author develops a theory of the scientific process and how it was applied to the scientific development of the world. Some may well disagree, but the thesis is vigorously defended and minutely argued, and it merits thoughtful consideration.

Allegre’s description of how the concept of plate tectonics eventually won widespread acceptance is reflected in this delightful read-able English translation. The account itself is well worth the reader’s time and attention. The anecdotes throughout the book, which personalize the process and reflect the actualities of the interplay of persons, personalities, and ideas, are a dividend.


Here is, in effect, a textbook that has the rare quality of not reading like a textbook. Fortunately, Preston Cloud is one of the few thoroughly competent and distinguished scientists who can construct attractive prose. As a consequence, readers who have no appreciable background in geology and related fields can, from a volume such as this, gain significant insight into the story of Earth’s origin and development. Even the reader who has done nothing else, it has arguably been worthwhile in bringing the planet’s human inhabitants to a realization of where this tiny, fragile sphere stands in relation to the immensity of space.


Just under a dozen of the various unorthodox health-related movements that have enjoyed substantial public support in the United States at one time or another over the past two centuries or more are treated in this compilation. In the preface, the editor asserts his intent to “provide a scholarly perspective.” To a gratified reader, this objective has in fact been achieved, although the contributing authors are often dealing with practices and practitioners that seem on the verge of the bizarre. The essays are readable and worth reading.


Two themes, one general and one more specific, carry through this study of what the dust jacket appropriately cites as the “irreducible core of crop production.” The general public knows all too little of the nature and history of crop breeding and seed production over the past several centuries; as the nation’s farm population drops to an ever-tinier fraction of the total, public awareness of dependence on agriculture continues to lessen. Kloppenburg’s book will do much to fill the void. His special interest in war-debt creation and the rise of the seed production enterprise by the emergence of private industry, as distinct from publicly supported laboratories. He pleads for readjustment of that relationship before biotechnology, in its modern form, has been with us too long.

Anna J. Schwartz


This monograph maintains that German borrowing and default during the Weimar Republic provide a perspective on the current debate over reparations from Latin American countries. On the basis of his examination of the statistical record, the author demonstrates that the Reich paid no net reparations to its wartime enemies. In fact, it obtained gross resources equal to 5.3 percent of its national income from 1919 to 1931 (2.1 percent of all reparations transferred), after stabilization, in the form of direct investment, bond finance, and inter-bank lending by its erstwhile enemies and, during the earlier hyperinflation phase, inflows provided by speculation on the mark. These capital inflows can be regarded as reverse reparations, hence the quotation marks in the title of the monograph. Even after 1931, the Standstill Agreement granted the Reich “essential” imports. Default on its long-term debt followed by stages between 1931 and 1934, for political rather than financial reasons.

The author demolishes a number of misconceptions: (1) Earlier students held that in 1929 because of the world’s financial boom, American lending to the Reich abruptly ceased. The outflow, in fact, declined only after 1930, as the Depression deepened. (2) It was not true that the Reich could not pay reparations because of an unavoidable current account deficit. The Reich made a political decision to grant a shorter work week and higher real wages than those warranted by productivity trends. Had it opted to improve its competitiveness, the Reich could have generated an export surplus. (3) It was not true that what the United States as Germany was transferred to the Allies as reparations and by them to the United States as repayment for war debts, so no real capital transfer could occur. During the peak years, 1924–28, the United States averaged $1.63 billion in annual foreign lending, whereas Allied remittances to the United States averaged only $185 million. There were no payment difficulties, or on account of war debts. (4) It was not true that tariff barriers in the 1920s prevented Europeans from servicing their debts. The 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act was deleterious, but it had little to do with the bond defaults in the early 1930s.

The author concludes that the Latin Ameri-
can debtors of today are following the same course as the Reich, which overborrowed in the 1920s, squandered its resources on public and private consumption, and then for political reasons deliberately failed to adjust its policies to meet its obligations.


Like an Old Testament prophet, Harvard economist Benjamin Friedman decries the legacy of the Reagan federal budget deficit, which he links to high real interest rates that have impeded investment and hindered productivity gains, to the half-decade of an overvalued dollar that has impaired our competitiveness, and to the growth of our external and internal debt that has mortgaged our future prosperity and diminished prospects for raising our standard of living. He condemns the Reagan tax reduction policy as a colossal failure, and treats the Reagan years as a violent departure from previous economic experience. To proceed on our present course means leaving the debts to our children—an immoral choice, in his view. We could reduce personal or government consumption, and thus save more, but he sees no consensus in favor of government spending cuts. Although a consumption tax would be preferable, it would be difficult to enact, so he proposes instead an increase of three percentage points in marginal income tax rates, from 15 and 28 percent to 18 and 31 percent, respectively, to raise as much as $75 billion per year.

Friedman acknowledges no positive accomplishment of the Reagan presidency. The tax increase he advocates seems paltry if that will suffice to undo the enormous harm he alleges the Reagan tax cut produced. But the links between budget deficits and the variables he highlights are not so well established as he suggests. Some countries with budget surpluses have trade deficits and undervalued currencies, and some with budget deficits have overvalued currencies and trade surpluses. The largest Reagan deficit as a percentage of GNP coexisted with declining interest rates.

Nevertheless, this is the book to read for a prosecutorial indictment of the Reagan years.


Herbert Stein, a long-time student of the federal budget process, here advocates budget reform, not to reduce or increase government spending, but to formulate the budget so as to make more visible the broad allocation of national output that it influences. In Stein’s approach, the president would state his plans for dealing with the nation’s chief problems at the outset of his administration and describe how he intended categories of uses of national output to be affected, given a four-year budget framework. The Federal Reserve in turn would be required to set a four-year target for a nominal variable, with which the budget estimates would be consistent. The president would submit appropriation requests for the next two years in accordance with the budget. Increases and decreases in different categories would be responsive to the president’s allocation preferences. The aggregate surplus or deficit would reflect his objective for the share of national output to be devoted to saving and investment, and would change only gradually, and from year to year. The policy aim would be to prevent short-run fluctuations of the economy from disturbing the long-run path of the ratio of federal debt to GNP.


The essays in this volume were prepared for an International Conference on the Unobserved Economy in 1982. They explore the nature, meaning, and measurement of activities that are designed to be concealed from government of market economies. The essay on the United States identifies three interrelated underground economies: one spawned by economic crime (“illegal”), one by tax evasion (“unreported”), and one by false information (“unrecorded”). Essays on underground activities in other nations deal with Canada, Germany, Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Italy, and France. In centrally planned systems, what is designated the “second economy” is intertwined with the official economy; two chapters examine the experience of the Soviet Union and Hungary. Different empirical procedures yield conflicting estimates of the size and growth of the underground economy. The contributors to the volume carefully assess the validity of varying approaches to measurement problems.

Lawrence Wilson


Six Russian travelers in America here record their impressions of this country, their attitudes arising from an initial enthusiasm and admiration for the vitality of the Americans and their faith in progress to a sense that America is less a model than a threat to Russian greatness to a grudging approval of American technology, even though America “lacked a technological culture as deep as the affection to the interest” of Turgenev, Tolstoy, and even Dostoyevsky gave way to unfriendly criticism, the pival figure in the change being Maxim Gorky, who came here in 1906 and later published strongly vituperative articles about his experiences (even though he wrote more savagely than he felt).


It is high time that we begin to pay serious attention to Cormac McCarthy, whose five novels have shown, says Bell, that “he is a major writer in all of the conventional senses of the word, our best unknown writer by many measures.” Because he is a Southerner, of the school (if that’s what it is) of Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor, we can expect to find in his novels a full representation of demented preachers and priests, of idiots and misfits. They move and have their being in an atmosphere of evil: gratuitous, real, and violent evil, which they accept because there is nothing else they can do. They do not think about their condition because—impoverished culturally, spiritually, and philosophically—they lack the wherewithal for thinking. They are “for the most part solitary and unsocialized—wholly indifferent to discourse and have no interest in ideas about how societies are sustained and kept coherent.” There is no preachment or moralizing in McCarthy’s novels, for he presents no summarizing explicator. We see what there is to see through the eyes of the characters (as if they were, however crampd in reaction, inheritors of the method of Henry James), and seeing, we learn how people can “imagine some human tale upon their otherwise bereft lives and change mere living into being.” A final and great justification of the novels is in McCarthy’s rich and sensitive language, which at its best, which is most of the time, approaches the magical.


Here is a rich field for browsing among the memorable—or at least memorable—remarks made by Americans and a few others about other Americans and things in general. The quotations are organized in categories from Action, Admiration, and Adversity (continued on back cover)
Phi Beta Kappa Names 1989–90 Visiting Scholars
(continued from page 1)


Karl Galinsky, Robert M. Armstrong Centennial Professor of Classics, University of Texas at Austin. Twice recipient of excellence-in-teaching awards from his university and former classicist-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome, he is author of Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome; The Herakles Theme; Ovid's Metamorphoses; and Perspectives of Roman Poetry.

Alan J. Hoffman, fellow and research staff member; T. J. Watson Research Center, IBM. A member of the National Academy of Sciences and a fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences as well as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he was the founding editor of Linear Algebra and Its Applications.

Recommended Reading (continued from page 7)

through Baseball, Beauty, Crime, Death, and Debt to Wealth, Wisdom, Woman, Work, and Youth. The people quoted range from George Abbott and Bella Abzug to Andrew and Brigham Young, Israel Zangwill, and F. B. Zinkle. Liberase is there, as are John Denver, Zsa Zsa Gabor, and Marilyn Monroe (cited twice, as is James Monroe). Emerson is, quite properly, cited 239 times; Mark Twain, rather stingly (and surprisingly), only 117 times; Henry James and Dorothy Parker, 14 times each. All our presidents save one (Zachary Taylor) have uttered at least one quotable remark (four of them—Tyler, Fillmore, Buchanan, and Arthur—only one). Lincoln, of course, has a whole section all his own. Still, for all the richness, one notes certain important omissions. Where, for example, is William McKinley's solemn defense of the sacredness of money?

Norval Morris, Julius Kreeger Professor of Law and Criminology, University of Chicago. A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Bar Foundation, he is the author of The Habitual Criminal, Capital Punishment, The Future of Imprisonment, and Madness and the Criminal Law.

Nel Noddings, professor of education, Stanford University. She is former director of the Stanford Teacher Education Program and twice received the excellence-in-teaching award in the School of Education. Her publications include Carrying: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education, Awakening the Inner Eye: Intuition in Education, and Women and Evil (forthcoming).

Michael Silverstein, Samuel N. Harper Professor in the departments of anthropology, linguistics, and behavioral sciences, University of Chicago. He has been a MacArthur fellow as well as a visiting fellow of the Max-Planck-Institut fur Psycholinguistik and of the Research School of Pacific Studies (ANU, Canberra), and is currently a senior research fellow of the Center for Psychosocial Studies (Chicago).

Paul J. Steinhardt, professor of physics, University of Pennsylvania. A theoretical physicist, he has been a visiting professor at Tel Aviv University and at IBM Research, as well as a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. He is coauthor of The Physics of Quasicrystals.

Richard S. Westfall, Distinguished Professor of the History and Philosophy of Science, Indiana University. His books include Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England, Force in Newton's Physics, The Construction of Modern Science, and Never at Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Royal Society of Literature.

F. Eugene Yates, Crump Professor of Medical Engineering and professor of medicine, University of California, Los Angeles. He was named a Centennial Scholar of Johns Hopkins University and a Distinguished Lecturer at Indiana University. He is the editor of Self-Organizing Systems: The Emergence of Order, a book that reflects his research on the dynamics of complex systems.

College of William and Mary Refurbishes Apollo Room

Paul Verkuil, president of the College of William and Mary, was among the speakers at a reception on April 10 to reopen the refurbished Apollo Room in Phi Beta Kappa Memorial Hall on the campus in Williamsburg, Virginia. The meeting place for Alpha of Virginia Chapter, which traces its history back to the students who organized the Society in 1776, has been redecorated in Queen Anne style, with a banquet table, wing chairs, a hunt board, and several 18th-century portraits of early members of the chapter.

Encouraged by historian Ludwell Johnson of the William and Mary faculty, who is a member of the chapter, the college administration provided $50,000 for the facelift. On exhibit at the entrance to the room is a display case containing a variety of Phi Beta keys and other memorabilia.