

in open debate, in the hopes that reasonable, rational, humane, intelligent people, an “enlightened majority,” will make the right choice. He is a humanist. He believes in freedom.

Sidney Hook does not like unreasoned behavior. When angry demonstrators in the streets outside the Waldorf-Astoria shouted raucous epithets at the participants in the Cominform “Peace Conference,” accusing them quite accurately of being disloyal to their country, (the demonstrators supporting, in one way, Sidney Hook), Professor Hook disapproved of such loutish, street-ruffian behavior and publicly condemned it. He calls America’s present Moral Majority “fatuous,” for it is no doubt irrational, and who are its members to call themselves “moral”?

How many people, like Hook, own a volume they have authored on Marx that has been ornamented with marginal annotations by Trotsky?

The problem with this rationalism, however, is that society does not have enough people like Sidney Hook. In the 1960s, with Leftist Brownshirts screaming and bullying and marauding through the university campuses of America, Professor Hook learned this to his sorrow.

Is Freedom Enough?

For Sidney Hook, “freedom,” with no sustaining belief system, might be enough. But my experience is that most people want freedom *plus something more*. Dreams of racist utopias now being radically out of fashion, most people, certainly most intellectuals—with whom Professor Hook is especially concerned—yearn in a sense for the Kingdom of God. And if they do not believe it exists in heaven, then they will demand it on earth. It is not rational of them, not reasonable, perhaps not intelligent. It might even, given the nature of their particular dementia, be suicidal. But they will not be deflected.

It was along these lines that Eric Hoffer was perhaps thinking when, not long before he died, he remarked off-handedly to Tom Bethell: “You’d better get yourself some fanatics, or you’re going to lose.” Which is why I am rather less likely than Sidney Hook to call the Moral Majority “fatuous,” or why I would be slightly less prompt than Professor Hook to repudiate coarse, unruly American crowds demonstrating against people they grossly but accurately perceive to be enemies of their country.

Yet I was struck by a word on the next-to-last page of Sidney Hook’s autobiography. The word is “faith,” a principle definition of which, as Professor Hook knows, is “belief not based on proof.” Almost in adieu, Professor Hook writes about the world “in which I was born,” the poor streets of Williamsburg, a world dark enough, he

admits, but “marked by qualities of hope and faith in the promise of American life that is difficult to find even among those today who are materially better off than most of us were.”

“The revival of these qualities,” he writes, “is indispensable if the United States, and therefore what remains of the free world dependent upon it for security, is to find the will and courage to resist the incursions of totalitarian powers.”

So Sidney Hook has a sustaining faith after all, a faith which must be revived in the young if we are to survive. He has faith in the “promise of American life,” in its capacity for “democratic self-renewal,” in the land of promise and opportunity in whose poor streets he was born. He has faith in America.

I suspected it, I confess, all along. For before the Brooklyn Boys High School socialist-universalist Sidney Hook, there was a diminutive Public School 145 Sidney Hook, a little fellow Professor Hook describes as a “bloodthirsty little nationalist.” How, now!

Well, I will scrub the “bloodthirsty,” but the “nationalist” I will not scrub. There is a strong strain of idealistic American nationalism in Sidney Hook. He believes in us. We cannot let him down.

Bloomsday

The Closing of the American Mind, by Allan Bloom (New York: Simon & Schuster, \$18.95).

Reviewed by Jeffrey Hart

It has been said that the man who wishes to find God has already found Him. Professor Allan Bloom of the University of Chicago wishes to recover Western civilization amid the rubble. The tremendous excitement here is that maybe he has done so. His disorganized, idiosyncratic book, the ultimate heroes of which are Socrates, Nietzsche, Plato, Locke, and Publius, has sold a breathtaking 300,000 copies in hardcover, and has been at the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list for months. The book quite possibly marks a historic turning point in the rediscovery of Western thought.

The Closing of the American Mind has an unforgiving disorganization. Trying to recover something from it is like trying to recover something from Montaigne’s essays. This is really Bloomsday in the Joycean sense—Allan Bloom, intelligent beyond any ordinary human measure, roaming through the specific diseases of the academy, through popular culture and popular language, coming on at the reader with a long and brilliant monologue on Nietzsche’s influence on the modern world as filtered through Freud and Max Weber, plus an assessment of the British utilitarians.

Finally toward the end, we learn where Bloom is headed. He believes in intellectual and spiritual heroes who have explored the ideal territory of human thought and feeling, people who call us to our best selves, or even beyond. Professor Bloom wants the university to resemble,

ideally, Plato's *Symposium*, in which *friends*—this is a tremendously important concept in ethical thought—discourse on the great questions of beauty, truth, love, death, immortality, and God. Thought itself is ecstasy and human completeness.

But in the foreground is the university we actually have. Bloom's description of it is horrifying. Out of his ideal love for what the university could be, Bloom has told the brutal truth about what it actually is. Bloom knows and tells his readers how this nation, and the West, is being morally and culturally gassed by its intellectual and academic elites.

Let us think first about Bloom's idea of the university—as noble, powerful and poetic as any hymns to Oxford written by Cardinal Newman or Matthew Arnold: "When I was 15 years old I saw the University of Chicago for the first time and somehow sensed that I had discovered my life. I had never before seen, or at least had not noticed, buildings that were evidently dedicated to a higher purpose, not to necessity or utility, not merely to manufacture or trade, but to something that might be at an end in itself." When he entered into his enormous idea, he found that it "protected the tradition, not because tradition is tradition but because tradition provides models of discussion on a uniquely high level." Allan Bloom knows: "The facile economic and psychological debunking of the theoretical life cannot do away with its irreducible beauties."

Bloom is so intelligent, so philosophically adept, that it must be exhilarating to take a course under him at Chicago. Okay, so Freud posits sexuality as the basis of everything, all creativity. Fine. Is repressed sexuality the basis of Freud's own thought? Next question. Mr. Marx, you say that economic interest explains all of human action. Fine. What economic interest explains your own thought, Mr. Marx? Bloom is absolutely brilliant at exposing the assumption within the answer.

A Farewell to Relativism

But first Bloom paints a vitriolic portrait of today's "student." In my own experience of teaching at Dartmouth, I would say that, with some outstanding and infrequent examples, Bloom is entirely accurate.

These opening sentences may well deserve to be ranked with the opening sentences of *A Farewell to Arms*. "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative." Enter Professor Bloom, fully armored with all the earned weapons of Western philosophy:

The students, of course, cannot defend their opinion. It is something with which they have been indoctrinated. The best they can do is point out all the opinions and cultures there are and have been. What right, they ask, do I or anyone else have to say that one is better than the others? If I pose the routine questions designed to confuse them and make them think, such as, "If you had been a British administrator in India, would you have let the natives under your governance burn the widow of a man who had died?" they either remain silent or reply that the British should never have been there in the first place.

As Bloom puts it in his subtitle, higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the soul of today's students. But Bloom gets it only half right with his discussion of "openness." Modern education, he writes, "pays no attention to natural rights or the historical origins of our regime, which are now thought to have been flawed and regressive. . . . It is open to all kinds of men, all kinds

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of life-styles, all ideologies. There is no enemy other than the man who is not open to everything." Well, that is the public face of the ideology. "Openness" applies only to the left. We are to be "open" to Castro or to Stalin, but Hitler has become a religious category, a guarantee of the existence of evil. The left always offers the possibility of a better world.

Bloom shows the intellectual underpinnings of this "openness." As he shrewdly points out:

At the root of this change in morals was the presence in the United States of men and women of a great variety of nations, religions and races . . . Openness was designed to provide a respectable place for these "groups" or "minorities"—to wrest respect from those who were not disposed to give it—and to weaken the sense of superiority of the dominant majority (more recently dubbed, WASPs, a name the success of which shows something of the success of sociology in reinterpreting the national consciousness). That dominant majority gave the country a dominant culture with its traditions, its literature, its tastes, its special claim to know and supervise the language, and its Protestant religions. Much of the intellectual machinery of 20th-century American political thought and social science was constructed for the purposes of making an assault on that majority.

Like Buddhist monks in Saigon, the WASPs immolated themselves culturally. They lost their nerve completely, and the entire idea of the gentleman died. Any tom-tom beater is as good, now, as anyone. Says Bloom:

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Sexual adventurers like Margaret Mead and others who found America too narrow told us that not only must we know other cultures and learn to respect them, but we could also profit from them. We could follow their lead and loosen up. . . . We would go to the bazaar of cultures and find reinforcement for inclinations that are repressed by puritanical guilt feelings. All such teachers of openness had either no interest in or were actively hostile to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Young Americans, even Bloom's elite students at the University of Chicago, "know much less about American history and those who were held to be its heroes" than past generations did. There has occurred a homogenization of American culture. "Practically all that young Americans

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have today is an insubstantial awareness that there are many cultures, accompanied by a saccharin moral drawn from this awareness: We should all get along. Why fight?"

It is fashionable for the elite universities to require a course in "non-Western" culture. But as Bloom shows, "if the students were really to learn something of the minds of any of these non-Western cultures—which they do not—they would find that each and every one of these cultures is ethnocentric. All of them think their way is the best way, and all others are inferior."

Right there is the intellectual turn within the turn. The very anthropological perspective that allows us for one moment to relativize and "appreciate" these cultures is itself Western and "higher." There is no Chinese anthropology that "appreciates" and "respects" Vietnamese culture. There is no Moroccan or Albanian anthropological perspective. In its academic apotheosis, Western culture is the only culture that does not celebrate its own ways and its own achievements. It keeps looking for some Zimbabwean Mozart. Bloom says: "It is important to emphasize that the lesson the students are drawing from their studies is simply untrue. History and the study of cultures do not teach or prove that values or cultures are relative. All to the contrary. . . ."

And yet we have undergone a civilizational lobotomy. "By the mid-sixties universities were offering [students]

every concession other than education, but appeasement failed and soon the whole experiment in excellence was washed away, leaving not a trace." Serious reading, foreign language, and other academic requirements were jettisoned; the Ivy League, with Brown University in front of the Gadarene swine, led the way.

A partial list of the sacrifices made by the students to morality will suffice to show its character: they were able to live as they pleased in the university, as *in loco parentis* responsibilities were abandoned; drugs became a regular part of life, with almost no interference from university authorities, while the civil authority was kept at bay by the university's alleged right to police its own precincts; all sexual restrictions imposed by rule or disapproval were overturned; academic requirements were relaxed in every imaginable way, and grade inflation made it difficult to flunk; avoidance of military service became a way of life and a principle. All these privileges were disguised with edifying labels such as individual responsibility, experience, growth, development, self-expression, liberation, concern. Never in history had there been such a marvelous correspondence between the good and the pleasant.

Nietzsche vs. Madison

Bloom's great theme throughout is that ideology has invaded the academy to an absolutely unprecedented degree, *closing* the American mind, at least the academic American mind, to the truths about human nature as it actually is and has aspired to be. The center of his book, which I doubt that many of his 300,000 purchasers have made their way through, is a brilliant University of Chicago lecture on the history of recent philosophy, though without much reference to William James (very likely the most important philosopher of our era), or to Charles Sanders Peirce (the power and subtlety of whose thought is only beginning to be felt). Nor does he say much about Whitman or T.S. Eliot or Emily Dickinson. Oddly enough, Professor Bloom, the rhapsodist of Chicago and its University, is relentlessly European in his intellectual reference.

Bloom himself seems torn between Locke, Madison, and sobriety, and the heights and depths of the Continental philosophy. He writes:

"God is dead," Nietzsche proclaimed. But he did not say this on a note of triumph, in the style of earlier atheism—the tyrant has been overthrown and man is now free. Rather he said it in the anguished tones of the most powerful and delicate piety deprived of its proper object. Man, who loved and needed God, has lost his Father and Savior without possibility of resurrection.

Bloom thinks that the buzzwords of our articulate and semi-articulate culture come out of Nietzsche's abyss, filtered through Weber and Freud, and packaged in a carton of cornflakes. The terms "commitment" (instead of love), "life-style" (which is designed to legitimate the bourgeois as he ventures beyond good and evil), "sexual orientation" (instead of male and female), "identity" (instead of who

you are and what you do), “relationship” (again, instead of love), represent Nietzsche turned upside down, the bourgeoisification of the proposed *Ueberschensch*, the Hero as a feminized Dagwood Bumstead. In the presence of Nietzsche, talk about *values* is “twaddle.” Nietzsche thought that God was dead, that there was no nature and objective structure of ethical meaning, and that therefore we had to reinvent ourselves in a heroic way. The old wide-sweeping classical conception of “nature”—that is to say, what is objectively true about human nature—was “dead.”

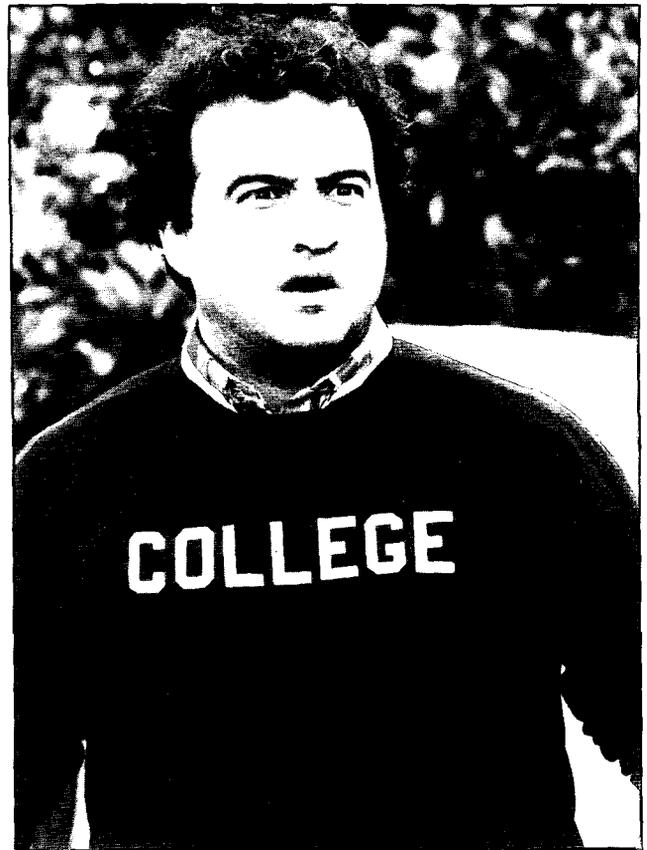
On the strange fish that thrash about in the sea of this liberation, Bloom is consistently coruscating. His *obiter dicta* during a lecture at Chicago must themselves be worth the price of the tuition. Bloom has a mind like a whirling sparkler, but it is deeply grounded in the classical conception of “nature.” For example, here is Bloom on feminism:

The souls of men—their ambitious, warlike, protective, possessive character—must be dismantled in order to liberate women from their domination. Machismo—the polemical description of maleness or spiritedness, which was the central *natural* passion in men’s souls in the psychology of the ancients, the passion of attachment and loyalty—was the villain, the source of the difference between the sexes. . . . A host of Dustin Hoffman and Meryl Streep types invade the schools, popular psychology, TV and the movies, making the [feminist] project respectable. Men tend to undergo the re-education somewhat sullenly but studiously, in order to avoid the opprobrium of the sexist label and to keep peace with their wives and girlfriends. And it is indeed possible to soften men. But to make them ‘care’ is another thing, and the project must inevitably fail.

Bloom is especially brilliant on the subjugation of eros, that once powerful god, in our debilitated culture. “The student who made fun of playing a guitar under a girl’s window will never read or write poetry under her influence. His defective eros cannot provide his soul with images of the beautiful, and it will remain coarse and slack.” Like the ancient philosophers, Bloom knows that “nature” decrees a male “lust” for knowledge, for the good and the true, for the beyond. “Aristotle said that man had two peaks, each accompanied by intense pleasure: sexual intercourse and thinking. The human soul is a kind of parabola, its phenomena are spread, displaying their tropical variety and ambiguity.”

Bloom is powerfully drawn to the 19th-century German philosophers. He knows how great a thinker Nietzsche was, and Bloom honors his attack upon Socrates and “reason.” After all, Nietzsche did see that “reason” in itself never built a civilization. All civilizations are rooted in religion and myth. Nietzsche looked over the brink, rationally seeing that reason was not enough. Up against John Locke and Thomas Jefferson, the agonized Nietzsche wins the purely philosophical contest by a knockout.

But from that Nietzschean brink Professor Bloom does, as he should, draw back. Without answering Nietzsche on a philosophical level, he turns from the nihilistic *Sturm und Drang* of 19th-century German philosophy, to the practical political world of the Founding Fathers:



The Saving Remnant

Freedom of thought and freedom of speech were proposed in theory, and in the practice of serious political reformers, in order to encourage the still voice of reason in a world that had always been dominated by fanaticisms and interests. How freedom of thought and speech came to mean the special encouragement and protection of fanaticism and interests is another of those miracles connected with the decay of the rational political order. The authors of *The Federalist* hoped their scheme of government would result in the preponderance of reason and rational men in the United States. They were not particularly concerned with protecting eccentric or mad opinions or life-styles. Such protection, which we now often regard as the Founders’ central intentions, is only an incidental result of the protection of reason, and it loses its plausibility of reason is rejected. These authors did not respect the many religious sects or desire diversity for its own sake. The existence of many sects was permitted only to prevent the emergence of a single dominant one.

It is not exactly clear from Bloom’s book how the university can escape its present cultural and spiritual anarchy. His answer is essentially Matthew Arnold’s, though informed with greater philosophical knowledge than Arnold had at his disposal. Professor Bloom puts his faith in the “saving remnant” who will lead the philosophical life within the American academy. He regards the activity of philosophy as a good in its own right, the activity of thought informed by the great books:

The model for all such efforts is the dialogues of Plato, which together rival the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or even the Gospels. . . . Plato turns the personages of *The Clouds* into one of those civilization-constituting figures like Moses, Jesus or Achilles, who have a greater reality in men's souls than do their own flesh-and-blood contemporaries. . . . Socrates is the teacher of philosophy in an unbroken chain for two and a half millennia, extending from generation to generation through all the epochal changes. Plato insured this influence, not by reproducing Socrates' philosophy, in the manner of Aristotle or Kant, but by representing his action, more in the manner of Sophocles, Aristophanes, Dante, and Shakespeare.

It is the philosophic *life* to which the saving remnant must aspire, the continuing reexamination of those great questions, the activity of reexamination itself constituting the peak of civilization.

And yet the very book that looks to the university for salvation contains one of the most savage indictments of the contemporary American academy. It is conceivable but

not very plausible that the civilization of the West will be revived by some impulse from these centers of moral and intellectual corruption. There are, no doubt, great isolated professors like Allan Bloom, but modern universities are, quite simply, out of business, intellectually, at least for the time being.

I have a second caveat here, and it is not a minor one. Yes, indeed, it is highly desirable to refine the great questions of love, beauty, friendship, truth, loyalty and so on, and it is highly desirable to keep the best examples of such discussion forever before us. All of this is certainly far superior to Women's Studies and all the rest of the dreck that now clogs the university curriculum.

But there will be readers who object that Western thought is not simply an ongoing conversation, ever-renewing itself. Western thought *got somewhere*. In the Agora, the public forum at Athens, there was an inscription "To the Unknown God." That is the point to which Greek philosophy, which means philosophy itself, had reached at that time. For the religious believer, however, God is not unknown. Bloom's brilliant dissection of the ills of relativism is weakened by his inattention to religious truth. 🗨

LETTERS

Harry V. Jaffa, Walter Block, Warren T. Brookes, Paul M. Fenech, Cesar A. Perales, Gov. Guy Hunt, Gov. Neil Goldschmidt, Paul Craig Roberts

Crisis of Strauss Divided

Dear Sir:

Dinesh D'Souza is a young man of great talent, energy, and ambition. He attended an eight-week summer program at Claremont McKenna College shortly after his graduation from Dartmouth, and I have watched his meteoric career ever since, with pride in the fact that I have been one of his teachers. I have read, usually with pleasure and admiration, nearly everything he has published.

In "The Legacy of Leo Strauss" (Spring 1987), however, he has simply outrun his strength. He writes, "In the bicentennial year of the American Constitution, it is time for serious men and women to come to terms with Leo Strauss." But Mr. D'Souza's article, however serious its intention, is not so in its execution. There is no excuse to write of "Socrates inaugurating philosophy" some centuries after Thales had done so, or of Lincoln objecting to "a state's right to choose" slavery—when Lincoln endorsed a proposed constitutional amendment in 1861 guaranteeing that right in perpetuity.

Mr. D'Souza asks in his subtitle, "Is America the Good Society that the Ancient Philosophers Sought?" Now this might be a good topic for discussion in a year-long graduate seminar in political philosophy. Athens, in the age of Periclean democracy, had a population of about 300,000. Of these, perhaps 30,000 were full citizens, and democratic "equality" applied only to them. Yet Aristotle thought that 10,000 citizens was too large a number for the

proper cultivation of civic virtue.

Mr. D'Souza writes that "Strauss was greatly attracted to the American regime because of its closeness to the moderation and lawfulness of Aristotle's favored 'mixed regime.'" Yet how can a regime of less than 10,000 "equals" be compared to one of 240 million? In a famous aphorism, Aristotle declared, "Whatever the law does not permit, it forbids." Such a conception of law would today apply only to a totalitarian state. Not even the Soviet Union would defend it in theory, however much they might put such a concept into practice. Certainly such an attempt at the complete regulation of human behavior could hardly foster "moderation" in any modern state. Today, limited government—of the kind whose principles are set forth in John Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government*—is much more akin to the spirit of "moderation," rightly understood, than any ancient model.

In the Introduction to *The City and Man* Strauss wrote that:

The relative success of modern political philosophy has brought into being a kind of society wholly unknown to the classics, a kind of society to which the classical principles as stated and elaborated by the classics are not immediately applicable. Only we living today can possibly find a solution to the problems of today.

Mr. D'Souza writes that:

Strauss' best known work is

Natural Right and History.

... In it, Strauss identifies pre-philosophic life with mindless attachment to tradition and authority. Strauss sees Socrates inaugurating philosophy by challenging the "primeval identification of the good with the ancestral."

As I have already noted, Socrates did not "inaugurate" philosophy. The interval that separates Socrates from Thales may be compared to that which separates Leo Strauss from Machiavelli. Socrates may be said to have inaugurated *political* philosophy, in virtue of a change in philosophy itself.

Pre-Socratic philosophers drew the distinction between the natural and the conventional. But pre-Socratic philosophy denied that there was any ground, natural or divine, for justice or the common good. The gods themselves were human inventions—of the poet—and morality had no other foundation than opinion. The only natural good was the pleasant.

Pre-Socratic philosophy led to the contemptuous withdrawal of philosophers from any moral or political concerns. But it also led—in the persons of the Sophists and their pupils—to the praise of the tyrannical life. The philosophers sought to maximize the balance of pleasure over pain, by minimizing pain. The tyrants could maximize that balance differently, by making sure that their pleasures were at the expense of everyone else. Both tyranny and philosophy were "according to nature," but morality was not.

It was at this juncture that Socra-