

What I have called the "Q" question emerges every time technology changes in some basic way. In each case, we have to ask ourselves, "What are we trying to protect? The old technology itself or what it carries for us, does to us?" The answer usually returned when considering the movement from book to screen has been the first. The book itself is sacred. Let's protect it. The codex book creates the vital central self. The codex book defines human reason. Our cultural vitals are isomorphic with the codex book. Its very feel and heft and look and smell are talismanic. We must have an agency of the federal government to protect it.

As I have said several times already in this, well, in this book, I am hardly against books. I have spent my life reading them, writing them, buying them, and walling my house with them. But I don't think the codex book provides the real center we want to protect. And defining that center is now an exigent task, which I try to begin in this essay.

The reader might be amused by the genesis of this seemingly heterogeneous essay review. I had agreed to review one of the books I discuss, but kept putting off writing the review. Meanwhile, I was reading all kinds of other books, reading them for amusement and distraction in a time of personal troubles. I woke up one night, literally in the middle of the night, realizing that all these books I had been reading bore upon the root problem I was trying to address in my scholarly life—the "Q" question. I sat down before the computer at sunup and wrote the essay in a single day.

you son of a
bitch!

The "Q" Question

At the beginning of book 12 of the *Institutio oratoria* Quintilian confronts what is for him a crucial question. Is the perfect orator—whom he has, for the eleven long books preceding, sought to form—a good man as well as a good orator? Begging the essential question of the entire *Speculum principis* genre, and hence of Western education from that day to this, he replies, "Of course! Such a man is the very one I seek to describe, the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* that Cato has defined." And then, sliding back a little to the question he has just begged, he reflects that if oratory serves only to empower evil (*si vis illa dicendi malitiam instruxerit*) then what has he spent his life doing? And not only that, what has nature done to us, if she allows something like that? Turned language, man's best friend, into a potential enemy? To confront this question honestly would imperil his entire endeavor and so, with that genial resolution which illustrates his sweet nature throughout the *Institutio*, he assumes the answer he wants and then goes on to bolster it with inventively adapted Platonism.

The problem itself, which I shall call the "Q" question in honor of its most famous nonanswerer, has underwritten, and plagued, Western humanism from first to last. We have a paideia, a "discipline of discourse," to translate Isocrates' *hē tōn logōn paideia*, which, from his day to ours, we all like to teach and always, in one form or another, have taught. But no one has ever been able to prove that it does conduce to virtue more than to vice. In fact, as we know from our first department meeting, much evidence points the other way. So, like Quintilian, we first deny the problem resolutely, and then construct something that I shall call "the Weak Defense." The Weak Defense argues that there are two kinds of rhetoric, good and bad. The good kind is used in good causes, the bad kind in bad causes. Our kind is the good kind; the bad kind is used by our opponents. This was Plato's solution, and Isocrates', and it has been enthusiastically embraced by humanists ever since.

This permanent postponement of the problem works well enough for us, but not for the locus of so much rhetorical theory and practice, the law courts: there the advocate cannot prejudge the case lest he threaten both justice and his own livelihood. This unavoidable confrontation explains, perhaps, why Isocrates thought the legal aspect of rhetoric so *infra dig*, and why so many commentators have thought Cicero's *De oratore*, which does confront the issue from time to time, so much more one-sided an argument than it is. It certainly explains why Quintilian, when he comes to address the advocate's dilemma in book 12, hides in another patch of up-market flummery. The law's answer to the "Q" question is generally taken to be "No!" And yet jurisprudence in the West from the Greeks onward has offered the opposite answer, a "Yes!" which I shall call "the Strong Defense," and which Samuel Johnson summarized with his usual absence of cant as, "Sir, you do not know it to be good or bad till the Judge determines it." The Strong Defense assumes that truth is determined by social dramas, some more formal than others but all man-made. Rhetoric in such a world is not ornamental but determinative, essentially creative. Truth once created in this way becomes referential, as in legal precedent. The court decides "what really happened" and we then measure against that. The Strong Defense implies a figure/ground shift between philosophy and rhetoric—in fact, as we shall see, a continued series of shifts. In its world, there is as much truth as we need, maybe more, but argument is open-ended, more like kiting checks than balancing books.

Much as we want to evade it, however, the "Q" question is coming after us these days. It presses on us in the university, for the university is like the law courts: it cannot dodge the "Q" question. It must design a curriculum. And it is, more and more insistently, being asked to design one that situates and justifies the humanities. To do that, you must answer the Question, or at least self-consciously beg it. For clearly it applies not only to rhetoric, but to all teaching of the arts and letters, to everything we call the humanities. To design a humanities curriculum (or even, as we more often do, to decline to design one), you must know how you get from a theory of reading and writing to a curriculum, and that requires having a theory of reading and writing in the first place. Requires, that is, answering the "Q" question. So we humanists are being pressured from without. But we are also being pressured from within. For the implications of the "Q" question have been worked on, if not always out and not always with Johnson's absence of cant, by the postmodern critique that began in the arts when the Italian Futurists attacked the codex book and all that it represents at the beginning of the century.

how historical
treatments of
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Several recent books have reflected these pressures, external and internal. Coming from a number of fields which the university's disciplinary structure does its best to keep apart, they have re-posed the "Q" question in divergent ways. The answers given to it fall, with a nicety that can help clear the mind, into the two defenses sketched above. By reflecting on these books as a group, we can perhaps begin to look beyond the customary evasions to some more persuasive explanation of what the humanities are and do.

Perhaps the most celebrated answer to the "Q" question in modern times—we might, in fact, argue that this answer started "modern times"—was supplied by Peter Ramus. He begins his *Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintilian* by attacking it head on:

And so first of all let us put forward the definition in which Quintilian outlined for us his ideal orator. . . . "I teach," he says, "that the orator cannot be perfect unless he is a good man. Consequently I demand from him not only outstanding skill in speaking but all the virtuous qualities of character." . . .

What then can be said against this definition of an orator? I assert indeed that such a definition of an orator seems to me to be useless and stupid. . . .

For although I admit that rhetoric is a virtue, it is virtue of the mind and the intelligence, as in all the true liberal arts, whose followers can still be men of the utmost moral depravity.¹

I am quoting Carole Newlands' recent translation, which appears with the Latin text of 1549 and an extended introduction by James J. Murphy (in which he tells us that Quintilian himself brings up the "Q" question twenty-three times!). For the debate about the humanities and the humanities curriculum in which we currently find ourselves, a more splendidly useful and well-timed volume can scarcely be imagined. To read it is to learn how the "humanities crisis" started, how the conception of language as value-free and ideally transparent underwrote the modern world.

Ramus separated the traditional five parts of rhetoric into two divisions, giving invention, argument, and arrangement to philosophy, and leaving "style and delivery [as] the only true parts of the art of rhetoric" (90). Ramus also separated thought from language: "There are two universal, general gifts bestowed by nature upon man, Reason and Speech; dialectic is the theory of the former, grammar and rhetoric of the latter" (86). Rhetoric and grammar thus become cosmetic arts, and speech—and of course writing—along

with them. Reason breaks free of speech and takes on a Platonic self-standing freedom. Add to a free-standing reason the Ramist zeal, one might almost say obsession, for dividing the seamless web of learning into self-standing and self-sealing divisions, divisions that later became academic disciplines, and we can see anatomized the two crucial elements that separate the traditional rhetorical *paideia* from the modern curriculum. Ramus, or the broad cultural change that he focused, not only settled the "Q" question by breaking rhetoric down the middle, but also reversed the centripetal flow the rhetorical *paideia* had built into its heart. In the traditional rhetorical curriculum, all subjects exfoliated out from the *ars disserendi*. This central focus meant that the arts were perpetually shifting position and overlapping one another. Such shifting is what Ramus hated the most: "For arts ought to consist of subjects that are constant, perpetual, and unchanging, and they should consider only those concepts which Plato says are archetypal and eternal" (99). And the self-contained discipline meant the possibility of a real textbook. As Father Ong, whose work has allowed us to accept Ramus as a major figure, puts it: "A Ramist textbook on a given subject had no acknowledged interchange with anything outside itself. ... [I]f you defined and divided in the proper way, everything in the art was ... complete and self-contained."²

We can hardly make too much of this decision. Value-free language and the possibility of a self-contained discipline make possible both modern science and that mapping of humanistic inquiry onto a scientific model which has created modern social science as well. And they create a concomitant problem, one Richard McKeon, in a discussion to be noticed later, finds characteristic of our own time: they render problematic the relation of thought to action. Thought now had its own disciplinary arena. Knowing could now be a self-enclosed activity all by itself, pursued "for its own sake," a claim that simply makes no sense in the rhetorical *paideia*, tied as it was to public action.

Restricting rhetoric to style and delivery, Ramus solves the "Q" question by definition. Rhetoric is a cosmetic, and bad girls wear makeup as well as good ones, probably better. The rhetorical *paideia*, as Quintilian described it, existed to hold rhetoric and philosophy together. Ramus rips them apart. By so doing, he makes possible a secularity in education that, for all the Platonic objections to it, the rhetorical *paideia* never permitted. Envaluation was everywhere in rhetorical education. From now on, ethics would have a special "department," religion first and then philosophy, where it could be studied in and for itself. And the Ramist division, by dividing the curriculum into separate subjects and texts, separated intellection and values in yet

another way. The rhetorical *paideia* was built upon the student's experience through time; no treatise illustrates this better than Quintilian's. But once disciplines and texts supervened, the student's development would always be at odds with the boundaries of disciplinary inquiry. Thus began the world we have now, where students change intellectual worlds every hour on the hour. Thus also begins another adjustment of inquiry to abstract schema rather than human experience: Ramus divides up rhetoric, and the range of learning to which he applied his attention, to facilitate inquiry.

If you separate the discipline of discourse into essence and ornament, into philosophy and rhetoric, and make each a separate discipline, it makes them easier to think about. Thus begins modern inquiry's long history of looking for its lost keys not where it lost them but under the lamppost, where they are easier to find. The consequences of these Ramist decisions, as the texts I will now notice illustrate, extend from how we interpret Renaissance education to how we read our own, from how we write about economics to how we manage big corporations, from the Platonic zeal of Allan Bloom to the supercilious treason of Anthony Blunt.

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Arthur F. Kinney, in his ambitious *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England*,³ describes the rhetoric-centered world Ramus upended. Kinney started out to write a book on Renaissance English fictions but came to something much broader, an attempt to understand the English Renaissance as animated by rhetoric, not by philosophy. "What may at first be startling, but is nevertheless essential to understand, is that philosophy was displaced by rhetoric among humanists and humanist educators. ... Reason, as man's distinguishing characteristic, was to be realized primarily through speech. *Oratio* is next to *ratio*, as Sidney puts it in the *Defence of Poesie*. ... [I]n the beginning was always the Word. We can see this wherever we look" (7). The texts Kinney discusses—*Utopia*, *The Courtier*, *The Adventures of Master F. J.*, *Euphues*, Sidney's *Arcadia*, Greene's romances, Lodge's tales, and Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*—all grow directly out of rhetorical education. The rhetorical neophyte's endless training in epistles, themes, and orations invites him "to frame narratives and characters in conflict: the authentic roots of western fiction, they set the imagination leaping. ... The line between a developing rhetoric and a developing poetic for fiction thus becomes perilously thin" (22). Kinney traces these and many other ways in which the rhetorical *paideia* of the English Renaissance led directly and specifically to the kind of literature it produced. Kinney

a nod to
Nietzsche

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link to
Richard's
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restricts himself to fiction, but the mapping to all of Elizabethan literature is easy enough to do once we know the moves. To have shown us how to do it, in such informed detail, removes a long-standing task from the Renaissance agenda and represents a very considerable scholarly and critical accomplishment.

But Kinney is after bigger game. He wants to confront the fundamental implications of the rhetorical *paideia* as a philosophy of education, and this means confronting the "Q" question. It stands at the center of his book, and by that I mean not only at the center of his argument about Renaissance education but at the center of his textual interpretations as well. Here, in my view, he is less successful in what he sets out to do. In his reading of both the educational philosophy and the literary texts, he follows Quintilian's procedure almost exactly. He poses the "Q" question; he says that he sees its difficulties; he then takes refuge in Plato, in "good rhetoric," in the Weak Defense. Finally, when the unsolved question threatens to get out of control—as it does in every text he examines—like Quintilian he begs the question, usually in a ringing phrase.

In his opening discussion of rhetorical education, for example, Kinney poses the "Q" question by quoting Sextus Empiricus: "For the orator, of whatever sort he may be, must certainly practise himself in contradictory speeches, and injustice is inherent in contradictions; therefore every orator, being an advocate of injustice, is unjust" (26). And then, by way of Cicero, Isocrates, and Puttenham, he comes to Plato. "Plato seems to have been the first to foresee this, to sense the endangering possibilities. In rescuing a rhetoric for a usable poetic while confronting such dangers openly, he established grounds for a fiction that might reliably teach. He gave philosophic and rhetorical validity and purpose, that is, for More to create Utopia, Castiglione his Urbino, or Sidney Arcadia" (27–28). But Plato did nothing of the sort. He did not confront the rhetorical *paideia*. Much of his work, as Eric Havelock has pointed out, exists not to confront it directly and "openly" but to distort and obscure it. If Kinney had confronted this Platonic critique (and it is hardly restricted to Havelock), he could not have rescued his "usable poetic." Plato allows as "good rhetoric" only the kind that enhances an argument we already know, from a priori grounds, to be true. As with Ramus, reason is one thing, and primary; rhetoric is another, derivative and cosmetic. Permitted in the service of truth, it is otherwise an abomination. Whether Tudor educational theory, which Kinney correctly describes as being rhetorical to the core, adopted in theory this Platonic nonanswer to the "Q" question is a very doubtful proposition, though Kinney argues it.

What stands beyond question, however, is that Tudor education could

not carry it out in practice. In practice, rhetorical education is education in two-sided argument, argument where the truth is decided by the judge or jury, where truth is a dramatic criticism handed down on the forensic drama which has been played out according to the rules laid down by a rhetorical education. Such an education stands fundamentally at odds with any absolute or a priori system of thought, and no amount of Platonic evasion, at first or second hand, can conceal this. The current religious fundamentalists of the "moral majority," with their fear of "secular humanism," as they call this interior logic, understand the danger. The Renaissance humanists understood it too. However frequent their euphoric flights about the unlimited powers and malleability of man, they knew that rhetorical education, in practice, saw man as limited, not unlimited, living in a world of play, not of ideal forms. Such an education inevitably involved the full range of human motive, our agonistic contentions and impulses of pure play as well as the ostensible purposes, or arguments, at issue.

Kinney fails to understand that the Strong Defense is required here, and he completely fails to imagine how one might construct it. This is a crucial failing, and it leads him repeatedly astray when he comes to read literary texts—*Utopia*, *Praise of Folly*, *Arcadia*, the fictions of Gascoigne, Lyly, Greene, and Lodge. Kinney keeps talking about "redeeming" rhetoric, but when rhetoric empowers literature, it is unredeemable. That is what rhetorical literature, I am tempted to say Western literature, is all about. I will argue later in this essay that a failure to confront the "Q" question disempowers humanistic study in general. Kinney's failure to see how rhetoric works in particular texts provides, for the Renaissance, a paradigmatic illustration of this disempowering.

Because the most acute reenactment of the Strong Defense in the Renaissance, and perhaps ever since, is Castiglione's in *The Book of the Courtier*, it is especially interesting to notice what Kinney makes of that. Castiglione resolves the immiscibility of rhetoric and philosophy, of truth and Truth, by creating a cultural ideal he calls *sprezzatura* that puts the two into a perpetual oscillation.⁴ The conversations in Urbino model the continual "conversation" which is human culture in a rhetorical, interpretive universe of discourse. Truth and truth are put in a continually reversing figure/ground relation that answers the "Q" question by putting it back into time. Castiglione implies a literary, as against a philosophical, answer to the basic humanistic question. Kinney completely misinterprets this argument, which is a vital one for his thesis:

The twin motives that inspire and govern *Il Cortegiano* (and in turn govern us) are, then, the inductive establishment of the pure human-

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ist community and the securing of its permanence. Such impulses resemble those of Hythlodæ. The fatal difficulty is that, in so shaping Urbino, Castiglione insists on realizing perfectibility in an imperfect society whose flaws are caught in a discernible time and place. Yet, confronted by the problems of mortality, Castiglione has, by a courageous act of the imagination, made his men and women *immortal*, **impervious to time**, by rendering them into the verbal art of a book, *Il Libro*, of the courtier.⁵

Philosophy and rhetoric, taken as the two great opposites of the Western cultural conversation, can be harmonized only by reversing the Platonic effort, by putting them back into time. Kinney's Platonizing makes sure that he misses the point. But once you have decided the "Q" question as he has, the point could not be there in the first place.

That the "Q" question takes so central a place in Kinney's effort to account for Renaissance literary rhetoric has an importance beyond the particular texts he seeks to explain. What stands at issue is how we read Western literature in general. Depending on which answer we bring to the basic question, we shall confront two different literatures. This becomes a matter of some moment when a series of self-teaching Great Texts is urged as the answer to all our educational and cultural problems.

The "Q" question, as posed by Renaissance rhetorical education, has been addressed in another recent book, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine's *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe*. "The subject of this book," they tell us, is "the sense in which the *bonae artes* are 'good.'"⁶ They are interested, more narrowly, in the gap Kinney discusses between the claims the Renaissance made for rhetorical education and the actual practice of it. They offer a rich set of case studies from original documents which no one interested in humanistic education, Renaissance or modern, should fail to ponder.

Grafton and Jardine view the failure to ask the "Q" question as the endemic failing in earlier discussions of Renaissance education: "The few intellectual historians [as against social historians] who have worked on early modern education have been more intent on grinding old axes than on testing new hypotheses. Themselves believing in the preeminent value of a literary education, committed to preserving a canon of classics and a tradition of humanism, they have treated the rise of the classical curriculum and the downfall of scholasticism as the natural triumph of virtue over vice" (xii). **In other words, these historians have, with Quintilian, simply assumed that a rhetorical education, and the literary one that evolved from it, brought with it moral improvement and civic virtue.** So, when the Renaissance edu-

cators pronounced this creed, surely that was what their educational practice produced. Educational practice, that is, was read with the same assumptions Kinney brings to Renaissance texts, and with the same results. Theory and practice are found to agree because the agreement was decided on beforehand. Grafton and Jardine read with a more jaundiced eye, and find that rhetorical education, in practice, did not support the claims made for it. It educated scoundrels as well as statesmen, and it served as a class badge for both. And if the meticulous patterns of rote repetition and memorization, verbal analysis, and dramatic rehearsal which made up the core of rhetorical education in Latin had any real connection with producing either scoundrels or statesmen, rather than unthinking parrots and poseurs, no one then was able to demonstrate it.

Erasmus, to take but one example from their discussion, "maintains that there is an intimate and vital relationship between the piety of his intentions ... and the systematic works on humanistic eloquence" (139). But the connection is never demonstrated. Instead, as we have seen Quintilian do, Erasmus resorts to iteration: "The fact that Erasmus returns again and again in his letters to the connection between his publishing activities in the secular sphere and his scriptural and doctrinal studies suggests that the welding of profane learning to lay piety requires a certain amount of intellectual sleight-of-hand" (144). The "sleight-of-hand" is simply to repeat, as Quintilian does twenty-three times, what you cannot prove, and such repetition has been the basic defense of humanism ever since, the generator of the endless tautological justifications of the humanities that have accompanied our requests for handouts, private or public, ever since.

Erasmus also uses that other staple evasion of the "Q" question, the great literary text itself:

In the *Methodus* Erasmus lays careful emphasis on the proper procedure for "disciplined" reading. He argues in detail that the only way to draw the true message from the Bible is to read it as a good humanist would read a classic pagan text: as the record of Christ, that incomparable orator, and Paul, that incomparable theologian, addressing specific audiences and dealing with specific issues. By keeping the context always in view, by bearing in mind the speaker's and writer's situation, the student will be able to avoid the doctrinal errors and evasions that the scholastics—those insensitive readers—have committed.

...

What Erasmus does not explain (what from his point of view as a humanist pedagogue requires no explanation) is how the young the-

ologian can be sure that simple, straightforward reading will produce guaranteed right doctrine. (146–48)

This “great text + right reading = moral truth” equation, this “convenient confusion” of the methodical with the morally sound, as Grafton and Jardine style it, has—as evidenced in Gerald Graff’s history and Allan Bloom’s revivalist tract to be considered below—caused trouble right up to the present moment.

Perhaps the most provocative discussion in the book is the chapter on “Pragmatic Humanism: Ramism and the Rise of ‘the Humanities.’” Ramus did not think he had split rhetoric from philosophy, only separated them so that, in due course, they would find their natural unity *in forum, in Senatum, in concionem populi, in omnem hominum conventum*. It is a touching faith that, as Grafton and Jardine make clear, did not always work out in practice. This great curricular Judgment Day when all things that humanist specialization has rent apart will come together, though we continually believe in and plan on it, continues to elude us.

On the one hand, we have the “humanism” of their title, the kind of liberal education which is moral in its essence, which answers “Yes” to the “Q” question. Ramus replaces that with the second key term of their title, the “humanities.” The *ars disserendi* was to be converted into a series of techniques that anyone could use to get ahead in any field. “It opened the prospect that the purpose of education was to purvey information and skills, not to be morally improving: Ramist teaching might make you a good grammarian or a good mathematician; there was no guarantee that it would make you a good person” (170). “A committed Ramist finds himself free to pursue the *ars disserendi* simply as a route to high government office, without worrying about being a *vir bonus* (a good man)” (189). This represents “the final *secularisation* of humanist teaching—the transition from ‘humanism’ to ‘the humanities’” (168).

This pattern of root self-contradictions has lived, then, to the present day, and its *Nachleben* is part of the story Grafton and Jardine tell. They begin by talking about Eliot and Leavis and their assumptions and, even closer to home, about the pressures that Mrs. Thatcher (she is not named but alembicated into an impersonal passive) exerted on English universities in recent years:

Where, it is asked, is the marketable end-product in the non-vocational liberal arts faculties that justifies the investment of public money? Where indeed? This book is offered in part as a contribution to our understanding of the long history of evasiveness on the part of teachers of the humanities—an evasiveness which has left them vul-

nerable to the charge of non-productiveness, irrelevance to modern industrial society, without those teachers themselves having deviated from their commitment to the liberal arts as a “training for life.” (xiv)

They pose the question rather than simply evade it. But, alas, they don’t answer it, or even begin to. Instead, they end their courageous study with laconic regret:

[W]e watch as our most gifted students master the techniques and methods of textual analysis, the command of ancient and modern languages (which they can transpose effectively to new and developing disciplines), but in the main discard that over-arching framework of “civilised values” by which teachers of the humanities continue to set such store. Whether we like it or not, we still live with the dilemma of late humanism: we can only live in hope, and practise the humanities. (199–200)

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How energizing it is to turn to the new collection of Richard McKeon’s essays that Mark Backman has edited, and for which he has supplied a superb introduction: *Rhetoric: Essays in Invention and Discovery*.⁷ Unhappily for America, our two greatest rhetoricians, Kenneth Burke and Richard McKeon, are for most people very hard to understand. Of the two, Burke, the Great Amplifier, is far the easier to follow. McKeon condenses. I have always thought that he took as his model Aristotle’s Greek at its most elliptical. For someone new to McKeon, Backman’s introduction is worth its weight in gold. Let me give an example. Here is McKeon:

When the philosophic arts are conceived of as arts of being or of thought, rhetoric is not treated as a philosophic art, although it is used extensively in the controversy and refutation which constitutes communication among philosophies. When the philosophic arts are arts of communication and construction, rhetoric is made into a universal and architectonic art. (108)

And here is Backman’s translation:

In the curriculum of the schools rhetoric has been assigned a much reduced role when the motive has been to establish discrete disciplines marked by unique subject matters and methods. Conversely, rhetoric has organized the entire course of study when the goal has been to bridge the gap between distinct subject matters. (xix)

McKeon's great theme emerges from these two sentences. He projects the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy, conceived both historically and theoretically, across the breadth of Western culture. From this overarching theme, of the greatest interest (Aristotelian prose and all) to anyone studying rhetoric, I can extract only the principal strand of argument, which focuses on the "Q" question. McKeon distinguishes between two kinds of rhetoric, "verbal" and "architectonic." "Verbal" rhetoric is the cosmetic and ancillary discipline left after the Ramist split occurred. "Architectonic" rhetoric is the overarching *paideia* Cicero and Quintilian sought to describe. The two definitions describe two basic orchestrations of reality. And from these two orchestrations emerge the Weak Defense and the Strong Defense of rhetoric. If we conceive the world as somehow externally fixed and sanctioned, then rhetoric, and by extension the arts, will be derivative and cosmetic, "verbal." If, on the other hand, truth is what the judge and jury, after a suitably dramatic proceeding, decide it is, then rhetoric is architectonic. McKeon puts it this way: "Rhetoric has replaced metaphysics as an architectonic art, in the past, when the organization and application of the arts and sciences was based, not on supposed natures of things or perceived forms of thought, but on recognition of the consequences of what men say and do" (18). McKeon argued that the reality to which rhetorical terminology referred was continually changing, making standard histories of rhetoric—which assumed that reality was a constant and the terminology changed—derivative functions. **The meaning of the terms did change, not because their relations changed but because the reality underneath them changed.** It changed, furthermore, in a bipolar pattern: it was either philosophical or rhetorical, or, in Kenneth Burke's terms, "dramatistic." Beneath the continual shifts there is a broad general oscillation between the philosophic and rhetorical world views, and this McKeon took to be the basic plate-tectonic of Western thought.

And so, on a very large scale indeed, McKeon puts our crucial question back into time precisely as Castiglione did, suggesting an answer to the "Q" question that is *sprezzatura* writ large. If we make the Platonic or Ramist assumptions, then to the "Q" question the obvious, indeed the tautological, answer must be "No!" If, on the other hand, we make the rhetorical assumptions, the assumptions built on a dramatistic theory of human reality and a metaphorical theory of language, then the answer, equally obviously, indeed tautologically, must be, as Quintilian has it, "Yes!" **How could it be otherwise, since the orator creates the reality in which he acts? He must be at one with it, "just" and "good" in its terms, since it is created for his purpose.** Now it becomes apparent that either answer, in its pure state, is

logical, true, and useless. And so both sides, once they have returned the answer of their choice, proceed to hedge it. Quintilian brings philosophical coordinates into his discussion continually, so that the basic tectonic oscillation is set in motion without his acknowledging or, most of the time, even knowing it. Ramus, having separated the two, trusts that in practice they will get all mixed up together again. Who cares, since the purpose is not to describe reality but to make inquiry and teaching easier? (Back to finding your keys under the lamppost.)

McKeon is thinking, in a systematic and literally global way, about how **to get out of the "Q" question dilemma** that has stymied the humanities for so long and made thinking about the humanities curriculum so stultifying an exercise in self-serving cliché and ritualized complaint. As so often with McKeon, however, the range and power of his argument do not immediately communicate themselves, at least to me; the reader is urged to try "The Uses of Rhetoric in a Technological Age," from which I have drawn the following passage, direct:

The growth of science and communication, the increase of knowledge and the formation of world community, have begun to lay out the field of systematic organization both as a system of communication for a universal audience, mankind, and as a system of operation of an ongoing development and inquiry, technology. It is a field which provides grounding for the intersubjectivity of communications of persons and groups and for the objectivity of conclusions of inquiry and action. It is within this field that the possible worlds, which are discussed in plans and policy, are constructed, and theses which are posited are stabilized into principles. Theses and principles have a history which carries back in tradition to principles that were called eternal and universal but were also derived from theses which posit being in the context of an agent, his environment, and his subject. It is the field of reflexivity and responsibility, which must be explored in rational action concerning rights and justice, laws and conventions, sanctions and obligations, utilities and values, and opinions and truths. The field of the new dialectical rhetoric, of debate and dialogue, is being travelled and cultivated by chance and by art. An architectonic-productive survey of the field of these activities could make its beginning by orienting rhetoric from the oppositions of the past to the understanding and projection of the new processes and needs of the present. (23–24)

He is exploring the interface between absolute and contingent statements,

the perpetual frontstage/backstage oscillation of human attention, and trying to distinguish the oscillation as the final integer. We cannot define a front stage, a rhetorical reality, without assuming a back stage or philosophical one. And we never define a back stage without knowing that in another act of attention, or in another time, it will be a front stage.

McKeon is trying, that is to say, to create an architectonic rhetoric which includes "philosophy" as a less than Platonic absolute. "In the emerging community of the world the first problem of philosophy—the new metaphysics or at least the new prolegomenon to all future metaphysics—will expound the sense in which what is on some grounds or in some circumstances true is at other times false and dangerous" (220). And, unlike almost all the professional humanists, but in sync with the postmodern critique in the visual and musical arts, he sees modern technology as a potential ally in this Herculean endeavor. Indeed, in describing what his architectonics would look like, he comes close to restating the postmodern critique itself:

It should be a rhetoric which relates form to matter, instrumentality to product, presentation to content, agent to audience, intention to reason. It should not make technology the operation of a machine, in which the message is a massage; it should not take its form from its medium. ... It should be positive in the creation, not passive in the reception, of data, facts, consequences, and objective organization. ... In a technological age all men should have an art of creativity, of judgment, of disposition, and of organization. This should be adapted to their individual development and to their contribution to forming a common field in which the subject of inquiry is not how to devise means to achieve accepted ends arranged in hierarchies but the calculation of uses and applications that might be made of the vastly increased available means in order to devise new ends and to eliminate oppositions and segregations based on past competitions for scarce means. (24)

If rhetoric is "an economics of language, the study of how scarce means are allocated to the insatiable desires of people to be heard," as Donald McCloskey argues in the volume noticed next, McKeon is suggesting that technology fundamentally alters this economy, and so the frequency and wavelength of the oscillation that underlies an architectonic rhetoric. His argument is a profound and (still rarer) profoundly forward-looking attempt to confront the "Q" question, not by waffling or resignation, but by thinking the problem through, and in terms likely to bear upon contemporary circumstance.

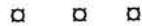
It may perhaps surprise us that Donald McCloskey's brilliant and witty *The Rhetoric of Economics*⁸ (Imagine it, a book about economics and rhetoric that is both brilliant and witty!) refers both to Quintilian's posing of the "Q" question at the beginning of book 12 and to the Ramist critique of it. McCloskey's book provides a perfect example of how McKeon's vision might be implemented. McCloskey's "rhetoric" is what McKeon would call architectonic rather than merely verbal: "Figures of speech are not mere frills. They think for us" (xvii); and, in a fine pun, "Virtuosity is some evidence of virtue" (71). Such a conception of rhetoric involves broadening the range of human motive from the economist's Man rationally balancing his possible benefits: "The understanding of individual motivation in economics could use some complicating" (65). McCloskey would make economists self-conscious about their rhetoric, in order to teach them that what they do is "a collection of literary forms, not a science." He argues that social science—he would extend this to "science" *tout court*—does not use value-free language, that value-free language does not exist, and that we cannot posit a purely transparent language devoid of distracting ornament, through which we transact business with pure facts.

I do love this.

McCloskey is attempting, that is, to correct an imbalance that he sees, as we would expect, as beginning with the Ramist division we have just discussed. To split language and thought, giving us the modernist, "objectivist" way of teaching, is dangerous for the same reason Ramism was. It is easy to teach: "Modernism and methodology have intruded into the classroom. The modernist routine is easy to teach, which is one reason it is taught so widely. This is a pity, because the way we teach becomes the way we think" (178). Those who oppose this act of self-awareness on the part of social science view it as one kind or another of "nihilism," and McCloskey makes a great deal of sense in showing how silly this charge is: "An irrational fear that Western intellectual life is about to be overrun by nihilists grips many people. They are driven by it to the practice of Objectivity, Demarcation, and other regimens said to be good for toughening, such as birching and dips in the river on New Year's Day" (41).

McCloskey's attempt to read economics as literature, to "use the humanist tradition to understand the scientific tradition," brings with it a defense of rhetoric, and an answer to the "Q" question which he does not appear altogether to understand. His stated defense is the Weak one: "Rhetoric is merely a tool, no bad thing in itself. Or rather, it is the box of tools for persuasion taken together, available for persuaders good and bad" (37–38). But what he succeeds in doing, with his splendid close readings of the rhetoric of economics in action, is to suggest the Strong Defense we began to see

emerging with McKeon. To read economics as McCloskey suggests is always to be toggling between looking at the prose and through it, reading it "rhetorically" and reading it "philosophically," and this toggling attitude toward utterance is what the rhetorical paideia was after all along. Train someone in it and, according to Quintilian's way of thinking, you have trained that person to be virtuous. "Virtuosity is some evidence of virtue." To think of this at/through toggle switch as "virtuous," as implicitly moral, is to comprehend the deeply felt "reasoning" behind Quintilian's evasive answer to his own question and to glimpse, perhaps, the beginnings of a legitimate explanation of, and justification for, what the humanities do—or at least can do.



I have been mapping, on my "Q" question grid, various efforts to return to the "architectonic rhetoric" of the rhetorical paideia. With E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*,⁹ we encounter an effort to flee from it. The great enemy for Hirsch is "romantic formalism": "The decline of American literacy and the fragmentation of the American school curriculum have been chiefly caused by the ever growing dominance of romantic formalism in educational theory during the past half century" (110). This is Dewey out of Rousseau's *Emile* by Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Against it, Hirsch calls for an education in the brute facts, as these are imbibed in a good traditional education, the kind that proves in the end much more useful than fancy "progressive" new ones: "For we have learned the paradox that traditional education, which alone yields the flexible skill of mature literacy, outperforms utilitarian education even by utilitarian standards" (126).

This book offers so limited a perspective and such maddening simplifications that it is hard to focus its root self-contradiction as turning on the "Q" question. For Hirsch believes that a positive answer to the "Q" question, the production of individual and civic virtue, comes from the citizenry's sharing the same body of facts, acquired from the same basic, Anglo-Saxon, canonical texts. These texts are self-interpreting, and the facts they contain can float context-free in long quiz sheets that have reminded many readers of the Trivial Pursuit game. That is, Hirsch preserves the same Ramist perspective that has informed his work as a theoretical critic—the belief in an "objectivist" world which is just out there, and a "merely verbal" ornamental rhetoric which is tacked onto the plain words that precisely describe it. He takes the Ramist view and insists, again without any proof, that it

produces a "Yes" answer to the "Q" question, rather than the resounding "No" that Ramus himself returned: "What distinguishes good readers from poor ones is simply the possession of a lot of diverse, task-specific information" (61). And good readers of this sort are, he assumes, good citizens.

This is begging the "Q" question in the most embarrassingly simplistic way. Ramus was right about splitting utterance into "facts" and "style," Hirsch would argue, but wrong that this was no guarantee of virtue. The rhetorical man is not always good but the factual man is. We were right all along; the well-informed man is the virtuous citizen. As our civics teacher promised, the world will be saved by the current events club.

The proof Hirsch offers for his case provides proof for the opposite one. It is proof that learning comes only in a context, with a specific purpose. You cannot learn a list of facts and dates because they hone the mind or simply are good and good for you. He opposes the teaching of reading as a value-free activity: "I cannot claim to have studied all the recent textbooks intended to train teachers or educate children in the language arts, but those I have consulted represent learning to read as a neutral, technical process of skill acquisition that is better served by up-to-date 'imaginative literature' than by traditional and factual material" (113). He advocates a contextualized reading, tied to particular texts, the "traditional and factual material." But to do this is to read economics, say, the way McCloskey says it ought to be read, self-consciously. It is to assume that language is intrinsically value-laden and that every "fact" comes with values attached. You cannot assemble a list of neutral facts which every citizen in a secular society can safely learn as a factual bible, a body of knowledge beyond cavil, which once absorbed guarantees public virtue. Put in this plain way, the contention sounds preposterous, but this is what Hirsch claims. And, having claimed it, he then equates it with the rhetorical paideia, which embodies the opposite conception of the world and works in exactly the opposite way:

The founders of our republic had in mind a Ciceronian ideal of education and discourse in a republic. . . . The Ciceronian ideal of universal public discourse was strong in this country into the early twentieth century. In the Roman republic of Cicero's time, such discourse was chiefly oral, and the education Cicero sought was in "rhetoric" rather than "literacy." But the terms are equivalent. [You can see him begging the "Q" question right here, by making this equivalence.] Literacy—reading and writing taken in a serious sense—is the rhetoric of our day, the basis of public discourse in a modern republic. The teaching of Ciceronian literacy as our founders conceived it is a primary but currently neglected responsibility of our schools. (109)

Hirsch's prime villain, John Dewey, was in fact trying to do exactly this, to reintroduce the full rhetorical paideia into a system which had ossified into the arbitrary memorization of a collection of disconnected commonplace facts and opinions. In the rhetorical paideia, facts and opinions are always used for something, enlisted in argument of one kind or another. They are, as Dewey argued, always enmeshed in the rough-and-tumble argumentative purposes of life. The best short statement of this concept of education that I know occurs in Whitehead's essay "The Aims of Education":

The solution which I am urging, is to eradicate the fatal disconnection of subjects which kills the vitality of our modern curriculum. There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations. Instead of this single unity, we offer children—Algebra, from which nothing follows; Geometry, from which nothing follows; Science, from which nothing follows; History, from which nothing follows; a Couple of Languages, never mastered; and lastly, most dreary of all, Literature, represented by plays of Shakespeare, with philological notes and short analyses of plot and character to be in substance committed to memory. Can such a list be said to represent Life, as it is known in the midst of the living of it? The best that can be said of it is, that it is a rapid table of contents which a deity might run over in his mind while he was thinking of creating a world, and had not yet determined how to put it together.¹⁰

What Burke
calls the
"philosophy
of the bin"

This table-of-contents curriculum resulted from the Ramist separation of rhetoric from thought, of one discipline from another, and of both from any implicit indwelling values. To this world Hirsch would have us return. To correct one simplification, he would have us return to the simplification that spawned it. Surely it would make more sense to ask what "Ciceronian literacy," the classical rhetorical paideia, was really about and trying to do.

In *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*,¹¹ Gerald Graff does for the teaching of literature in American universities what Grafton and Jardine do for Renaissance humanism: he contrasts theory and practice. He also does historically for literary study what McCloskey does rhetorically for economics—introduces some therapeutic self-consciousness into it. And, like McKeon, he strives to find some cultural architectonics that can encompass all the current theories of literature competing in the university marketplace today. In all these aspects, it is a long-overdue volume, very well done and welcome indeed in the present debate about the humanist curriculum.

The theory of humanism, which Graff calls the "humanist myth," has two aspects, historical and theoretical. The historical aspect portrays a myth-

ical golden age when the humanities flourished and the sciences, for once, had to eat dirt. From this golden age, we have declined into the present one of mass illiteracy and swinish ignorance, from which we are to be rescued by what Graff calls "MLA Jeremiads," impassioned defenses of the humanities which have the "ritualistic aura of the Sunday rebuke." The theoretical aspect is simply Quintilian's smug answer to the "Q" question, that whatever humanists are doing at the present time makes overwhelmingly for public and private virtue. Graff illustrates in wonderful detail how these eulogistic clichés have protected the most widely differing pedagogies with, in all cases, no proof beyond the psychology of rumor offered to support the splendid claims. At the heart of the "Q" question stands the need to demonstrate a connection between specific reading and writing practices and the moral life. This connection, as Graff documents at length, literary study (like orthodox rhetoric) has never been able to make.

The "practice" of humanism which Graff surveys includes so many different varieties that simply by juxtaposing this perpetual change with the unchanging justifications used to explain them, he illustrates the failure of literary study, and by implication of humanism itself, to supply any convincing self-justification, any real answer to the "Q" question. But he is most convincing in analyzing the stable structure that determines current practice and how it operates. This is the division of literary study into special fields. "The field-coverage principle seems so innocuous as to be hardly worth looking at, and we have lived with it so long that we hardly even see it, but its consequences have been far reaching. Its great advantage was to make the department and the curriculum virtually self-regulating" (7). Field coverage constitutes what the behavioral biologists call an "evolutionarily stable strategy," one that is proof against any demand for adaptation. Simply add another field. And, if the field is the study of nonfieldable studies, simply make a special field out of that. Such ready subdivision constitutes the perfect tool for conflict regulation. Every disagreement can, after suitable preliminary acrimony, be coopted into the fold. The Ramist enfranchisement of disciplinary self-division and self-enclosure can be applied at the level of the discipline itself, with the same fissiparous effect. Instead of a curriculum, we have Whitehead's tentative table of contents.

This "table-of-contents," or as we are now more likely to call it, "supermarket" conception of the curriculum follows directly from the Ramist answer to the "Q" question. No part of the curriculum offers any moral education. That education takes place elsewhere—in forum, in Senatum, in concionem populi, in omnem hominum conventum—anywhere but in the curriculum. There, you simply choose the specialization that you want for your

own particular purposes. The same stabilizing conflict-resolution strategy used within disciplines applies to the larger curriculum that contains them.

But if you want to return the opposite answer, argue for the discipline of discourse as in some sense a moral education, you cannot accept this supermarket curriculum, and so cannot avail yourself of its handy "Q" question-begging conflict-resolver. You must argue for some kind of general education. There has to be, somewhere, a nonnegotiable kernel of humanistic learning, and we should be able to specify this kernel and insist on it as the nonnegotiable prolegomenon to professionalized advanced study. Therefore to the question, "How do we get from specific reading and writing practices to moral judgment?" we must add a parallel one: "If we claim such a relationship, how do we get from it to a specific curriculum?" The structure of the humanities curriculum is a subset of the "Q" question. **If you answer it with "No," you get what we have now. If you answer it with "Yes," you must then decide what curriculum is implied by your answer.**

Two basic patterns have been suggested: the Great Books and the course in method. The Great Books argument was first advanced by John Erskine at Columbia in 1917 and then in a different form by Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler at the University of Chicago in the 1930s and after. The best-known contemporary version of the method argument is Daniel Bell's *The Reforming of General Education*. The most widely discussed restatement of the Adler thesis is Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, and E. D. Hirsch's volume, as we have seen, belongs in this camp as well.

Graff discusses the periodic appearances of both these views on the American scene. He points out how traditional humanist theory and practice have assumed that the literary text is self-teaching: "The assumption implicit in the humanist myth and the field-coverage principle has been that *literature teaches itself*. Since the literary tradition is presumably coherent in and of itself, it should naturally dictate the way teachers collectively organize themselves" (9–10). The Great Books curriculum must make the same assumption. The books come context-free. You need only expose the students to them. If they require interpretation, then you must ask what kind, and the "Q" question returns—how do you get from a specific theory of reading and writing to moral judgment? But if they don't require interpretation, then they are context-free and, as Ramus saw, value-free as well, and hence cannot be the source of value.

The alternate "method" curriculum, which we must recognize, I suppose, as some etiolated variant of Dewey's educational argument, returns us again to the "Q" question. The Bad Persons as well as the Good Persons can

use the same method. Science, like rhetoric in the Weak Defense, is a neutral tool, equally available to all. Those who defend this curriculum, like Quintilian defending his own program, have found "good" and "bad" versions of method, but the distinction has never been supported convincingly.

Graff concludes his history with an account of the current contention between the Arnoldian "humanists" and the Derridean "theorists," as representing today's version of the quarrel about how to connect discursive practices with moral judgment. He does not take sides in the debate, though he takes each side apart with great skill. **Rather, he suggests that, since we cannot resolve this debate, we dramatize it instead—**make the students privy to our private debates through team-teaching and other pedagogical techniques. We can recognize in this advice a pedagogical implementation of the *sprezzatura* oscillation that McKeon recommends, and that had always stood at the heart of the rhetorical *paideia*.

Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*¹² does not offer a coherent or informed argument, either historically or theoretically, for the Great Books curriculum, but is instead an "MLA Jeremiad," a thunderous collection of what Graff calls "Sunday Clichés." Its cardinal theme is an apocalyptic restatement of the Adlerian argument for the Great Books curriculum, and its greatest triumph is the most extended, pretentious, and self-satisfied begging of the "Q" question we have seen in a long time. It is a hard book to summarize, since its premises and arguments metamorphose so unpredictably, but what it proposes as a solution for the spiritual debilities of our time (rock music, feminism, social science, the sixties and the changes in university governance resulting therefrom, the democratization of learning and university admission, the decline of the nuclear family, pop culture, nonrepresentational art, deconstruction and other relativisms, etc.) is this:

Of course, the only serious solution is the one that is almost universally rejected: the good old Great Books approach, in which a liberal education means reading certain generally recognized classic texts, just reading them, letting them dictate what the questions are and the method of approaching them—not forcing them into categories we make up, not treating them as historical products, but trying to read them as their authors wished them to be read. ... [O]ne thing is certain: wherever the Great Books make up a central part of the curriculum, the students are excited and satisfied, feel they are doing something that is independent and fulfilling, getting something from

the university they cannot get elsewhere. . . . Programs based on judicious use of great texts provide the royal road to students' hearts. Their gratitude at learning of Achilles or the categorical imperative is boundless. (344)

One is tempted to cite external fact to disprove this preposterous ukase (What, for example, about the alarming drop-out rate at St. John's, which teaches the very curriculum Bloom proposes, or its equally embarrassing failure to produce any of the seminal minds who people Bloom's Ideal U.?), or to consult one's own teaching experience, in which student enthusiasm for the categorical imperative may in fact know bounds; but verily we need go no further than that qualifier "judicious." This means, presumably, "as I, Allan Bloom, do it," and puts us, as Grafton and Jardine saw that it put Erasmus, right back into the lap of interpretation and the "Q" question. Or we might ask why, if the Great Books are "generally recognized" as being the great and self-teaching source of all intellectual authority, a curriculum based on them is "almost universally rejected." And if we can read them as totally context-free (and this is the most extreme statement of the Ramist position one is likely to come across), how can they at the same time be so value-laden?

For Bloom, like Hirsch, accepts the Ramist division but not the Ramist "No" to the "Q" question. The answer for Professor Bloom is that the book of books is Plato's *Dialogues*, and there we learn that the truths the books communicate are Platonic absolutes. Like the Word of God in an absolutist religion, they require no interpretation, no cultural Protestantism. And so he solves the "Q" question, or begs it, by a private act of religious revelation. Because he knows the truth, and where to seek it, like Erasmus he will always read aright. Such biblical teaching is indeed self-validating. And it brings its own curriculum with it, and so solves that question too.

These views are not new. Mortimer Adler protested in a national magazine that Bloom's book was but Adler *redivivus*, and he was right. And Bloom is far from the only humanist to hold them. But Bloom is unusual for the candor with which he expresses them. He doesn't construct any equivocal answer to the "Q" question; he doesn't think that any is needed. He thus has performed a signal service for us, in revealing at devastating length what substructure the humanities presently stand on. As a subset of revealed religion, public or private, solid as a rock; as a subset of intellectual inquiry, incredibly flimsy. He also shows, and for this we should be equally grateful, what version of humanism follows from answering the "Q" question in a religious way. For the book is a spiritual as well as an intellectual confession,

and the book's very favorable reception suggests that Bloom's conception of the humanist life is widely shared. What kind of life, in his view, does the ideal humanist lead? What kind of person has a lifetime of the Great Books made of Allan Bloom?

Well, obviously a Platonic absolutist, for a start. The answers are known, right there in the Great Books. The university exists to spell them out. Spelling them out Bloom calls "the theoretical life," and it is the only acceptable, the only truly human life possible.

Never did I think that the university was properly ministerial to the society around it. Rather I thought and think that society is ministerial to the university, and I bless a society that tolerates and supports an eternal childhood for some [the professors, not the students], a childhood whose playfulness can in turn be a blessing to society. Falling in love with the idea of the university is not a folly, for only by means of it is one able to see what can be. Without it, all these wonderful results of the theoretical life collapse back into the primal slime from which they cannot re-emerge. (245)

The "primal slime" is ordinary nonuniversity life, as the following reflection on the role of the college years suggests:

He has four years of freedom to discover himself—a space between the intellectual wasteland he has left behind and the inevitable dreary professional training that awaits him after the baccalaureate. In this short time he must learn that there is a great world beyond the little one he knows, experience the exhilaration of it and digest enough of it to sustain himself in the intellectual deserts he is destined to traverse. He must do this, that is, if he is to have any hope of a higher life. These are the charmed years when he can, if he so chooses, become anything he wishes and when he has the opportunity to survey his alternatives, not merely those current in his time or provided by careers, but those available to him as a human being. The importance of these years for an American cannot be overestimated. *They are civilization's only chance to get to him.* (336; emphasis mine)

All human life and value is condensed into the university—everything else is "primal slime," presumably—but not the university as it exists now, Clark Kerr's multiversity of pluralistic interests and contending values, or as it has actually existed in a very checkered and irregular past, but the university as a golden-age collection of "authentically great thinkers who gave living proof of the existence of the theoretical life and whose motives could

not easily be reduced to any of the baser ones people delight in thinking universal. They had authority, not based on power, money or family, but on natural gifts that properly compel respect. The relations among them and between them and students were the revelation of a community in which there is a true common good" (244-45). This paradise he locates in the American university of the 1950s. Those of us who were students in that university may well gaze in wonder at Bloom's characterization, even if he does go on to acknowledge that his youthful imagination has made most of it up.

At the top of Bloom's ideal curriculum stands the figure of Plato's Socrates: "The character of the experience Socrates represents is important because it is the soul of the university" (268); "Socrates is of the essence of the university. It exists to preserve and further what he represents" (272). *So all that is worthwhile in human life comes down, at last, to studying about the Platonic Socrates with, presumably, Allan Bloom.* The combination of personal arrogance, historical ignorance of educational history, and adulatory misreading of Plato which this definition of the university represents simply takes your breath away. But clearly it is not only what Bloom believes the ideal life of the humanist to be; it is what the many thousands of people who bought his book believe humanist inquiry to be all about. Socrates is the secular messiah; we are apostles studying the book that chronicles his deeds, sayings, and martyrdom; and we do so in a monastery that shuts out a fundamentally corrupt and irredeemable world.

Behold what the great Renaissance dreams Arthur Kinney chronicles have come to. The difference between humanist theory and practice that Grafton and Jardine describe could hardly have found a more striking modern representation than this book, a bizarre and scary confession of a closed mind at work rearranging intellectual and educational history, and calling itself, with ultimate intellectual arrogance, the closing of the *American* mind.

We should all be grateful to Bloom for this extraordinary act of humanist self-revelation. For what he says is also, though seldom put with such bold contempt of one's fellow human beings (especially of one's students—*what strikes you above all in this book is how the man despises his students, even when they give him the proper adulatory audience*), what a great many humanists think they are and are doing. Humanists regularly rewrite the history of universities into a golden-age Platonic academy which puts them centerstage. That is what Graff's book is all about. We regularly preach one way and teach another; that is what Grafton and Jardine's book is all about. *We regularly confuse the right kind of middle-class factual knowledge with moral virtue, public and private, as does E. D. Hirsch.* We apply to our own writing a Platonic and Ramist theory of language which pretends that it is

value-free, as McCloskey's critique of scholarly writing, using economists as an example, so brilliantly points out. We regularly, in the interests of Platon-worship, disembodied language and reason, with the narrow-mindedness Mark Johnson points out in an important recent book, *The Body in the Mind*.¹³ Our persistent evasion of the "Q" question makes for a great deal of self-centered, self-serving preaching and a great deal of self-satisfied practice. We do sometimes follow that master of contemptuous, self-satisfied self-absorption, the Platonic Socrates, closely indeed.

□ □ □

As circumstances would have it, recent history has given us an extraordinary example of how unhumanistic the humanities can be, of an archetypal "No!" to the "Q" question. Barrie Penrose and Simon Freeman begin their *Conspiracy of Silence* thus: "On Thursday, 15 November 1979, the Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, told the House of Commons that Sir Anthony Blunt, the distinguished art historian who was a former Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures, was a self-confessed Soviet Spy."¹⁴ It is a fortuitous coincidence, perhaps, but one a Greek tragedian might have seized upon, that the same prime minister who made this announcement is responsible for the attack on the English humanities establishment which Grafton and Jardine remark. "If," Mrs. Thatcher might have said with her parliamentary disclosure fresh in mind, "humanist inquiry is as morally improving, as essential to civilization as you claim, please explain to me the case of Anthony Blunt." The English universities, Grafton and Jardine suggest, are paying a high price for their inability to answer this question. After all, what could have been more quintessentially humanistic than Blunt's education at Marlborough and Trinity College, Cambridge? Than his brilliant, indeed almost preeminent career, as an art historian and royal curator?

George Steiner, in his penetrating essay on the Blunt case, "The Cleric of Treason" (1980), remarks of the Blunt story, "A cursory look at the tale shows that it is so full of gaps, unanswered questions, and implausibilities as to be almost useless."¹⁵ It is to these gaps, unanswered questions, and implausibilities that Penrose and Freeman address themselves, with as much success as a very cold trail and the Official Secrets Act permit. Their bizarre tale includes some extraordinary snapshots: "the Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures awaking at the Courtauld after a night with rough trade [the working-class homosexual companions Blunt used to pick up at a nearby public lavatory]; then taking seminars with his students, emphasizing the need for art historians to be champions of Truth and Beauty, before slipping away

many good things here

late in the afternoon for a session with Martin [the government agent investigating him for spying]."¹⁶ Or this one: "In November 1972 the Queen met Blunt at the Palace and thanked him for his hard work as a royal servant over the past twenty-seven years. She said that she hoped to see him just as often in his new capacity as adviser. Since there is no doubt that she knew about his work for the Soviets she must have gone through this ceremony with mixed feelings" (477).

The most amazing aspect of the Blunt case was the public reception of Blunt's treachery. A few people attacked him, like the art historian Denis Mahon: "Once you get away with lying on one subject, it spills over into the rest of your life and that is what happened with Blunt, he became a practised liar" (295). But much more characteristic was the response of A. J. P. Taylor to the demand that Blunt be expelled from the British Academy: "I couldn't be a fellow of an academy which uses the late Senator McCarthy as its patron saint. It's not the duty of the academy to probe into the behaviour of fellows, except on grounds of scholarship" (529–30). In other words, humanist inquiry, indeed the whole life of the mind, has nothing to do with the moral life. Even to ask the question is infamous. This is the Ramist answer with a vengeance.

Perhaps the most illuminating example of how the news about Blunt was received is contained in an extraordinary letter written to the *Guardian* in April 1983 by Janet Kennish:

I was there [at the Courtauld] from 1961 to 1964 and we did not need to assess the Director's political ideals from attention to his lectures; it seems extraordinary now, but, as new students we were casually informed that the Director was also a Russian spy. It was even more specific than that—he was actually said to be "the fourth man involved with Burgess and Maclean." I have no idea who told us, but I believe it was the older students who were merely, and openly, passing on the folklore of the place to new arrivals. After I left, I thought no more of it for many years but when the Blunt scandal became public, my reaction was one of astonishment—but we all *knew*, why did no one else? Should we have told someone? I suppose we didn't take it seriously, and I was naive enough to accept anything that I was told, so awed was I by the esoteric, socially elite atmosphere of the Courtauld in those years. Just another idiosyncrasy of the unfathomable upper classes—you might meet a spy on the Adam staircase. (453–54)

To my mind, this is the most revealing passage in *Conspiracy of Silence*, for it suggests that the "secret" was no secret but a shared hypocrisy, a sponta-

neous conspiracy, not only on the part of the authorities but of the intellectual classes too, not to ask the embarrassing "Q" question. At this point emerges, now on a broad social scale, the persistent evasion we have been tracing. As Ms. Kennish shows, it is no problem, really, so long as the atmosphere is imposing enough, the stylistic signals are all right, and the ruling classes keep their solidarity. Penrose and Freeman remark, "Half a century later it probably seems odd that Blunt should have been able to find a job so easily in the heart of British intelligence. Yet, it has to be emphasized, the recruiters of MI5 and MI6 had no alternative other than to accept personal recommendations. Recruits were invariably drawn from that closed circle (the public schools—Oxbridge—the City—the Law), membership of which had always been a guarantee of a man's character and patriotism" (236). The assumption that humanist education worked, that the answer to the "Q" question was "Yes," underlay how the British government worked, how the society worked. To doubt Blunt was to doubt the traditional educational system and therefore the entire society. Nobody wanted to do it. If you met a spy on the Adam staircase, you smiled and went on your way. As Penrose and Freeman conclude their book and their argument, "Perhaps it was not so surprising, after all, that Britain had produced Anthony Blunt. Indeed, it might be said that Britain deserved Anthony Blunt" (570).

The "Q" question has been George Steiner's great subject for a number of years. "Unlike Matthew Arnold and unlike Dr. Leavis," he tells us in an early essay, "I find myself unable to assert confidently that the humanities humanize." In "The Cleric of Treason," Steiner asks the "Q" question in its most uncompromising form:

What *is* certain is simply this: Anthony Blunt was a K.G.B. minion whose treason over thirty years or more almost certainly did grave damage to his own country and may well have sent other men... to abject death.... Professor Blunt's treason and duplicity do pose fundamental questions about the nature of intellectual-academic obsession, about the co-existence within a single sensibility of utmost truth and falsehood, and about certain germs of the inhuman planted, as it were, at the very roots of excellence in our society.... I would like to think for a moment about a man who in the morning teaches his students that a false attribution of a Watteau drawing or an inaccurate transcription of a fourteenth-century epigraph is a sin against the spirit and in the afternoon or evening transmits to the agents of Soviet intelligence classified, perhaps vital information given to him in sworn trust by his countrymen and intimate colleagues. What are the sources of such scission? How does the spirit mask itself?¹⁷

Penrose and Freeman seek an explanation in Blunt's life, and find there an actor whom nobody truly knew, an Iago who deceived for the pleasure of deception—and a society that collaborated with the deception. Steiner looks, instinctively, at Blunt's work. The explanation he finds there, I am afraid, is one he constructs himself. It goes this way:

Like so many of the "radical élite," Blunt cherishes two possibly antithetical persuasions. He holds great art to be of matchless significance to man; and he would want this significance to be accessible to the community as a whole. The solution is, more or less unavoidably, Plato's: "guardians," chosen for their intellectual force and their probity, are to ensure the positive, life-enhancing quality of art and are to organize the presentation of such art to their entire society. And this quality and public presentation will elevate collective sensibility to a higher plane. Blunt seems to have felt that something very like this mechanism of authority and diffusion was at work in the autocratic city-states of Renaissance Italy and, above all, in the century of Louis XIV and his immediate successor. ... [H]ow else are the arts, without which man would recede into animality, to be rescued from their isolation, from the prostitution of the money market? (192–93)

So, at least, Steiner conjectures that Blunt might have thought. He is trying to find an explanation that will make Blunt a hero along the lines laid down by Allan Bloom, to put him again on the right side, as a "man of theory," so that this horrible split will be a mistake or misunderstanding, not a betrayal. Steiner floats another guess: that Blunt wanted to study Lorrain, not Poussin, but the fact that Lorrain's paintings were mostly in private hands and this private ownership prevented his studying them so enraged Blunt that he went over to Russia. This grasps even harder at a straw. And Steiner knows it, for he broadens his search for an explanation into the nature of humanistic inquiry itself. What he says takes us deeper into the "Q" question than anyone has gone in a long time.

The absolute scholar is in fact a rather uncanny being. He is instinct with Nietzsche's finding that to be interested in something, to be totally interested in it, is a libidinal thrust more powerful than love or hatred, more tenacious than faith or friendship—not infrequently, indeed, more compelling than personal life itself. ... He is, when in the grip of his pursuit, monomaniacally disinterested in the possible usefulness of his findings, in the good fortune or honour that they may bring him, in whether or not any but one or two other men or women on the earth care for, can even begin to understand or evalu-

ate, what he is after. This disinterestedness is the dignity of his mania. But it can extend to more troubling zones. The archivist, the monographer, the antiquarian, the specialist consumed by fires of esoteric fascination may be indifferent also to the distracting claims of social justice, of familial affection, of political awareness, and of run-of-the-mill humanity. The world out there is the formless, boorish impediment that keeps him from the philosopher's stone. ... The more so ... when the spell is antiquarian. ... [Such a man] has, necessarily, inverted time. For him, the pulse of most vivid presence beats from out of the past. This, again, is a social and psychological estrangement to which we pay too little heed. ... The humanist is a rememberer. He walks, as does one troupe of the accursed in Dante's *Inferno*, with his head twisted backward. He lurches indifferent into tomorrow. (197–98)

Here is Allan Bloom's hunger for "spirituality" without the pretentious Platonism or evangelical zeal. Steiner sees that at the core of humanistic inquiry stands the pure formal pleasure of play. **No intrinsic connection binds this pleasure to moral judgment. When you leave humanistic inquiry to itself, it folds itself in on this formal pleasure.** And as Bloom's book illustrates, when deprived of action it turns rancid. Steiner is brilliant about this: "The practice of devoting one's waking hours to the collation of a manuscript, to the recension of watermarks on old drawings, the discipline of investing one's dreams in the always vulnerable elucidation of abstruse problems accessible only to a handful of prying and rival colleagues can secrete a rare venom into the spirit. *Odium philologicum* is a notorious infirmity" (199). Scholarly asceticism, he argues, "cuts a writer off from 'the great springs of life' and can nurture a pathological need for cruelty." We return to McKeon's paramount question, the connection between thought and action: "Above all, Professor Blunt was able to translate into clandestine performance, into covert mendacity and, possibly, murderousness (the men and women tagged for Soviet vengeance in Eastern Europe), those fantasies of virile action, those solicitations of violence, which bubble like marsh gas from the depths of abstruse thought and erudition" (200).

An academic autobiography has appeared recently that makes a fascinating contrast with the Blunt story, Sidney Hook's *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century*.¹⁸ Hook's youth in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn and his intellectual odyssey at City College lie as far as may be from Blunt's Marlborough and Trinity, Cambridge. And if much of Blunt's real education came from the aesthetical hothouse of the "Apostles," much of Hook's education took shape in that antithetically opposite intellectual hothouse of New York Jewish intellectuals Irving Kristol has described

in *Reflections of a Neo-Conservative*. Both Hook and Blunt began as leftists. Both were approached by the Party to be spies (Hook by Earl Browder). Both ended up, to some part of their constituency, traitors to their class. But Hook earned his scorn by turning down the invitation to espionage, by becoming disillusioned with the Communist utopia which Blunt served faithfully, and by becoming a spokesman for free enterprise and an ardent and tireless activist in the open political debate from which Blunt took flight into art history. Both ended up answering McKeon's question about the relation of thought to action, though in very different ways.

And both, again in opposed ways, confronted our key question. Blunt answered it by treachery and silence, and his friends answered it for him by asserting that humanist inquiry had nothing to do with goodness. Hook, in a memorable passage in his life, and in the book, looked it in the face and confessed that he had no answer. The passage comes when he is relating his disgust with the response of American universities, and the American professoriate, to the threats and intimidations of the student left during the sixties:

Not only did the events of the sixties in American universities lead me to modify the severity of my judgment on the behavior of the German professoriate under Hitler, it led me to reevaluate one of the cardinal principles of my ethical philosophy. I had always believed, and was fortified in that belief by my study of John Dewey, that intelligence was the supreme virtue. I had taken for granted the operation of moral courage. After discovering that it was in such short supply in the academy, I began to wonder whether, as necessary as intelligence was, it was sufficient, and if not, what was the source of moral courage. By sophisticated argument I could like Plato try to show that someone who was truly intelligent would also possess moral courage. But I knew this to be empirically false. ... Although I have puzzled over the problems concerning the nature and nurture of moral courage, I am not satisfied that I have found any adequate answers to them. Nor so far as I know has anyone else. (550–51)

We find ourselves with a curious pairing. Blunt, the actor par excellence, the man who created a public identity out of stylistic rhetoric, found at the end of it all the same gulf between humanist learning and moral action which Hook, the man of consummate philosophical principle, came to stare down at the end of his academic career. Rhetoric and philosophy come to the same chasm each of our texts has either made up, tripped over, or fallen down. For Hook, as for Allan Bloom, the university represents, or rep-

resented, the last best hope of humankind. Clearly they both idolized and idealized it in their youth. It is extraordinary, and profoundly sad, that Hook can look the failure of that enthusiasm so resolutely in the face. But, like Grafton and Jardine, he remarks the Gorgon by the roadside and then trudges bravely on.

To set Hook beside Allan Bloom is to surprise another suggestive comparison, not only between two different humanities curricula but between two different kinds of humanism. Bloom's conception of humanism is absolutist, religious, theoretical, and asocial. Society exists to serve the university and not vice versa, and the scholar remains a "perpetual child," pure in heart and motive, professing a set of canonical texts (although, since they are self-teaching, they scarcely need professing) in an environment insulated from all political pressures—without, in fact, any social context whatever. The scholar does not act in society except by being what he is. He is, in terms of the familiar Harold Nicolson anecdote, what the culture exists to create. (Harold Nicolson, walking in civilian clothes in London during World War II, was reproached for his lack of uniform. He is said to have replied, "I *am* what you all are fighting for!")

Sidney Hook was the opposite brand of humanist. The truth he served was contingent rather than absolute, secular rather than religious, and texts were admitted to his canon only after screening by a tough street-kid's experienced crap-detector. He devoted his life to political and social activism, and in his conception the university served society as much as society served it. Both Bloom and Hook were horrified at the campus disruptions of the sixties, but Bloom's response is the jeremiad in his book; Hook, characteristically, founded a national organization and pursued the issues it raised until the day he died.

The differences in their humanisms come into clearest focus in Hook's chapter on "God and the Professors." Bloom, as we have seen, was trained by Plato; Sidney Hook was trained by John Dewey. Some of the book's most illuminating moments come when he describes how he took on his teacher's great enemies, Hutchins, Adler, and the neo-Aristotelian Great Books movement, a movement which made in the thirties the same argument that Bloom and a different moral majority are raising today. "The educational philosophy of Hutchins and Adler was an attempt to justify a counterreformation in American education. ... Education was to be desecularized; metaphysics and theology were to be instated as prescribed courses in the curriculum of institutions of higher learning. The controlling values and objectives of the lower school were to rest upon the truths of metaphysics and religion, which were declared 'superior' to all other truths, particularly those reached by the

scientific method" (341). We are hearing this same argument against secular education and for a religious counterreformation today, and it has not grown in stature or persuasiveness during the intervening half-century. On Hutchins and Adler especially, Hook is simply devastating. Anyone who wonders where Bloom comes from can find out in this chapter. And since Hook went through the kind of fact-heavy education Hirsch would resurrect, his comments on it effectively demolish Hirsch as well.

The curriculum of Boys High School was still fairly classical in those days [1916]. Latin was a required subject for two or three years, as were algebra, geometry, a year of biology, a year of physics or chemistry, a modern foreign language, three years of European and American history, and four years of English. Some stress was placed on elocution in the English classes. Compared to contemporary high schools, it would be considered an elite school. Some of its distinguished graduates, Clifton Fadiman for one, have written about their educational experience as if it were ideal and contrasted its course of study very favorably with the curricula that were introduced later. The truth of the matter—and I sat in some of the very classes that Fadiman has described in such glowing terms—is that no one learned anything in that school who was not already self-motivated, and not (with the rarest of exceptions) by virtue of the teaching but despite it. The pedagogy was execrable. The textbook was the only authority, and except in some classes where problems were studied (mathematics and physics), excellence in scholarship depended upon the students' ability to regurgitate it. . . . Instruction was not geared to broadening the interests and liberalizing the minds of the students but to the passing of examinations, especially the Regents' tests. (17–18)

It is to these basics—accepted facts in accepted texts—that we are now from all sides urged to return. True, Hook's intellectual confessional is not free of an old man's cranky vindictiveness—his motto sometimes seems to be "Never Forget! Never Forgive!" But when we ask of him the question we asked of Bloom—"What kind of person did this life of humanist inquiry and teaching create?"—the answer, even for those who dislike his politics, must be more reassuring.

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We return by broad ambages to where we began, Quintilian's seemingly facile begging of his own central question. What genuine argument, or at

least observation, might lie behind what appears only permissive optimism? Might he have been arguing, or at a deeper level might he simply have felt he knew in his bones, from a lifetime of experience, that the rhetorical education he had just finished describing vented the discipline of discourse in action, liberated it from the *odium philologicum* that hermetic enclosure in pure formal pleasure creates?

What sets us humanists, the Bloomian persons of theory, above the sordid world of trade, what we like to think defines us as humanists, is the purity of our motives. We do what we do, not for money or power but "for its own sake." Yet this turns out to be a formal, not a moral, pleasure, as Steiner comes to admit, and a formal pleasure that left to itself soon sours, as Bloom's book so embarrassingly illustrates. What rescues the humanities from this poisonous self-enclosure, when they are rescued, is some external circumstance, some problem, that puts this formal pleasure to work. Steiner adduces a perfect example, the way purely formal mathematical and logical talent was put to work by the British to break the German codes during World War II: "All who look back on the days of 'Ultra' and 'Enigma' at Bletchley Park do so with a sense of holiday. For once, hermetic addiction and the raw needs of the time coincided."¹⁹ Practical purpose, the need to defend England, was added to the motivational mix. And a third type of motive, competition, was added to the mixture, for they were trying at every point to match wits with their German counterparts, to decrypt what the enemy was encrypting.

Could this mixture of motives have been what animated and supported Quintilian's optimism? Might the good man, for him, have been the man whose motives were deeply mixed, and who knew how and why? I would argue that this mixture of play, game, and purpose was the characteristic product (if not always the avowed purpose) of the rhetorical, as against the philosophical, *paideia*. It did not try to purify our motives but to radically mix them. It created not a self-enclosed humanism but one connected at every juncture to what Whitehead called "the insistent present." It aimed, that is, to address what McKeon thought the characteristic problem of our times, the relation of thought to action, the problem that became a problem when Ramus "purified" thought of rhetoric, and thus of action as well.

Humanism, construed in this rhetorical way, is above all an education in politics and management. Can it also be construed as an education in civic virtue? To answer this question, we must revert to what I have called the Strong Defense of rhetoric. The Strong Defense argues that, since truth comes to humankind in so many diverse and disagreeing forms, we cannot base a polity upon it. We must, instead, devise some system by which we

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can agree on a series of contingent operating premises. The system that rhetoric devised, and which was enshrined in rhetoric as a system of education, was built upon an oscillation very like Castiglione's *sprezzatura*.

The most familiar example of this procedure to most of us is the Anglo-Saxon system of jurisprudence. We stage a public drama, empanel an audience whom we call a jury, and offer contending versions of reality. The jury decides on one. That decision then becomes a different sort of reality altogether, a precedent, a referential reality against which further judicial dramas are measured. The magic moment of transmutation, what drives the system, is the need to reach a decision. Chaim Perelman cites Article 4 of the Napoleonic Code in this connection, an article which says that the judge must render a verdict in every case. As York says in *Richard II*, when he has to decide whether to join Bolingbroke or not, "Somewhat we must do." That decision is made by people, not handed down by God, but the system does all it can to strengthen the decision by arriving at it in a certain way. It is a proceeding of radically impure motives. It is fundamentally a contest, a game. It is full of the formal pleasure—what makes the law so complex is the need for formal pleasure, as much as for exactitude—that renders the proceedings themselves highly satisfying, "full of drama" as we like to say. And these two motives, play and game, are driven and controlled by purpose, by the need to reach a decision: "Somewhat we must do." The Strong Defense does not apologize for this mixture of motives but rather glories in it, for it reflects the motivational structure of humankind, and in so doing holds the greatest promise of enduring effectiveness.

The Platonic and Bloomian condemnation of this political manner of proceeding argues that conceptual truth, arrived at through pure reason, should create our "referential reality"; the "basal [motives] people delight in thinking universal" must be purified out. The Strong Defense would contend not only that this argument is impossible but that it is dangerous; that its decision-making process has no built-in system of error-correction, of cybernetic control when human purpose, rationally arrived at, turns out to be wrong. Such a cybernetic system of error-correction, of continually modifying one arena of motive by another, is what the Strong Defense of rhetoric aims to create and explain. Gregory Bateson tried to sketch out such a system in a prophetic essay on the Treaty of Versailles.²⁰ Pure rational purpose, Bateson argued, ran out of control, established a positive-feedback system of geometrically increasing error. The formal pleasure of play can control this increasing reamplification of the same signal, and so (though Bateson was not arguing in this direction) can the pleasures of contest. Motive-balancing provides the means by which we can exercise social control over ourselves.

Perhaps now we can comprehend how Quintilian might have felt that a rhetorical education as he had traced it conduced to civic virtue. It trained people in the Strong Defense, in the skills needed to create and sustain a public, as against a private, reality. It did not simply train, it created, the public person. It is the perfect training for the pattern of government Plato hated the most, a genuine, open-ended democracy. || *

Such a training implies a particular version of humanism: Hook's kind instead of Bloom's, a kind that is always oscillating from the formal pleasure of game and play to the demands of insistent purpose. The rhetorical *paideia*, the "discipline of discourse" Isocrates bequeathed to us, tried to build a verbal model of this oscillation. It was the oscillation around a fulcrum of self-consciousness that built up the linguistic model, the behavioral allegory, by which rhetorical education trained for the public life, by which it built in self-consciousness about motive as a cybernetic correction to social deliberation. To look at language self-consciously is to play games with it; to look through language unselfconsciously is to act purposively with it. The running debate about decorum as a key term in rhetorical theory is a debate about how this behavioral toggle-switch operates. And rhetoric's long effort to preserve both kinds of attention, and both kinds of language, however self-contradictory in theory the effort may prove to be, attests to its final loyalty to making things happen in the world. To do that, you must forever estimate human motive, and toggle from contemplating the surface of human behavior to taking a role in it. Writ small, this oscillation is the method of the pun; writ large, it is McKeon's architectonic rhetoric. McCloskey has put the two together in the golden apothegm I have already cited: "Virtuosity is some evidence of virtue."

We can begin to envisage as well how a theory of reading and writing can become a training in moral judgment. For what links virtuosity, the love of form, and virtue, is *virtù*, power. Formal training in words models the balance of motive that creates power; this is how Isocrates' "discipline of discourse," how "Ciceronian literacy" has always worked. And if we want to view in detail how a curriculum can be developed to do this modeling, we have only to reexamine, more diligently to be sure than we have done up to now, the rhetorical *paideia* which has dominated Western education for most of its two-and-a-half millennia.

If we can conceive the connection between verbal practices, moral judgment, and education in this way, a deep and abiding irony about the Great Books curriculum—the alternate curriculum to this rhetorical one—begins to dawn. Those canonical texts—Homer, Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare—are rhetorical through and through. The very substance out of which they were created was, as Arthur Kinney's book demonstrates for the Eng-

lish Renaissance, drawn from the standard practices of rhetorical education. The characteristic humanist "right reading," as Grafton and Jardine document so well, was also rhetorical through and through. I have argued myself that the oscillation of self-consciousness sketched above underlies the basic narrative-speech-narrative Thucydidean pattern which informs Western literature from its beginnings until today. What these canonical texts teach—and let us assume them to be as didactic as a Bloomian "man of theory" would desire—is the rhetorical kind of civic virtue I have just sketched.

It really does need saying that the professional defenders of the canon don't understand what makes it canonical. They radically mistake why the Great Books are "great." The primary spokesman for the traditional cultural canon which the Great Books symbolize, former Secretary of Education William Bennett, observed when pressed that he wanted *King Lear* taught today the way it was taught to him—the way, presumably, Professor Bloom might teach it. It is no exaggeration to say that such teaching, such an answer to the "Q" question, radically disempowers humanistic study, fundamentally misapprehends its nonnegotiable core, cuts us off from the wisdom of Western literature we so vitally need.

If we return a "Yes" answer to the "Q" question, then, I think we can explain why we have done so. But what follows from that answer implies a very different definition of humanism from the cloistered virtues and pure motives which humanism at the present day is usually thought to require. If you vote for the cloister, then you can no longer pretend that, though you do what you do "for its own sake," somehow what you do is still essential to moral health and civic virtue. That is the essential fraudulent equation that humanism has perpetrated for too long, that leaves Grafton and Jardine, and even Sidney Hook, finally speechless. No, if the university does not want to serve the society, there is no reason why the society should serve the university. If humanists want to remain perpetual children, then their poetry will, to use Bentham's alliterative pairing, never be any better than pushpin, will indeed be taught as if it were pushpin.

I have said that humanism rhetorically construed is a training in management as well as in politics. The need for a humanistic ingredient in business and government management-practices is front-page news, of course, though it is not being couched in our terms. Japanese industrial practices are beating our brains out because their motivational mix—the final human equation for "efficiency"—is deeper and richer than our own. The American automobile industry has nearly destroyed itself by its blindness to the play sphere, to a wide range of formal pleasures of both design and engineering. The great American companies have separated their vital functions—engineering, manufacturing, sales—with the same Ramist rigor the

university has applied to dividing itself into disciplines, and with the same effect: nobody talks to anybody else and the collective purpose evaporates. Instead, American industries perish by slavish loyalty to a "bottom line" that proves the obverse of "practical." About these issues humanism has much to say and something to learn; they, too, should be part of its "canon."

As an illustration of how this cross-fertilization might work, let me discuss a last recent book that revolves around the "Q" question, John Sculley's *Odyssey: Pepsi to Apple*.²¹ Sculley began his life as an orthodox hard-charger at PepsiCo, and he ended up as president of Pepsi-Cola. He begins his account with the climax of that career, the meeting at which it was announced that Pepsi had at long last sold more soft drink than Coca-Cola. "It was," he says, "one of those moments for which you worked your entire career. . . . All of us started out with that objective, and we never took our eyes off it" (3). This culmination reads as self-satire to humanists, but surely we have unveiled the "purity" of motive Bloom recommends, only now transposed from pure play to pure competition. The PepsiCo corporate headquarters in Purchase, New York, was not called "the campus" for nothing. The social usefulness—the purpose—of producing Pepsi-Cola was taken for granted, and this left smart guys—they were then all guys—like Sculley free to drink deep of the pleasures of pure competition and pure play. His account shows him intoxicated with both, "obsessed" in precisely the way Steiner describes the academic obsession.

Then the guys at Apple Computer broke in on the pure career game that Sculley was playing; he was "the guy from corporate America" they needed to take Apple into the big time. Their prolonged courtship was consummated on the balcony of Steve Jobs's Manhattan condo. In a line that has already become legendary in the computer world, Jobs asked Sculley the management version of the "Q" question: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?" Do you want to "apply" your "pure career" to the moral life?

Sculley decided to change the world, and if he hasn't done that, he has certainly changed Apple. The company he found there differed in almost every way from Pepsi. Sculley calls Apple a "third wave" company and Pepsi a "second wave" one. "Second wave" organizations are hierarchical, focus on stability, institutional tradition, and stable markets; "third wave" organizations are flexibly networked, focus on interdependency, individual entrepreneurship, and growth. The differences, transposed into terms humanists would find familiar, might be thought of as the differences between "modernism" and "postmodernism."

Is not Sculley's "third wave" thinking (though perhaps trite in its terminology) similar to McKeon's description of an architectonic rhetoric,

which "relates form to matter, instrumentality to product, presentation to content, agent to audience, intention to reason," which is "positive in the creation, not passive in the reception of data, facts, consequences, and objective organization"? Although both corporations represent the world Allan Bloom describes as "primal slime," perhaps Apple would seem worse than Pepsi to him because its "curriculum," if I may use the word, deliberately tries to mix motives rather than purify them. Mixing the game and play motives that created the personal computer with the purposive world of salable products was what Sculley was brought to Apple to do. Doing it made Apple a completely different world from Pepsi, and John Sculley's acclimatization to the new environment makes for an interesting reading he did not altogether intend.

Without sentimentalizing the life of a volatile corporation, we can say that people working at Apple found that it engaged far more of the human personality than the highly ritualized and spiritualized competitive atmosphere at Pepsi. The people at Pepsi were pursuing a purely theoretical goal and reward very like what Bloom means by "spirituality." The two companies represent, in fact, two model curricula, two possible patterns of university life. Pepsi is the perfectly pure career game; pure competition with a wonderfully symbolic product to lend a laughable justification to it—sugared water with bubbles. Apple, at least at its best, has been trying to mix human motives, not to purify them, to stake its future on a rich mixture of game, play, and purpose, as the most creative for us humans. It answers its version of the "Q" question with the motivational mixture of the older, rhetorical paideia, rather than the Ramist one. It has been trying to expand the industrial canon.

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The books I have reviewed show, I would argue, that the American university, or at least its humanistic component, stands at a similar crossroads. We humanists are becoming ever more career-oriented in the purely competitive Pepsi way. We are perpetually attracted to the pure think tank, on its idyllic campus, the perennial golden age which Graff describes and Bloom yearns for. We assume the virtue of our product automatically, just as they did at Pepsi, and because we do so, it is coming to resemble more and more, for all its pretensions, not the model of power it pretends to be, but our own version of sugar water with bubbles. Yet the structure of the American land-grant model for a university, the practical place of immediate use as well as the home of pure speculation, where any person can study any subject, how-

ever untraditional, offers an opportunity for the opposite pattern, for the radical mixture of motives that Sculley describes at Apple. But, like the Ramist agenda which enfranchised it, the land-grant pattern defers indefinitely the time when its various separate inquiries will be mixed into the moral life. Finding the means to resituate this mixing into the curriculum, giving it both a theoretical and an administrative home, is the primary item on our current agenda. **For this mixing of motives, this perpetually fruitful and unstable struggle to build a fully human purpose, is the nonnegotiable center for which all our learned commissions have been searching in vain.** If we don't reincarnate it, the humanist establishment in America will both create, and deserve, its own Anthony Blunts.

NOTES

1. Peter Ramus, *Rhetoricae Distinctiones in Quintilianum* (1549) (Arguments in rhetoric against Quintilian), trans. Carole Newlands, intro. James J. Murphy (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 83–84, 87.
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CHAPTER SEVEN

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This tweet immediately reminded me of this chapter

Thread

You Retweeted

 **Adam Kotsko** @adamkotsko

Liberals systematically mistake ethical problems for epistemic problems.


Dan Rather @DanRather

Just a thought: Which should be considered more "marginal" - believing in Santa at age 7 or not believing in climate change at age 72?

10:08 AM · 12/27/18 · Twitter for Android

9 Retweets 49 Likes

 **Adam Kotsko** @adamkotsko · 12/27/18

No one, or almost no one, fails to believe in climate change out of sincere ignorance. They *choose* to disbelieve either for material gain or just to be dicks. I'm not sure which motive is worse.

  3  35 

 **Peter Gratton** @PeterMGratton · 12/27/18

Replying to @adamkotsko

It's endemic to Platonism: to know the good, they think, is to do it.

   3 

TECHNOLOGY, MEDIA AND RHETORIC

THE WEAK/STRONG DEFENSE OF RHETORIC

The Basics

First introduced by Richard Lanham in his essay "The 'Q' Question," the binary of the strong and the weak defense of rhetoric charts a key distinction between perspectives on rhetoric, one *productive* and one *reductive*. Briefly described, the *weak defense* supposes that rhetoric is either good or bad depending on what it represents. That is, rhetoric is a value neutral tool that can be used for good or bad causes: good rhetoric represents good causes and bad rhetoric represents bad causes. This view treats rhetoric as purely ornamental.

The *strong defense*, however, takes issue with key assumptions built into the weak defense. Namely, the assumption that "good" and "bad" are value judgments that exist independent of human rhetorical action: that "good" and "bad" are not themselves arguments. The strong defense asserts that rhetoric is the means by which we decide, in the first place, what "good" and "bad" are. This

defense is seen as "stronger" not simply because it "likes rhetoric more," but because it allows us to better examine and understand what rhetoric is and does.

Rhetoric is superficial, a layer added around unrhetorical stuff



Weak Defense of Rhetoric

Rhetoric is built *into* stuff itself. As such, it determinative and essentially creative.



Strong Defense of Rhetoric

As the figure here (should) indicate, the strong defense of rhetoric asserts that values, ideas, thoughts, concepts (such as "good" and "bad") are themselves rhetorical rather than arhetorical. Rhetoric, then, can certainly be used in advancing "good" and "bad" causes, but the goodness or badness of a cause is itself rhetorically determined (through argument, through persuasion).

While this certainly complicates matters, the strong defense's biggest strength is the pressure it puts on us to re-assess our *assumptions about basic categories* such as good and bad. It also, incidentally, places rhetoric much nearer to the heart of human experience. Rather than merely ornamental, rhetoric is essentially creative.

Applications: Technology

Not only does Lanham's binary help us to understand and appreciate rhetorical action, the weak/strong distinction can be used to explore discussions of technologies, which are often seen as value-neutral tools that can be used for both good and bad ends. This we can easily see as the weak defense of technology. The strong defense of technology, instead, could go like this: technologies are value-laden and make arguments about what we can and should do (that is, set patterns of behavior and ethical norms). The strong defense of technology calls us to question and understand how *all* technology works in these ways.

RHETORIC



Week 6 Strong Defenses

Rhetoric, ironically, has an image problem. Rhetoric, unfortunately, gets a bad rap. That all changes here.



Weak Defense
Weak Defense

"The Weak Defense argues that there are two kinds of rhetoric, good and bad. The good kind is used in good causes, the bad kind in bad causes. Our kind is the good kind; the bad kind is used by our opponents" (Lanham 155).



Strong Defense
Strong Defense

The Strong Defense assumes that truth is determined by social dramas, some more formal than others but all man-made. Rhetoric in such a world is not ornamental but determinative, essentially creative" (Lanham 156).

Weak Defense



Briefly described, the weak defense supposes that rhetoric is either good or bad depending on what it represents.

That is, rhetoric is a value neutral tool that can be used for good or bad causes: good rhetoric represents good causes and bad rhetoric represents bad causes.

The weak defense view treats rhetoric as purely ornamental.

Strong Defense

The strong defense takes issue with key assumptions built into the weak defense: the assumption that "good" and "bad" are value judgments that exist independent of rhetorical action: that "good" and "bad" are not themselves arguments.

The strong defense asserts that rhetoric is the means by which we decide, in the first place, what "good" and "bad" are.

The strong defense's biggest strength is the pressure it puts on us to reassess our assumptions about basic categories such as good and bad. It also, incidentally, places rhetoric much nearer to the heart of human experience.



Through rhetoric we collectively compose our worlds.

Values



Laws

Policies



Families

Technologies



Beliefs