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THE CENTER MAGAZINE

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THE CENTER MAGAZINE

A Publication of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions

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One of our members has written chiding the Center for publishing Kenneth Tollett's "What Led to *Bakke*" and Louis Pollak's "Race as a 'Permissible Touchstone,'" in the January/February, 1978, issue, because both articles favored one view of the Bakke case and affirmative action in general, whereas, as everyone by now knows, there are a number of views being taken on this subject. Our critic pointed out that the Center is dedicated to the dialogue, but where was the dialogue in this case?

It happened that the day we received that letter we were reading galley proofs of this month's article, "A Critical Look at Affirmative Action," by George McAlmon (page 43) and the ensuing discussion (page 46) which includes Maxwell Greenberg's powerful and impassioned criticism of race-oriented methods to achieve fair treatment of minorities.

While we may not always be able to publish opposing points of view in the same issue of *The Center Magazine*, we think that the Center has demonstrated and will continue to demonstrate its willingness and ability to air, over time, the major positions on controversial matters.

Regardless of how the United States Supreme Court decides *Bakke* — and the decision may come before this appears in print — we think there remains a fundamental issue that must be looked at carefully in the months — perhaps years — ahead. It is how to make equal opportunity for historically deprived citizens a reality without at the same time imposing intolerable and constitutionally impermissible burdens on other citizens. We hope that we shall be able to contribute some enlightenment on this issue in future Center dialogues and publications.

Meanwhile, we think that both Mr. Tollett's article and Dean Pollak's comment make substantial contributions to an understanding of this complex issue. Mr. Tollett reminded us of some important history leading up to *Bakke*. And Mr. Pollak, in the course of listing current constitutional issues, took a position on *Bakke*, but went on to raise a broader question posed by *Bakke* — i.e., the extent to which it is appropriate to extend governmental remedial action to any and every ethnic group that a government agency or legislature may determine is a "disadvantaged or deprived minority."

We hope that the exchange of views on pages 43 to 55 this month will add to that understanding.

— D.MCD.

MARCH/APRIL 1978

Humanities at Large	2
<i>Walter H. Capps</i>	
The Center's President	7
<i>A Conversation with Maurice B. Mitchell</i>	
Rating the Media	17
<i>Hugh Downs</i>	
The Liberal Learning in America	23
Learning and Liberalism	24
<i>Thomas F. Green</i>	
The Higher Learning	32
<i>Leon Botstein</i>	
A Critical Look at Affirmative Action	43
<i>George A. McAlmon</i>	
Discussion	46
World Peace in Truth	56
<i>Mortimer J. Adler</i>	
Schools and Society	65
<i>Joseph J. Schwab</i>	
Child Abuse and Neglect in the American Society	70
<i>A Center Report</i>	
Letters	78
Cover	
<i>Consuelo Julian</i>	
Design	
<i>Barbara Smith</i>	

HUMANITIES AT LARGE

A few months ago, the Center sponsored a conference on urban growth policy. I participated in the conference, followed the reports and discussion carefully, sensitive all the while to another agenda. I am concerned about ways in which the humanities and public policy issues come together, or share common ground. With this in mind, I spent much of my time during the conference listening for references to humanities interests, and I heard a number of provocative ones.

My interest stems from two immediate sources. In the first place, serving as a member of a faculty in the humanities on a major campus of a distinguished university, I have felt increasing frustration. Faculty members have been taking criticism for some time from legislators, from the general public, not least from the students, and, occasionally even from among our own ranks. At times, the call is for a greater relevancy. In other forms, it is a request that educational methods, pedagogical techniques, and the content of courses be updated in keeping with changing times. Most recently, we are witnessing the transposition of imperatives regarding extramural re-

search proposals — heretofore generally expected only of faculty in the sciences — to humanistic scholarship.

All of this adds up to a growing awareness, from all sides, that the humanities and public policy issues only rarely come explicitly and effectively together. We recognize this, and we know it is too easy to blame persons, institutions, situations, or even the prevailing intellectual mind-set. In the main, persons in the humanities do not find that the cultivation of their special interests necessarily involves public policy issues. Nor has it been customary for public policy framers to acknowledge dependence upon the humanities — or even upon humanities forms of inquiry — in their general line of work. Professors who are trained in the humanities find that promotions and merit increases come along in almost predictable sequential order, so far at least, even without translations of their knowledge into public policy terms. And because such translations do not occur very often, those in the public domain seem not to expect them.

But there is increasing pressure to change expect-

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of all, including the
custodians of the
tradition of wisdom.*

tations. When expectations change, so also do the models by which teachers and scholars understand their intentions. Yet it seems that we within the profession are not sure of our next step, or convinced that we should be led to take it.

The second stimulus — a refinement of the first — has broader application. I refer to the general consensus that the society in which we live is undergoing a pervasive change. Humanists, the acknowledged custodians of a tradition of wisdom and value that reaches back through the centuries, lending the society the fiber and continuity on which it depends, are being looked to for help. But the humanists, in the main, remain silent. They offer no perceptible response. And the society at large has the right to ask why this should be. This is why the slogan "the humanities and public policy" is more than a title for another fundable area of research. It is an eloquent way of identifying a pervasive lack, a vacuum that needs to be filled. It calls for a translation, the fitting of humanistic resources to issues of public human concern.

I refer to my own frustration, for I have not been

able to find the formula to encourage or effect the necessary translation in terms that befit the academy (given its reward system, regulative faculty incentives, compartmentalization of knowledge along lines of departmental jurisdiction, and cognitive temperament). And, because of my inexperience in such matters, I have not known how to define, or even outline, a significant rapprochement from the public policy side. Yet, I was fascinated by that urban growth conference and by the many conferences I have attended on planning-related subjects. They demonstrate that humanities content is evident in the public policy area. We know this to be true. But we do not know how to make both dimensions discernible, how to allow each side of the equation to register in the other's terms.



Permit me here to draw on my experience during the past decade. I studied at the Warburg Institute in London in 1968 and 1969. Ostensibly, I was there to engage in art history, with a concentration on medieval iconography. I did that and I still do. But I was intrigued and captivated just as much by the "Warburg approach" to historical change and cultural knowledge. From Aby Warburg's time to the present, the Institute has been committed to the development of a rather sophisticated multidimensional method of cultural analysis, a method developed by Ernst Cassirer, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, and Ernst Gombrich, with dependence upon Jacob Burckhardt, and others.

Without going into further detail here, I will simply summarize the primary methodological conviction: the "Warburg school" believes that there are certain recurrent motifs or themes, expressed in both image and thought (sometimes simultaneously), by reference to whose development the history of culture can be discerned. Thus, Jean Seznec (a Warburgian) approached the Renaissance by tracing the survival of pagan deities in post-medieval form. Others have chronicled the psychic interiorization of planetary deities (or powers) into human temperaments. And there is a tendency within this approach to account for the birth of psychoanalysis by tracing its use and transposition of some of the components of the world of classical antiquity. These are but a few of the numerous examples that could be cited. I mention them only to introduce the suggestion I want to make.

Heretofore, it seems, attempts to bring the humanities into correspondence with public policy is-

sues have sought connections through a mode of "application." The assumption has been that the humanists know something that ought to be "applied" to the clarification of public policy issues, that they should be able to draw upon this knowledge and expertise to convey something meaningful to the public policy domain. That is how the expectation is expressed. And there is an increasing call for applied research even in the humanities area.

I am not opposed to application per se as the means of connection and/or correspondence. But I think it is limited. And I believe we should look to other models. In the first place, application connotes that some body of knowledge or information gathered from one source is carried over or transposed as illumination and assistance to another set of conditions. We all recognize that this process occurs frequently: insights from one subject area prompt insights in other areas, often in unanticipated ways.

But this application model is manifestly mechanical. It belongs to a world conceived primarily in atomistic terms, within which there is occasional contact or conjunction when entities tend to reach the limit, or transgress the boundaries of their assigned range. The application mode of correspondence allows the humanist to continue to work in his area and the public policy framer to work with his set of tools; the two will come together only occasionally and fortuitously, probably more by virtue of a conference on the need for interdisciplinary cooperation than out of any intrinsic or organic necessity.

I wonder if there might be a step forward when the correspondence is established in another way. Is it possible to identify specific humanities substance in the public policy context? And, conversely, can we regard public policy substance as having a formative influence upon the development of the humanities? It seems to me that the answer to both questions is affirmative.

In other words, it must be true that humanities substance is always present in public policy inquiries and deliberations, even when it goes unrecognized or is not identified as such. (The Warburg example can be probed for analogies: as classical substance can be present in Renaissance form, even when not recognized or identified as such, so, too, may humanities substance be inherent in public policy issues.) But the other side is equally true: the public policy dimension must always be implicit in humanities content, perhaps as a perpetual transformer and catalyst within a more comprehensive intellectual process. Both affirmations are true simultaneously. The rela-

tion between the humanities and public policy issues is intrinsic, reciprocal, and reflexive. Instead of requiring to be established by some mode of connection (like "application"), the relationship needs to be discerned or, perhaps, teased out. It is already there, but it needs to be deciphered. And I will add that the Center's forum — with the limitations we recognize, together with the genius of its deepest intentions — seems to me to be an instrument fit for this task.

Another dimension of the subject is worthy of note. I have been fascinated with the attention given to the subject of planning here at the Center. I refer to the distinguished current work being directed by Otis L. Graham, Jr., as well as to the impressive record the Center enjoys in this area. My own intrigue with this subject is sustained in part by the parallels one can find between planning, say, in governmental policy and the shift toward an anticipatory function in other areas of endeavor, within and outside the academy and throughout the public domain. One hears the distinction between "anticipatory" and "reactionary" suggested frequently. A number of the academic disciplines have endeavored, as it were, to "take the future into their own hands" so as to be able to anticipate their own needs in the future. A few years ago, the International Philosophical Congress called upon philosophers to alter philosophy in this way. And now there is an important philosophical movement in France which seeks to remove the obstacles to this comprehensive transposition and transformation of the philosopher's task. In theology there has been an attempt to move by way of "design" rather than "response."

When one finds the same thing occurring in art, for example, where there has been a shift from fixed or set styles toward kinesis — or the kinetic element — one recognizes that a pervasive "shift toward planning" (as Graham calls it) is occurring throughout our society. The shift affects us comprehensively. Its presence registers in a multitude of fields and contexts. The shift has been stimulated by the taking of a new reflexive turn. We are coming more and more, I believe, to understand how things are formed, by which dynamics they pulsate, how they are constructed. And in being able to know how they are constructed, we are able to create them ourselves. This is what I mean by the new comprehensive reflexive turn, of which planning is an expression and a product, and of which the anticipatory mood is a fitting methodology. The larger observation is that we do not understand the world to be static any more. We do not take traditions to be this way, or social

matrices, or legal formulations, or even the Constitution, or our religion, or our morality, or the humanities, or much of anything. We understand that we are making the transition from stasis to kinesis, from the static to the self-consciously dynamic.



I am using these thoughts as background to my own intrigue regarding a phrase that has been part of the Center's intentions from the beginning. I refer to the words "early warning system." I submit that the desire for an early warning system is integrally related to the compulsions implicit in the humanities and public policy. The dynamics of the two subjects interrelate and intertwine.

The challenge is to find a way to talk about either or both in a methodologically rigorous way: to understand the process by which someone is able to anticipate enough of what is happening to sound a warning. I am not sure that we yet know enough about the logic of anticipation, the sorts of perceptions it requires, and the way its sensitivity is nurtured.

I suspect that there are at least two phenomena that provide clues. First, it would be appropriate to issue an early warning when something within the socio-political-cultural stream becomes something else, as for example, when "interest" becomes "enthusiasm" and when enthusiasm becomes pathological. Similarly, notice should be taken when a single ingredient within a constellation of entities begins to assume a regulatory role — when something within the society tends to assume importance in much larger proportions.

The second way in which the early warning system might be conceived to work is to trace the movement of a subject from within a very specific context into a much larger public domain. For example, everyone knows that the Bakke case does not pertain simply to admissions standards at the University of California Medical School at Davis, but has ramifications with respect to affirmative-action interests in a wide variety of areas of our common life. The Warburg precedent is that psychoanalysis originated in the field of medicine but that psychoanalysis itself has now come to define human consciousness in a way that reaches into many other areas. The same role has been assumed by those with ecological and environmental sensitivity. There is a host of similar examples.

These two subjects — the interest in early warning systems and the subject of the humanities and public

policy — flow together. They are confluent, because the ability to perceive crucial occurrences is based on a deep sensitivity to the world of values to which the humanities have traditionally provided access. By "world of values" I refer to an assumption that truth, goodness, and beauty, as Western culture has depicted them, possess qualities of permanence, stability, durability, and, most important, self-authentication. And, with deepest respect, I invoke the words of Robert M. Hutchins on the cover of the September/October, 1977, issue of *The Center Magazine*, dedicated to his memory:

"Justice and freedom, discussion and criticism, intelligence and character — these are the indispensable ingredients of the democratic state. We can be rich and powerful without them. But not for long."

I think the ability to sound a warning is based on a recognition of the power of the indispensable ingredients of society and culture. The ability to sense that something has changed presupposes an awareness of social and cultural dynamics. It is from a perspective within this tradition of trained sensitivity that one can detect changes, transitions, transformations, metamorphoses, absences, atrophy, stagnation.

I repeat the proposal that we must look to implicit humanities substance within specific areas of our common life, and, conversely, to the ways in which public policy affects the development of the humanities, and gives expression to their development, if we are to make headway in this area. The persons with whom I spoke at the conference on urban planning said that it would be helpful to them to know more about the history of cities, and to be able to assume knowledge of the history of cities in the way we seem to know about the history of ideas and/or the history of (selected) institutions. This, for them, is implicit humanities substance in public policy contexts.

But there are additional concerns. Why do we deem it good to have cities? If civilization is dependent upon the continued vitality of cities, this correspondence must disclose something significant about the nature of civilization, the nature of cities, and the dynamics of continuation and endurance. With respect to the same subject, to what extent do distinctions between rural and urban involve a discrimination between kinds, functions, and qualities of space? Do distinctive spaces have distinctive qualities? Can poetics of space be translated into city planning? And what about the correspondence be-

tween traffic patterns and pilgrimage routes: Can cities be expected to support or provide for the distinctive motives, alternations, and pulsations implicit in individual and corporate human aspirations? Is the vitality of a city dependent upon its institutions, and thus upon its incorporated wisdom (the availability of cultural legacies)? Do the humanities thus possess a formative function?

How, specifically, is humanities substance implicit in city life? Is "city" a product of correspondence between the humane and the public, and does the personality of a city reflect a particular meshing of these factors — a symbiosis that can also be described in artistic and stylistic terms? What set of conditions makes a city a catalyst of particular styles, art forms, new modes of thinking? Why Florence in the Renaissance? Why Vienna (with Freud, Wittgenstein, the Vienna Circle, the best in art history) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Why San Francisco in the nineteen-sixties? Was it counter-culture or San Francisco that set these waves in motion? Why were Frankfurt and Amsterdam and Tokyo willing to receive San Francisco's creation? Has "L.A. sound" been generated by Los Angeles freeways? And why is the best of Finnish jewelry designed by women in rural settings? What about the character of a city? What role does character play with respect to public policy formation?



In the area of planning itself, questions occur: What deeper conceptual, ideational, attitudinal, and temperamental dimensions are implicit in this shift? For example, what does the shift imply with respect to the capacity to exercise authority? To what extent does acceptance of its assumptions require correctives of theories about human destiny? Does the comprehensive shift entail a new appreciation and understanding of time? The way in which time functions? The way in which time can be utilized? The way in which one of the time tenses may dominate within the interrelation of tenses?

If planning entails design, some sort of aesthetic dynamic must be involved. One can ask, by what transformational processes does a society submit its goals and aspirations to aesthetic categories and criteria? Can aesthetic considerations be programmed? What about the role of projection? Are the humanities — or the subject-areas included within the humanities — able to become projective? If so, can one identify parallels between the shift to planning in the

public domain and a projective turn in art, philosophy, literature, religion, etc.? Is the planning shift, with all its attendant transformational requirements, decipherable in humanities terms? Does its occurrence signal fundamental changes in human self-understanding, changes which register in both humanities and public policy contexts?

We can ask similar questions about the impact of ecology and environmental sensitivity. We all recognize that such sensitivities permeate a large portion of contemporary public policy formation. Would it be useful to ask how these sensitivities look when viewed from within the perspective of the history of landscape art? Does the present awareness invoke a return to a former conception of nature, for example? Or, is it a radically new understanding of nature, a safeguard against massive technological intrusion? What imagery is involved (the garden versus the machine, perhaps)? Is there an attendant mythology (either new or newly found)?

And, if understanding of nature is crucial to the new sensitivity, what does this imply with respect to other categories, terms, and perspectives by which nature has been understood, such terms as "primitive," "primordial," etc.? And the question about nature can be asked about space, and, indeed, about time. Does the permeation of ecological and environmental sensitivities imply that we no longer expect to be able to think our way or approach reality as a puzzle or a project, but that our relationship with all that surrounds us is more delicately nuanced?

We can raise similar questions about other areas of interest. But the examples we have cited support the contention that humanities substance is implicit in questions of public policy. To discern its presence, we must re-examine ways in which perennial cultural values of Western culture interact with and are affected by the dynamics of change. The ramifications of addressing this issue in these terms are far-reaching. For one, it will force some humanists to question the conceptions they have of their role in the society. Also, it may lead those responsible to think anew about graduate education in the humanities, its goals, foci, and structure. From such new analyses may come the vitality that can rejuvenate the humanities and strengthen their inherent ties with the public domain.

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