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Review Article

The University: The Anatomy of Academe. By Murray G. Ross. New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976. pp. xii, 282, bibliography, index. Canadian price: \$13.25.

This ought to be a good book, but unfortunately is not. It is intelligent, informed, comprehensive, systematic, readable. The author is a competent researcher, an experienced administrator, a concerned observer and participant, writing with authority on issues that matter. Yet something is missing: something subtle yet vital, without which the rich promise is not redeemed.

Before we endeavour to wrestle, however, with what it may be that disrupts the venture, let us first set forth what the book positively proffers. For one thing, it is quite well written: the English is jargon-free, clear, and even engaging. Secondly, the study treats, in explicit comparative fashion, the English, the Canadian, and the U.S. academic scenes in relation to the various matters canvassed (except, of course, for the introductory mediaeval sketch). For outsiders, this broad perspective on each major point as it comes along is illuminating; for Canadians, it is for course particularly cogent. Patently, our universities in this country are not intelligible in and of themselves. (Also, their present crisis has to do in significant part—although the author does not stress this—with their current transition from the older British model to the more recent American.) Thirdly, a great deal has of late been written on the modern university in this or that country or era, or in relation to this or that modern problem (student unrest, faculty trade-unionism, government financing, the erosion of the classical ideal, etc.) and much such literature is here not only listed bibliographically but also extensively cited.

The book comprises four well demarcated sections: "The Background", "The People", "The Issues", "The Future". The first, historical, gives outline treatments of the mediaeval university in Europe, the 1500-1850 period in the three countries mentioned, the expansive century from the latter date to 1950 (with an addendum on Germany), and finally the crisis period 1950-1975.

Part II of the book, "The People", offers three chapters: the first two treat, respectively, of students (an historical essay up to 1950) and of professors (with considerable attention to certain recent fairly drastic changes in their orientation, loyalties, professional organization, and in what constitutes for them a day's— or year's—work). The third chapter in this part is on the student revolts of the 1960's.

Part III, entitled "The Issues" (sc., of the present-day academic crisis; and obviously this is the *raison d'être* of the book), offers the following four chapters: "Goals", "Governance", "Academic Freedom", and "The State". The first has to do with varying notions as to what the purpose of a university fundamentally is, and especially with the fact that divergence on this has become wide, deep, and debilitating. The author is concerned to press especially two points: one, that not merely in society at large, but also and increasingly within the academic community itself, traditional consensus has been shattered—there is no agreement or prospect of agreement; two, that traditional ideals of academic life have become increasingly "unrealistic", and indeed quite out of touch with what universities are actually doing—and therefore are no longer to be taken seriously. On this second point, he applauds Clark Kerr's "multiversity" thesis, as "precise and accurate": a statement of how things in fact are. Nonetheless he seems also to hold that *some* ideal should be held by the institution and its members if it is to function successfully, although he comes close to suggesting that it does not much matter what that ideal be so long as it is more or less agreed upon, and is not too far out of alignment with actual operations. (We shall return to this.)

The chapter closes, however, with a summarizing list of eight unresolved issues of policy that universities are to-day challenged to decide. On them, he says, a new consensus may emerge; or government or other outside pressures may come in and decide them (giving the institution "a new form and character"—p. 156). "In the meantime, the university stood in danger of disintegration—or at least of mindless drift", he pessimistically concludes.

The chapter on "Governance" surveys, in the three countries, structures of university administration and modern "democratizing" of these, meaning especially the increasing control by faculty members until 1950, but noting also the growing student representation since that date on committees and even on boards. The radically new unicameral University of Toronto Act of 1971, superseding both senate and board of governors, is presented. The drift of both loyalty and interest of faculty members away from their university and towards their "professional associations" is remarked; but less note is taken than one might have expected of the recent but now sharp bifurcation, particularly in North America, between what has come to be perceived as "the administration" (presidents, deans, chairmen) and other faculty members.

The opening two sentences of this chapter are "The university is one of the most complex of modern organizations, and therefore one of the most difficult to administer. But in the postwar period of increased demand for participation

and of democratization, the problem of how to administer efficiently, operate fairly, and govern wisely became acute" (p. 159).

The third chapter here, on "Academic Freedom", outlines the recent history of this matter in the three countries, including the McCarthy era and the California oath dispute in the United States, and the Crowe case in Canada. In the earlier part of the chapter the matter is presented as relatively straightforward, as if the issue were in the author's eyes clear and easily definable (his convictions about "detachment and objectivity" (p. 211) as the agreed basis of academic life are apparent). Later on, however, it emerges that the matter is not so simple; "abuses of academic freedom" (p. 218) are recognized and recorded, the former tacit assumption that with freedom would go responsibility on the part of scholars is noted as "broken" (*ibid.*) by the latter, and once again confusion is proffered as the summarizing conclusion. "By 1975 a new definition of academic freedom . . . was required. . . . Above all there was required some consensus" (pp. 217-218).

The question of academic freedom is a double one: "the freedom of the individual in the university to pursue study and to teach without restraint or inhibition", and that "of the institution to function without undue control or influence by external forces or agencies" (p. 191). This survey has dealt essentially with the former; the latter issue constitutes in effect the topic of the next chapter, on "The State", whose opening sentence reads: "By 1975 a central concern of North American universities was identical with that of her counterparts in Britain: How to retain independence in the face of pressures for increased state direction and control" (p. 223). Even in Britain, though much less so there than in the United States and especially less than in Canada, since 1950 and especially in the 1970's governments are seen as increasingly paying the inordinately expensive piper and more and more calling the tune. Problematic are how novel the tune called is in process of becoming, how discordant with traditional airs, and how divergent from what the increasingly ambivalent or mutually unharmonized pipers would like to play.

Part IV, on the future of universities, is much the briefest, and of course is the least documented, but is sober, and sets forth cogently some of the problems currently being faced, and the extant patterns, both academic and social, in terms of which those problems seem to have to be met. Basically the thesis is that universities have in the past shown themselves capable of surprising per-durability on the one hand and adaptation to ever-changing circumstances on the other, and some hope is held out that this may prove so once again, the profoundly new situation of our day being adjusted to without too much dislocation and the inherited tradition being continued in not too miniscule or ineffective part. The attitude of society towards academia, the change in which, from honour to distrust, is recognized as very much part of the problem, it is hoped may perhaps once again improve. As the chapter wears on, however, the general tone becomes increasingly gloomy.

The aspiration of the volume is not to propound a solution so much as to delineate the problem and to outline the historical background, and the facts

and the pattern of facts of the present situation; setting forth clearly, analytically, and in well organized fashion the context in which a solution, if at all, is to be found. The seriousness of the problem and the complexity of the context are, in this process, portrayed.

This is, then, an important book, ably done. One could quite readily affirm the typical verdict that it is "must" reading for anyone interested in the contemporary problems of university development—as the ranking U.S. sociologist Lipset does on the dust-jacket. One might go further and urge that it should be read also by those academics who are not so interested, in order that they become so; since to be a specialist in some corner of academe and not to be alert to the rapid transformations and the probing uncertainties of the total operation, is rather parochial. Nevertheless the volume as a whole is deeply disconcerting; and one might even find oneself wondering whether in the end it may not do more harm than good. The work makes evident that the storm brewing or already raging in and around academe is grave indeed. Yet fundamentally, books of this sort are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Several specific criticisms could, of course, be made. At this level I would choose as instances that the author, whose own education has been in Canada and the States, is not only less familiar with but a good deal less discerning and appreciative of the British university scene; or that he is begrudging or snide in his historical references to classical and also to Christian education (the role of the Churches in setting up most of the universities on this continent is remarked but disparaged: one wonders whether his experience as an undergraduate at Acadia, a century later, may not perhaps have been unfortunate); or that he disparages undergraduate education, to centralize the doctorate; and so on. Or one might cavil also that although the exposition is decidedly systematic and sober, nonetheless a tendency is discernible for almost every chapter, and certainly for the whole study, to proceed in a quiet and judicious, and yet to end in a pessimistic, way. The depth of the crisis to which the account works up is set forth in a tone somewhat different from that of the account itself. More substantially, things are shown to be worse than the presentation makes fully intelligible.

To these points it might be responded that the author has covered so wide a field in on the whole so balanced a fashion, that some such imperfections in the balance might be accepted as humanly inevitable. They become major, however, when seen rather as symptoms of a deeper problem in the work: a flaw not in execution but in over-all conception. Let us turn to this; to what I would regard as the fundamental fallacy of the presentation.

One way of stating the matter would be to say that in expounding the various factors in university development the book omits one crucial ingredient: the history of ideas. A possible, and certainly telling, criticism would be that Ross, concerned with universities, their social context, and their "purpose", is inept in his understanding of the relation among ideas, ideals, and reality. Perhaps

more serious, however, than the sorry inadequacy of his views on these matters is its innocence. The position that he holds, he holds insouciantly, uncritically, taking for granted its validity and taking for granted also that his readers will of course agree with him. He is therefore utterly incapable not only of recognizing, but even of suspecting (and certainly of informing his readers) that the ideology within which he works may itself be (I should say: is) a fundamental cause of the crisis that he sallies forth to describe and to analyse. The reason that he can assume the ideology blandly, and the reason that the crisis is deep, are the same: namely, that that particular ideology has indeed become rather prevalent in academe.

Ross shows himself much concerned with the contemporary disarray among professors and others on the "goals" of the university. As remarked: in stressing that the institution will not flourish unless it (once again) have some fairly widely agreed-upon "purpose", he comes close to insinuating that it does not much matter what that purpose be, so long as it be widely held. He speaks here as a sociologist, observing that institutions flounder if they have no ideals. He speaks also as a modern-style university president, willing to implement his faculty's wishes if only these can be stated and harmonized. He does not speak as a thinker. Moreover, in his sociologically orthodox and modernly prevalent way, he believes and insinuates that ideals are no part of reality. (He nowhere defines "reality", of course; he just takes for granted that the material world and society are real, that a metaphysical realm, a world of ideals, is not.) He is consistently disparaging (*without really meaning to be*) not only of the classical, traditional ideals by which the university lived, but of ideals as such. The former he keeps referring to as "a mystique", a "mythology" (pp. 9, 114f., 223, 224, 253, etc.). At one point he inadvertently implies that the respect that the university once commanded from society and from its own members was somehow something skillfully developed by cunning and presumably self-interested academics "to exploit" (p. 9) society's needs and to take "advantage" of men's desires (and presumably their gullibility?). It is important to re-iterate that he does not mean to disparage ideals: he thinks that they are fine things, well worth having and useful if they correspond reasonably closely to objective actuality, which is reality for him. That human life might at least in part involve approximating the actual to the ideal, rather than *vice versa*, seems never to occur to him. In his view, rather, an ideal is but a humanly idealized version of transient actuality, not true or false in itself yet more or less useful in serving one's purposes. Intelligent people like him do not have ideals. And on finding that earlier ages did have them, he and his friends explain them away reductionistically: they themselves have become far too detached, objective, sophisticated to be dupes of such metaphysical fallacies. Nonetheless it would be nice, he virtually implies, if other people (in the university?) would excogitate relevant and attractive new ones and would live by them; indeed, we and our institutions are lost, otherwise. Ideals, and loyalty to them, his tacit ideology

"knows", are old-fashioned "myths"; yet both are indispensable, his current observation suggests. Of course, he does not make this paradox explicit, and that precisely is my complaint: he seems to have no inkling of the extent to which the new ideational outlook, of which he himself is a victim, has itself generated in modern times the problem that he bemoans.

There is a good deal of surreptitious talk in the book of moral matters, attitudes, and qualities: a "love" of learning, a "respect" for knowledge, the "will" to search for truth, "loyalty" both to an institution and to its goals, a "commitment" (this and "trust" are dubbed "central", in his "Conclusion"), the "value" of the life of the mind, "responsibility", and so on (examples: pp. 140, 141, 142, 146, 160, 271, 279, 264, 102f., etc.). Yet nowhere is there the slightest discussion of the relation between the moral and the rational, nor any hint that such an issue exists and is significant—except casually and negatively, as from time to time he makes clear his disdain for contaminating academe with moral consideration, and his own loyalty (as if it were obviously valuable?) to "valuefree" learning. The absence of discussion, however, does not mean any absence of position on the matter. On the contrary, his ideology (like that of many) is that values have no transcendent status, no independent validity. "Value-free" learning is for him "cognitive" learning (e.g., p. 115), which implies that values are not cognized. Knowledge is of reality, and values for him are not real (again, he never says so; he simply takes this for granted).

Some of us hold that some things are of intrinsic value, not merely of instrumental. It is theoretically possible that we are wrong, and that Ross and his fellows are right; but in that case universities are not intrinsically valuable; truth is not; the will to learn is not. These things are then not worth our loyalty, and there is no reason why philanthropists or tax-payers should provide large sums of money so that those of us who suffer from these illusions should continue to live by them. Nor, insofar as they do, is there any reason why such institutions should command respect. As Ross correctly points out, in recent times the number who have such loyalty within the institution, and the number outside who have that respect, have strikingly dwindled. He does not seem to see the logic of it.

Universities, I would contend, cannot leave aside for long the question of whether truth and knowledge are *good*. This is the question where the inseparability of the moral and the intellectual is chiefly conspicuous. Nonetheless, let us for the moment leave aside this and all other moral and all other philosophic questions, to consider simply the one matter of truth, or knowledge, in itself. Ross uses the former term seldom, the latter often. He reiterates (unwittingly, it seems) the famous opening sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, by referring more than once to "man's desire to know". Unlike the Greek thinker, however, he gives this no metaphysical dimension. On the contrary, he is content to call it "curiosity". What is this knowledge, then, that is explicitly the *raison d'être* of the university? We have already seen that for

him it includes no knowledge of right or wrong, good and evil; for him it has nothing to do with character (he assumes that we all look down on that phase in university history when an ideal of character formation was included). Yet what about its understanding of itself? Do we know what knowledge is? Is our concept of truth true?

I would submit that one of the central and most consequential developments in intellectual life in modern times in the West, especially the academic West, has been the lowering of the idea of truth and knowledge from something higher than man to something lower than we. Traditionally, and essentially, universities were what they were—and uncontrivedly had the allegiance and respect that they deserved to have—because they were in pursuit of a truth that is above us all. Because it was above us, transcended us, it freely won our loyalty and—not so freely—our behaviour: we strove to live (not merely to think) rationally, in the sense of conforming our wills (*sic*) to an intellectual order higher than our individual persons; something that could be attained at times only at great cost, and never without firm discipline—but worth it.

To live in accord with this truth higher than ourselves was often at odds with our lower desires, our baser inclinations, and our “interests”; yet self-fulfilment on a higher plain was made available, through self-transcendence towards one’s own true (*sic*) self. Also, it conferred community. For in the rational order lay a shared truth for corporate living, to which the disparate wills (or “interests”) of individuals or partial groupings were subordinated, and finally transformed into a shared universalism.

These ideals were approximated to in actuality, of course, only very partially, in any given instance perhaps only remotely; and at times hypocrisy was substituted for even a distant loyalty. Nonetheless the vision informed and sustained academia for centuries, and there are many persons still living who were touched by it and in some small or large degree transformed. Ideally, education consisted in that transformation.

The shift in recent times has been from this notion of truth that we serve, to a different notion of it as something that serves us (or, more usually, as with Ross, the new notion is now of knowledge). Reason has moved from being that to which our purposes should conform, to becoming rather that by which they may be implemented (whatever they happen to be). We manufacture knowledge as we manufacture cars, and with similar objectives: to increase our power, pleasure, or profit—or if we are altruistic, to offer it to others that they may increase theirs. The university has been becoming “the knowledge industry”, its products ours to command (to buy and sell).

That we are the masters, and knowledge is seen now as our servant, is the result in part of an in some ways higher sense of man (though this has of late been slipping fast). It reflects chiefly, however, a lower (and correspondingly fragmented) view of knowledge. Transcendence generally has been banished from the *Weltanschauung* of modern intellectuals: Truth can no longer be spell-

ed with a capital T, there is nothing higher than man, and knowledge therefore becomes (in disparate bits) our underling. Purposes replace ideals, for there is no higher reality to determine what we ought to aim at, to aspire to. Society is impelled by needs, to whose requirements its institutions respond; human beings are driven by drives, by motivation, and insofar as their wills are free they are totally free, to will whatever each may choose, with only practical restraints but not theoretical impingements.

Whether this change in outlook represents a truer or a distorted view of reality and of human nature is not for the moment at issue; my point is simply that the change has historically occurred, and has affected academia. Indeed, it has been largely articulated within academia. That Ross takes an instrumental view of knowledge (and of idealisms) is throughout implicit (nowhere explicit: again, that lack of self-critical awareness). A frothy illustration of the technological orientation is his casual acceptance of the definition of a "major university" (in the U.S.) as "one which turns out more than 1 percent of the nation's Ph.D.'s" (p. 63; even the phrase "turns out" is noteworthy. He is at his ease also with the concept of "educational techniques"—p. 121).

As already remarked, he cites most favourably Clark Kerr's 1963 Godkin Lectures setting forth the new "multiversity" concept. He notes that the title of those Lectures was "painful" for many: *The Uses of the University*. I find instructive his incapacity to understand the pain. He says of the title, bathetically: "the implication was that the university should be useful in many practical ways to the society in which it existed" (p. 150). His failure to discern what is going on here is surely crucial. Some of us, because of our own sense of what the universe is all about and of what it means to be a human being, aspire to live a life that will be useful to other persons and to society. *Exactly the same metaphysical reasons*, however, are the grounds for resisting being used by other people. Insensitivity to the difference between the university's being used and its being useful, is surely serious.

Another illustration, somewhat more subtle: on academic freedom, he quotes President Lowell of Harvard from early this century on a "search for truth", without (it seems) any sensitivity to the lingering remnants of a transcendent notion of truth that Lowell took for granted, for instance in the passage that he quotes, and its difference from the materialist notion of knowledge that Ross does. Yet it is just that difference that helps to explain the modern dilemma on this issue—particularly the matter of state control of the institution.

So blandly does he assume that of course the cognitive and the moral are two discrete things that he is virtually unaware of an alternative view. (The moral he sees, in passing, as closer to the "affective": I suppose that for him moral judgements are simply a matter of feeling this way or that?). He calls the "detachment and objectivity" that reigned just before the turmoils of the 1960's "traditional" (—wrongly. Early academic orientations would for him come under his headings of "mired in religiosity" (p. 76) or the "rigid" and disparaged classical phase?). And when radicals at the time of the Student Revolt pro-

tested against the aridity and depersonalization of academe, he continues to assume that the rational on the one hand, and the personal, the moral, the experiential, on the other, are dichotomous, and therefore he perceives those radicals as aiming at substituting the latter for the former, not at reuniting them, and not even as protesting against their divorce. He apparently has not read Roszak; and not only then does he not know where the wasteland ends, but he is not even aware that the technological culture and its ideology (his ideology) are indeed a wasteland.

(He has apparently not read George Grant, either; nor Jacques Ellul, on the technological society.)

Some of us hold a position according to which the ontological, moral, epistemological, and personalist philosophy presumed in books such as this is intellectually in error. For in our view it is seriously reductionist of reality, of value, of the process of rational learning, of man, and seriously disruptive of human wholeness and of our self-transcendence and of community. Nonetheless, this book's ideology did in fact become for a time fairly dominant in our universities. Ross is in good company: he fairly represents the prevailing orthodoxy. Whether right or wrong, this reductionist, a-moral, depersonalized view of the universe and of human life has in historical fact come to prevail in academe of late, and has led to the crisis that Ross delineates—led logically. If truth is not transcendently good; if "values" are merely what (-ever) is valued rather than what is in fact valuable; if the a-moral impersonalism of objective sciences is our only knowledge; if the rational is the instrumental; if being human has no intrinsic or absolute or higher or even shared purpose, only individual purposes; then there is no reason why the university should continue to have loyalty and consensus within, respect without, freedom from tight state control. Efficiency management for externally imposed objectives would be its rational role.

In classical terms: Aristotle saw reason as twofold, theoretical (or "contemplative", we might to-day translate it) and practical; having to do respectively (to oversimplify) with ends and with means. Modern intellectuality has been losing its hold upon the former, coming to know rationality only in the latter form, only instrumentally. As this has happened, the temple of reason is desacralized; and the community of the faithful gives way to a juxtaposition of competitors. In more modern terms: as academia has been losing its erstwhile ability to hold the rational and the fully human together, and as the old ways of converging them were shot down, new ways have as yet not been found or generated.

To conclude, then: the Ross book is grossly inadequate because it traces the results of our disease with care and skill, but fails to trace its central development: the ideas that inform the academic process. (A book on the history of the university without at least one section on the history of ideas is surely an eloquent fact?) "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, But . . .". One is

tempted to say: the problem, dear Murray, is not in our governance patterns, our finances, our programmes, but in our ideas. And ideas are the business of university. It is not a new purpose that we must concoct, or a new environment, but a new understanding of man and the universe and what it means to seek the truth. In fact, there are two haunting questions that universities to-day face. One is whether we can attain a discerning of the relation between the rational and the human that will do justice to both. The other question, more sombre, is: is it already too late.