

*Continued from page 20*

The major news media, for instance, "went to extraordinary lengths" to shield from the public the identity of "the Central Park jogger," a young Wellesley graduate and Wall Street investment banker, who was brutally beaten and raped by a gang of youths in 1989.

Gartner and others argued that naming rape victims will help to eventually remove the social stigma against rape victims. The contention, Pollitt observes, rests on a dubious assumption. "Why would society blame rape victims less if it knew who they were?" The issue of naming the victim, she says, cannot be divorced from blaming the victim.

The news media's coverage of the Palm Beach case, Pollitt says, underlines the fact that rape is treated differently from other crimes. "There is no other crime in which

the character, behavior and past of the complainant are seen as central elements in determining whether a crime has occurred." No one, for instance, would tell an elderly lady cheated out of her life savings by a con man that she had been "asking for it."

Why is rape different? "Because lots of people, too often including the ones in the jury box, think women really do want to be forced into sex, or by acting or dressing or drinking in a certain way, give up the right to say no . . ." That being so, Pollitt says, privacy for women who claim to have been raped is justified. Instead of denying it to them, "we should take a good hard look at our national passion for thrusting unwanted publicity on people who are not accused of wrongdoing but find themselves willy-nilly in the news."

## *Vox Populi?*

"The Power of Talk Radio" by James C. Roberts, in *The American Enterprise* (May-June 1991), American Enterprise Inst., 1150 17th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Overshadowed first by television and then by the rise of stations on the FM band, AM radio once seemed well on the way to obsolescence. Now, however, this stepchild of the airwaves has found a new formula that may be balm not only for its bottom line but for American democracy.

That, at least, is the hope of Roberts, president of a Washington, D.C.-based radio syndicate: "At a time when the public is reading less and is coming to rely on the 30-second sound bite for information, talk radio . . . provides a forum for in-depth discussions of . . . public policy issues."

There are about 10,000 radio stations in the country, reaching 80 percent of Americans at least once a day. Roughly 400-500 of the stations had a news/talk format in 1990, up from 300-400 a year earlier. Today's national talk shows were made possible by two key developments: Satellite technology of the late 1970s allowed programs to be aired nationally; phone deregulation a few years later fostered the cheap "800" number service that let listeners call in from far and wide. (About five percent of the shows' listening audience

phones in.) Today, a big-name syndicated talk show, such as Rush Limbaugh's, which originates at WABC in New York, reaches four million people a day on 250 stations nationwide.

With audiences has come influence. Jim Gearhart's show on WKXW Trenton, reaching half a million New Jerseyites a day, was instrumental in forcing a partial rollback of Governor James Florio's 1990 tax increases. That same year, talk-show hosts across the nation spearheaded a successful grass-roots protest against the proposed congressional pay raise. Joe Klein of *New York* magazine has dubbed the hosts the "political organizers of the '90s." A less sympathetic David Broder, of the *Washington Post*, accuses them of "know-nothing demagoguery."

Attitudes such as that, say Roberts and other defenders of talk radio, show how distant the national news media are from common concerns—and help to explain talk radio's success. Talk-show hosts tend to be conservative or "populist." (Ralph Nader was a frequent talk-show guest during the congressional pay-raise campaign.)

Even Roberts parts company with enthusiasts who believe that talk will eventually crowd music off the airwaves, creating a brave new world of informational radio.

Yet, he maintains, "talk radio will provide an anchor for our rootless and mobile society and an invisible public forum for our far-flung democracy."

---

**RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY**

---

*In Defense  
Of Sophistry*

"For and Against the 'New' Education" by Bernard Knox, in *Humanities* (July-Aug. 1991), National Endowment for the Humanities, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20506.

Plato (427–347 B.C.) gave the Sophists a bad name, and it has persisted to this day. The denigration was quite undeserved, observes Knox, a classics professor emeritus at Yale University. In fact, he says, the Sophists, who taught rhetoric in Athens during the fifth century B.C., were "the first professors of the humanities," and they "created an education designed for the first great democracy."

The birth of Athenian democracy in that century had created a need for a new education. Whether to win a majority in the Assembly for a desired policy, or just to win a verdict for oneself in the new courts of law, Athenians now found "the art of persuasion" to be the key to success. And the Sophists—such as Protagoras, Gorgias, and Hippias—were professionals in that art. "Protagoras offered to teach, for a price . . . how to make the weaker case appear the stronger. This, of course, is the essence of the art of persuasion: it is the weaker case that needs the rhetoric." But although rhetoric was its core, the Sophists' educational program also included, in rudimentary form, all the liberal arts, Knox says. For the ancient Greeks, Homer and other poets were the authorities on questions of conduct and belief, and the Sophists all claimed to be interpreters of poetry. Their discussions might begin as literary critiques, but they then moved easily into the moral and political realms.

The Sophists, Knox says, "encouraged their students to question every received idea, to subject age-old concepts of the relationship between man and god, man

and society, to the criterion of reasoned, organized discussion." For the first time in Athenian history, he says, doubts were expressed about the superiority of Greeks to barbarians, and there was debate over the position of women in society, of political equality, and even of slavery.

Plato, who turned the word *Sophist* into a term of abuse, "also, though this aspect of his work is seldom mentioned, tried to suppress the new humanities," Knox points out. "It was perfectly logical that he should do so. They had been created to provide education in citizenship for that democracy which Plato loathed and despised, not only because it had put his master Socrates to death but also because he saw clearly the real flaws of Athenian imperial democracy—its inability to maintain a stable policy, its encouragement of sycophancy and political corruption." But Plato also perceived as flaws of democracy "what in fact were its virtues—its openness to new ideas, its freedom of speech."

In the fifth century B.C. as today, Knox says, the humanities were on the defensive. Now, the "canon" of the great books of Western civilization is being attacked; but then, too, the humanities were under fire. Then as now, "they were vulnerable to the accusation that they posed questions but gave no definitive answers; that their effect was often unsettling, if not subversive; that they made their devotees unfit for real life." But the humanities came into being as an education for democracy—and that, Knox says, is still the strongest argument for them.