

THE CULTURAL WARS

AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL LIFE, 1965-1992

At century's end, the universities and other enclaves of American intellectual life are torn by conflict. The canon and the "hegemony of dead, white, European males" are under attack; the tenured and their students rally around feminism, multiculturalism, and other causes. To chart the history of these developments, Daniel Bell argues, is to trace the decay of American intellectual life.

by Daniel Bell

There is no longer any intellectual center in the United States. And, for that matter, very few intellectuals remain, if by intellectuals one means those socially unattached individuals devoted solely to the search for truth. The existence of such a stratum was, for the sociologist Karl Mannheim, one of the more distinctive facts about cultural life in the 20th century. As he wrote in 1929:

One of the most impressive facts about modern life is that in it, unlike previous cultures, intellectual activity is not carried on exclusively by a socially rigidly defined class, such as a priesthood, but rather by a social stratum which is to a large degree unattached to any social class and which is recruited from an increasingly inclusive area of social life. This sociological fact determines essentially the uniqueness of the modern mind, which is characteristically not based upon the authority of a priesthood, which is not closed or finished, but which is rather dynamic, elastic, in a constant state of flux, and perpetually confronted by new problems.

How dated all this seems more than a half-century later. How many intellectuals are there, outside institutional attachments? There is a considerable amount of intellectual activity—in universities, think tanks, and research centers of public policy; in centers of literary studies in universities, libraries, and museums; in various "institutes of advanced studies," most of which are attached to universities; and in government and business, usually among "planning staffs."

We do not have intellectual inquiry or discussion but "research," "policy analysis," and, in literature, "theory." Increasingly, intellectual life is specialized, professionalized, jargonized, and often hermetic in its focus



Deconstructionists and other literary theorists—including Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and Geoffrey Hartman—at work in Mark Tansey's wry "Constructing the Grand Canyon."

and language. There is little attention to the "common reader" of the kind that Virginia Woolf sought to address, while, ironically, the life of Mrs. Woolf has itself become a cottage industry and her work (despite her strictures) an icon for ardent feminist critics.

Mannheim also assumed another condition that might sustain the existence of the independent thinker. This would be the freedom from the patronage system—of church, government, and wealthy individuals—and its replacement by the market, so that writers would be free to

chance their own thoughts and fortunes (as had already begun in the 18th century, when Alexander Pope had led the way by selling his books by subscription and when independent printers began to be publishers). Mannheim also assumed the expansion of a broad educated public, as a result of the spread of mass higher education, which would be receptive to such writers.

Yet there is no broad intellectual life and no broad intellectual public today. Most readers from the larger managerial and professional public (there are now 30 million such people, according to the last census!) want and seek "information" of a utilitarian variety, but few have the taste or desire for discussions of a philosophical kind that undergird or challenge their prejudices and pursuits. And how many serious intellectual journals are there that exist independent of the new patronage system of foundations, universities, or wealthy patrons? By and large, institutions dominate intellectual life.

Such developments may have occurred in other "advanced" societies as well. Still, one thinks of Paris as an intellectual center, with its concentration of universities, publishing, broadcasting, and government (with publishers still sponsoring intellectual magazines such as *Le Débat*), and the tradition of the important public thinker, though no one today matches the stature or influence of a Raymond Aron or a Jean-Paul Sartre. There is the monarch, M. Mitterrand, who builds new opera houses and grand libraries, and refurbishes museums, and who had as a door-keeper and courtier, M. Jacques Attali, who has written 10, 20—or is it 30?—books, from dawn to noon of the day (reversing the habits of Balzac). Major historians and intellectuals, such as Georges Duby, or Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, or Roger Chartier, or François Furet, continue to occupy major cultural positions.

English cultural life still retains the smile of the Cheshire cat, with the feline manners and style and gossip of a concentrated literary life, and, *mirabile dictu*, books are reviewed, in seven or eight quality newspapers and magazines, in the week of their publication. The *Times Literary Supplement* has become lively under the editorship of Ferdinand Mount, a political analyst and novelist, while the *London Review of Books* is one of the few periodicals, if not the only one, that has carried long and serious discussions of philosophy, featuring Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam

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(two Americans), Bernard Williams, and others. The triangulation of Parliament, the universities, and journalism provides sustenance for newspapers such as the *Independent*, the *Times*, the *Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, and the *Sunday Observer*, though their glossy weekly supplements reflect the cultural contradictions of capitalism in their stylish consumerism. But the writing often sparkles, especially in the parliamentary sketches, while the *Economist* presents polished weekly tutorials on politics and economics, and the *Financial Times* publishes cultural pages that are informed and enlightening. It is high-class journalism, and only that.

England has rarely had the high-brow cultural periodicals that were once published in such profusion in the United States. *Encounter*, an Anglo-American journal published in London, lasted almost 40 years but disappeared mysteriously one month, without even a whimper. *Granta*, a lively journal published in Cambridge, is edited by an American and presents intelligent literary articles and occasional criticism. For a time, there was an active group of left-wing journals, principally the *New Left Review*, edited by Perry Anderson (who insistently sought to bring European thought and Marxism to the parochial English), and the chic communist journal, *Marxism Today*, which combined upper-class bohemianism with "designer socialism." But Anderson now spends part of the year teaching in California, while *Marxism Today* suspended publication with a bang—that is, a bang-up party that featured left-wing gliterati of stage and screen at its farewell ball.

German intellectual life, one is told, is



fragmented, lacking a center. But political issues, largely because of the problems of identity and historical consciousness and guilt, necessarily engage an educated public, particularly the historians and philosophers. The *Methodenstreit*—the philosophical controversies about positivism between Karl Popper and T. W. Adorno—has faded, but the *Historikerstreit*, the debate about “mastering the past,” remains warm, and one can still read a Jürgen Habermas, a Michael Stürmer, a Thomas Nipperdey, a Hans Magnus Enzensberger, a Günter Grass. There are informed newspapers such as *Die Zeit* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, as well as a “thick” newsmagazine, *Der Spiegel*, whose cultural discussion and analysis make *Time* and *Newsweek* look like the weekly “shoppers” sent free through the mail.

One can without much effort cite other instances of brightness such as, in Spain, the thoughtful newspaper *El Pais*, an authoritative, critical voice of opinion, and its serious magazine, *Claves*, which reminds one in its breadth of Germany's *Der Monat*. And in Mexico, there is still the “old-fashioned” interest in literature and ideas that arises from the unmistakable voice of Octavio Paz, in his magazine *Vuelta*.

The reason for this cursory survey is to point up the dryness of American intellectual life. There is one general cultural periodical that “everyone” reads, the *New York Review of Books*, but its featured and repeated writers are drawn usually from England (with a few American “lapsed conservatives” such as Garry Wills and Joan Didion), and its audience is principally in the universities. The *New Republic*, a weekly, is often bright, and the back-of-the-book section is literate and sophisticated, but the focus is primarily political and on gossip from “inside the beltway,” the hothouse atmosphere of concentrated Washington flora. *Commentary* and *Partisan Review*, once the authoritative forums of intellectual discussion and engagement with European culture, have faded, the one for its strongly conservative stance, the other with the passing of the “New York Intellectuals” and their concerns.

A previous generation had such independent intellectuals as Edmund Wilson, Lewis Mumford, and Dwight MacDonal (who was the freest floater of them all), none of whom were identified with a university culture. Today's writers exist largely within the academic milieu. A book on this theme by an itinerant left-wing writer, Russell Jacoby, has as its title *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (1987). The book chronicles the disappearance of an independent sphere of American cultural life, and the fact that intellectuals who emerged 30 years ago, “like Daniel Bell, William F. Buckley, Jr. and John Kenneth Galbraith, still command the cultural heights.” These “last intellectuals,” Jacoby points out, wrote for the educated public. “Yet they are now an endangered species, without younger successors”—though there is still Norman Mailer and his perpetual advertisements for himself.

To continue the inquiry within this framework, however, is to con-

tinue the misconception fostered by Mannheim, a conceit still accepted by many intellectuals to reinforce their claim to being the "privileged thinkers" judging the age. Mannheim, influenced by the late-19th-century Russian view of the *intelligenty*, thought that the social role of the intellectual was to be critical, and that "structurally" the intellectual was outside the existing class society. But intellectuals today—those who shape and transmit words and ideas—are all *within* the social structure and occupy comfortable positions therein. They have tenure in the universities and exercise considerable power over status, funds, and the organization of research and literary centers. They staff the elite media—newspapers, television, and Hollywood. They play influential and often decisive roles in the staff positions and committees of the Congress and the executive branch.* They *constitute* the institutional life of the society, and their wars—over positions in the institutions, especially the universities—and their conflicts over the definitions of what is salient in the culture (such as feminism and multiculturalism), constitute the "cultural wars" that are taking place in American life today.

To understand the modalities of intellectual life today, we need a basis other than the ones that have been used to set off the intellectual class (since it is not a unity or a defined social role) from other groups in the society. The problem is, how do we define various differentiations?

I begin with an arbitrary yet perhaps useful distinction between a *culture* and a *society*, the *culture* being the regnant attitudes and traditions that are the wellsprings of belief, the *society* denoting common attitudes and interests that define a people.† In some nations—Islamic, for example—there is a congruence between the two because of the unifying force of religion. In modern Western nations there is usually a division between the realms.

The United States today is a *bourgeois society but not a bourgeois culture*. It is a bourgeois society in its emphasis on individualism and materialism. But it is, at the "advanced" level, a *modernist culture* in its acceptance of experiment, new design, and complex forms. (In the formation of the republic, one could say that there was a unity between the culture and the society because of the unifying role of Protestantism, the Calvinism of a Jonathan Edwards and the practicality of a Benjamin Franklin. By the mid-19th century a split developed with the spread of populist attitudes in the society and a genteel spirit in the culture.)

The *culture* of the United States today is permissive in its ethos (espe-

*To give one a sense of the scope of the intellectual establishment: There are more than 3,600 institutions of higher learning in the United States, employing more than 700,000 college and university teachers (more than 10 million students are enrolled in degree-credit programs, and an additional five million in college courses). There are about 350,000 social scientists, of whom about 200,000 are psychologists and 120,000 economists. There are 260,000 editors and reporters, more than 80,000 authors and 60,000 technical writers, 200,000 librarians, 395,000 natural scientists, 730,000 mathematical and computer scientists, etc.

†I would hope to avoid possible confusions by using "society" and "culture" as separate realms, when one has also used "society" as a generic term. I could talk of the "mundane" and the "symbolic," but these carry their own confusions. I hope that the contexts make my distinction clear.

cially on moral and sexual issues) and modernist in its willingness to accept new and innovative and trendy expressions in the arts and literature. It is, to use the phrase of Lionel Trilling, an "adversary culture," in its opposition to the prevailing societal attitudes.* Yet that adversary culture is increasingly entrenched within the institutions of the society, especially the universities, and enjoys a cozy nonconformity in parading its new snobbishness, often on the pretense of still being persecuted. Inevitably, those attitudes have produced a reaction within the culture of what Sidney Blumenthal has called "the counter-intellectuals," or, in the political arena, of the "neoconservatives," men and women who have come forward strongly in defense of "bourgeois society" and its values. And uneasily between the two is a current of "political liberalism," which, in separating the public and the private realms, defends the permissiveness in culture, but is more concerned to rectify the deficits of "bourgeois society," especially on the issues of equality and redistributive justice.

In effect, we have a new set of "cultural wars," or *Kulturkämpfe*† which are not the romantic visions of the intellectuals against the society, but intense disputes between—and within—enclaves of intellectuals whose arguments only occasionally (as now with the debate about "political correctness") reach the larger public.

II

During the past 25 years, there have been three currents in American intellectual life that can be designated, loosely, as radical, conservative, and liberal. After dealing with the historical background of these currents, I will move on to current controversies.

The radical march

The radical movement derives largely from the events of 1968, the eruptions in the universities in the United States, France, and Germany and, to a lesser extent, in other countries as well. It was, uniquely, a youth movement, similar to the *Jugendbewegung* of early-20th-century Germany, with its romanticism, self-preening, the attack on materialism and impersonality of an alienating society, and the use of Nietzsche's relentless denunciations of bourgeois society.

In the United States, the focus of the emotional heat was the Vietnam

*Let me distinguish here between the idea of an "adversary culture" and that of the "new class" put forth by, among others, Irving Kristol. For Kristol, the new class is a stratum that brings together those who occupy the elite positions in the media, the universities, and publishing, and who have an anticapitalist stance. I think the definition is a conceptual muddle, for it seeks to bring together in one frame a structural position in the society and a cultural mentality. The word *class* here is, I think, misleading.

†The original meaning of *Kulturkämpfe*, literally *cultural wars*, goes back to 1870 when the newly unified German state sought to impose a cultural dominance of Protestantism against the Catholic minority. Hence *Kulturkampf* meant a new "war of religion." It became transposed in Weimar Germany as conflicts between Left and Right, and now would mean simply "cultural war."

War and the conscription that threatened all young males—though university students could postpone or sidestep the draft, while the burdens fell disproportionately on young blacks. The upsurge also owed much to the eruption of a large youth cohort (because of a demographic bulge) and was tied to a music-drug culture and, in its own conceit, to a sexual revolution.* The movement was not revolutionary, in the sense of having a programmatic alternative to capitalist society, but rebellious; and like many rebellious movements, it was diffuse in its targets and its impacts.

There were differences. In the past, particularly in Europe, the youth movements became attached to older political or artistic movements. What was striking about the New Left was that it cut itself off from previous socialist and communist generations, in part because of the hiatus of the 1950s, when many of the older generation had made their peace with society, and in part because the artistic movements, such as abstract expressionism in painting, became the established modes.

The pride of the New Left was in the word *new*, that these young people had made themselves anew. And this was a vision that, in its impulses and actions, was different from the programmatic and somewhat scholastic doctrines of the left-wing movements of the 1930s. There were three components to this worldview: the idea of participatory democracy, the repudiation of “white-skin” privilege, and the embrace of a romantic revolutionary dream centered on the Third World.

The emphasis on participatory democracy, vaguely Rousseauian, focused on the idea of “community,” and the community organization of the poor, the dispossessed, and even the *lumpenproletariat*, or criminals, particularly black criminals, since these were seen as victims of the society. The trade-union movement, by and large, was either ignored or scorned as bureaucratic and as “integrated” into capitalism.

Repudiating “white-skin” privilege meant the acceptance of guilt in being white, and the designation of the Third World countries as a new “external proletariat” serving the core capitalist countries, a theme first enunciated, ironically, by Arnold Toynbee, but made into a revolutionary slogan in the 1960s by Lin Biao, then Mao’s designated successor.

The revolutionary romanticism was the salute of a new cadre of heroes—Mao, Fidel, Ché Guevara, and in the long trail a-winding, Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas of Nicaragua. Much of this was rhetoric, but the greatest publicity arose with the embrace by the New Left of the Black Panthers (and of Frantz Fanon as an intellectual avatar). The most notorious event came when the *New York Review of Books* featured an article by Tom Hayden, one of the leaders of the New Left, and on its cover depicted a Molotov cocktail. (No one was hurt, except the *New York Review of Books*.)

*A conceit because more than 50 years before, a sexual revolution had begun in the bohemian enclaves of Greenwich Village. The difference, as is so often the case, is in the *scale*—the larger numbers involved, the spread to other classes, but most important, the attention and visibility won because of the media by the “beats,” the “hippies,” the “flower children,” and similar groups who flaunted a “new” lifestyle.

All of these themes and visions unraveled and blurred over time. Participatory democracy placed the Left in a bind. Individuals and communities ought to have the right to "affect the decisions that controlled their lives." The Left assumed that whatever "the people" wanted would be right. But what, then, of the claim of Catholics in South Boston to resist integration and the busing of black children into their schools on the ground that it would disrupt *their* community? Should they not have the right to affect decisions that controlled their lives? How far down does participatory democracy go, and to what extent are individuals also members of the larger, inclusive polity that makes a decision binding on all?

Atoning for white-skin privilege often meant endorsing violence and murder by black militants, and justifying actions by men such as George Jackson, who killed three prison guards in an attempt to escape from San Quentin in 1971.

Because of the very nature of a democratic (even if flawed) society, blacks had to make the choice of coming into the system and seeking electoral place and power or becoming even more militant and extreme. Inevitably the black movement split. Some went the way of extremism, such as Eldridge Cleaver, who achieved great literary notoriety, fled abroad and, after years of wandering in Cuba and Algeria, came home to repudiate his past and become a born-again Christian. Most blacks came into the system, with the result that in the past decade and a half, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, Washington D.C., Cleveland, Atlanta, Newark, and smaller cities have elected black mayors. The Black Panthers faded.

As for the revolutionary romanticism, in the 1970s a section of the New Left, the Weathermen, went underground and carried out bombings and bank hold-ups and killings, and led empty lives for years until their movement finally evaporated. For the larger number, there have been the successive disillusionments with Mao and the Cultural Revolution; with Fidel, in part because of the imprisonment of homosexual and cultural figures such as Heberto Padilla; with Ché, for his inept failures in seeking to carry out Régis Debray's theory of guerrilla revolution. And most recently there was confusion over the repudiation of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in a free and democratic election.

And yet, though bereft of causes, many in the generation, and their epigones, retained a radical posture and began (in the phrase of the German radical Rudi Dutschke) "the long march through the institutions." In the 1980s, the aging New Left—now in tenured positions in the universities, in powerful positions in the print media, Hollywood, and broadcasting—began a number of *Kulturkämpfe* which have made many universities a new battleground.

There is little of a radical economic or political program in their concerns. The battleground is culture, and the field is the curriculum and "theory." The language, the rhetoric, and to some extent the analysis

derived from the Frankfurt School and Georg Lukacs (though few knew that the two denounced each other violently) and from Antonio Gramsci, and while those initial influences have been fading, the new rhetoric and rodomontade in the justifications of a cultural nihilism come from Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida.

The key word, from Gramsci, is "hegemony"—an essential tool in the Left's effort to undermine the dominion of "capitalist culture," but as it is difficult to define the capitalist "culture," what this means in practice is the legitimacy of capitalism as a just system. The attack was developed most sharply by the Critical Legal Studies movement, which originated in the early 1980s at the Harvard Law School and has now spread to the major law schools of the country. The contention of the movement is that law, especially judicial decisions, serves to reinforce the systems of power and privilege in the society—a not very original insight which, in the United States, goes back to the "legal realism" of Jerome Frank and Thurman Arnold in the days of the New Deal, but which is given here an Hegelian-Gramscian frippery, rather than the pragmatic cast of the earlier movement. To the extent there is a central thinker, it is the Harvard Law professor Roberto Mangabeira Unger. And to the extent that one can state a central theme in a large and impressive number of books, it is the need for societies to find mechanisms to break up old, encrusted institutions and create new ones. The difficulty is the lack of a normative vision, namely, what should law be, what is justice? Unger emphasizes the need for a continual re-ordering of institutions. But if law is built, as are most societies, on tradition, what are the consequences of the "permanent revolution?" If law requires stable rules, so that people shall obey the law, how does one know how to behave?

But all this has been the past, and a new and larger sociological development has taken place among radicals (and in the social sciences themselves), the decline of interest in *class* and the focus on *gender* and *race* as the crux of power and position in the society. In the last decade, feminism and black studies have been the redoubt of radicalism in the United States, and these challenges have posed some of the more troubling questions to established institutions and thought.

The conservative turn

A neoconservative, Irving Kristol quipped in the 1970s, is "a liberal who has been mugged by reality." Yet at the start, at least, the phrase "neoconservative" was a misnomer. The term had not been put forth by the men called by that name, and it was not an accurate description of their beliefs. It was, in fact, coined in *Dissent* by the socialist writer Michael Harrington, who, in a maneuver typical of old sectarian politics, masked his own move to the "right"—in this instance abandoning independent socialist electoral politics and joining the Democratic Party—by attacking those who were themselves Democrats, though of a

skeptical cast. The label was given a journalistic stamp in a book by Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing American Politics* (1979). In that book, Steinfels singled out Irving Kristol as the publicist of the group, Daniel Patrick Moynihan as the professorial politician, and this writer as the theoretician and moralist. A large number of social scientists associated with the magazine the *Public Interest*, founded by Kristol and me in 1965, were identified with this orientation: the sociologists Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Robert Nisbet; the political scientists Samuel Huntington and James Q. Wilson; and, in the background, such posthumous individuals as Lionel Trilling, Richard Hofstadter, and the legal scholar Alexander Bickel. The significance of the movement, said Steinfels, apart from its members' influence as writers and their "links to power" through their positions in elite universities and on government commissions, was their opposition to liberalism and their belief that "neoconservatism is the serious and intelligent conservatism America has lacked."

Yet, not surprisingly, the content of this alleged conservatism was never stated. Not surprisingly because except for Robert Nisbet, who espoused a Durkheimian belief in community as against individualism, there was not at the time a conservative content shared by all these men. In my own writings, for example, I have been critical of bourgeois life, and my proposals for a "public household," in my *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), represent the liberalism of John Dewey. (I have also described myself as a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture.) Kristol, in his writings, has sought to work out a union of the free-market and individual-interests principles of Adam Smith with the principles of liberty of Edmund Burke—who despite the label of "conservative" was for most of his life a Whig in politics and temperament. If any common definition is possible—unless it is too much of an oxymoron—it would be a skeptical Whiggism: a hope for progress, but doubt that it may be possible.

Much of the difficulty with this term, now more than 25 years old, derives from the fact that there have been two different phases in the orientations of this "movement." The first, identified with the launching of the *Public Interest* in 1965, was the singular focus on domestic social policy. The telling fact was that the principal intellectual periodicals of the day—*Commentary*, the *New York Review of Books*, and *Partisan Review*—had all swung left, and their pages were closed to those critical of the nascent New Left and its revolutionary romanticism. Equally, none of these periodicals had any interest in economics or social policy, though these were the crux of the Kennedy–Johnson Great Society programs.

The opening editorial of the magazine declared that it would be anti-ideological, for "the essential peculiarity of ideologies [is] that they do not simply prescribe ends, but also insistently propose prefabricated interpretations . . . that bitterly resist all sensible revisions." The magazine emphasized the necessity of empirical social research and was critical of

many of the vague proposals in the areas of health, education, and housing. The magazine was attacked as "pragmatic" or "technocratic," while Norman Podhoretz, the new editor of *Commentary*, who had taken it to the left, somewhat scornfully derided the *Public Interest* (in his 1967 autobiography, *Making It*) as little more than a "company suggestion box," though he genuflected to his elders as men of talent.

Yet there was a larger theme in the thinking of the "neoconservatives" that derived from the experiences of the previous 30 years. This was the recognition of the difficulties in realizing utopian programs in an imperfect world. In the "socialist" states this would begin in revolutionary terror and end in bureaucratic nightmares, while in the democratic societies, efforts to use "blueprints" for social planning would result in unexpected consequences, so that if one were to seek "social engineering," it would have to be, in Karl Popper's phrase, in piecemeal fashion. Thus, the underlying philosophical orientation was skepticism toward utopianism. If that is conservative, so be it.

Toward the end of the 1970s, there was a distinct shift in American politics with the election of Ronald Reagan and the emergence of foreign policy, in particular the confrontation with the Soviet Union and communist adventurism in Latin America, as the center of political attention. This brought to the fore a number of individuals, former Democrats, who had not been identified previously with the neoconservatives. The "bridge" between the two was Irving Kristol, who had already become a Republican, and who, through a column in the *Wall Street Journal* and other periodicals, had become a major public thinker in American life. Now he was joined by Norman Podhoretz, who, principally because of his support of Israel and the Likud party, had come forth as a "hard-liner" on foreign policy. Also joining him was Jeanne Kirkpatrick, whose 1979 article in *Commentary*, suggesting that authoritarian regimes were subject to change but that totalitarian regimes were not, caught the attention of Mr. Reagan. Though a Democrat, Kirkpatrick was named the ambassador to the United Nations. The overtly ideological posture of the Reagan administration in foreign affairs also attracted a large segment of anticommunist Democrats and former Social Democrats who, having the political savvy and propaganda skills, moved into important ideological positions in the Republican administration—in the Voice of America, in the National Endowment for Democracy, and in the various negotiation teams dealing with the Soviets.

Dennis Wrong, in his review of the Steinfels book, remarked, apropos of the subtitle, that "It seems far more probable that American politics will change the men, rather than the other way round." I left the *Public Interest* 10 years after its founding. Senator Moynihan, challenging Reagan's ideological interventionism, advanced Wilsonian principles in international relations (defending international law).

And yet, in the last decade a distinctive neoconservative movement

did emerge in the United States, combining an ideological posture in foreign policy, a hostility to the welfare-state bureaucracy, a commitment to supply-side economics, and animosity to the "adversary culture." With the support of several conservative foundations, a large number of neoconservative journals have emerged which, until recently, have dominated the intellectual scene outside the universities. In addition to the *Public Interest*, there is now a seven-year-old sister magazine on foreign affairs, the *National Interest*, published by Mr. Kristol. Three major cultural periodicals are edited by neoconservatives: the *New Criterion*, a magazine devoted to the arts, edited by Hilton Kramer, a gifted art critic, yet often testy, even when justified, in his scathing remarks on left-wing cultural criticism; the *American Scholar*, the journal of Phi Beta Kappa, edited by Joseph Epstein, who writes a witty and barbed column on literary affairs; and *Partisan Review*, now more than 50 years old, edited by William Phillips, once the insignia of the New York intellectuals, but now, regrettably, a pale shadow of its former self. *Commentary*, published by the American Jewish Committee, is still a brilliantly edited journal, but focused relentlessly, if not monomaniacally, on attacks on the Left and the defense of Israeli hard-line policy. In addition, there is a slew of magazines supported by right-wing organizations, such as *Policy Review*, funded by the Heritage Foundation, and a number of conservative student magazines on the major campuses, funded by foundations where Kristol has an influential voice.

What is striking in all of this is the large chasm between the neoconservatives on one side and the liberal and Left cultures on the other, a split that reflects the different spheres of influence and antagonism between the two sides. The neoconservative influence is largely in Washington and government institutions (such as the grant-giving National Endowment for the Humanities) and in the spheres of public policy. The influence of the Left and liberal circles is predominantly in the universities, and since many of the neoconservatives are also professors, they feel themselves to be isolated and scorned within the universities, while leftists and liberals feel derided and attacked in government circles. And they may both be right.

The return of liberal philosophy

The third intellectual current of the past two decades, in addition to the activist New Left and the reactive neoconservative movements, has been an astonishing revival of philosophical liberalism.

Postwar America, it is said, demonstrated the triumph and exhaustion of political liberalism. The triumph was the entrenchment of the welfare state so firmly that three different Republican administrations, those of Nixon, Reagan, and Bush, could not dismantle it but only attempt to starve it. The exhaustion arose out of the realization that extravagant promises had been made—the elimination of poverty, the creation of

an adequate health-care system, the raising of educational standards—but that the costs had risen substantially and the systems increasingly were bogged down in bureaucratic swamps. While this has probably been a common feature of most advanced industrial societies, the situation in the United States was compounded by the Vietnam War, which not only sapped the moral self-confidence of the society but stalled the Great Society programs and unleashed a surge of inflation that took more than 20 years to wring out.

Yet a paradox emerges. While liberalism as public policy has been foundering, liberal political philosophy has exploded with great intellectual strength and excitement, reviving a field that had been moribund since mid-century. Four men, with a new analytic rigor, and by returning normative considerations to the precincts of philosophy, have been crucial to these changes.

The first is John Rawls of Harvard, whose book *A Theory of Justice* (1971) has inspired countless debates. Every society, argues Rawls, requires some allocative system for the “social primary goods” that comprise liberties, opportunities, economic resources, and conditions of self-respect. The question is how one designs a system that is both just and fair in the minds of its citizens. If one says, as do some conservatives, that one cannot “design” a set of social arrangements, how can one explain the U.S. Constitution, which laid out a framework of rights and representation that has worked for over 200 years?

A utilitarian system, such as that set forth by Jeremy Bentham, says that the community is a “fiction,” that rewards should go to individuals, and that justice is the “greatest good for the greatest number.” But is that fair if there are large disparities of income or privilege? How do we get individuals to agree on some common standard?

Rawls begins with the crucial point that scarcity will be present in any society (socialists had assumed that abundance would be created by technology) and that distributive allocations require a moral standard that is just for all. The novelty of Rawls’s scheme is that while it begins with an individualist premise, it forces individuals to achieve a collective consensus. The basis for this is not utilitarianism but a “social contract” founded on Kant’s argument that individuals would wish to universalize their positions.

Rawls’s innovation is to propose a game, a “veil of ignorance,” under which each person has to choose a “maximin” allocation of social primary goods (in rough terms, a “safety net”) that would be the measure of resources needed for each person to participate fully in the society, the measure which, as Aristotle pointed out in *Politics*, defines him as a citizen. That level, chosen for one’s self, behind the veil of ignorance, then becomes the standard for all.*

*In the old folk tale, the father allows the elder son to draw the division of the inherited land, but the other son has first choice after the division.

Ronald Dworkin, the second writer, though a professor of jurisprudence at Oxford, spends half his time in the United States and writes largely for American publications, notably the *New York Review of Books*, on U.S. constitutional issues. The title of an early collection of his essays, *Taking Rights Seriously* (1977), exemplifies his standpoint. Rights, in Dworkin's view, are not created by explicit political decision, such as prescribed by legal positivism, or by metaphysical natural law, but derive, following Rawls, from the "right to equal concern and respect" which each person has. While for Rawls the foundation of these rights is contractarian, for Dworkin rights derive from "our intuitions about justice," and from the fact that in the chain of interpretations and reasoning, rational discourse and argument will provide one "right" answer. (Aware, from criticism, of the weakness of his philosophical grounding, Dworkin has sought to find in the "integrity" of law, the concern for justice, an underlying coherence behind the empirical applications of law.)

Dworkin's major influence has been, however, in the application of the idea of rights to constitutional matters. The focus on "concern and respect" allows him to interpret the "equal protection" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment as extending to affirmative action for minorities and the "right to privacy," and from that to the right to "choice" in such matters as abortion and sexual preference.

Both Rawls and Dworkin, in their separate ways, seek to establish unitary standards for the polity, yet problems are posed by the fact that in the distribution of social goods there may be different rules for the distribution of wealth, power and status, and other social goods. And if there are different rules, how does one avoid contradiction or undue advantage? These are the questions raised by Michael Walzer, of the Institute for Advanced Study, in his thoughtful book, *Spheres of Justice* (1983). Walzer argues that different spheres may have their own relevant principles of distribution, founded in the social meanings and the values of these spheres. If wealth is gained freely, some inequality may exist. While everyone is entitled to respect, not everyone is entitled to praise or status (e.g., professorial position) in a university. The basic principle is that individuals who have authority or advantage in one sphere should not be able to convert those positions into advantages in the others (e.g., wealth into power or priority in access to medical care). In this way, Walzer seeks to maintain the principle of plurality and complex equality, so that domination cannot be exercised uniformly across the range of different spheres in society.

The fourth individual who has begun to influence moral and economic theory profoundly is the Indian-born economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, who, after a long career in England, now teaches at Harvard. What Sen has done is to clothe neoclassical economic theory with a set of ethical evaluations, providing a more complex view of the individual and his nature. In neoclassical formulations of economic behavior, a person is simply a "bundle of preferences," which are ordered, in a utility

scale, in respect to one's tastes or needs. For Sen, beginning from welfare economics, a person or a family is conceived of as a "bundle of entitlements," which consist of "endowments" (the labor power of its members) and the claims for social support such as unemployment assistance, social security, and the like.

Sen has applied this conceptual scheme most acutely to his analysis of famine and hunger. The former, as he showed in his study of the Bangladesh famine of 1974 (*Poverty and Famines*, 1981) and most recently, with Jean Drèze, in *Hunger and Public Action* (1989), is due not to the physical scarcity of food because of crop failures or drought, but to the social fact that the entitlements of individuals do not provide access to food. And as against the compassionate impulse of providing food through famine relief—which may lead to pilfering, corruption, or aid to people who are not needy—the better social policy is the redefinition of entitlements: providing public-works jobs for people for cash wages. The cash income activates the market for food, bypassing cumbersome administrative apparatus. Substituting jobs for outright grants of food, moreover, may reduce possibilities of corruption and political misuse.

These explorations by Rawls, Dworkin, Walzer, and Sen have stimulated many debates in moral and political philosophy, in ethics and economics, and over the meaning of individualism and community, and the nature of virtue and justice. The paradox is that while liberal political practices have thinned out, liberal political philosophy has "thickened." Whether this will open new roads in political programs or social policy remains to be seen.

III

The two most important political events at the turn of the decade have been the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the war in the Persian Gulf. Surprisingly, neither of these events has left a strong imprint upon the intellectual community in the United States.

The reason for the insignificant response to the first is that in the last decade, if not before, few intellectuals had defended the Soviet Union or the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. In France, the intellectuals had been polarized between support for the Soviet Union or for the United States, and given a latent anti-Americanism and cries of imperialism, had tilted toward the Soviet Union and shrugged off revelations about the regime. That is why the volumes of Alexander Solzhenitsyn about the Gulag had such a shattering effect. When this was followed by the revelations of the repressions of the Cultural Revolution in China, the '68 generation, led by such "master thinkers" as André Glucksmann, turned strongly against the communist countries. In the United States,

however, there had been within the intellectual community a strong anticommunist force led by such people as Sidney Hook and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., while in the larger political ambiance, anticommunism was represented by Hubert Humphrey and the AFL-CIO. What remained strong among the Left was an anti-Americanism and a denunciation of "imperialism," especially, during the Reagan years, in Latin America. There was a marked generational difference. The older generation of intellectuals had grown up with Stalinism as the central political question of their lives, and the successive disillusionments from the Moscow Trials on reinforced their anticommunism. For the New Left generation, all that was "ancient" history. The Vietnam War set their emotional bearings and provided the basis for their anti-American attitudes.

Has the collapse of communism also undercut Marxist ideas? Here the answer is more complex. Most economists and sociologists would agree that Marxism has little relevance for the building of a "socialist" society and that market mechanisms are necessary in a complex economy. Many might still argue that Marxism, in varying aspects, is useful for the analysis of capitalism and commodity production. A number of Marxist sociologists, such as Erik Olin Wright of the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Fred Block of the University of California at Davis, have moved away from stilted Marxist class analysis and adopted, in varying degrees, a post-Marxist or postindustrial scheme as the new feature of Western development. The most prominent exponent of Marxist economic ideas, Robert Heilbroner, has admitted the failure of "socialism," but continues, understandably, his criticism of capitalism. Some Marxist economists, notably John Roemer, have sketched the outlines of a socialist market economy as an alternative to private capitalism. But, by and large, all this is academic—even in the best sense of the word.

The Gulf War produced a complicated reaction among the intelligentsia, especially the Jewish intellectuals who have been so prominent in American life. Few supported the claims of Iraq, though writers in such places as the *Nation* saw U.S. actions as a further illustration of the imperialist drive to control oil. A number of writers, including the feminist Barbara Ehrenreich, the co-chair of the Democratic Socialists of America, took the position (reminiscent of the socialist leader Norman Thomas in 1939–1941) that radicals should concentrate their energies on evils at home rather than abroad. The majority of the intellectual community, like the Democratic Party in Congress, supported economic sanctions.

After the war began, the Democrats in Congress supported the administration. The *Nation* opposed the war. The two major liberal/Left magazines, *Dissent* and *Tikkun*, split internally on the question. *Dissent*, the long-time socialist but anti-New Left magazine edited by Irving Howe and Michael Walzer, refrained from an open statement because of divisions within its board. *Tikkun*, a new magazine made up of younger Jewish intellectuals, also divided, though its editor, Michael Lerner, supported the war with reservations. *Tikkun* (the Hebrew word for repair and re-

construction) had started a few years before as a counterpoint to *Commentary*. Ironically, *Commentary*, which began in 1945, had been the route for the younger Jewish intellectuals of the time to find their way back into Jewish life and even to celebrate American society. *Tikkun*, 40 years later, was itself a new route for the '68 New Left to find its way back into a Jewish identity and new roots in Jewish life. The new, strong identity with Israel became its first crisis, and the magazine divided.*

The amazing rapidity of the American-led victory in Iraq, however, also quieted the debate about the war. Many people were sickened by the huge number of casualties inflicted on the Iraqis. Many still question whether the decision to begin military action may not have been too precipitous. But some of this criticism has been stilled by the revelations of the hidden nuclear capabilities that Saddam Hussein had developed.

In the 40 or so years after World War II, American intellectual concerns had been oriented strongly to the political questions of Stalinism and the fates of the people in the Soviet bloc. What is striking now is how all this has moved so quickly into history. The rising problems of the recession and the starving of social services within the United States have turned attention inward. And this may be the most important development in American political and intellectual life today.

The Left was until recently unified around the strong emotional championing of the Third World and anti-imperialism. Now the Third World—to the extent that there is a single “Third World”—has lost its allure, particularly as many of these countries turn to market economies and the race issue in South Africa seems to be moving toward some resolution. There is bewilderment about the rise of nationalism and a quiet fear about the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, but few if any intellectuals have been able to confront these questions. Liberals still speak of the need to spread democracy throughout the world and to aid the nations of Eastern Europe economically (though there is also the awareness of a possible swing to the right in these countries). Politically, the Left (along with part of the Right) has become isolationist, and its attention has turned not only to domestic problems but, more, to the debates about the issues of feminism and gender and about multiculturalism in the schools. Not only politically but intellectually the world has become centripetal. It is to these whirling divisions that I shall now turn.

*The division over support of different forces in Israel is the fault line that divides Jewish intellectuals and cuts across many of the other divisions. *Tikkun* is a strong supporter of the Peace Now movement in Israel and of rapprochement with the Palestinians. But so are many figures identified with the neoconservatives, such as Nathan Glazer and Seymour Martin Lipset and myself. Liberal Jewish leaders, such as Henry Rosovsky, have initiated a movement called *Nishma* (“Let Us Listen”) to strengthen support for peace initiatives in Israel within the U.S. Jewish community, which often fears to speak out openly on these questions. But important publicists such as Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol support Yitzhak Shamir and the Likud.

IV

For the intellectual, in the beginning is the word, and the word is truth, power, and glory. Inevitably, the competition for these coronets leads to a war of words. In the past decade one can identify three *Kulturkämpfe* in the American intellectual playground, often with a surprise crossing of old lines.

1. *Neocons vs. paleocons*. These odd-sounding abbreviations for neoconservatives and paleo- (old) conservatives would be of only minor interest if not for the ugly manifestations of anti-Semitism that have broken through the surfaces of the controversy.

For years, conservatives chafed at their outcast status in American intellectual life. The banner of conservatism had been raised in 1953, by the author Russell Kirk, whose book, *The Conservative Mind*, received attention because of the revival of interest in Edmund Burke and for Kirk's belief in order and tradition, hierarchy and authority, and the concept of an organic society—strange sentiments in a plural and immigrant society such as the United States, sentiments that seemed to give off echoes of the famous *I'll Take My Stand* (1930) manifesto of the Southern Agrarians, including John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks, and their attack on the harsh industrialism they had seen as disrupting the traditions of the old South.

But conservatism in the United States broke into the national scene with the appearance of *National Review* in 1955 and the quirky brilliance of its editor, William F. Buckley, Jr. The core of *National Review* was its anticommunism and the leading role in its editorial board of a group of former communist or Trotskyist intellectuals, including Whittaker Chambers, James Burnham, William Schlammm, and Frank Meyer, rather than any single philosophical conservative vision. Indeed, a free-market capitalism that is wholly disruptive of tradition, let alone the libertarianism of Ayn Rand (who was cast out in the cold by *National Review* for her anti-religious sentiments), always sat uneasily with the organicist views of a Richard Weaver, an *éminence grise* of conservative thought. It was politics, not philosophy, that made conservatism prominent.

The emergence of the neocons in the 1970s, an able and articulate group, gave conservatism a new vocabulary and a new visibility. But their writings were marked more by skepticism than by a philosophical orientation. To the extent that there was a philosophical backdrop it was the writings of the late Leo Strauss, a political philosopher at the University of Chicago. Strauss attacked the subjectivism of modernity and espoused the foundational ideas of virtue and excellence that are to be found in classical political writings. Strauss attracted a strong group of exegetes, and through them a cohort of younger acolytes who today occupy key staff positions in the executive branch of the Republican administration. His most famous disciple is Allan Bloom, at the University of Chicago, whose

book on education, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), became a startling best-seller, and whose own disciple, Francis Fukuyama, achieved wide notoriety with his essay, subsequently converted into a book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Irving Kristol acknowledges Strauss's influence.

The success of the neoconservatives in gaining intellectual attention and in influencing conservative foundations to support a myriad of neoconservative magazines, conferences, and organizations, has angered the paleocons, who have felt excluded from the front pews of politics. The antagonisms first broke out publicly in 1981, when the paleocons proposed as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, M. E. Bradford, then a professor at the University of Dallas. Bradford had written a scholarly denigration of Abraham Lincoln, had opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which struck down race segregation, and had twice supported the Alabama segregationist George Wallace for president. The neocons proposed William Bennett, the director of the non-governmental National Humanities Center in North Carolina, and, after a bitter public battle, Bennett was chosen. (Subsequently, Bennett became secretary of education in the Reagan administration, the drug czar in the Bush administration, and is now an editor of *National Review*.)

These antagonisms simmered for a decade but broke out more openly in recent years as the old unifying ideological issues have receded. At a 1986 meeting of the Philadelphia Society, Stephen Tonsor of the University of Michigan identified conservatism with Christianity and tied neoconservatism to the "instantiation of modernity among secularized Jewish intellectuals." (What is strange is that two of the leading neoconservative thinkers are Peter Berger of Boston University, a Lutheran who has written a number of profound books on religion, and Richard John Neuhaus, the editor of *First Things*, a Lutheran pastor turned Catholic.) And Russell Kirk, the avatar of the paleocons, delivered a speech to the Heritage Foundation, an aggressive right-wing organization (whose research director at the time, Burton Pines, is Jewish), asserting that the preservation of Israel "lies in back of everything" the neocons believe in, and "not seldom it has seemed as if some eminent neoconservatives mistook Tel Aviv for the capital of the United States."

Israel is the nub of the matter, and what might have been a heated teapot quarrel among old and late newcomers for the front seats on the political bench has now become an open and vitriolic public matter. The man who made it so is Patrick J. Buchanan, the former Nixon and Reagan speechwriter, a nationally syndicated columnist and television personality, who has challenged President Bush for the Republican nomination. Buchanan's speeches have become a rallying point for the cranky, the fundamentalist, and the frustrated sections of the electorate.

Buchanan, a pugnacious and brawling "macho" personality, took an isolationist stand on the Gulf War and accused the Jews of leading the call

for American intervention. "There are only two groups beating the drums for war in the Middle East," he said on a television show, "the Israeli Defense Ministry and its amen corner in the United States." And in a syndicated column, he attacked the neoconservatives, saying: "Hadn't we made a terrible mistake when we brought the ideological vagrants in off the street and gave them a warm place by the fire?"

The virulence of these remarks has precipitated a crisis in the ranks of conservatism. "Which side are you on?" has now become a question that conservative writers are forced to confront. In a remarkable special issue of *National Review* (which will be published as a book) William F. Buckley, Jr., explored the ramifications of this question, and concluded, in part, that Pat Buchanan has "said things about the Jews that could not reasonably be interpreted as other than anti-Semitic in tone and in substance." Buckley raised the ominous corollary: Ten years ago, Buchanan would not have been able to make his statements publicly; the shadow of Auschwitz is now fading and no longer inhibits expressions of overt anti-Semitism. Like the covert issue of race, raised by the former Klansman David Duke, and the growth of isolationism and attacks on foreigners, the revival of anti-Semitism portends a possible dark period in American life. So far it is a small cloud, but the fact that prominent intellectuals and publicists—and even almost all of the paleocons—are willing to use these issues publicly, makes one somewhat fearful of the political storms ahead.

2. *Liberals and Communitarians.* If the ugly battle between the paleocons and neocons is largely within the corridors of power and influence in Washington, the dispute between liberals and communitarians is within the ivory tower of political philosophy, and only secondarily is there a spill over into social policy. In a broad sense, both camps are "liberal" in having a melioristic stance, though one end of the continuum moves to an individualist libertarianism and the other to defining the community as prior to individual rights.

One should start, perhaps, with the "players" to locate the different positions in the argument. On the liberal side are the older figures such as John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, insofar as they take the individual as the foundation of their philosophies. A more activist, younger group is centered in the new policy journal, the *American Prospect*, co-edited by Paul Starr, a sociologist at Princeton University, and Robert Kuttner, an economist. The journal sets itself up in opposition to the *Public Interest*. One of Starr's concerns has been to differentiate liberalism from socialism, insofar as New Deal liberalism has been loosely identified as a form of reformist socialism.

On the communitarian side, there are Michael Sandel, Robert Bellah, and Alasdair MacIntyre. The movement's publicist is Amitai Etzioni, a sociologist at George Washington University who edits a journal, the *Responsive Community*. Etzioni, for example, asserts that the defense of individual rights has gone so far as to hobble the work of public-

health authorities (in AIDS testing) and the police. Sandel, along with many feminists, would allow communities to curb pornography, and Sandel would also limit the power of firms in closing plants.

Off to one side (is it left or right?) are libertarians such as Robert Nozick, who had championed the idea of the minimal state but has recently modified his views, and the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., a group that expresses a thoroughgoing *laissez-faire* in all fields, from economics to morals, including the legalization of drugs. (One should point out that some people often thought of as conservative, such as the free-market leader Milton Friedman, also support the legalization of drugs, on prudential as well as libertarian grounds.) At the edge, falling off the continuum, perhaps, are the followers of Ayn Rand, who espouse individual freedom based on reason in all fields. If there is a position further over on the communitarian side, it would be the espousers of "civic republicanism," as expressed by the English political philosopher Quentin Skinner and the British-born historian of ideas, (now at Johns Hopkins) J. G. Pocock—though their growing influence has been primarily in the history of ideas and the languages of political theory rather than in explicit contemporary issues.

At the heart of the problem is the dilemma expressed most sharply by Rousseau, that in modern society man is both *bourgeois* and *citoyen*, having egoistic self-interests and obligations to the community. Rousseau's answer was to dissolve egoism by having each person surrender all his rights to the general will, which becomes the single moral person. At the other end was Jeremy Bentham, who said that the community was a "fiction," and that society is made up only of individuals whose desires are expressed by their utility preferences.

In the language of contemporary political philosophy, the issue has been posed as *right* versus *good*. Michael Sandel of Harvard, in his *Liberalism and Its Critics* (1984), criticizes the abstract individual of Rawls's fictional contract by claiming that in "the absences of common purposes" there is only "moral chaos," and that an individual can be treated only as a member of a community and the social ties in which he is embedded. Alasdair MacIntyre, a peripatetic philosopher who, having explored all 57 varieties of contemporary modernism, has come to rest in the Aristotelian bedrock of civic virtue, emphasizes the "socially established," "shared activities," and "shared understandings" of art and politics. The recurrent theme in these commitments is the underlying foundation of "the common good."

But in a plural society, how far do "shared understandings" extend, and how common is the common good? Some efforts have been made to establish what may be called "mediating positions." Michael Walzer, as I explained earlier, accepts the particularities of different realms and different principles of distributive justice, but seeks to prevent the conversion of positions in one realm into advantages in others. Robert Bellah, the influential sociologist at Berkeley, has, with his associates, in their book

The Good Society (1991), emphasized the need to strengthen *institutions*, which provide attachments to society, rather than the untrammelled claims of individuals. Yet the emphasis on commonality still may fail to answer the fears once expressed by Reinhold Niebuhr, that "collective egoism" (e.g., nationalism or syndicalism) may be worse than "individual egoism" in distorting the nature of distributive justice.

Liberal responses to these dilemmas are of two kinds. One is the argument of Isaiah Berlin that in every society there is, intrinsically, a plurality of ends or values that inevitably clash (such as a merit principle based on achievement and an ascriptive principle based on redress for past injustices, the basis for affirmative action) and that the central feature of any liberal society has to be the *procedural* frameworks that encourage negotiation. A different argument emphasizes the distinction between the public and private realms, and proposes, as this writer has done, a "public household" for the issues of distributive goods, and a private realm, of morals and personal conduct, left free to individuals.

Much of this debate has taken place in the abstract realms of political philosophy, but rarely have these rival positions led to consistent stands on matters of public policy such as pornography, drugs, affirmative action, the limits of expression in the arts, abortion, and the like. To the extent that one can identify some consistency, the line-ups would look like this:

- Liberals seek some regulation in the economy, but few restrictions on morals.
- Communitarians would seek regulation in the economic market but also some controls on social behavior and restriction of some rights.
- Neoconservatives want a free market in the economy, but social tutelage in morals.
- Libertarians want a free market in the economy and in all other spheres of private conduct.

What is important to stress, however, is that these debates are occurring within a very different context from the one in which the fevered ideological struggles of the previous 50 years over socialism and capitalism occurred. By and large there is a broad consensus on the idea of a civil society *and* a market economy. The market, necessarily, emphasizes the role of individuals and firms in responding to price signals and shaping allocations by their demands. The civil society emphasizes the role of institutions and voluntary associations outside the state, through which individuals can work collectively to achieve their common ends. The question, in all these instances, is what kind of balance can be struck amid the competing nature of the different ends.

3. *Multiculturalism, the canon, and political correctness.* In the past several years, the most rancorous cultural war has been over the questions—

or should one say labels—of multiculturalism, political correctness, the canon, Eurocentrism, deconstructionism, and similar recondite terms in what St. Augustine once called “the bazaar of loquacity.”

This has taken place principally in the universities, and there largely in the humanities, over the definition of “core” courses in civilization required of all students. In the primary and secondary schools, there has been a more focused conflict about curriculum, specifically concerning textbooks in American history, especially in the cities where minority groups (black and Hispanic) are in control. And in politics it has involved primarily the government institutions that fund cultural projects, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Behind all this may be a larger change in the cultural climate, in which a cultural populism and even a cultural relativism have taken hold. This change is signified by the attack on “the canon,” the idea that there is a body of crucial moral and imaginative works that every educated person should know (or know of!), the erasure of the distinction between “high” culture and “low” culture, and the spread of the view (most strongly signified by deconstructionism) that there can be no authoritative reading of a text, that an author’s intention is irrelevant to the understanding of the text, and that the reader’s response is the starting point for analysis. That this is a caricature of serious work in hermeneutics, one of the oldest fields of exegetical studies, going back to early study of the Bible, or even of “deconstructionism,” is to some extent beside the point, for it is the vulgar voices that speak the loudest on their behalf.

Yet much of this also merges with the trendy term “postmodernism,” which, given its contradictory meanings in architecture, literature, painting, and the arts—the jumbling of styles from past and present in architecture, the mixing of figurative and abstract in painting, the self-conscious use of pastiche and parody in the arts, and the exuberant use of all modes to explode any and all definitions of genre—allows all of these meanings to be presented as equally relevant. But relevant to what?

While many of these fashions have been pervasive throughout Europe, in American culture—and in what other society could this have been possible?—there have been three distinctive turns:

- *aesthetic*—the spread of a relativism that denies the idea of standards and judgment in art;
- *sociological*—the replacement of class by race and gender as the meaningful terms for social divisions in society and the cruxes of power;
- *philosophical*—the denial of Western civilization as the source of our basic questions in epistemology, morals, and politics, and the rejection of required reading of classical works in the university curriculum.

In the debates that have wracked the cultural world in the last several years, deconstructionism, as first formulated by Jacques Derrida, has

been taken as the ultimate source of the nihilist temper. But this "construction" would be an intellectual mistake. Deconstructionism is but one of several intellectual streams that have emerged in recent decades that seek to set forth means of decoding a text. The question of meaning is the most vexing problem in the history of philosophy and literature.

In our time, there have been many efforts to restate a text in some extra-literary categories: Marxism with its "de-mystification" of formal or legal relations; psychoanalysis as the effort to uncover unconscious and sexual roots of displaced motivations; structuralism, from Saussure to Lévi-Strauss, in its statement of the formal properties of language itself to establish a system of literary and social relations.

With Derrida, there ensues what Morris Dickstein has called "the vertigo of interpretation." Deconstructionism is not, as its acolytes assert, "destruction," but de-construction, the effort to undermine both construction and destruction. Like a throwback to ancient Pyrrhonism, deconstructionism seeks to uncover the internal contradictions of a text, to undermine its coherence and reject any idea of a "privileged" meaning, and to overturn "hierarchies"—that of nature over culture, male over female, of writing over speech. Like every new cult, it has its own hermetic language that one must learn in order to partake in the Elysian mysteries—*différance*, absence/presence, *aporia* (the insoluble conflict between rhetoric and thought)—and a group of hierophants to instruct the initiates. A delicious way of having one's cake, and crumbling it.

Apart from the claim that the nature of figurative language is the primary clue to understanding (allowing some literary theorists to argue that science is only a "rhetoric" not an ordering of nature), what made deconstructionism attractive to others was its coupling by some writers with the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault sought to eliminate the Cartesian "subject" as an exemplary of the bourgeois ego, (to "de-construct" Man in his own language) and thus destroy humanism and the assertion of man's powers over nature. What gave deconstructionism its explosive public notice was the revelation in 1986 that Paul de Man, the mystagogue of deconstructionism in the United States until his death in 1983, had in his youth written more than 100 articles for a collaborationist magazine in Belgium, many of these attacking the Jews as alien to European culture and praising the "Hitlerian soul," and had never told this to any of his colleagues at Yale, many of whom were Jewish. The effort to link de Man's life with his theories became the object of furious controversies in American literary studies.

Movements such as deconstructionism have given rise to attacks on tradition and established thought. The most widespread has been the attack on "the canon," the view that there is a body of literature that stands apart from the vicissitudes of time and place and that transcends the particularities of culture and class. But this rejection

is more than a denial of any fixed body of works making claims to be masterpieces. It is the repudiation of the very idea that any canon, or any such set of judgments, is possible.

One of the novel sources of this view is the assertion that the canon is shaped by white, male, patriarchal literary standards. Barbara Herrnstein Smith of Duke, a former president of the Modern Language Association (the professional organization in the field), writes: "Minorities and women perceive and experience the world differently. These perspectives now collide with those of white males." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1985) goes hunting through the centuries for evidence of the "intrinsic separateness and unique particularity" of women as writers. That there may be such evidence cannot be gainsaid, but what is eschewed is any judgment of quality, or Virginia Woolf's dictum that mind and imagination have no gender but are the common founts of the creative talent.

These attacks have been widened by Houston A. Baker, Jr., a black literary theorist at the University of Pennsylvania, and the new head of the Modern Language Association. He regards reading and writing as "technologies of control," and charges that the literature read in the schools "perpetuates Western hegemonic arrangements of knowledge." Choosing between Virginia Woolf and Pearl Buck, he has remarked, is "no different than between a hoagie and a pizza."

Yet what is striking is that "minorities" and "women" are taken as generic terms, as if no differences existed within these groups, the way, 60 years ago, "bourgeois" and "proletarian" were used in Marxist literary criticism to separate different categories of writers. (Who, today, recognizes the names of the "proletarian writers" of the 1930s, such as Jack Conroy, Robert Cantwell, Clara Weatherwax, Fielding Burke, Grace Lumpkin, the latter three being women, as against the "bourgeois" writers such as Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald?) In the same way, any distinction between high culture and low culture is erased, and both, as well as films or painting, are interpreted as "reflections" of the age. What is ironic is that a vulgar sociology, driven out of the sociology of knowledge a generation ago, returns stridently through the prism of popular culture. But, then, historical memory has also been erased.

The politicization of these issues has arisen from the effort to introduce "multicultural" education into the schools, from the primary schools to the universities. As a nation of immigrants, America has been hospitable to such efforts, and particularly in recent years history textbooks have been revised to present the various immigrant experiences. But the agenda now is different, namely to attack Western civilization itself as "cultural imperialism." As one black writer states, liberation is impossible "until the white monopoly on Black minds is broken." The Eurocentric curriculum, asserts Molefi Kete Asante, is "killing our children, killing their minds."

Much of this has been given impetus by a work of the British sinolo-

gist now teaching at Cornell, Martin Bernal, in his book *Black Athena* (1987). Bernal has argued that what is called Western civilization began in Egypt, a part of Africa, and that Greek thought and other foundations of Western ideas were derivations of African civilization. This claim is now the basis for many Afro-American studies programs in U.S. schools.

All of this has become a "progressive orthodoxy" at many American universities, and efforts to challenge such views often run into what is now called "political correctness." More than a 100 universities, according to Dinesh D'Souza in his book *Illiberal Education* (1991), a conservative exposé of these issues, now have "speech codes" that prohibit racially or sexually "stigmatizing" or offensive speech. And the political and social atmosphere on most campuses, which are predominantly liberal in their outlook, discourages expressions of "sexist" or "homophobic" or "racial" remarks.

Even the First Amendment has come under suspicion. As Stanley Fish of Duke University, the loquacious leader of the literary guerrillas, has written in the *Boston Review*: "... words and phrases and concepts ... generative of [progressive left] politics have been appropriated by the forces of neoconservatism. This is particularly true of the concept of free speech [which] has been used to justify policies and actions that the left finds problematical if not abhorrent: pornography, sexist language, campus hate speech ... Free speech, in short, is not an independent value, but a political prize and if that prize has been captured by a politics opposed to [the Left] it can no longer be invoked in ways that further [the Left's] purposes and is now an obstacle to those purposes."

A strange echo, one must say, of the remarks of Herbert Marcuse almost 30 years ago, in *One Dimensional Man*, that bourgeois society practices "repressive tolerance" by giving artists freedom the better to control them.

V

How does one evaluate the seriousness of the developments in American intellectual life? Deconstructionism has already begun to diminish as an intellectual fashion. Its emphasis on a self-contained or contradictory set of internal differences in a text, rather than the relation of text to external reality, often ends in a logorrheic set of word games. As an interest, it is being replaced by the "new historicism," exemplified by the work of Stephen Greenblatt at Berkeley, which reads literary texts and history in relation to the linguistic conventions of the time. Whatever the problematic relation of the new historicism to radicalism (and that would be, if at all, a generational dimension) it is a return to literature and the world, rather than just another exercise in theory and tropes.

More directly, deconstructionism may have received an intellectual and ultimately mortal blow with the disclosure of Paul de Man's early anti-Semitic writings. It is true that doctrines may not be related integrally to the individual. T. S. Eliot made anti-Semitic remarks in his poetry, but these prejudices do not vitiate the power of his verse. And many of the practitioners of deconstructionism are Jewish, such as Derrida himself and Geoffrey Hartman at Yale. But one can apply a moral judgment to de Man only if we see that language decidedly refers to reality, that meanings are not necessarily indeterminate, that the "self" does exist and can be used to elucidate an author's intention, and that the truth can be established—all of which the deconstructionists have denied. And if one does deny that, then all moral discourse is meaningless.

The humanities "establishment" has become defensive about its activities. In 1989, the American Council of Learned Societies issued a long statement, "Speaking for the Humanities," signed by six directors of humanities centers in six universities, which sought to answer the criticisms of Allan Bloom as well as William Bennett, then the secretary of education, and Lynne Cheney, the director of the National Endowment for the Humanities. In defense, and in moderate tones, the authors pointed out that "Modern thought has—or ought to have—made us uncertain about the boundaries and limits of knowledge," and that modern social science has indicated "that all thought inevitably derives from particular standpoints, perspectives and interests."

This is true, but what is striking is the authors' failure to follow through from these premises. While modern thought has widened the boundaries of knowledge and expanded the nature of *experiences*, surely a useful point, that does not deal with the *judgments* one makes about the qualities of that knowledge or how they relate to the recurrent and perennial moral dilemmas of mankind. And while thought may *derive* from particular standpoints, the *truth* of a generalization does not necessarily depend upon that standpoint. What we have here is a confusion of epistemology. Worse, the Council statement says nothing about the extremist declarations of Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Houston A. Baker, Jr., Stanley Fish, and others, which are destructive of the humanities.

Inevitably the sweeping attacks on the cultural imperialism of the canon, the arbitrary classification of knowledge and literature as male versus female and as white versus black, and the reduction of literature to "hegemony" and "power" have provoked counterattacks. A book on de Man and deconstructionism by David Lehman, *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (1991), has ignited wide controversy and much soul-searching in the world of literature. The book by Dinesh D'Souza on "political correctness" has been praised by C. Vann Woodward, the most respected American historian, in the *New York Review of Books* and by Eugene Genovese, a onetime radical and foremost Marxist historian, in the *New Republic*. Irving Howe, the editor of *Dissent*, and one of the elders of American radicalism and a literary critic in the

Wilson, Trilling, Kazin tradition, defended the canon in a special issue of the *New Republic*, remarking, "The Bible, Homer, Plato, Sophocles, Shakespeare are central to our culture." And Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the foremost liberal writer of the older generation, in the book *The Disuniting of America* (1991), criticizes a New York state report proposing a new multicultural curriculum for the public schools, saying: "Consider the present-day American literary canon: Emerson, Jefferson, Melville, Whitman, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Lincoln, Twain, Dickinson, William and Henry James, Henry Adams, Holmes, Dreiser, Faulkner, O'Neill. Lackeys of the ruling class? Apologists for the privileged and the powerful? Agents of American imperialism? Come on!"

As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who has emerged as probably the leading black literary critic in the United States, has written in the *New York Times Book Review*, though ethnic or sexual identity is an integral aspect of a writer, "No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world."

VI

The cultural issues that dominated American intellectual life in the mid-years of the century were primarily Modernism and Marxism. Modernism has been absorbed into cultural history, and its later unwinding trails have become simply trendy fashion. It is doubtful that anyone today takes the phrase *avant-garde* seriously. The very term postmodernism indicates the lack of a coherent definition, and its stylistic tricks have become the commonplace staple of television. Marxism has dissolved as an intellectual scheme, and facets of it are now becoming integrated into other perspectives in sociology and political theory. The 1950s saw an interest in existentialism and religion, questions raised by Sartre and Camus, by Tillich, Niebuhr, and Barth. None of these writers is discussed today. The 1950s also saw an effort to understand the complexities of American life through sophisticated sociological reportage, but this was swamped by the upsurge of radicalism in the late 1960s and only now is slowly beginning to return, in such work as Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised Land* (1991), a study of the northward migration of some black families.

The striking thing about the radicalism of the 1960s was its anti-intellectualism and the denunciation of imperialism, though what was propounded was a contradictory mixture of a Leninist theory of imperialism, which said that capitalism would spread throughout the world, and a neo-Marxist theory that capitalism would inhibit the growth of peripheral countries in order to enforce dependency. One looks in vain for any major theoretical innovation since the '60s, other than the "world-systems analysis" of capitalism of Immanuel Wallerstein (inspired by the histori-

cal work of Fernand Braudel), which foretold a socialist revolution sweeping the world in the 21st century but could not account for the decline of the international working class. (Perhaps the "external proletariat" will rise again.)

What is striking about the current intellectual scene is how few individuals have come to the fore as intellectuals speaking to a wide public audience. In 1974, the sociologist Charles Kadushin published a book, *The American Intellectual Elite*, in which he identified 70 people who had been named as "the most prestigious intellectuals" in 1970. Of the first group of 11, four have died, but the others retain their prominence today. Of the second group of 10, six remain prominent, indicating, perhaps, the early age when they began to write and be recognized.*

Of the major Left intellectual figures who emerged in the 1970s—Christopher Lasch, historian and moralist, and Eugene Genovese, historian and sometime editor of *Marxist Perspectives*—both are today disillusioned. Lasch remains skeptical of liberalism and espouses a faith in radical populism, even while he praises traditional family and religious ideals. Genovese, more deeply skeptical of all creeds, has come to appreciate the virtues of the conservative writers of the antebellum South.

To the extent that a group of public intellectuals has appeared, they are primarily journalists who write with a depth of historical or philosophical analysis: George Will, the conservative columnist; Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor of the *New Republic*; Garry Wills, a critic of the Establishment writing for the *New York Review of Books*; and Christopher Jencks, a onetime writer for the *New Republic* and now professor of sociology at Northwestern University, who has written the most careful and wide-ranging studies of poverty and inequality in the United States.

What is perhaps most surprising is that as radical historians have looked back, among them Sean Wilentz at Princeton and Richard Pells of the University of Texas at Austin, they have found a new appreciation of the once-scorned 1950s period in intellectual life. As Pells writes in his book, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* (1984):

These intellectuals . . . all shared a disenchantment with the political and cultural radicalism of the 1930s, together with the need to ask new questions and explore new tensions of a 'post-industrial' society . . . [T]heir desire to act as free-floating intellectuals . . . offered more provocative and imaginative criticism of their society than one can find in the manifestoes of either the 1930s or the 1960s. Indeed, I regard Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, William Whyte's *The Organization Man*, John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd*, Daniel Bell's "Work and its Discontents," Dwight MacDonald's *Against the*

*The first group of 11 (two tied for 10th place) were arranged alphabetically. The asterisks before their names indicate, sadly, the deceased: Daniel Bell; Noam Chomsky; John Kenneth Galbraith; Irving Howe; *Dwight MacDonald; Norman Mailer; *Mary McCarthy; Robert Silvers; Susan Sontag; *Lionel Trilling; *Edmund Wilson. Of the second group, numbers 11 to 20: *Hannah Arendt; Saul Bellow; *Paul Goodman; *Richard Hofstadter; Irving Kristol; *Herbert Marcuse; Daniel Patrick Moynihan; Norman Podhoretz; David Riesman; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

American Grain, Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*, Daniel Boorstin's *The Image*, and C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* as superior in quality to any comparable collection of works produced in America during other periods of the 20th century.

The intellectual life in the United States today is often quite vigorous and scholarly in specific realms. The most striking change is in political and moral philosophy. Thirty years ago, arguments over these questions had been ruled out of philosophy by a positivism that called them emotive or not subject to verification. But philosophical writing in recent years has challenged the normative/factual distinction, while constitutional debates have brought moral issues to the fore.

Richard Rorty has established a reputation for his repudiation of epistemology and his espousal of dialogue as the more meaningful mode of discourse. Hilary Putnam has proposed a modified ground of realism, and Bernard Williams (trans-Atlantic since he spends half the year at Berkeley) has proposed a radical skepticism in ethics. Thomas Nagel on moral questions, Charles Taylor on the nature of the self, and Judith Shklar on the role of ordinary virtues are names that have some public recognition.

In law, the proposed elevation to the Supreme Court of Robert Bork, a former Yale professor, provoked a stormy public debate when he challenged the extension of constitutional reasoning to the issues of privacy. Ronald Dworkin and Laurence Tribe write on public issues, often in the *New York Review of Books*. Some of the most vigorous writing on the law has come from a panoply of conservative writers such as Richard Epstein and John Hart Ely, and from some conservative judges sitting on high benches, such as Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court, Frank Easterbrook and Alex Kozinski on the appeals courts, and the prolific Richard Posner, who has led the way in applying economic reasoning to legal questions.

Economists long ago entered the public arena. Nobel laureates such as Paul Samuelson, Milton Friedman, Robert Solow, and James Tobin, and a number of others have been deeply involved in public-policy questions, none more strikingly than 36-year-old Jeffrey Sachs of Harvard, who has been a major adviser to the governments of Poland and Russia on the conversion to a market economy. But the resolutions these economists propose are more technical than ideological and rarely extend, as debate did up to a decade ago, into the wider intellectual spheres.

Literary theory—other than the vulgar forays into pop sociology—has become virtually hermetic. Kadushin, in his study almost 20 years ago, listed 33 magazines read regularly by the elite intellectuals in his sample. Most of these—*Commentary*, the *American Scholar*, *Daedalus*, *Partisan Review*—have declined drastically in circulation; only the *New York Review of Books* retains a wide audience. If one identifies what today might be considered the leading literary journals, few would have any recognition outside the literary field, and it is doubtful that any are

even read outside the field.*

More to the point, the critics who 40 or so years ago wrote for the intelligent "common reader," such as Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, or Irving Howe, are now dismissed by the literary theorists as "amateurs," for one does not find in their writings the necessary recondite references to Greimas, Propp, Lottman, or other esoteric sources of phonology or semiology and other gnostic tracks into the lair of the Minotaur. Umberto Eco has no counterpart in the United States.

It is not only specialization that has fragmented the intellectual world. Today one finds enclaves that are focused largely on their own concerns and, in some instances, their own ideologies. The most obvious one is the body of feminist critics who have sought to re-interpret the entire range of imaginative writing from their particular perspective, scholarly critics such as Elaine Showalter (Princeton), Catharine Stimpson (Rutgers), Patricia Meyer Spacks (Virginia), Barbara Johnson (Harvard)—though a very powerful critic, Helen Vendler (Harvard), has protested the excesses.

The other major enclave is the black intellectuals. Twenty or 30 years ago, the claims to a special black sensibility were couched largely in nationalist language and were intended less in scholarly than in polemical terms. In recent years, a group of younger black thinkers has emerged, primarily in the university, who have quite thoughtfully begun to debate questions of identity, affirmative action, group coherence, and the like. Orlando Patterson, a sociologist at Harvard, has pointed out that blacks could not claim they have been crippled psychologically through historical disadvantage and at the same time claim the right to compete equally with whites. William Julius Wilson at Chicago has argued that the disadvantages of class, not race, better explain the persistence of black poverty. Conservative black economists such as Thomas Sowell and Glenn Loury reject government welfare programs as being more inimical to the black community and the black family than helpful. Stephen Carter of Yale has questioned the continuing validity of affirmative action, while Randall Kennedy of the Harvard Law School has launched a lively new magazine, *Reconstruction*, to provide a forum for all these questions. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., now at Harvard, a gifted and nimble critic, equally at home with technical literary lingo and with public forums, may now be the focus of Afro-American studies, inasmuch as he has become the head of the Du Bois Institute and the Afro-American studies program at Harvard.

The problems are those of *particularity* and *parochialism*. The claims of particular sensibilities are, like all claims to private language in philosophy, hermetic unless there are some public and shared understandings

*A list compiled by this writer, by asking various book publishers to identify the leading journals, includes: *Critical Inquiry* (Chicago), *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Duke), *Diacritics* (Cornell), *New Literary History* (Virginia), *Representations* (Berkeley), and *Raritan* (Rutgers). *Critical Inquiry*, which has been named as the most important, has a circulation of 3,700.

between readers and writers of different groups. Otherwise one is shuttled, as in the ancient theological debates, between the Monophysites and Nestorians, or is left hanging on the diphthong that separated Homoousians from Homoiousians in the war of sects.

The parochialism of the intellectuals is a symptom of the breakdown of the larger cultural community. Fifty or so years ago, American intellectuals still sought eagerly to share in the cultural life of other countries and to maintain a relationship with European culture. Some of that was due to the huge influx of Europeans during the Nazi period into all fields of American culture—literature, painting, music, as well as the sciences—which gave American life a cosmopolitanism it had previously lacked. Some of it was still the mythos of the Hemingway-Fitzgerald generation seeking to escape the constrictions of American small-town life, some the insatiable curiosity of the New York intellectuals, children of an immigrant generation who sought to claim European culture as their legitimate legacy.

Now, almost all of those impulses and curiosities are gone. Few American writers know the names of counterparts in France, Italy, or Germany. Professional interests have multiplied and professional ties and travel have thickened in different scholarly fields, but the cultural ties have thinned. A sense of exhaustion marks intellectual life, if seen from that broad consideration. Among writers, the generation of Faulkner and Cummings, shaped by World War I, is gone, and that of Bellow and Malamud passing, and only Philip Roth has engaged in the heroic effort to introduce Central European writers to an American public. The next generation of American writers—such as Thomas Pynchon or J. D. Salinger—have retreated, some into silence. The younger writers, the post-Vietnam generation of Don DeLillo, Robert Stone, and Michael Herr, still fueled by rage, play out a phantasmagoria of American life, though Stone has recently become more reflective. For the rest, there are minimalist tricks (Ann Beattie), or *Vanity Fair* pursuits.

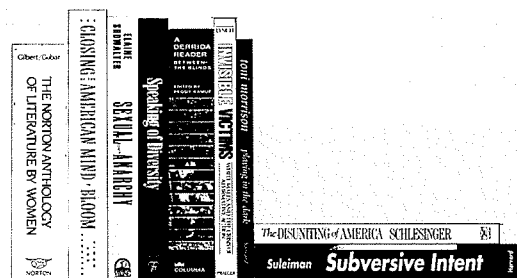
Perhaps there are no more surprises in the world of culture, as the muddle, jumble, tumble of postmodernism attests. As one once talked of the end of ideology, and even the end of history, there is also the theme (enunciated by Arthur Danto) of the end of art. But in the humanist tradition, or even in the philosophy of Hegel, the concept of *end* did not mean the vanishing of forms but of time, and therefore the re-introduction of philosophy, or *realized* form. One hears that new adventures in technology—mixed media, computer-generated images, radical juxtapositions of materials, virtual reality—will open up new horizons. It reminds one a little of the radical agitator who used to proclaim that communism was on the horizon, until he was told that the horizon is an imaginary line that recedes as you approach it.

All of this is past and present. The future, however, may be vastly different, for America itself is changing in far different ways than it has

before. Apart from the persistent problems of poverty and racial tensions, what may be happening is the unraveling of the middle class, and the erosion of its comfortable expectations about the American future. As the economist Robert Solow has written, this generation may be the first in American history that will leave its children poorer than itself. The economic foundation for culture is beginning to show cracks.

For the intellectuals, and the culture, there is another import. The "project" that framed intellectual life during the past 200 years in the West has been utopianism and universalism, the direction of history laid down by the Enlightenment. Those larger visions have now receded and, in a different sense, the terrain in the West is now occupied by a cultural nihilism, a melioristic liberalism, and a conservative defense of traditional values, all of which are oriented to present issues. Outside the West we see the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism that challenges all the values of the West.

All these create different sounds and furies and different kinds of cultural wars. We may be at the end of old ideologies and old History, but there are no unified sets of beliefs to take their place, only the splintering of cultures and political fragmentation. And that is the transition to the 21st century.



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