
journalists see it, "is only to be expected," and thus barely rates a mention.

The Hidden Congress

"Decline and Fall of Congressional News" by Stephen Hess, in *Society* (Jan.–Feb. 1994), Rutgers–The State University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

Once a staple of front pages and nightly news shows, regular coverage of Congress is now scant, especially on TV. CNN is now the only TV news organization that has correspondents covering both the House and the Senate full-time, observes Hess, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution.

One reason for the change, he says, is a shift in power within many "mainstream" news organizations. Key decisions about what gets covered now are often made, not by a bureau chief in Washington, but by home-office editors, to whom the intricacies of the lawmaking process seem a good deal less fascinating.

The definition of "news" also has changed. In 1965, 84 percent of the front-page stories in the *New York Times* during one week were about government and politics; in 1992, only 55 percent

were. The trend has been much the same in TV news. Now, developments in business, health, and culture seem just as newsworthy as Washington doings.

Advances in technology also have had an impact. "When Washington had the only coaxial cable that fed directly into the TV networks' New York headquarters, often more than 60 percent of the items on the evening news programs originated in the capital," Hess points out. Satellites, tape, and portable equipment helped change that in the early 1980s.

At first, the use of satellites increased TV's focus on the nation's capital, as some local stations inaugurated their own Washington coverage. Membership in the Senate Radio and Television Gallery jumped from 750 in 1979 to 2,300 by 1987. Before long, however, many Washington bureaus were shut down. As one news director explained, "Government news is boring."

The problem with the decline of congressional coverage, Hess says, is that while the "boring" regular business of the nation's legislature gets less attention, any hints of official corruption draw throngs of reporters. The result: a distorted picture that suggests to the public that Capitol Hill is little more than the capital of scandal.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Crackup of Philosophy

"American Philosophy Today" by Nicholas Rescher, in *Review of Metaphysics* (June 1993), Catholic Univ. of America, Washington, D.C. 20064.

Early in the 20th century, American philosophy was dominated by a handful of giants—men such as William James, John Dewey, and George Santayana—and their writings affected the thinking of people in many walks of life. For better or worse, observes Rescher, of the University of Pittsburgh, American philosophy today has become "democratized"—and the influence outside the academy of its leading thinkers is virtually nil.

Books such as John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (1971), Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror*

of Nature (1979), and W. V. Quine's *Word and Object* (1960) have produced "large ripples" in the pond of academic philosophy, Rescher acknowledges. But even the most influential philosopher is, these days, just "another—somewhat larger—fish in a very populous sea." The odd fish without approved credentials is not even welcome to join in the swim. A Spinoza or a Nietzsche, he says, "would find it near to impossible to get a hearing in the North American philosophical world of today."

The number of academic philosophers (and, thanks partly to the "publish or perish" ethic, most professors of philosophy can claim to be not just teachers of philosophy but "philosophers") has grown enormously. Membership in the American Philosophical Association has in-

creased more than threefold since 1965; the *Directory of American Philosophers* for 1992–93 lists more than 10,000 academic philosophers in the United States and Canada.

What is most striking about American philosophy, Rescher maintains, is its fragmentation: "Every doctrine, every theory, every approach finds its devotees somewhere within the overall community. On most of the larger issues there are no significant majorities." Indeed, there is not even a consensus on what the urgent problems in philosophy are.

"Specialization and division of labor run rampant, and cottage industries are the order of the day," Rescher says. One cottage industry, for example, has to do with ethical questions in the professions; another, with the epistemology of information processing. Issues that once would have been considered merely bizarre (e.g., "Is Polygamy Good Feminism?") now are solemnly discussed at professional meetings and in the pages of journals. Entire professional societies are devoted to subjects that no one a generation ago would have deemed philosophical (e.g., the Society for the Study of Ethics and Animals).

While American philosophers were once inspired by religion, then took natural science as their guide early in the 20th century, today they draw from a wide variety of sources, ranging from French philosopher Jacques Derrida to mathematician John von Neumann.

"Philosophy—which ought by mission to be and is by tradition an integration of knowledge—has itself become increasingly disintegrated," Rescher laments. Yet American philosophy's "pluralistic character" is just "a realistic and effective accommodation" to the American environment. "One must," Rescher says, "accept the inevitable."

Bishops' Move

"The Politics of the American Catholic Hierarchy" by Timothy A. Byrnes, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Fall 1993), Academy of Political Science, 475 Riverside Dr., Ste. 1274, New York, N.Y. 10115-1274.

The American hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church became very active in national politics during the 1970s and '80s, as the bishops

jumped into the right-to-life movement and published lengthy pastoral letters on U.S. defense and economic issues. As early as 1976, some got involved in national elections. Byrnes, a political scientist at Colgate University, contends that the bishops' new prominence in politics was not entirely their own doing.

Earlier in this century, when many Americans still looked upon "papists" with great suspicion, the bishops spoke out mainly in defense of the patriotism of American Catholics. In some cities, bishops came to have clout with local political leaders. By the 1960s, however, this "parochial" era was essentially over. Prosperous and well-educated, American Catholics no longer needed clerical apologists to provide political leadership. John F. Kennedy's election symbolized the movement of Catholics into the mainstream. But the bishops, encouraged by Pope John XXIII's Second Vatican Council (1962–65), strengthened the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and began to apply Catholic social teaching to national issues.

At the same time, Byrnes points out, the breakdown of the long-dominant Democratic New Deal coalition led some politicians in both parties to appeal to voters on religious grounds. Roman Catholics make up nearly a quarter of the U.S. population (57 million in 1990). The bishops do not control Catholic voters, Byrnes observes, but many politicians "believe, or perhaps fear, that the bishops can still exert a substantial influence" on them. Hence, many candidates have sought to play up their areas of agreement with the bishops and to minimize differences.

Thus, in 1976, three years after *Roe v. Wade*, Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist, met with the NCCB executive committee and tried, unsuccessfully, to paper over his differences with the bishops on abortion. Republican president Gerald Ford, meanwhile, proclaimed his support of an antiabortion constitutional amendment and had the NCCB executive committee to the White House.

By 1984, the bishops had expanded their public agenda to include opposition to nuclear arms and were divided over whether or not