Opening the American Mind: International Political Science*

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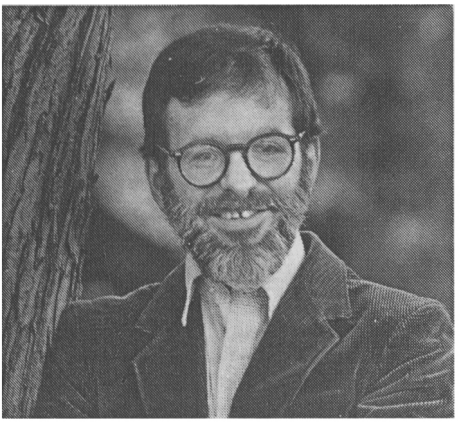
Widespread disagreement over the mission of the university pervades the history of higher education in the United States. This lack of common commitment was noted by Robert Maynard Hutchins, the renowned president of the University of Chicago, who described the modern university as "a series of separate schools and departments held together by a central heating system" (quoted in Fiske, 1986). Recalling Hutchins' comment, Clark Kerr, then president of the University of California, quipped: "In an era where heating is less important and the automobile more, I have sometimes thought of it [the modern university] as a series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking" (quoted in Fiske, 1986).



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Today, these observations are amplified in books, some of them by scholars, which have captured public attention. Although I cannot claim to have studied all the recent books on the so-called crisis of American education, the ones I have consulted finished on the 1987 best-sellers lists: E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* and Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*. Though not open to easy empirical demonstration, mounting frustration over the decline of U.S. competitiveness in the global economy partially accounts for the popularity of these books. There is a widespread belief that power is shifting away from Washington to the Pacific Rim, a notion explored in another best seller by a scholar: Yale historian Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. As in the Sputnik era, a peculiarly American disposition is to think that a large share of human affairs is manageable by knowledge and that higher education is a way to escape the nation's doldrums.

The contributions by Hirsch and Bloom are the occasion for, not the subject of, this article. Stated briefly, my thesis is that these books are framed in a global perspective and embrace a world view that merits careful scrutiny. While reviewers of different persuasions have commented on the ideas of Hirsch and Bloom, to the best of my knowledge critics have not linked the authors' arguments to an articulated world view. To grasp their meaning and implications, the reader has to dig out the ideological underpinnings. Most important in this regard is the distinction between moral relativism and parochialism. In the books being considered here, arguments against the former are merely a defense of the latter. (To reject parochialism, one need not be a moral relativist. Indeed,

https://doi.org/10.2307/419870 Published online by Cambridge University Press

some global educators are anti-relativists who, for example, believe in universal standards of human rights.) Anti-relativists such as Bloom fail to grasp that moral judgments are concrete and thus defensible: open to criticism, evidence, and argument. It is an incapacity to take the place of the other, a pervasive provincialism, that is at the root of an inability to make moral judgments. Hence, indifference is not the consequence of cultural openness, but of provincialism connected to certain analytical deficiencies, discussed below.

Meanwhile, it has passed unnoticed that the acclaim bestowed upon recent books on the supposed crisis in American education could be turned to the advantage of political science. Opening a debate within the profession over proposals for conservative educational reform would help to provide a more clearly defined sense of purpose and may attract greater support for teaching and research.

While I single out political science, my commentary applies to the other social sciences and international studies. In the discussion that follows, I will adopt the term international studies as a shorthand for an interdisciplinary field that encompasses the subdisciplines of comparative politics (including American government) and international relations as well as aspects of political theory and methodology.

Moral Relativism

Of course, the books by Hirsch and Bloom are not a perfect reflection of the criticism of higher education filling newspapers, magazines, and journals. Savants present different visions, angles, and hobbyhorses; the scope of the major works varies enormously. Nonetheless, there appear to be shared themes.

The problem with American education, as Hirsch and Bloom see it, is that students do not know enough and cannot think well enough to function in modern society. For these observers, the blame lies with popular culture, elementary and secondary schools, misguided teachers who offer vocational and trendy subjects, and an incoherent curriculum. The real culprit, however, is moral relativism: the belief that one opinion is as good as another, one fact as salient as the next, and none transcendent above its cultural or historical context.

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To be sure, surveys regularly show that international students outperform their American counterparts, particularly in regard to knowledge of other cultures (Hechinger, 1986). Hirsch cites reports which analyze large quantities of data to indicate that in the United States, children's information about American culture has declined precipitously in recent years (Hirsch, 1987, pp. 7-8). A mastery of national culture, Hirsch argues, is essential to the ability to communicate. While cautioning that nationalism may become excessive, Hirsch claims that multicultural education should not be the main focus in our schools. While multicultural study imparts tolerance and perspective, it should not interfere with the teaching of "American literate culture" (Hirsch, 1987, p. 18). Although his style is generally less combative than Bloom's, Hirsch nonetheless advances a provocative thesis: the absolute standard for education is core information about national—not local or world—culture, itemized in a 64-page list compiled by the author and two of his colleagues at the University of Virginia.

There is no question about the accuracy of Hirsch's empirical findings. But the deeper issue is whether knowledge of brute facts is the test of a successful education. How are the facts selected and which educational values do they represent?

Bloom, a political philosopher at the

https://doi.org/10.2307/419870 Published online by Cambridge University Press

University of Chicago, answers this question: "a smattering of facts learned about other nations or cultures" and relativism, or "openness" to different ways, have eclipsed the real purpose of higher education: the quest for a good life (Bloom, 1987, p. 34). The crisis of liberal education consists of our incapacity to recognize the lack of "a unified view of nature and man's place in it," as was the case when great minds debated on the highest level (Bloom, 1987, pp. 346-47). Students who knew about and loved Western Europe have dwindled, replaced by students focusing on Third World countries and their development needs. "This is not learning from others but condescension and a disguised form of a new imperialism. It is the Peace Corps mentality. . . ." (Bloom, 1987, p. 34).

Standards assigned trans-historical validity do not help in understanding changes in human behavior and the directions in which societies are moving.

At bottom, openness as currently conceived by students is indifference, not the search for knowledge and certitude. Any and all values are deemed morally permissible, anything goes. Bloom's core argument is a paradoxical one: the result of the closing of the American mind is an openness taught in the schools that eliminates the ability to make decisive moral or intellectual judgments.

Moral Ideology

It is not sufficient for our colleges and universities to operate in a cultural warp regardless of the diverse ages, races, and genders of their students. To be well educated is to understand concepts and theories in light of their changing context. In fact, historical inquiry emphasizes the relativeness of human behavior. Historians produce explanation through the use of case studies, the identification of contingent relationships, and critical analysis of competing interpretations. Sensitivity to historical and cultural context is integral to comparative judgment, for such reasoning helps to develop standards for the validity of parallels and lessons, as well as the value of and risks in generalization (Fry, 1987, pp. 10 and 12).

Joining forces, the anti-relativists and cultural nationalists champion the cause of insularity.

Nowhere do the anti-relativists take insensitivity to, or ignorance about, non-Western cultures to be a problem. Nowhere do the anti-relativists consider ethnocentrism to be a shortcoming. Rather, Bloomians push the moral relativist argument to the extreme of absolute tolerance of all beliefs. Presumably, these beliefs include genocide, anti-Semitism, and racism—a position few relativists would defend.

The real challenge is to strike a balance between universal norms, such as freedom from violations of the integrity of the person or the protection of civil and political liberties, and the social basis for achieving these rights. For example, the State Department's 1987 human rights report noted that Mozambique, a centralized single party state that professes a Marxist-Leninist ideology, closely controls the electoral process and does not permit citizens to change their government; organized political opposition is proscribed (U.S. Department of State, 1988, p. 203). From a historical perspective, however, it is important to bear in mind that until 1975, Mozambique was ruled not by a liberal colonial power but by Portugal, the longest-lived fascist regime on record. The elections held since independence have in fact

marked the first time when all adult Mozambicans, save those who had served the colonial state, were entitled to vote. Proportionally, there are more women in Mozambique's Popular Assembly than in the U.S. House of Representatives (Isaacman, 1979; Mittelman, 1988, p. 129-155). That Mozambican men and women readily dissent and are encouraged to voice criticism in the single party, but not in public, is certainly a step forward from what they knew under colonialism. The point is that by themselves, standards assigned transhistorical validity do not help in understanding changes in human behavior and the directions in which societies are moving.

Without sufficient institutional capacity or bona fide commitment, internationalizing the curriculum could actually miseducate students.

Conservative educational reformers cannot demonstrate the anti-relativist thesis to be philosophically correct. Sometimes they argue by assertion. A recent example is former Secretary of Education William J. Bennett's charge that a revision of Stanford University's Western culture requirement to incorporate the work of women and minority writers was a "capitulation to a campaign of pressure politics and intimidation" ("Bennett," 1987, p. A2). In opposing the Faculty Senate compromise calling for a "Culture, Ideas, and Values" requirement, Bennett alluded to Bloom's thesis: "We have seen in this instance the closing of the Stanford mind" ("Bennett," 1987, p. A2). The former Secretary of Education indicated that the explanation for what happened at Stanford is that Stanford, like many universities, is controlled by "a standard kind of left-wing agenda" consisting of a "combination of Marxism and feminism" ("Bennett," 1987, p. A2).

There is no question that educators should assign serious works that teach analytical skills. But why should all of the books be derived from a single cultural tradition? Where is the empirical evidence to sustain the argument that students have migrated from Western to Third World studies? According to data generated by the Institute of International Education (1987, p. 81), the vast majority of U.S. study abroad students are concentrated in one region: in the 1985-86 academic year, 76.8% of them chose Western Europe. In comparison, Latin America received 7.0% of the total U.S. study abroad population; South and East Asia, 5.4%; the Middle East, 4.0%; and Africa, 1.1%. The United Kingdom, the destination of 29.3% of U.S. students who went abroad, accounted for more of them than did the entire Third World. All of the top five countries were in Western Europe; after the United Kingdom came France (13.7%), Spain (8.8%), Italy (7.8%), and the Federal Republic of Germany (6.1%).

Without adducing any data to back their claims, the anti-relativists emphasize absolute moral values. But what are they? How does one identify them? Putting aside apriority, what method does one adopt? Bloom does not say. Instead, he propounds moral ideology: normative conceptions that have the appearance of universality and are constitutive of social relations.

Developing global perspectives is a commendable objective, but one that is operationally elusive.

For Bloom, these conceptions take the form of certitude and are for consumption at elite universities by students who will be streamed into society's leading roles in business and the professions. For Hirsch, underlying values are separable from the facts that Americans need to know about

https://doi.org/10.2307/419870 Published online by Cambridge University Press

national culture. He assumes that logical positivism is a nonideological form of inquiry. In extolling cultural nationalism, Hirsch makes no attempt to clarify values or to consider competing perspectives emerging from other cultures. Joining forces, the anti-relativists and cultural nationalists champion the cause of insularity.

Overcoming Provincialism

What goals might be adopted to overcome provincialism in American higher education? What concrete steps might be taken to remedy this problem? To answer, it may be useful to reaffirm the purposes of, and strategies for, building international studies. While elements of this rationale may be taken for granted on some campuses, struggles over curriculum are rife elsewhere.

Clearly, wide swings in scholarship, rather than enduring concerns, impede better understanding.

The purpose of international studies is to enable students to see the broad picture, understand competing perspectives, and grasp not only single issues but especially interconnections (e.g., between the arms race and development). To realize this purpose presupposes attaining certain competencies, four of which I deem crucial: theory and general concepts, knowledge of history, familiarity with a specific area or region of the world (including at least one of the languages spoken there), and practical skills such as computing or statistics. It is tempting to go into detail regarding each of these competencies or what constitutes an appropriate skill mix, but fastening curricular nuts and bolts is not possible here.

Taken together, the above mentioned competencies give international studies their coherence and intellectual integrity. As a field of inquiry, international studies look beyond national frontiers and adopt the world as a unit of analysis. Surely the lessons of Bhopal and Chernobyl call for global perspectives, for in a technological and nuclear era, there are no isolated problems. International studies meet practical needs, including metamorphoses in the global political economy and the changing cultural matrix of our cities. Moreover, familiarity breeds blindness; the shock of difference promotes self-understanding. To take a single example, confronting racism as it exists in its most virulent form—i.e., south of the Zambesi River—can enable students to better comprehend their own country. Given the immense power of the United States, our values and policies ought to be studied, for they touch virtually all peoples (see "Educating for the World View," 1980).

Before proceeding, a note of caution is in order. Nowadays, internationalizing the curriculum is a buzz word on many campuses. Quite clearly, it is essential to avoid programming for its own sake. Without sufficient institutional capacity or bona fide commitment, internationalizing the curriculum could actually miseducate students. Hence, the first step must be to set concrete goals, for the beauty of the theme of "internationalization" is that it can become an infinite process, one that is never completed, for there are always new issues and needs (McCaughey, 1984, p. 211). Developing global perspectives is a commendable objective, but one that is operationally elusive.

Broadly speaking, there are three ways to internationalize a curriculum: designing core courses, mounting a program, or infusing campus life with global activities. One can obviously choose among these strategies or combine them. But what is to be avoided is the temptation to put frills such as exchanging academic delegations ahead of the essential task of building from the ground up. This requires consistent cultivation of close working relations between faculty and students.

Tensions and Challenges

However carefully crafted and piloted, international studies typically engender three sets of tensions. One is between

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functional concentrations and area studies. Whereas the former focuses on holistic problems such as global conflict, development, human rights and technology, the latter entails detailed investigation of a particular region or country. Another tension is felt between the analytical powers of the disciplines and the value of interdisciplinary twinning in such fields as international political economy. While it is important to expose students to the content and methods of the several social sciences, problems of the real world—policy issues—cross disciplinary boundaries and require the integration of different branches of knowledge. Finally, theorists are the knowers, whose emphasis differs from the more concrete approach of the doers. The opposition between learning and application, like the other tensions, really represents the poles of a spectrum. These tensions are not dichotomies but a continuum of knowledge (Goheen, 1987, pp. 20-21).

Both curriculum and research are subject to rapidly shifting priorities. Ten to 20 years ago, a period of exuberance about the apparent expansion of international organizations (especially the European Community, the East African Community, and the Caribbean Community and Common Market), studies of regional integration came into vogue. Then during the Carter years, human rights was a popular topic. In the Reagan era, conflict-oriented research was the fashion. Clearly, wide swings in scholarship, rather than enduring concerns, impede better understanding (Puchala, 1982, pp. 5-6).

In this respect, Bloom is on target. Higher education should go back to the basics in order to go forward from there. Then we can adapt old concepts to new problems, albeit ones for which they were not intended. To be sure, new problems require new answers.

In rehabilitating wisdom from a bygone era, one can recognize that competing viewpoints are tolerable and even reasonable. It is not moral relativism, as the champions of national culture and insularity would have it, but parochialism that precipitates indifference. In a paradoxical sense, Bloom is right again, but at the juncture where he contradicts himself: "The kinds of questions Tocqueville put to America—the answers to which allowed him to affirm the justice of equality more reasonably and more positively than most of us can do—came out of an experience that we cannot have: his direct experience of an alternative regime and temper of soul—aristocracy" (Bloom, 1987, p. 248). Nineteenth-century aristocracy aside, Bloom articulates the very purpose of international studies: to make a range of possibilities accessible to students who would not otherwise have them.

As struggles over curriculum develop, it is essential to eschew moral ideologies and advance critical scholarship: an appraisal of the assumptions, genesis, and possible transformation of a given framework of action (for a discussion of critical inquiry and theoretical arguments, see Cox, 1987). The immediate tasks are to erode the divisions between branches of learning, form wider intellectual communities, and share a sense of the manifest diversity of the human experience. This is the way to open the American mind.

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James H. Mittelman is professor of political science and Dean of the Faculty of the Social Sciences at Queen's College, City University of New York. His most recent book is *Out from Underdevelopment: Prospects for the Third World* (London: Macmillan, and New York: St. Martin's, 1988).

Note

I owe a debt of gratitude to Lawrence Weiss, who alerted me to the Institute of International Education's data on the U.S. study abroad population. For comments on an earlier draft of this essay, I wish to thank James A. Caporaso, Peter Manicas, Irving Leonard Markovitz, Linda Yarr, and Burton Zwiebach.

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Discretion in Editorial Decision-Making: The Case of the Journal of Politics

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Refereed journals occupy a central role in the life of the profession. They provide the vehicle for the communication of ideas and information within the scholarly community. Moreover, publication in journals, particularly in the more important journals of the discipline, is taken as an indication of an individual's scholarly abilities and weighs heavily in annual evaluations and in decisions regarding tenure and promotion.

Do reviews provide generally clear and consistent guidance to editors?

While journals play such a prominent role in the profession and in the lives of its individual members, relatively little empirical evidence exists on the decision-making calculus which the journals employ (for an exception see Patterson, et al., 1987 *PS*). The mechanics of anonymous peer review are well-known, but the reliability of the reviewing process and the degree to which editorial discretion is exercised in the decisional process has more often been the basis for convention anecdotes than for serious analysis. Do reviews provide generally clear and consistent guidance to editors? Do editors' decisions adhere to or depart from the recommendations of the reviewers? The present study provides information on these important questions by examining the reviewing and decisional processes of *The Journal of Politics* for the

https://doi.org/10.2307/419870 Published online by Cambridge University Press