

BARBARIC PROFESSION

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gle out of the cave of such orthodoxy and dogmatism by the express use of reason. But this process is essentially one of "unlearning" what we have blindly acquired so that we may free ourselves for the intellectual apprehension of the Truth. For Plato, this is a life-long inductive process in which we increasingly forsake particulars for a vision of those general principles, or ideals, those eternal forms, that anchor the cosmos. The knowledge of the Good, of the highest form, is paramount to a truly liberated mind, one that has abandoned a petty preoccupation with imminent particulars for a vision of universal laws.

It is during the middle ages that the Greek sense of a liberal education is gradually abandoned. Plato had indeed advocated the study of Music, Gymnastics, and especially Mathematics, but not as ends in themselves. They were the "arts," the "skills" that could lead one toward the truth, but only by going beyond them into Dialestis. They were the can opener but not the caviar. But by the sixth century A.D., medieval scholastics had standardized the "trivium" and "quadrivium" into a course of study that has come down to us as the "liberal arts." The "trivium" consisted of grammar, logic and rhetoric; the "quadrivium" consisted of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. It takes little imagination to see in this course of study the basic requirements for the normal Bachelor's degree in almost any college of Liberal Arts. Whereas Plato advocated these studies as a means to a higher vision of the Truth, the medieval scholastics advocated them as a means to the parochial end of better serving God. We today have simply completed this trend toward particularizing those arts. We advocate the liberal arts as a means to becoming a bus driver or a Ph.D., as a means to "professional success," by

which we mean a devotion to money, or some unquestioned orthodoxy.

Ortega y Gasset, in his essay "The Barbarism of Specialization," has clearly argued that the narrowness of mind required by most "professions" is a kind of ignorance. Nowhere is this clearer than in the way we educate our teachers in our universities, and in the way our teachers educate the rest of us throughout our schools. If one seeks to obtain a Ph.D. degree, he must write a dissertation that makes "a significant contribution to new knowledge." He can increasingly only do that by writing in a field so specialized that few people have written in it before. He is required to narrow and focus his view rather than to expand it. Then he is a "specialist." Upon graduation he is hired to teach his "speciality" at some college or university and he is rewarded for extensive publication in "specialist" journals. He belongs to a specific discipline, of which he frequently becomes jealous. So philosophers will avoid football coaches, and engineers will avoid poets. The modern university becomes a multi-versity ridden with factions.

These attitudes carry over into undergraduate education, and to education in high schools too. We coerce students into choosing a curriculum in high school - general, commercial, or academic - that will lead to a specialty. At college, we

sharply define separate disciplines, separate majors, even within the college of Liberal Arts. When a student takes a course in liberal arts, he is given information and then asked to regurgitate that information on a multiple choice test. Such activities more resemble a kind of conditioning than they do a liberating education. We train our teachers, train our students, much as we train our dogs--with some specific "professional" end in view, or to train him only in a narrow discipline, is to deliberately train him in a mode of ignorance. For no training of any kind is consistent with the liberal ideal of an "activity pertaining to a free man."

In what way does it free him? In what way does it liberate him? To replace the tyrant of youthful ignorance with the tyrant of mature parochialism or vocationalism or orthodoxy is not to free man at all.

The way in which we profess to teach the liberal arts is barbaric. Because we have forgotten the true meaning and goal of the liberal arts, because we have forgotten that they are "those skills which make us free," we have crippled liberal education and made it into a mode of vocational training. In doing this we behave as barbarians, as men foreign to the classical Greek and Roman ideals of "liberalis" and "artem." It is terrifying to think that exactly those persons who pretend to imitate Socrates or Pericles, are really the new Alarik.

*All of the word analyses in this essay, and much of the information upon which it is based, and much of its wording, are based on the definitions of "Art," "Liberal," and "Barbarian" found in the Unabridged Oxford Dictionary of the English Language.

ACORNS

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Mrs. Dr. David. Eric Bell and Richard Campbell were seen climbing some oak trees, Richard asking, "What is Knowledge?" and Eric replying, "Who cares?"

Several days have gone by now and the upper classmen have recovered from the shock. The freshmen have been quietly seen in the Library with their coloring books.

It was noted that the Shields Building was at fault. Some secretary had pushed the wrong button on the computer; therefore, Mrs. Bushbottom's Kiddy College class was sent to Highacres by mistake. The situation has been corrected and things should be back to normal by next week.

Dean Mac----- stated that he felt there was no need for further disciplinary action. He then quietly excused himself and walked toward the Library with his coloring book under his arm.