

OPINIONS

Defending the arts and humanities

by Paul M. Marini
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Math and science may feed the body, but the arts and humanities feed the soul. I'm the first to admit that math and science are both honorable subjects to study, after all, no matter what culture one lives in, it is inevitable that its technology will advance.

However, the latter subjects - the arts and humanities - must not be denied. You might ask: what would happen if the greatest majority of college students receiving diplomas were math and science graduates?

True, the U.S. would have the greatest technological advantage the world over, but our American culture would eventually die. Let me add that I am not trying to make all my readers switch to Liberal Arts majors, I am just stating that the liberal arts can only enhance a person.

First of all, some say that studying the arts and humanities

humanities is or becomes more human; studying such subjects as literature and music will help make you a more "well-rounded" person.

This is true if you are studying more than just one culture. And what do I mean by "well-rounded"? A person who strives to be well-rounded will have more material at his or her disposal to form a more educated opinion. Also, this will enable him or her to back up his or her opinion with facts.

Second, studying the arts and humanities will give you a broader appreciation of art and literature. It will help you understand what a piece is getting at. Needless to say, I am not stating that you have to like a piece of art in order to understand it.

is 'passé'. I say, far from it. As the name implies, the primary purpose of studying the

An example would be music - an art form that everyone is familiar with. When a song comes on the radio, you can hear

what style or "mood" the song is. A Blues song has a very different "mood" than a pop song. However, you may not even like Blues or Pop, but you can still appreciate where the performer is coming from.



Third, contrary to popular belief, the American culture is not just MTV and McDonald's. I have no wish to censor either of them, because both wonders of technology have their good points. But if your whole social

life revolves around Beavis and Butt-head or "Super Mario Bros." GET OFF THE COUCH!

When I was a boy around eight, my parents told me that watching too much TV would rot my brain. Of course, it doesn't literally, but if all I did was watch TV, I would be no smarter than the chair I was sitting on. My brain would rot, but not in a physical sense.

As my final point, the arts and humanities should in no way be censored or altered. I take that back: they must not be censored or altered.

As my 12th grade English teacher Mrs. J. put it, "God forbid someone would want to think for himself!"

For example, three or four years back, several school boards across the country were considering banning Huck Finn because of certain racial slurs in the book. Of course people were going to be upset by those slurs, but Mark Twain used the language to effectively get his

point across. Another example would be the musical Hair, the "rock musical" which the song "Age of Aquarius" comes from. This musical contains "adult" language and some nudity in it, but it captures the spirit and protest of the sixties. In fact, next summer, the Erie Playhouse will perform it, and Erie is a very conservative city.

In conclusion, the more music, drama, art, etc. you experience, the more well-rounded you'll be. In fact, I dare anyone reading this column to go out and see a show at the Roadhouse or Erie Playhouse.

The United States alone has a plethora of culture in its past. This includes everyone from Louis Armstrong to Jimi Hendrix, from Mark Twain to John Steinbeck, from Rodgers and Havverstein to Stephen Sondheim, and the list goes on. If today's youth become more interested in trash than art, that's all the American culture will be - passed.

Dave goes to Italy

by Dave Berry
Syndicated Columnist

Recently, in an effort to gain insight into the European currency crisis, not to mention large quantities of weight, my family and I went to Italy.

Our plan was to rent a car and drive around on winding, picturesque Italian roads. Because we are international travel sophisticates, we went in the middle of August, which is when the entire population of Italy, including statues, goes on vacation. It turns out that the No. 1 Italian vacation activity is to get in a car and drive around on winding, picturesque roads, at approximately the speed of light.

I imagine that some traffic maneuvers are illegal in Italy. For example, you're probably not allowed to drive your car over a uniformed police officer without signaling. But other than that, pretty much anything goes. When we picked up our car in Rome, I asked a man for directions; he told me to start by driving the wrong way up a one-way street.

"Isn't that a one-way street?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, shrugging. "But who reads the signs?"

As far as I could tell, in 10 days of driving around Italy, there is only one strict traffic

regulation: You are NOT allowed to be behind another motorist. If somebody is in front of you, you MUST, by law, get past this person, even if you are on a winding, hillside road the width of a strand of No. 8 spaghetti, next to a humongous cliff. Several times I was passed by drivers who, as far as I could tell, got past me by driving right off the cliff's edge, so that their cars were briefly hanging right out in space, the way the cartoon Road Runners does.

We were on many small roads, because we stayed in some picturesque hill villages built a thousand years ago by people who put massive stone walls around them to indicate that these villages were never intended for automobile traffic. But you have to try to drive in them anyway, to reach your hotel. To do this, you follow a series of arrows, apparently put up by prankster villagers, which lead you through a winding maze of streets, sometimes passing the same point four or five times before reaching the center of the town, where the pranksters laugh and laugh as you inch your car through streets so narrow that they make the winding, hillside road look like the New Jersey turnpike, with stone walls

practically scraping you car on both sides and even overhead, so that you appear to be driving inside ancient Roman air-conditioning ducts, clenching the wheel in terror, convinced that you're about to drive into somebody's living room. The only indication that you are on a legal automotive thoroughfare is that occasionally an Italian driver



will pass you if necessary by driving on your roof.

Once we reached the hotel, we did fine, thanks to my sophisticated international knowledge of Italian. I had memorized the Italian expressions for "I do not speak Italian," and "Do you speak English?" As a result, on two occasions, I strode confidently up to the hotel desk person and stated, in

crude Italian, "I do not speak English."

Fortunately, the Italians are low on snoot, so we were treated well despite communicating like tourist versions of Tonto ("We stay in room with toilet, yes?"). We ate many wonderful meals in the Italian style, wherein they keep bringing you more courses, and when you finally stagger away from the table, they follow you to your room and stuff food into your mouth while you sleep. We also saw several hundred thousand important and historic ruins, cathedrals, statues, paintings, frescoes, mosaics, arches, relic, etc., which eventually formed one massive unforgettable throbbing historic blob in our minds.

At one point, we were in a very important church in Venice, and a guide was pointing toward the historic spot where St. Mark was entombed, and my son, looking impressed, said, quote, "THE St. Mark?"

But of all our experiences, the one I remember most vividly was when we were in the Dolomite Alps, an area of historical importance and spectacular natural beauty, and I realized -- as perhaps such visitors as Hannibal and Napoleon had realized before me -- that our passports were

missing. So I reported this loss to the local police, who typed up and handed me a detailed document that I believe said, in Italian: "The people holding this document have no idea what it says, but it will certainly get them out of our hair. Thank you."

In my sophistication, I actually believed that this document would be an adequate replacement for our passports. You can image how comical this seemed to the authorities when we got to the Milan airport and attempted to leave Italy. So our plane took off without us, and we got to spend a whole extra day in Italy, rearranging our travel plans and trying to prove to the American Consulate that we were Americans and should be permitted to return home. During this process, I thought a lot about Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, whom our government cheerfully admitted despite the fact that he listed his occupation, on his visa application, as "Terrorist Loon."

Not that I am bitter.

Anyway, we eventually got home, bringing with us valuable insights into the European currency situation, the main one being that if you go over there, you should take a lot of it.