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The Academy's Inherent Racism

By

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“Πολυμαθητη νοον εχειν ου διδασκει...”

Heracleitus

How is racism, which I believe is inherent in the structure of the Academy, possible? How is it, that it is *countenanced*, even when not actually embraced?

Put this way, I *should* be carrying out a properly critical enterprise. That is defined as an inquiry which begins with an examination of the apparent particular, with regard to the universal in it. Since we haven't got all day, I am going to proceed dogmatically — subsuming the particular case under universals.

I shall argue that the Academy — which I use here to refer to the whole academic constellation — this college, this university and other institutions of higher education, here and elsewhere — is caught on a trilemma, the horns of which are limiting characteristics *built into* the academy and which make it impossible for the academy to be anything but a hotbed of uncritical prejudice. This is universally so, and indeed, *necessarily* so, for the academy as we know it.

The first horn is conceptual: Within social enclaves there is a “high culture” as well as local or provincial cultures. The Academy conceives itself as a repository of the “high culture”¹ of the society within which it exists. What is done “within the walls” is cultural; what happens outside is at least suspect.

The second horn is constitutional: Any organization is an expression of the

¹ “High culture” is a term of art; it refers to the *standard* culture of a society's leaders. Some people set the style for things and other people accept that leadership, if they are “in the know.” The further one gets from the centers of a society, the more “provincial” the culture — it diverges from “high” culture.

people and *personæ* it organizes. The academy is constituted largely of “don-ish” sorts, and the Academy reflects the character that suggests.

The third horn of the trilemma is historical: The academy (in all its senses) is in history and historical, and as such a bearer of tradition. In an *Überlieferungsgeschichte*,² there is an interpretive moment, and through interpretation, some very unpleasant things have transpired.

* * *

Let’s begin with the last horn, the historical and interpretive problem, first; this is the most substantial aspect of my thinking.

Throughout the first two centuries of the modern period,³ the academy tended to go along very much as it had from the end of the Middle Ages, with limited changes made in rather *ad hoc* fashion. The university which fostered the great thoughts of the Enlightenment was not vastly different from that which gave rise to the Scholasticism generally rejected by modern thinkers.

In that same two-century period, the natural sciences and the engineering they support had advanced dramatically from the innovations made in the late Middle Ages and during the transition from Middle Ages to Modernity. The issues of concern to those

² *Überlieferungsgeschichte* is a rather interesting term, developed in Gadamer’s *Wahrheit und Methode*. *Überlieferung* is “tradition;” *Geschichte* is “history.” The combination is strange; the expression seems meaningless in English. As I use the term here, “tradition” is a sort of tail hanging out behind and, as the say is, we have a case of the “tail wagging the dog.” “History” is an interpretation of that tail — evaluating, making rational and appropriating tradition. This makes the correct translation something like “historicized Tradition.” [This may be a very different understanding of the term than Gadamer wants to purvey.] The Academy may be more completely at the mercy of its own tradition than most other institutions; that is another matter for another time when a more critical examination is possible.

³ Modernity is, somewhat arbitrarily, dated from the beginning of the 17th century; some people would say it has come to an end, or is ending now.

interested in “engineering” society and seeking a social science comparable to natural science, lagged considerably in development.⁴

The early part of the 19th century was marked by some important changes in both these quarters. The concept and structure of the university was greatly changed. An important methodological determination was made as to ways of “firming up” social-scientific speculation.

The origin of what became an almost universal university reform program is generally attributed to Alexander von Humboldt— part of a very illustrious family (his brother, Karl Wilhelm, was no slouch), and a real candidate for the accolade of universal genius. His changes in the structure of the universities in Brandenburg-Prussia shifted focus from lecturing to research, and the changes were rapidly imposed, *mutatis mutandis*, throughout the Academy (with the notable exception of Great Britain’s ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which managed to remain firmly grounded in the mediæval tradition until well into the present century, and the United States, which only began serious change at the beginning of the 20th century from the English model). Variations on the theme — already at work in the wake of the Revolution — changed the nature of universities in France and Austria, and to a lesser extent, in northern Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium, Spain, the Scandinavian countries and even still-semi-barbaric Russia.

⁴ Biological science seems to have been in a “bridge” system, lagging vis-à-vis the physical sciences, but ahead of the examination of the strictly social sciences. This is not to ignore some very pointed speculation on matters of individual and social characteristics during the 17th century, and very skillful reflection on such topics during the Enlightenment in France, with far-reaching influence. But the key event in the development of social science — the application of d’Oresme’s dictum, that qualities could be quantified as qualities in ratios, by J. S. Mill — did not happen until well into the 19th century. Developing bureaucratic government wanted better tools; it did not get them as fast as it wanted; as the social sciences emerge as well-defined disciplines in the 19th century, they are quickly introduced into government. E. g., in the U. S., the Bureau of Ethnology (“official” anthropology) is busy measuring skulls in the 1880s.

There are some interesting aspects to this change. First, it was clearly a change in Academic structure. The faculty (at least, *ordinarii*; *extraordinarii*, *Assistenten* and *Privatdozenten* remained peripheral) under its Rector and Deans, determined the curriculum; the State, through what were generally admitted to be the most competent of civil departments, managed university operations without faculty interference. The idea that a dean, coming up from among the faculty, should actually be involved in the administration of the university, was an appalling notion, so it seems. Part of this was clearly that professors should teach and think and so on; part of it, I am quite certain, was a recognition that your average don, if any good at all as a scholar and teacher, simply isn't a very good administrator, in most cases

Though there was a change in the academic structure involving substantial state control, there appears to have been a realization that only scholars of great puissance are qualified to recognize and elevate one of their own. Along with control of the curriculum, the *ordinarii* remained vested with the authority to call a suitably qualified person to a university chair.

A professor, having been called, entered (enters) into negotiations with the government, as to the elements of the research institute that becomes part of his charge. How much will he make? How many assistants can be brought into the institute and so on. Once installed, and within his institute, the professor was to a great extent sacrosanct.⁵

It is a remarkable system, and it worked very well indeed, in all its variant forms.

⁵ The professor was also, of course, politically neutralized. Government would tolerate all kinds of things, even politically unpalatable things, within the walls of the university; it was smart enough to control the expression of such things outside the walls. Thus Kant ("Think what thou wilt, but obey!") and Hegel and others, to the present time, were secure in their positions, but did not publish certain of their doctrines.

Germany and other Continental countries (and of course, Scotland — always more in the orbit of France, intellectually, than England) had universities where scholarly research delivered the goods — big-time. This structure survived intact until the early 1970s, and in large part, survives still.

The second interesting aspect of this change is its effect on the United States. U.S. education was collegiate until the last quarter of the 19th century, for all intents and purposes.⁶ Colleges had as their models, ultimately, the colleges of the universities of England (*not* Scotland...). Advanced study meant travel abroad — to Scotland or the Continent (it varied depending on specialty as to where one went for study).

In the latter part of the 19th century, scholars who had made that journey began convincing the colleges at which they taught to add graduate study programs⁷. Commonly, these were separately administered; a person might teach in the college at the core of the growing university, and he (women didn't play in this arena) might also teach graduate courses, but the two lines were, in important ways, separate jobs. Graduate programs focused on research, in the European fashion, and soon embraced studies never part of the firmly classical curriculum which had always been the foundation of the college regimen.

⁶ Some colleges had medical faculties, but independent medical colleges were common; e.g., what is now NYU's school of dentistry began as a separate dental college — quite respectable and run by MDs. Things began to change in the 1880s, but the shift from colleges to universities as the academic norm in the U. S. was still debatable in the 1950s. For example, the noted scholar, John Cranford Adams, as president of Hofstra College, planned to expand the college as a top-notch undergraduate institution. The trustees thought otherwise, bagged the great Shakespeare scholar, and made the changes requisite to make Hofstra a university. There are some questions as to how effective this has been. Another example of the controversy: the city colleges remain more independent than the name "CUNY" would suggest.

⁷ I believe Clark University, in Worcester, was particularly notable for its pioneering effort. Harvard's programs and those of Columbia were more organic outgrowths of programs centered in museums affiliated with the university (e. g., the Peabody museum and the American Museum of Natural History).

This is a momentous change. We, right here in this room, stand at the tail end of what resulted. A greater change was happening in the social sciences.

Never forget: these disciplines, as something separated out from more general history and moral and political philosophy, simply didn't exist much before the middle of the 19th century as special subjects. What we would recognize as psychology, for example, can be dated rather precisely to Wundt in the mid-1870s — and it was a philosopher (Franz Brentano, in *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*) who offers the counter to Wundt's experimentalism. John Stuart Mill had separated out the quantifiable (in a strange sort of way; see my note *supra*) from the merely qualitative, and claimed for the first science, relegating the latter to philosophy; this was surely a dramatic *volte-face* from the situation in the third quarter of the 18th century, when Adam Smith's lectures, from which *Wealth of Nations* derives, were the meat of a course in moral philosophy.

Anthropology,⁸ in particular, arising in a very general way at the end of the 18th century, and driven by the new Idealism prevalent as the Enlightenment⁹ closes, shows

⁸ Not a "scientific" anthropology; in the U. S., anyway, that awaits Franz Boas and his legion of students. European anthropology is equally unclear as a special discipline until the very end of the 19th century. The *usual* admixture was some kind of anthropological interest upon academic biology; Boas is rather interesting, as he represents the same kind of influence on physics (his dissertation was on refraction in water). Boas is also interesting because he was influenced by the early stirrings of the Neo-Kantian revival, having spent time studying with Benno Erdmann.

⁹ The term, Enlightenment, and its German coordinate, *Aufklärung*, needs some discussion: This period, it seems to me, is the culmination of the Early Modern period, and can be roughly dated to the second and third quarters of the 18th century. All the fruitful notions of 17th century are well worked out, and the interpretations have been tested, both in the academy (through voluminous correspondence and publishing) and at court (this is the age of the enlightened monarch, after all). The summary steps are very visible, in the publications of the Scottish Common Sense thinkers (e. g., Adam Smith — note his close affiliation with both English and French thinking in *Wealth of Nations*), in the first elaborations of philosophical critique (Kant's inaugural dissertation, e. g.), and in that most enlightened of revolutions, that of England's 13 fractious American colonies (whose documents are very self-consciously grounded in the common culture of the Enlightenment). The last quarter of the 18th century involves working through this summary — and the first stirrings of something very different in Modern thinking. By the end of the century, Idealism and Romanticism

the origins of what we now call racism in developing social science. What appears to have happened is that a general sense of difference among cultures sharpens into an evaluation.

George Stocking, in a very interesting series of essays on the history of anthropology,¹⁰ illustrates the shift from Enlightenment approaches to those of the early 19th century in a comparison of the ethnological perspectives of Joseph Marie de Gérando with those of Georges Cuvier — and indeed, of Cuvier with himself.

Degerando (as he was more commonly known) grew up after the climax of the Enlightenment, but his perspective is still, I think, relatively free of the pessimism and prejudice of later social science vis-à-vis other cultures. To be savage is to be different, but not for that reason necessarily inferior, to Western Europeans.¹¹

have erupted. Fichte, Schelling and Hegel are moving to center-stage in Germany — Kant, initially interested, ends up repudiating what Fichte does with the critical philosophy. Smith's admirable account of how things work in political economy gives rise to "Classical Economics" in Malthus and Ricardo; in it, the invisible hand moves without reference to common sense. The French revolution is very different from its American predecessor.

Of the several differences between the Enlightenment, and the period that comes after it, it seems to me the change in understanding of what is really real — a matter of ontology — may be the most significant. Enlightenment thinkers are pretty much ontological Realists; there really is something "out there" to be known. This is as true for Kant as it is for Hume. Enlightenment thinkers are epistemological Idealists; all we can know is that of which we have direct experience, and that is the idean. After the end of the 18th century (and I think, even earlier in some special circumstances), this is no longer a tenable division. That which is really real for Idealism is like that which is really knowable — the idean alone. This perspective becomes dominant in all European thinking; even in England, British Idealism, is (as Charles Sherover has said) simply a translation of continental, especially German, idealism. But I think a case can be made that a "minority opinion" survives, which remains stubbornly convinced of the existence of an other, even as Idealism is become ever more extravagant in its claims (as an example of extravagance, consider the doctrines of McTaggart).

¹⁰ George W. Stocking, jr., *Race Culture & Evolution*: New York (Free Press), 1968. In particular, the essays comprising chapters 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 are very nice grist for this paper's mill. Stocking's understanding of his discipline's history, and its place in the larger scheme of things is very good, and I have been inclined to defer to that perspective where it has differed from my own.

It should be noted that racial formalism, which has such unfortunate effects in the social sciences, especially when they become "official" science from the 1880s on, has its roots in Biology, especially the taxonomical treatises of the Johann Friedrich Blumenbach; cf: Gould, "The Geometer of Race," in *Discover*, Vol. XV, no. 11 (November, 1994), p. 65ff.

¹¹ Stocking, *op. cit.*, p. 23

Cuvier presents a more complex picture. There is, according to Stocking, a marked shift from a young scholar unwilling to admit *necessary* difference between the bearers of savage cultures and those possessed of Western European civilization, and a more mature scholar some thirty years later, who not only asserts the difference, but makes it a matter of *physiological* necessity. This latter difference is also a mark of inferior competence; no African race could have built Egyptian civilization.¹²

I find very little discussion of race as something well defined and other than arbitrary in the Enlightenment and its coda. With the swing into Idealism and Romanticism, race is a great issue; it is something absolute and capable of close definition, and its mensuration is the foundation of a great number of careers, without effective demurrer from the social scientific community through the first half of the 20th century. The difference appears to be dramatic. Even after it is clear that the term is one completely without any referent — which is to say, it is *nonsense* — it is still respectable both inside and outside the walls to this day.

I do *not* suggest that enlightened Western European thought was anything but convinced of its superiority vis-à-vis most of the rest of the world (its view of China, and to some extent, the Ottoman Empire, being ambiguous¹³). Clearly, enlightened Western European opinion was pessimistic when it came to the obviously primitive; it was profoundly shocked by the extent of the barbarisms it encountered in some parts of the western hemisphere and in Africa and in the South Seas.¹⁴ A thinking man such as

¹² Stocking, *op. cit.*, p. 35

¹³ Adam Smith, for example, cannot readily fit China into his scheme of mature, and overly static economies, because it is in his time still a potent mercantile power

¹⁴ Remember that 18th century warfare — and attendant barbarism — was *comparatively* orderly and civilized. The reason was simple: Military tactics required well-trained soldiers; the training was expensive, which meant a premium on keeping the soldiers alive and enlisted. A good general did not waste troops. This is something else that changed in the 19th century — most notably in the context of the U. S. Civil War. Armies in that war were largely composed of local militias or even less-prepared

Thomas Jefferson, convinced that negro slavery and other kinds of civic class structure (e. g., indentured servitude amounting to serfdom, which survived in New York through the first decade of the 19th century), were inimical to the well-being of the Republic, could still assert that persons of color were constitutionally incapable of *de facto* (as opposed to *de jure*) equality with white Anglo-Saxons. In one letter,¹⁵ Jefferson responds to a correspondent who has disagreed with Jefferson's conviction, that indeed, he was not comfortable with that belief, and wished to be proven wrong. There is no reason to doubt Jefferson's sincerity.

That is what seems to change: There is a shift in attitude toward other cultures and the persons who bear them, in the move from Enlightenment to Idealism. There is simply no longer openness even to the *possibility* of equivalent merit in other cultures.

The reformed Academy quickly consolidated this Idealist point of view. The best example of this, clearly, is in the Hegelian interpretation of history. History is perceived as a matter of evolution, of a progressive revelation of the Spirit. The Spirit is most fully revealed in Western European civilization. Variations on this line pervade all Western European and Anglo-American thinking. It is as pervasive in Marxist ideologies as it is in more conservative, academic thinking. It persists to the present; I have heard its echo from the likes of Rudiger Bübner (in a guest lecture at the New School) and (interestingly) from social scientists of various cultural antecedents within the last decade or so — quite a bit in the last calendar year, in fact.¹⁶

conscripts. Generals “of the old school” and conserving their armies to an extreme degree, frustrated Lincoln and his government. Grant, with no such scruples, carried out a war of attrition against Lee, which he could win only because he had a much larger army and could take losses Lee could not afford.

¹⁵ Cited by Anthony Appiah, in an as yet unpublished paper delivered in the Fall, 1994 Arendt/Schürmann Symposium at the New School.

¹⁶ The example which immediately comes to mind, of course, is *The Bell Curve*. Actually, the argument in that book is rather subtle. The basic idea is, we live in an age where information and the — largely intellectual — ability to convert data into information is the foundation of power and success and so on.

I believe the point is simple: A crucial change in Western European thinking¹⁷ takes place in the last quarter of the 18th century. An Enlightenment/Common Sense view¹⁸ certainly took cognizance of obvious differences in cultures among people; at the same time, there was no sense that the specific difference of persons from these other cultures was in any measurable way different from that of Western Europeans. By the first decade of the 19th century, participation in that same specific difference (rationality) was denied to persons not also of Western European (indeed, *northern* Western European) race. This was the received scientific opinion, throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century; it was the doctrine taught to generations of young scholars, and the university propagated this with a will, generally punishing people for maintaining any different view. The reform movement in university infrastructure, occurring at the same time, only made this easier.

The Academy embraced and fostered the novel disciplines of the social sciences, and accepted their early dicta on culture and persons, almost inventing a concept of race as something measurable where it had not been before. Long after serious scholarship

The book goes on to claim that some folks can't do it, and more of them are in one racial, or ethnic or whatever group, than in others. This line can be attacked in several ways. The basic idea is as flawed as is the racist/classist/whatever-it-is concept. This society does not necessarily reward folks who are intellectually capable of manipulating data and converting it to information; it rewards quite a few people who can promote spurious information as "gospel truth." Infomercials are an excellent case in point.

¹⁷ The nature of racism "analogues" in other cultures and other times — those of earlier times in Europe, or places such as East Asia, for example — is not something I can deal with in this paper. It is a real problem, but reflective of cultures that have not been, particularly cosmopolitan in recent centuries. E. g.: Chinese have tended to a very general bigotry toward non-Chinese and even Chinese ethnic minorities in the last centuries; China has also been an inward-looking society during that period. At other times in its history — during the Tang dynasty, for instance — Chinese society turned outward with great enthusiasm, so that the capital of Chang-an was a great meeting place of cultures. On the other hand, "race" is spoken in several senses, and in different ways, throughout European history. Sometimes it is a purely cultural term, sometimes its is biological, and sometimes it is nationalist. Things become still more confusing, when these senses are indiscriminately mixed — and that was typically so, as Professor Picard's paper on Lacan clearly demonstrates.

¹⁸ For the Scottish Common Sense view of things, see the citation of Lord Kames in Stocking, *op. cit.* p. 44.

had exploded such dicta as utterly absurd, the university, inherently conservative and the creature of rather timid sorts, and having this in its tradition, has yet to fully purge this absurdity from its body. In subsequent generations, the Academy has made it possible for racists from the other side to have equal opportunity — but pardon me if I think this is not much of an answer. The Academy remains, if you will, mired in its historicity.

We — those of us who teach — are the Academy. We are the problem; even if we ourselves manage to avoid the worst excesses of the Academy's historicity, we, taken together — and severally, for the most part — *countenance* them. So we need to look at the professoriate.¹⁹

I am not concerned with the obviously wrongheaded in the university. I am *very* interested in why folks, who would not consider embracing the views of these very mysterious people, will countenance their views, will deal with them as colleagues, and even show a certain friendship toward them. How is this possible? A couple things seem salient.

First, there is the way in which academic credentials are acquired, and through which departments forge a *modus vivendi*. After all, the degrees themselves are often granted haphazardly. The further one proceeds in the credential-granting loop, the more dependent the decision to grant the credential upon imprecise grounds.

Appointment is clearly as haphazard. Many department chairpersons indulge in

¹⁹ I have called this horn “constitutional”; by this, I mean that the university is, proximally and for the most part, comprised of and constituted by those scholars who are also teachers. Administrators are all well and good; someone has to take care of the bureaucratic niceties — but we could strip away the largest part of the swollen administrations that are typical (of the city colleges, in particular) and the university would survive handily. Students are also important; they provide an outward and visible sign of academic mission — that is, if things are going as they should be. But students are a transient population, and they cannot squeak long enough to get much oil, say.

hiring practices that are patently illegal — and are smart enough to justify it to themselves and their colleagues. Tenure decisions are as uncanny as the rest of it. Decisions to not grant tenure, or to deny promotion may rest on something as frivolous as “academic judgment” — a more precise reason need not be given in this university, and it is a reason not generally subject to appeal.

Once a don is tenured, the choice is, live with that person or make that person’s continued presence in the department so unpleasant that he gets the idea and goes elsewhere.

It has been argued — by otherwise respectable scholars — that this tissue of rather absurd judgments constituting the Academy’s recognition process is a signal guarantee of academic freedom and purity of thought. In fact, it seems that the process by which academic credentials are granted is intended to minimize any freedom that challenges the received opinion and to insure that “purity of thought” is of the kind represented by the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*.

This haphazardness, it seems to me, breeds a certain insecurity.²⁰ As novelist Lisa Mason suggests, arrogance and insecurity are intimately related; academic insecurity breeds academic arrogance. This manifests as personal conviction of one’s own, personal, rectitude.

²⁰ I can cite no grand scholarly study on the insecurities prevalent in the Academy, whether psychological or sociological; the last I saw that dealt even vaguely with this was a 1950s study of the promotion process in universities, and that is likely to be out of date. But unscientific observation is illuminating if not conclusive: Graduate students are easily cowed; their “union card” is on the line; things are generally worse, the lower the graduate school is in the Academy’s pecking order. The insecurity bred into graduate students is reinforced by the process of hiring, reappointing and tenuring — again, this seems to be more haphazard in schools lower in the pecking order (in “white shoe” schools, one *knows* from the outset they will retain only folks from similar backgrounds, and tend not to promote from within).

The Academy has always tended to produce people who placed an inordinate premium placed on working alone — both as a matter of doing-one’s-own-work, and as a matter of keeping it from being stolen. The very nature of the academic endeavor, as that is presented in the schools, is solipsistic: One spends hours in the lab, or in one’s study. One aims at such mastery of that corner of a discipline that is one’s own, that one achieves certitude. The tendency is, to take such a position, and cleave to it, come what may.

In a discipline in which one has a great degree of mastery, sense of certitude can have merit; sadly, there is a tendency to assume that a conviction of one’s own rectitude *outside those narrow limits* is justified. That this is a besetting sin is suggested in Isaac Asimov’s description of a middle-ranked don as bright in a merely academic way.²¹ That it is arrogant is clear from the root meaning;²² that is a symptom of a species of insecurity seems fairly obvious.

While I think all of this is true, now as much as when I first visited the matter, I have changed my view a bit.

The moving cause for the change was a presentation by Parker Palmer, the eminent epistemologist and sociologist of knowledge.²³ The kernel of his claim is simple: Effective, human learning takes place in the space between people. In fact, I

²¹ In *Fantastic Voyage II*. Asimov was not only a great sci-fi novelist and popular expositor of science; he was a well-credentialed biochemist. *Fantastic Voyage II* is a reworking of the central theme of the original *Fantastic Voyage*, with a more dramatically “Clive Cussler” character, who is a good scientist, but inept in managing the larger world.

²² From the Latin, *arrogare*; the sense is “to take or claim for oneself without right; appropriate” (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition).

²³ This presentation was delivered at the January, 1995 conference of Trinity Institute. At the time this is written, I am informed the presentation has not yet been transcribed. Dr. Palmer, of course, has a long list of *viva voce* and written product, in which his views are expressed. This particular presentation has special merit because of its summary and extraordinarily clear character.

would take this further, as I think he would: What is truly human in human existence is captured in the expression, being with and among people (*inter homines esse*).

Academic solipsism precludes this kind of being with and among people. The solipsism is a manifestation of the arrogance — as is the extension of disciplined certitude beyond disciplinary limits; the arrogance is a symptom of the insecurity; the insecurity is an outcome of haphazardness in credentialling (the kneebone connected to the thigh-bone, &c.).

This arrogance is deeply rooted in modern Western thinking. Descartes fiddles with his wax — and distrusts the data his senses purvey; if one cannot trust one's eyes and ears, one cannot even be certain of another's existence as real and distinct. It is quite all right to wipe out figments of the imagination; it is even a good thing.²⁴ What might follow from that should be obvious.²⁵

So where are we now? Can we say something that avoids pop-psychology? Perhaps this will do: The condition of the possibility of the Academy being a primary purveyor of racism is the development of a greater degree of insecurity among those “within the walls.” This insecurity showed itself in the arrogant assertion of notions not grounded in sound thinking from within the several academic disciplines, but in an unfounded dogmatism (unfounded, because the universals under which particulars were subsumed²⁶ appear to have been merely popular, without attendant scholarly reasoning to

²⁴ There is a contradiction in all this: Descartes, after all, makes it perfectly clear in the *Discourse* that all members of a species equally possess and participate in the specific difference (and this persists as an obvious truth). Idealism is nothing but Cartesian rationalism writ large. But the same thinker makes it impossible to be certain in one's own thinking (that is, without recourse to the Deity) of anything outside oneself, to participate equally in any specific difference.

²⁵ Compare, perhaps, the slaughter of Catholics and Protestants during the 30 Years' War, with the genocide (Hannah Arendt's term, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*) practiced by Belgian colonialists. in the Congo.

²⁶ Kant in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* §74

support them). It may be, then, that the insecurity and attendant arrogance we experience in today's Academy is just the latest expression of something more fundamental; my candidate for this is the collapse of confidence I now believe was part and parcel of the Age of Reason.

The Ideal, which the history of the Academy has thrown up, taken altogether, is expressed in something which is often called "High Culture." It is the measure against which all other expressions of culture are measured. It is commonly associated with one group or one locality or some combination of the two; other cultural expressions are commonly deemed provincial, and not quite — *à la mode*?

This notion is a *very* pervasive one. Let me offer an example or two of how it can shape up. At a recent meeting to discuss a U. N. summit on social development, all sort of world ills were brought up, of which the greatest was poverty in LDCs. I suggested that what had not been nailed, is the problem of four centuries of soaring population growth. One respondent noted that, where women are admitted to the educational cycle, population can be controlled. Another suggested that the problem was that of local elites setting a proper example.

Both of these ostensible solutions show a "high culture" response. Both say, simply adopt our cultural perspective, you poor sots out there, and all your ills will disappear. Your culture does not accommodate an education for women? Your culture must change. Your culture does not embrace middle-class-elite values?²⁷ Your culture

²⁷ These *are* values, properly speaking. Most cultural judgments are relative, as we understand today, to the cultural milieu in which they arise, and to particular circumstances contemplated by them. This is as true for "high culture" as it is for local cultures. It is, obviously, helpful to my case that both of the respondents were non-Western and academics — one from a place that has successfully resisted Europeanization, and the other from a place where a veneer of Europeanization sits on a foundation that could be construed as a devolved pre-Modern tribalism. Neither of these respondents has any desire but

must change. While I tend to think some such change might be desirable, I also think that one mucks about with fundamental cultural values to one's peril. More to the point, it is not clear that the "high culture" values thus espoused can readily displace other values in cultures which have strong records of success, which can even assert themselves as "alternative high cultures." E. g., Western European high culture does not effectively compete with — much less does it displace — the ancient high culture of China; this rather distresses the PRC government (which, of course, espouses a vaguely Sinified Western political dogma).

The Academy regards itself as a repository of at least a large part of High Culture.

Very clearly, there is something rather ingenuous in this self-regard. Academic art — music, painting, literature — is almost synonymous with what is dull and trivial, and art only in a technical sense. Scholars are seldom as modish as the students they teach; this is good, since most of us have long since lost the other charms of youth which work well with modishness — but some of us get decidedly frowzy at times, especially when stumbling around in our studies, labs or whatever.

It is also true, however, that notions which gain currency in the Academy tend to trickle down, at least in a vulgarized way, to a larger audience. A quick example will show what I mean: Who has not heard — probably in junior high school or earlier — a description of something called the "scientific method"? Scientists, we were taught, gather experiential data, and from this experience formulate hypotheses which are tested experimentally, with a process of refinement, until something that is either always verifiable or rarely falsifiable (depending on which philosophy of science appeals)

for the best, for his society, of course — but one is entitled to ask if the solutions thus blithely suggested will prove more disruptive than the problems intended to be solved.

emerges as a theoretical explanation of the originally observed phenomena. That is the 20th century version of Kant's "We go to Nature to ask her questions."²⁸ Quite a few other notions have also found their way from professor to student to larger world outside the walls.

One of these notions has already been featured. The Academy became the apologist for racism in the 19th century. It continued to be an apologist until well into the 20th century. It censured those who criticized activities that could be considered racist or otherwise a manifestation of cultural bigotry.²⁹

The Academy's view was indefensible, even in its earliest expressions; such "science" as was available was clearly unable to establish the claims made by its adherents.³⁰ Nevertheless, less rigorous scholarship continued to assert this debunked science, and to popularize it. Obsolete science, not only in obsolete scholarly texts, but those of some currency, continued to espouse doctrines known within the walls to be fatally flawed. This scholarship was taken up outside the walls, and, given the gloss of authority by the estimable credentials of supposed advocates, became the foundation for what have been generally regarded as atrocities throughout the third and fourth decades of the present century, continuing to the present day only somewhat diminished.³¹

²⁸ [*Prolegomena? Metaphysische Anfangsgrunde der Natur?* **CHECK THIS!!!!**]

²⁹ My favorite case, I suppose is the censure of Franz Boas in 1920 by the anthropological association of which was a founder; Boas had publicly criticized anthropologists who went to Latin America as spies and agents of the United States government. But the Academy has never had a particularly luminous record when it comes to resisting bigotry. Universities did not desegregate on their own, nor did they strongly resist the rush of oath-taking in the 1950s (and indeed, on more than one occasion, university officials made signing a loyalty oath a condition of employment through the early 1980s).

³⁰ Even in the first part of the 19th century, scholarly commentary noted that consistent predictive results was not obtainable from, say, tabulations of skull measurements and other exercises in scientific phrenology.

³¹ A related, not precisely identical, case involves the noted ethologist, Konrad Lorenz. Lorenz was linked to certain current notions of eugenics; his views were, at most, injudicious, in the views of his colleagues, and certainly not grounds for any program of action. But Lorenz became one of the authorities upon which the vicious programs of the Nazi regime were founded.

In short, the preponderance of evidence, in my view, is that the Academy has promoted bigotry as a condition of being truly cultivated. Certainly, in many instances, this has been inadvertent — mere misspeaking, or misinterpretation as scholarly views became vulgar. But there are too many instances where members of the Academy have spoken quite deliberately to promote views which had some social currency and to which they adhered on purely cultural grounds, but which had no solid ground in science.

Here is the problem: The Academy does purvey a view of the world which is very persuasive. Sometimes what the Academy believes passes outside the walls in a form that no academic would recognize; sometimes the Academy's view is reported accurately. Moreover, the Academy is far from immune to the general currents of the larger society within which it subsists; it is demonstrably capable of adopting those views, and “rationalizing” them — even beyond the limits of reason. Of course, the Academy is composed of ordinary mortals, and there is a general resistance to embarrassing the establishment through too much airing of dirty linen in public; people who would not embrace bad science, will countenance its broadcast publication by colleagues.

* * *

So the three horns of the trilemma hang together in this way, I think:

- The modern Academy had its foundation shaken, or even severely damaged, with the collapse of Reason, Realism and Criticism at the end of the 18th century, and the rise of Idealism to “received opinion” in the 19th century. Idealism makes the nature of the Other dubitable, and even inconsequential.
- Idealism alters the character of the Academy and its credentialled members. It

expresses an insecurity in the face of the exigencies of the Real. The Idealist is essentially a solipsist.³² This becomes, in the 19th and 20th centuries a norm for the Academy. At the same time, the Real has this nasty habit of persisting, and showing itself in other-than-scholarly views that — in ways often not acknowledged — influence the ways in which members of the Academy function as scholars.

- Members of the Academy are regarded — and often, regard themselves — as conservators and perveyors of the Best, the High Culture, adherence to which is the very essence of civilized existence. What we say is Good, True and Beautiful, &c.. This can have two very unfortunate results: First, what we may say guardedly, may be taken up with a fervor quite a ways beyond what we would want. Second, that which we hold and assert fervently, however eccentric vis-à-vis the best and latest scholarship, may quite well be taken as gospel by folks who regard us as authoritative.

The apparent need to assert the superiority of Western European culture in the face of more intense contacts with non-Western societies and some very real discomfort with the outcomes of the 18th century, coupled with these general difficulties in an expression of a particular form of bigotry, “racism.” Racism had little foundation in social or biological science, and was not even all that obvious to “pre-scientific” observation: In addition to the objection, that the term “race” has been used in several, largely inconsistent ways, there is the simple fact that even seemingly obvious distinctions, based on gross physical differences such as skin color, do not hold up for determining specific (in the precise technical sense of that term, as well as the conventional one) groups. But social science, and even (to a smaller degree) biological

³² McTaggart, a late exponent of British Idealism, shows this in its most extreme form.

science was pressed into support of these notions, and we have countenanced this to the present day. Recent publications, such as *The Bell Curve*,³³ are evidence of the persistence of the problem.

³³ Peter Kott, with whom I am seldom in agreement, has nevertheless done an interesting job of assessing *The Bell Curve*. It is his view that these authors are — consciously or otherwise — engaged in asserting “reasons” for limiting participation in a generally shrinking labor pool.