## Issue 4

"No field of study can advance significantly unless outsiders bring their knowledge and experience to that field of study."

I strongly agree with the assertion that significant advances in knowledge require expertise from various fields. The world around us presents a seamless web of physical and anthropogenic forces, which interact in ways that can be understood only in the context of a variety of disciplines. Two examples that aptly illustrate this point involve the fields of cultural anthropology and astronomy.

Consider how a cultural anthropologist's knowledge about an ancient civilization is enhanced not only by the expertise of the archeologist--who unearths the evidence--but ultimately by the expertise of biochemists, geologists, linguists, and even astronomers. By analyzing the hair, nails, blood and bones of mummified bodies, biochemists and forensic scientists can determine the life expectancy, general well-being, and common causes of death of the population. These experts can also ensure the proper preservation of evidence found at the archeological site. A geologist can help identify the source and age of the materials used for tools, weapons, and structures--thereby enabling the anthropologist to extrapolate about the civilization's economy, trades and work habits, life styles, extent of travel and mobility, and so forth. Linguists are needed to interpret hieroglyphics and extrapolate from found fragments of writings. And an astronomer can help explain the layout of an ancient city as well as the design, structure and position of monuments, tombs, and temples--since ancients often looked to the stars for guidance in building cities and structures.

An even more striking example of how expertise in diverse fields is needed to advance knowledge involves the area of astronomy and space exploration. Significant advancements in our knowledge of the solar system and the universe require increasingly keen tools for observation and measurement. Telescope technology and the measurement of celestial distances, masses, volumes, and so forth, are the domain of astrophysicists. These advances also require increasingly sophisticated means of exploration. Manned and unmanned exploratory probes are designed by mechanical, electrical, and computer engineers. And to build and enable these technologies requires the acumen and savvy of business leaders, managers, and politicians. Even diplomats might play a role--insofar as major space projects require international cooperative efforts among the world's scientists and governments. And ultimately it is our philosophers whose expertise helps provide meaning to what we learn about our universe.

In sum, no area of intellectual inquiry operates in a vacuum. Because the sciences are inextricably related, to advance our knowledge in any one area we must understand the interplay among them all. Moreover, it is our non-scientists who make possible the science, and who bring meaning to what we learn from it.

## Issue 11

"All nations should help support the development of a global university designed to engage students in the process of solving the world's most persistent social problems."

I agree that it would serve the interests of all nations to establish a global university for the purpose of solving the world's most persistent social problems. Nevertheless, such a university poses certain risks which all participating nations must be careful to minimize--or risk defeating the university's purpose.

One compelling argument in favor of a global university has to do with the fact that its faculty and students would bring diverse cultural and educational perspectives to the problems they seek to solve. It seems to me that nations can only benefit from a global university where students learn ways in which other nations address certain social problems -- successfully or not. It might be tempting to think that an overly diversified academic community would impede communication among students and faculty. However, in my view any such concerns are unwarranted, especially considering the growing awareness of other peoples and cultures, which the mass media, and especially the Internet, have created. Moreover, many basic principles used to solve enduring social problems know no national boundaries; thus a useful insight or discovery can come from a researcher or student from any nation.

Another compelling argument for a global university involves the increasingly global nature of certain problems. Consider, for instance, the depletion of atmospheric ozone, which has warned the Earth to the point that it threatens the very survival of the human species. Also, we are now learning that clear-cutting the world's rainforests can set into motion a chain of animal extinction that threatens the delicate balance upon which all animals--including humans--depend. Also consider that a financial crisis---or a political crisis or natural disaster in one country can spell trouble for foreign companies, many of which are now multinational in that they rely on the labor forces, equipment, and raw materials of other nations. Environmental, economic, and political problems such as these all carry grave social consequences--increased crime, unemployment, insurrection, hunger, and so forth. Solving these problems requires global cooperation--which a global university can facilitate.

Notwithstanding the foregoing reasons why a global university would help solve many of our most pressing social problems, the establishment of such a university poses certain problems of its own, which must be addressed in order that the university can achieve its objectives.

First, participant nations would need to overcome a myriad of administrative and political impediments. All nations would need to agree on which problems demand the university's attention and resources, which areas of academic research are worthwhile, as well as agreeing on policies and procedures for making, enforcing, and amending these decisions. Query whether a functional global university is politically feasible, given that sovereign nations naturally wish to advance their own agendas.

A second problem inherent in establishing a global university involves the risk that certain intellectual and research avenues would become officially sanctioned while others of equal or greater potential value would be discouraged, or perhaps even proscribed. A telling example of the inherent danger of setting and enforcing official research priorities involves the Soviet government's attempts during the 1920s to not only control the direction and the goals of its scientists' research but also to distort the outcome of that research---ostensibly for the greatest good of the greatest number of people. Not surprisingly, during this time period no significant scientific advances occurred under the auspices of the Soviet government. The Soviet lesson provides an important caveat to administrators of a global university: Significant progress in solving pressing social problems requires an open mind to all sound ideas, approaches, and theories---irrespective of the ideologies of their proponents.

A final problem with a global university is that the world's preeminent intellectual talent might be drawn to the sorts of problems to which the university is charged with solving, while parochial social problem go unsolved. While this is not reason enough not to establish a global university, it nevertheless is a concern that university administrators and participant nations must be aware of in allocating resources and intellectual talent.

To sum up, given the increasingly global nature or the world's social problems, and the escalating costs of addressing these problems, a global university makes good sense. And, since all nations would have a common interest in seeing this endeavor succeed, my intuition is that participating nations would be able to overcome whatever procedural and political obstacles that might stand in the way of success. As long as each nation is careful not to neglect its own unique social problems, and as long as the university's administrators are careful to remain open-minded about the legitimacy and potential value of various avenues of intellectual inquiry and research, a global university might go along way toward solving many of the world's pressing social problems.

## Issue 38

"In the age of television, reading books is not as important as it once was. People can learn as much by watching television as they can by reading books."

The speaker contends that people learn just as much from watching television as by reading books, and therefore that reading books is not as important for learning as it once was. I strongly disagree. I concede that in a few respects television, including video, can be a more efficient and effective means of learning. In most respects, however, these newer media serve as poor substitutes for books when it comes to learning.

Admittedly, television holds certain advantages over books for imparting certain types of knowledge. For the purpose of documenting and conveying temporal, spatial events and experiences, film and video generally provide a more accurate and convincing record than a book or other written account. For example, it is impossible for anyone, no matter how keen an observer and skilled a journalist, to recount in complete and objective detail such events as a Ballanchine ballet, or the scene at the intersection of Florence and Normandy streets during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Besides, since the world is becoming an increasingly eventful place, with each passing day it becomes a more onerous task for journalists, authors, and book publishers to recount these events, and disseminate them in printed form. Producers of televised broadcasts and videos have an inherent advantage in this respect. Thus the speaker's claim has some merit when it comes to arts education and to learning about modern and current events.

However, the speaker overlooks several respects in which books are inherently superior to television as a medium for learning. Watching television or a video is no indication that any significant learning is taking place; the comparatively passive nature of these media can render them ineffectual in the learning process. Also, books are far more portable than television sets. Moreover, books do not break, and they do not depend on electricity, batteries, or access to airwaves or cable connections--all of which may or may not be available in a given place. Finally, the effort required to read actively imparts a certain discipline which serves any person well throughout a lifetime of learning.

The speaker also ignores the decided tendency on the part of owners and managers of television media to filter information in order to appeal to the widest viewing audience, and thereby maximize profit. And casting the widest possible net seems to involve focusing on the sensational---that is, an appeal to our emotions and baser instincts rather than our intellect and reasonableness. The end result is that viewers do not receive complete, unfiltered, and balanced information, and therefore cannot rely on television to develop informed and intelligent opinions about important social and political issues.

Another compelling argument against the speaker's claim has to do with how well books and television serve their respective archival functions. Books readily enable readers to review and cross-reference material, while televised broadcasts do not. Even the selective review of videotape is far more trouble than it is worth, especially if a printed resource is also available.

Moreover, the speaker's claim carries the implication that all printed works, fiction and non-fiction alike, not transferred to a medium capable of being televised are less significance as a result. This implication serves to discredit the invaluable contributions of all the philosophers, scientists, poets, and others of the past, upon whose immense shoulders society stands today.

A final argument that books are made no less useful by television has to do with the experience of perusing the stacks in a library, or even a bookstore. Switching television channels, or even scanning a video library, simply cannot duplicate this experience. Why not? Browsing among books allows for serendipity--unexpectedly coming across an interesting and informative book while searching for something else, or for nothing in particular. Moreover, browsing through a library or bookstore is a pleasurable sensory experience for many people--an experience that the speaker would have us forego forever.

In sum, television and video can be more efficient than books as a means of staying abreast of current affairs, and for education in the arts that involve moving imagery. However, books facilitate learning in certain ways that television does not and cannot. In the final analysis, the optimal approach is to use both media side by side--television to keep us informed and to provide moving imagery, along with books to provide perspective and insight on that information and imagery.

## Issue 41

"Such non-mainstream areas of inquiry as astrology, fortune-telling, and psychic and paranormal pursuits play a vital role in society by satisfying human needs that are not addressed by mainstream science."

This statement actually consists of two claims: (1) that non-mainstream areas of inquiry are vital in satisfying human needs, and (2) that these areas are therefore vital to society. I concede that astrology, fortune-telling, and psychic and paranormal pursuits respond to certain basic human needs. However, in my view the potential harm they can inflict on their participants and on society far outweighs their psychological benefits.

Admittedly, these non-mainstream areas of inquiry address certain human needs, which mainstream science and other areas of intellectual inquiry inherently cannot. One such need involves our common experience as humans that we freely make our own choices and decisions in life and therefore carry some responsibility for their consequences. Faced with infinite choices, we experience uncertainty, insecurity, and confusion; and we feel remorse, regret, and guilt when in retrospect our choices turn out be poor ones. Understandably, to prevent these bad feelings many people try to shift the burden of making difficult choices and decisions to some nebulous authority outside themselves--by relying on the stars or on a stack of tarot cards for guidance.

Two other such needs have to do with our awareness that we are mortal. This awareness brings a certain measure of pain that most people try to relieve by searching for evidence of an afterlife. Absent empirical proof that life extends beyond the grave, many people attempt to contact or otherwise connect with the so-called "other side" through paranormal and psychic pursuits. Another natural response to the prospect of being separated from our loved ones by death is to search for a deeper connection with others here on Earth and elsewhere, in the present as well as the past. This response manifests itself in people's enduring fascination with the paranormal search for extraterrestrial life, with so-called "past life" regression and "channeling," and the like.

While the sorts of pursuits which the speaker lists might be "vital" insofar as they help some people feel better about themselves and about their choices and circumstances, query whether these pursuits are otherwise useful to any individual or society.

In the first place, because these pursuits are not rooted in reason, they are favorite pastimes of charlatans and others who seek to prey on dupes driven by the aforementioned psychological needs. And the dupes have no recourse. After all, it is impossible to assess the credibility of a tarot card that tells us how to proceed in life simply because we cannot know where the paths not taken would have led. Similarly, we cannot evaluate claims about the afterlife because these claims inherently defy empirical proof--or disproof.

In the second place, without any sure way to evaluate the legitimacy of these avenues of inquiry, participants become vulnerable to self-deception, false hopes, fantastic ideas, and even delusions. In turn, so-called "insights" gained from these pursuits can too easily serve as convenient excuses for irrational and unreasonable actions that harm others. On a personal level, stubborn adherence to irrational beliefs in the face of reason and empirical evidence can lead to self-righteous arrogance, intolerance, anti-social behavior, and even hatred. Moreover, on a societal level these traits have led all too often to holy wars, and to such other atrocities as genocide and mass persecution.

In sum, I concede that the non-mainstream pursuits that the speaker lists are legitimate insofar as they afford many people psychological solace in life. However, when such pursuits serve as substitutes for reason and logic, and for honest intellectual inquiry, participants begin to distrust intellect as an impediment to enlightenment. In doing so, they risk making ill-conceived choices for themselves and unfair judgments about others--a risk that in my view outweighs the psychological rewards of those pursuits.

## Issue 43

"To be an effective leader, a public official must maintain the highest ethical and moral standards."

Whether successful leadership requires that a leader follow high ethical and moral standards is a complex issue--one that is fraught with the problems of defining ethics, morality, and successful leadership in the first place. In addressing the issue it is helpful to consider in turn three distinct forms of leadership: business, political, and social-spiritual.

In the business realm, successful leadership is generally defined as that which achieves the goal of profit maximization for a firm's shareholders or other owners. Moreover, the prevailing view in Western corporate culture is that by maximizing profits a business leader fulfills his or her highest moral or ethical obligation. Many disagree, however, that these two obligations are the same. Some detractors claim, for example, that business leaders have a duty to do no intentional harm to their customers or to the society in which they operate--for example, by providing safe products and by implementing(实施) pollution control measures. Other detractors go further--to impose on business leaders an affirmative obligation to protect consumers, preserve the natural environment, promote education, and otherwise take steps to help alleviate society's problems. Whether our most successful business leaders are the ones who embrace these additional obligations depends, of course, on one's own definition of business success. In my observation, as business leaders become subject to closer scrutiny by the media and by social activists, business leaders will maximize profits in the long term only by taking reasonable steps to minimize the social and environmental harm their businesses cause. This observation also accords with my personal view of a business leader's ethical and moral obligation.

In the political realm the issue is no less complex. Definitions of successful political leadership and of ethical or moral leadership are tied up in the means a leader uses to wield his or her power and to obtain that power in the first place. One useful approach is to draw a distinction between personal morality and public morality. In my observation personal morality is unrelated to effective political leadership. Modern politics is replete with examples of what most people would consider personal ethical failings: the marital indiscretions of President Kennedy, for instance. Yet few would disagree that these personal moral choices adversely affected his ability to lead. In contrast, public morality and successful leadership are more closely connected. Consider the many leaders, such as Stalin and Hitler, whom most people would agree were egregious violators of public morality. Ultimately such leaders forfeit their leadership as a result of the immoral means by which they obtained or wielded their power. Or consider less egregious examples such as President Nixon, whose contempt for the very legal system that afforded him his leadership led to his forfeiture of it. It seems that in the short term unethical public behavior might serve a political leader's interest in preserving his or her power; yet in the long term such behavior invariably results in that leader's down-fall, that is, in failure.

One must also consider a third type of leadership: social-spiritual. Consider notable figures such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, whom few would disagree were eminently successful in leading others to practice the high ethical and moral standards which they advocated. However, I would be hard-pressed to name one successful social or spiritual leader whose leadership was predicated on the advocacy of patently unethical or immoral behavior. The reason for this is simple: high standards for one's own public morality are prerequisites for successful social-spiritual leadership.

In sum, history informs us that effective political and social-spiritual leadership requires adherence to high standards of public morality. However, when it comes to business leadership the relationship is less clear; successful business leaders must strike a balance between achieving profit maximization and fulfilling their broader obligation to the society, which comes with the burden of such leadership.

## Issue 48

"The study of history places too much emphasis on individuals. The most significant events and trends in history were made possible not by the famous few, but by groups of people whose identities have long been forgotten."

The speaker claims that significant historical events and trends are made possible by groups of people rather than individuals, and that the study of history should emphasize the former instead of the latter. I tend to disagree with both aspects of this claim.

To begin with, learning about key historical figures inspires us to achieve great things ourselves--far more so than learning about the contributions of groups of people. Moreover, history informs us that it is almost always a key individual who provide the necessary impetus for what otherwise might be a group effort, as discussed below.

Admittedly, at times distinct groups of people have played a more pivotal role than key individuals in important historical developments. For example, history and art appreciation courses that study the Middle Ages tend to focus on the artistic achievements of particular artists such as Fra Angelico, a Benedictine monk of that period. However, Western civilization owes its very existence not to a few famous painters but rather to a group of Benedictine nuns of that period. Just prior to and during the decline of the Roman Empire, many women fled to join Benedictine monasteries, bringing with them substantial dowries which they used to acquire artifacts, art works, and manuscripts. As a result, their monasteries became centers for the preservation of Western culture and knowledge which would otherwise have been lost forever with the fall of the Roman Empire.

However, equally influential was Johannes Gutenberg, whose invention of the printing press several centuries later rendered Western knowledge and culture accessible to every class of people throughout the known world. Admittedly, Gutenberg was not single-handedly responsible for the outcomes of his invention. Without the support of paper manufacturers, publishers, and distributors, and without a sufficient demand for printed books, Gutenberg would never have become one of "the famous few." However, I think any historian would agree that studying the groups of people who rode the wave of Gutenberg's invention is secondary in understanding history to learning about the root historical cause of that wave.

Generally speaking, then, undue attention to the efforts and contributions of various groups tends to obscure the cause-and-effect relationships with which the study of history is chiefly concerned. Gutenberg is just one example of an historical pattern in which it is individuals who have been ultimately responsible for the most significant developments in human history. Profound scientific inventions and discoveries of the past are nearly all attributable not to forgettable groups of people but to certain key individuals--for example, Copernicus, Newton, Edison, Einstein, Curie, and of course Gutenberg. Moreover, when it comes to seminal sociopolitical events, the speaker's claim finds even less support from the historical record. Admittedly, sweeping social changes and political reforms require the participation of large groups of people. However, I would be hard-pressed to identify any watershed sociopolitical event attributable to a leaderless group. History informs us that groups rally only when incited and inspired by key individuals.

The speaker might claim that important long-term sociological trends are often instigated not by key individuals but rather by the masses. I concede that gradual shifts in demography, in cultural traditions and mores, and in societal attitudes and values can carry just as significant an historical impact as the words and deeds of "the famous few." Yet, it seems that key individuals almost invariably provide the initial spark for those trends. For instance, prevailing attitudes about sexual morality stem from the ideas of key religious leaders; and a culture's prevailing values concerning human life are often rooted in the policies and prejudices of political leaders. The speaker might also point out that history's greatest architectural and engineering feats--such as the Taj Mahal and the Great Wall--- came about only through the efforts of large groups of workers. And, however, it was the famous few--monarchs in these cases whose whims and egos were the driving force behind these accomplishments.

To sum up, with few historical exceptions, history is shaped by key individuals, not by nameless, faceless groups. It is the famous few that provide visions of the future, visions which groups then bring to fruition. Perhaps the speaker's claim will have more merit at the close of the next millennium since politics and science are being conducted increasingly by consortiums and committees. Yet, today it behooves us to continue drawing inspiration from "the famous few," and to continue understanding history chiefly in terms of their influence.

## Issue 130

"How children are socialized today determines the destiny of society. Unfortunately, we have not yet learned how to raise children who can help bring about a better society."

I find the speaker's dual claim to be specious on both counts. The claim that society's destiny hinges on how children are socialized, while appealing in some respects, is an over-statement at best. And the claim that we have not yet learned how to raise children who can better society is poorly supported by empirical evidence.

Consider first the speaker's assertion that society's destiny depends on how children are socialized. I concede that unless a child is allowed sufficient opportunities for healthy interaction with peers, that child is likely to grow into an ineffectual, perhaps even an anti-social, adult. To witness healthy socialization in action, one need look no further than the school playground, where children learn to negotiate, cooperate, and assert themselves in a respectful manner, and where they learn about the harmful results of bullying and other anti-social behavior. These lessons help children grow up to be good citizens and effective leaders, as well as tolerant and respectful members of society.

However, socialization is only one factor influencing the extent to which an individual will ultimately contribute to a better society. And in my observation it is not the most important one. Consider certain prominent leaders who have contributed profoundly to a better society. Mahatma Gandhi's contributions sprang primarily from the courage of his inner convictions, in spite of his proper socialization among genteel Indian society and, as a law student, among British society. Martin Luther King's contribution was primarily the result of his strong religious upbringing, which had more to do with parental influence than with socialization. An even more remarkable modern example was Theodore Roosevelt, whose social and physical development were both stunted by life-threatening physical infirmities during his childhood. In spite of his isolation, odd manner and aloofness throughout his early life, Roosevelt ascended to a social-activist presidency by means of his will to overcome physical infirmities, his voracious appetite for knowledge, and his raw intellect.

Consider next the speaker's claim that we have not yet learned how to raise children who can better society. If we define a "better" society as one characterized by greater tolerance of differing viewpoints and people who are different from ourselves, greater respect for individual rights, and greater cooperation across cultural and national boundaries, then the children of the most recent half-century are creating a better society. The most recent quarter-century has seen an increasing sensitivity in our society toward ensuring public health by policing the food and drug industries and by protecting our natural environment. We're becoming more sensitive to, and respectful of, the rights of women, various ethnic and racial groups, homosexuals, and mentally- and physically-challenged individuals. The re-emergence of political third parties with decidedly libertarian ideals demonstrates an increasing concern for individual freedoms. And there is ample evidence of increasing international cooperation. The former Soviet Union and the U.S. have worked collaboratively in space research and exploration since the 1970s; peace-keeping missions are now largely multi-national efforts; and nations are now tackling public health problems collaboratively through joint research programs. In short, the speaker's second claim flies in the face of the empirical evidence, as I see it.

In sum, when it comes to whether a child grows up to contribute to a better society, the key determinant is not socialization but rather some other factor--such as a seminal childhood event, parental influence, raw intelligence, or personal conviction. And, while reasonable people with differing political and social viewpoints might disagree about what makes for a "better" society, in my observation our society is steadily evolving into a more civilized, respectful, and tolerant one. In the final analysis, then, I fundamentally disagree with both aspects of the speaker's dual claim.

## Issue 141

"Most people recognize the benefits of individuality, but the fact is that personal economic success requires conformity."

Personal economic success might be due either to one's investment strategy or to one's work or career. With respect to the former, non-conformists with enough risk tolerance and patience invariably achieve more success than conformists. With respect to the latter, while non-conformists are more likely to succeed in newer industries where markets and technology are in constant flux, conformists are more likely to succeed in traditional service industries ensconced in systems and regulations.

Regarding the sort of economic success that results from investing one's wealth, the principles of investing dictate that those who seek risky investments in areas that are out of favor with the majority of investors ultimately reap higher returns than those who follow the crowd. It is conformists who invest, along with most other investors, in areas that are currently the most profitable, and popular. However, popular investments tend to be overpriced, and in the long run最后 their values will come down to reasonable levels. As a result, given enough time conformists tend to reap lower rewards from their investments than nonconformists do.

Turning to the sort of economic success that one achieves by way of one's work, neither conformists nor non-conformists necessarily achieve greater success than the other group.

In consumer-driven industries, where innovation, product differentiation and creativity are crucial to lasting success, non-conformists who take unique approaches tend to recognize emerging trends and to rise above their peers. For example, Ted Turner's departure from the traditional format of the other television networks, and the responsiveness of Amazon's Jeff Bezos to burgeoning Internet commerce, propelled these two non-conformists into leadership positions in their industries. Particularly in technology industries, where there are no conventional practices or ways of thinking to begin with, people who cling to last year's paradigm, or to the status quo现状 in general, are soon left behind by coworkers and competing firms.

However, in traditional service industries--such as finance, accounting, insurance, legal services, and health care--personal economic success comes not to non-conformists but rather to those who can work most effectively within the constraints of established practices, policies and regulations. Of course, a clever idea for structuring a deal, or a creative legal maneuver, might play a role in winning smaller battles along the way. But such tactics are those of conformists who are playing by the same ground rules as their peers; winners are just better at the game.

In conclusion, non-conformists with sufficient risk tolerance and patience are invariably the most successful investors in the long run. When it comes to careers, however, while non-conformists tend to be more successful in technology- and consumer-driven industries, traditionalists are the winners in system-driven industries pervaded by policy, regulation, and bureaucracy.

## Issue 144

"It is the artist, not the critic, who gives society something of lasting value."

This statement asserts that art, not the art critic, provides something of lasting value to society. I strongly agree with the statement. Although the critic can help us understand and appreciate art, more often than not,时常 critique is either counterproductive to achieving the objective of art or altogether irrelevant to that objective.

To support the statement the speaker might point out the three ostensible functions of the art critic. First, critics can help us understand and interpret art; a critic who is familiar with a particular artist and his or her works might have certain insights about those works that the layperson外行 would not. Secondly, a critic's evaluation of an art work serves as a filter, which helps us determine which art is worth our time and attention. For example, a new novel by a best-selling author might nevertheless be an uninspired effort, and if the critic can call our attention to this fact we gain time to seek out more worthwhile literature to read. Thirdly, a critic can provide feedback for artists; and constructive criticism, if taken to heart, can result in better work.

However, reflecting on these three functions makes clear that the art critic actually offers very little to society.

The first function is better accomplished by docents and teachers, who are more able to enhance a layperson's appreciation and understanding of art by providing an objective, educated interpretation of it. Besides, true appreciation of art occurs at the moment we encounter art; it is the emotional, even visceral impact that art has on our senses, spirits, and souls that is the real value of art. A critic can actually provide a disservice by distracting us from that experience.

The critic's second function that of evaluator who filters out bad art from the worthwhile is one that we must be very wary of. History supports this caution. In the role of judge, critics have failed us repeatedly. Consider, for example, Voltaire's rejection of Shakespeare as barbaric because he did not conform to neo-classical principles of unity. Or, consider the complete dismissal of Beethoven's music by the esteemed critics of his time. The art critic's judgment is limited by the narrow confines of old and established parameters for evaluation. Moreover, critical judgment is often misguided by the ego; thus its value is questionable in any event.

I turn finally to the critic's third function: to provide useful feedback to artists. The value of this function is especially suspect. Any artist, or anyone who has studied art, would agree that true art is the product of the artist's authentic passion, a manifestation of the artist's unique creative impulse, and a creation of the artist's spirit. If art were shaped by the concern for integrating feedback from all criticism, it would become a viable craft, but at the same time would cease to be art.

In sum, none of the ostensible functions of the critic are of much value at all, let alone of lasting value, to society. On the other hand, the artist, through works of art, provides an invaluable and unique mirror of the culture of the time during which the work was produced a mirror for the artist's contemporaries and for future generations to gaze into for insight and appreciation of history. The art critic in a subordinate role, more often than not, does a disservice to society by obscuring this mirror. 遮蔽它的镜子

## Issue 185

"Scandals---whether in politics, academia, or other areas---can be useful. They focus our attention on problems in ways that no speaker or reformer ever could."

Are scandals useful in calling our attention to important problems, as this statement suggests? I agree that in many cases scandals can serve to reveal larger problems that a community or society should address. On the other hand, scandals can sometimes distract us from more important societal issues.

On the one hand, scandals can sometimes serve to call our attention to pervasive social or political problems that we would otherwise neglect. Perhaps the paradigmatic modern example is the Watergate scandal. Early in that scandal it would have been tempting to dismiss it as involving one isolated incidence of underhanded campaign tactics. But, in retrospect the scandal forever increased the level of scrutiny and accountability to which our public officials are held, thereby working a significant and lasting benefit to our society. More recently, the Clinton-Gore fundraising scandal sparked a renewed call for campaign-finance reform. In fact the scandal might result in the passage of a congressional bill outlawing private campaign contributions altogether, thereby rendering presidential candidates far less susceptible to undue influence of special-interest groups. Our society would be the dear beneficiary of such reform. Surely, no public speaker or reformer could have called our nation's collective attention to the problem of presidential misconduct unless these two scandals had surfaced.

On the other hand, scandals can sometimes serve chiefly to distract us from more pressing community or societal problems. At the community level, for example, several years ago the chancellor of a university located in my city was expelled from office for misusing university funds to renovate his posh personal residence. Every new development during the scandal became front-page news in the campus newspaper. But did this scandal serve any useful purpose? No. The scandal did not reveal any pervasive problem with university accounting practices. It did not result in any sort of useful system-wide reform. Rather, it was merely one incidence of petty misappropriation. Moreover, the scandal distracted the university community from far more important issues, such as affirmative action and campus safety, which were relegated to the second page of the campus newspaper during the scandal.

Even on a societal level, scandals can serve chiefly to distract us from more important matters. For example, time will tell whether the Clinton sex scandal will benefit our political, social, or legal system. Admittedly, the scandal did call our attention to certain issues of federal law. It sparked a debate about the powers and duties of legal prosecutors, under the Independent Counsel Act, vis-i-vis the chief executive while in and out of office. And the various court rulings about executive privilege and immunity WIU serve useful legal precedents for the future. Even the impeachment proceedings will no doubt provide useful procedural precedent at some future time. Yet on balance, it seems to me that the deleterious effects of the scandal in terms of the financial expense to taxpayers and the various harms to the many individuals caught up in the legal process---outweigh these benefits. More importantly, for more that a year the scandal served chiefly to distract us from our most pressing national and global problems, such as the Kosovo crisis, our social-security crisis, and health-care reform, to name just a few.

In sum, I agree that scandals often serve to flag important socio-political problems more effectively than any speaker or reformer can. However, whether a scandal works more benefit than harm to a community or society must be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

## Issue 208

"The way people look, dress, and act reveals their attitudes and interests. You can tell much about a society's ideas and values by observing the appearance and behavior of its people."

This statement generalizes unfairly that the way people look, dress, and act reveals their attitudes and their society's values. In my view, while in certain respects the habits and customs of a people are accurate indicators of their attitudes and values, in other respects they are not.

Turning first to the way people look and dress, certain aspects of the outward appearance of a culture's people do inform us of their ideas, attitudes, and values. A society whose members tend to be obese might place a high value on indulgence and pleasure, and a low value on physical health. A general preference for ready-made, inexpensive clothing might indicate a preference for practicality or for saving rather than spending. And, a society whose members prefer to wear clothing that is traditional and distinct to that society is one that values tradition over modernization. In other respects, however, the way people look and dress is not a function of their attitudes and values but rather their climatic and work environment. In harsh climates people bundle up, while in hot, humid climates they go with few clothes. In developed nations people dress for indoor work and their skin appears pink and supple, while in agrarian cultures people dress for outdoor work and appear weather-beaten.

I turn next to the way people act. The habits, rituals and lifestyles of a culture often do provide accurate signals about its values. For instance, a society characterized by over-consumption is clearly one that values comfort and convenience over a healthy environment. And, a society whose members behave in a genteel, respectful, and courteous manner toward one another is one which values human dignity, while a society of people who act in a hateful manner toward others clearly places a low value on respect for others and on tolerance of other people's opinions and beliefs. In other respects, however, the way people behave can belie their attitudes and values. For instance, a society whose members tend to work long hours might appear to place a high value on work for its own sake, when in reality these work habits might be born of financial necessity for these people, who would prefer more leisure time if they could afford it.

Finally, the statement overlooks a crucial distinction between free societies and oppressed ones. Free societies, such as contemporary America, are characterized by a panoply of rituals, behaviors, and manners of dress among its members. Such diversity in appearances surely indicates a society that places a high value on individual freedoms and cultural diversity. Accordingly, it might seem that a society whose members share similar rituals, ways of dressing, and public behaviors places a low value on individual freedoms and cultural diversity. However, any student of modern Communism and Fascism would recognize cultural homogeneity as an imposition on society's members, who would happily display their preference for individuality and diversity but for their oppressors.

To sum up, while the statement has merit, it amounts to an unfair generalization. The way that people look, dress, and act is often bred of necessity, not of attitude or values. And in oppressed societies people's customs and habits belie their true attitudes and values in any event.