

# MULTI-CULTURALISM

The Crucial Philosophical and Organizational Issues

By Patrick J. Hill

In higher education today and in American society at large, we are wrestling with an incredible explosion of diversity. There are those who deem higher education complicitous with society's leadership in depreciating or ignoring the diversity of human experience; their attempt is to provide institutional and curricular status of a non-marginal sort for enterprises like women's studies, ethnic studies, and Latin American studies. Then there are those who judge the early responses to diversity to have been more or less appropriate under the circumstances, who worry about incoherence, fragmentation, and "particularism" in the curriculum, and who want to clarify what students should be led to regard as central and what as marginal. In one way or another, all these parties are concerned with the comparative value of the diverse visions, and with how we are to conceive their relationship.

This article attempts to clarify the crucial philosophical and organizational issues that underlie the current struggles in higher education about multi-culturalism. The article is in two parts. The first examines the explosion of diversity and evaluates four major frameworks that have been employed in the West to comprehend or order diversity. The second part reflects on the ramifications of these frameworks for current and possible approaches to the conduct of higher education.

## I.

### Four Frameworks

"The hallmark of modern consciousness," Clifford Geertz observes insightfully, "is its enormous multiplicity." Diversity of opinion, of course, is hardly new; it was, for example, radical diversity of opinion more than 300 years ago that shaped the philosophical projects of Montaigne and Descartes. The novelty in the contemporary engagement with diversity is a function of four other novelties:

1) Awareness on the part of most Western philosophers of the collapse of the Enlightenment goal of objective reason, in the light of which it was hoped to sort and hierarchize the great diversity of opinion. Gadamer's rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice as an inevitable feature of all human thinking may by itself symbolize how far we have moved from the ideal of a disembodied, objective mind.

2) The related awareness, partly philosophical and partly political, of the socioeconomic and political dimensions to the development and sustaining of knowledge-claims. While the claims of scientists were falsely cloaked in the mantle of pure objectivity, the knowledge-claims of other groups (e.g., women, minorities, persons of color, and third-world persons) were and are suppressed, invalidated, and marginalized.

3) The growing incapacity of groups hitherto exercising monopolizing control over judgments of truth and worth to sustain such power. The wealth of Japan and the Arab peoples,

for example, and the voting power of women and the elderly in the United States have forced accommodations by the established order to a newly emerging one.

4) The realization on the part of many of the intrinsic beauty and worth of the diverse voices--a realization that came to many people in the United States through the black revolution of the '60s. This shift in consciousness was crisply expressed by Octavio Paz:

The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life.

**D**iversity, again, is not new, and intellectuals have not needed the stimulations of today to construct its analysis. In Western thought, four major frameworks have been employed in the analysis of diversity:

1) *Relativism*, which in one way or another regards all knowledge-claims as self-contained within particular cultures or language communities, and which recognizes no higher or commensurable ground upon which objective adjudication might take place.

2) *Perennialism* or *universalism*, which see commonalities or constancies in the great variety of human thought, and which frequently (as in the influential work of Frithjof Schuon) regard those constancies as the essential and more important aspect of diverse historical phenomena.

3) *Hierarchism*, which attempts to sort or rank the multiplicity by a variety of means, among them establishing criteria or methods of inquiry that divide knowledge from opinion, or interpreting world history and human development in such a way that certain opinions and behavior are progressive, developed, and/or mature while others more or less approximate those ideals.

4) *Pluralism*, which in its democratic version is central to the analysis of this article and which I will therefore spend a longer moment here to expand upon. In the philosophical and political traditions of American pluralism, diversity has played a prominent role. Nowhere was diversity more prominent than in the epistemology and social philosophy of John Dewey. Though aware of the idealized dimension of his thinking, Dewey grounded both science (as a way of knowing) and democracy (as a way of life) in a respect for diverse opinion.

It is of the nature of science not so much to *tolerate* as to welcome diversity of opinion, while it insists that inquiry brings the evidence of observed facts to bear to effect a consensus of conclusions-and even then to hold the conclusions subject to what is ascertained and made public in further new inquiries. I would not claim that my existing democracy has ever made complete and adequate use of scientific method in deciding upon its policies. But freedom of inquiry, toleration of diverse views, freedom of communication, the distribution of what is found out to every individual as the ultimate intellectual consumers, are involved in the democratic as in the scientific method.

In linking science and democracy, Dewey welcomed not just the diversity of opinion of highly trained scientists; he welcomed as an intellectual and political resource the diversity of every human being:

Every autocratic and authoritarian scheme of social action rests upon a belief that the needed intelligence is confined to a superior few, who because of inherent natural gifts are endowed with the ability and the right to control the conduct of others.... While what we call intelligence may be distributed in unequal amounts, it is the democratic faith that it is sufficiently general so that each individual has something to contribute.

For Dewey, the inclusion of diverse perspectives becomes an ethical imperative:

The keynote of democracy as a way of life may be expressed, it seems to me, as the necessity for the participation of every mature being in the formation of the values that regulate the living of men [sic] together.... All those who are affected by social institutions must have a share in producing and managing them.

Finally, appreciation of diversity is linked by Dewey to visions of human nature and community. The resources of diversity will flourish in those social and political forms that allow the pooling of the experience and insights of diversely constituted individuals. Not that the pooled insight is inherently preferable to the workings of intelligence in an individual or within a single-language community-Dewey is forever appreciative of the value of small communities-but that the pooling is an escalation of the power of human intelligence:

The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled and co-operative experience. . . . What is the faith of democracy in the role of consultation, of conference, of persuasion, of discussion, in formation of public opinion, which in the long run is self-corrective, except faith in the capacity of the intelligence of the common man [sic] to respond with common sense to the free play of acts and ideas which are secured by effective guarantees of free inquiry, free assembly, and free communication.

In pooled, cooperative experience, Dewey is saying, the powers of human intelligence are increased and human nature or capacity is completed.

This view, or at least the narrowly epistemological dimension of it, is affirmed in other traditions. In Gadamer, the essential and unavoidable partiality of the human knower must be corrected or supplemented in dialogue. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche states the epistemological value of cooperative inquiry quite succinctly:

The more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our concept of this thing, our objectivity, be.

## **Interpreting diversity**

What is at issue among these four competing philosophic frameworks? How might we go about choosing among them?

The philosophical issue in most general terms is the appropriate interpretation of diversity: how to give it its proper due. In an older style of doing philosophy-what Rorty terms the metaphysical as opposed to the "ironist" view-we would now seek to determine which one of these frameworks is true to the nature of things, in this case to the phenomenon of diversity. In a post-metaphysical mode of doing philosophy, we recognize that each of these frameworks is an interpretation, a value-laden interpretation of the variety of human experience. No neutral ground exists upon which we might stand to evaluate either the values or the frameworks objectively.

The choice among the frameworks is to be made (assuming, as I judge to be the case here, that each has dealt honestly and intelligently with the full range of available data) not in terms of conformity to the nature of things, but in terms of each framework's appropriateness for sustaining the values of the culture or language community. The question of the adequacy of each of the interpretations of diversity, then, will be answered differently in different cultures. All answers will be value-laden answers that cannot be justified without reference to these values.

In the United States and much of the Western world, we are at least nominally committed to a democratic social order. The evaluation that follows of the four frameworks is thus done within the context of that cultural commitment. The judgments reached are not abstract ones about the correspondence of particular frameworks to the nature of things, but judgments about their appropriateness to sustaining the vision of "pooled and cooperative experience" articulated above. Crucial to each of those judgments will be the extent to which diversity is "welcomed" and incorporated democratically into pooled experience as well as the extent to which each framework can suggest a relationship of self and diverse other that might motivate the kind of conversation capable of sustaining a public sphere.

With these considerations and a frank commitment to democratic values in mind, I make the following observations about the frameworks for explaining diversity.

1) *Relativism*. This is the framework that accords enduring centrality to diversity, both to the fact of diversity and to its defense if not its nurturance. The endless attempts of philosophers to discredit the logical foundations of relativism are convincing to themselves but ineffective in undermining the attractiveness and strength of its straightforward recognition of diverse, frequently non-intersecting (or impermeable) modes of thinking. While those who describe themselves as relativists will endlessly be dogged with logical objections, the opposite position -- what Geertz calls "anti-relativism" -- can mask a great lack of appreciation for the profound, intractable diversity of our time.

From the standpoint of democratic values, the problem with relativism is less its logical incoherence than its comparative incapacity to motivate interest or conversation-an incapacity

which may stem more from the individualism of our culture than from the framework itself. If we all live in separate and/or incommensurate reality-worlds, the motivation to inquire into the world of the diverse other can be readily relegated to the anthropologist or world traveler. For democracy to work, its citizens must sense if not a commitment to a shared future, then at least an occasional need for each other.

2) *Perennialism* or *universalism*. These philosophies do not ignore diversity, as is frequently charged. They could not uncover perennial themes in diverse cultures or epochs without first immersing themselves in the diversity. Perennialists would claim that they do accord diversity its proper due; indeed, their system is not incapable of explaining anything.

The problem with perennialism from the standpoint of democratic values is less its capacity to explain diversity than it is the comparative non-centrality it accords it. If the dialogical other is inevitably going to be viewed as an instantiation of a previously known pattern-or, more generously, if the dialogue is at best going to force a modification of a previously known pattern in the light of which I and the other will then be seen as instantiations-it is understandable that the other may feel his/her uniqueness depreciated and forced to fit a mold. Genuine appreciation of diversity must be found to some extent upon an expectation of novelty.

3) *Hierarchism*. Philosophies or theologies or social systems that hierarchize or sort differences according to some historical or developmental scheme are obviously taking diversity -- especially inequality -- seriously. It is not ignored. It is ranked and explained (or explained away, critics would say).

While inequality is a fact of life and some sort of ranking may for the near term be unavoidable, what is disturbing to a theorist of democracy is the way in which whole epochs and entire peoples -- e.g., Native Americans, women, the physically challenged, and the so-called underdeveloped nations-have been and continue to be marginalized and their experience depreciated in such rankings. Democratic social theory cannot in the end be satisfied with an egalitarian epistemology-because some insights and truths are more appropriate than others to particular situations and because we wish to encourage the development of continually diverse perspectives. Still more opprobrious to democratic social theory as an interpretation of human diversity and inequality is a system of ranking joined to a hierarchical structure of association; in any such system, the epistemologically marginalized remain politically vulnerable and effectively voiceless. Whatever inequality currently exists is worsened and perpetuated by structures that de facto operate (in Dewey's words) "as if the needed intelligence" to participate meaningfully "were confined to a superior few."

4) *Democratic pluralism*. Within the context of a commitment to democratic values, the diversity of the world's peoples is to be welcomed, respected, celebrated, and fostered. Within that context, diversity is not a problem or a defect, it is a resource. The major problem within all pluralistic contexts (including relativism) is less that of taking diversity seriously than that of grounding any sort of commonality. It is the problem of encouraging citizens to sustain conversations of respect with diverse others for the sake of their making public policy together, of forging over and over again a sense of a shared future.

Conversations of respect and the making of public policy in a democracy cannot be based on mere tolerance-on the "live and let live" or "to each his own" attitudes of individualistic

relativism—at least, not in the Jeffersonian and Deweyan, as opposed to the Federalist, vision of democracy. Democracy needs something at once more binding or relating of diverse viewpoints, and something that grounds the respect in a public sphere, in a world or situation that is at least temporarily shared. It is impossible to respect the diverse other if one does not believe that the views of the diverse other are grounded in a reality—the democratic version of reality—that binds or implicates everyone as much as do our own views.

Conversations of respect between diverse communities are characterized by intellectual reciprocity. They are ones in which the participants expect to learn from each other, expect to learn non-incidentally things, expect to change at least intellectually as a result of the encounter. Such conversations are not animated by nor do they result in mere tolerance of the pre-existing diversity, for political or ethical reasons. In such conversations, one participant does not treat the other as an illustration of, or variation of, or a dollop upon a truth or insight already fully possessed. There is no will to incorporate the other in any sense into one's belief system. In such conversations, one participant does not presume that the relationship is one of teacher to student (in any traditional sense of that relationship), of parent to child, of developed to underdeveloped. The participants are co-learners.

**M**y paradigms of such conversations of respect are drawn from my experience in interdisciplinary academic communities. Not all interdisciplinary conversations, to be sure, are respectful: Social scientists often view English professors as providing a service, the service of illustrative examples of their truths, or as high-class entertainment. Humanists often assume that scientists are value-blind dupes of the military-industrial complex. Other interdisciplinary conversations, somewhat less disrespectful, are so complementary as to involve little or no diversity of substance.

In genuinely respectful conversations, each disciplinary participant is aware at the outset of the incapacity of his/her own discipline (and, ideally, of him/herself) to answer the question that is being asked. Each participant is aware of his/her partiality and of the need for the other. One criterion of the genuineness of the subsequent conversations is the transformation of each participant's understanding or definition of the question—perhaps even a transformation of self-understanding.

This definition of a conversation of respect may strike many as too demanding, uncritical, or relativistic. It seems to suggest that the respect easily acknowledged as appropriate to conversations between Christians and Buddhists or between Palestinians and Jews is also appropriate to conversations between biologists and philosophers, between those in higher education and those currently excluded. Or, worse yet, between systems of beliefs on the one hand modernized to accommodate contemporary science and philosophy and, on the other, fundamentalists, traditionalists, pantheists, and all sorts of local and tribal and idiosyncratic cognitive systems.

I have three responses to these concerns. First, we foreclose the ethnographic task that Geertz and others have urged upon us as appropriate to the contemporary explosion of diversity if we presume that we will not discover something about the life of the mind and something valuable for all of us in a dialogue with the radically diverse other. Second, I do not regard these

boundary-crossing conversations as the only conversations worth having or the only activity worth engaging in; they just deserve far more of our energy at this time than we have been allotting to them. Third, in view of the collapse of Enlightenment values, of the crisis of the planetary environment, and in view of the many critiques of universalism, the reluctance of modern thought to engage in conversations with communities that retain pre-industrial values ought to be considerably less than it was a quarter of a century ago. The deep distrust of modernity for everything that originated prior to the 16th century has less and less to recommend it.

One last observation about the four frameworks of interpretation: Although particular versions of the four have done so, none of them (as presented in general terms here) attends adequately to the politics of knowledge, to the postmodern awareness of the interplay between power and truth. Democracy's celebration of the diversity of knowers is a healthy corrective to the alternatives of hierarchism; but democracy's framework attends no more sufficiently than the others to the de facto inequality among these alternatives and to the impact of that inequality upon the pursuit of truth. A fuller analysis of the nature of thinking in democratic contexts, which I have attempted elsewhere, would attend to: a) the habits of mind appropriate to participation in a democracy, and b) the creation of conditions under which the power of pooled intelligence might be fully realized.

## **II.**

Having looked at the fact of diversity-at the principal interpretations of it-and attempted to evaluate those interpretations in the context of a democratic pluralism, I turn now to three more topics: 1) the philosophical underpinnings of the current organization of higher education, including the implications of that organization for liberal education; 2) how higher education would be differently organized with the philosophical underpinnings of democratic pluralism; and 3) possible objections to my analysis.

Let me begin with this introductory observation. Higher education, judged by the standards of democratic pluralism, does not take seriously even the diversity within its walls, much less the diversity outside its walls. The diversity of disciplinary or ideological perspectives is muted by what the recent national study of the major conducted by the Association of American Colleges called "the ethos of self-containment." Even in institutions that take interdisciplinary seriously, the diversity most frequently worked with is not the challenging diversity of unshared assumptions or excluded peoples but the congenial diversity of presumed complementary. Wedded as most of higher education is to the notion that the point of teaching is to transmit what we already know, few agree with Gerald Graff in seeing a positive pedagogical function for exposing our students to unresolved conflict.

### **Organizational Philosophy**

At first blush, and from the point of view of the student, the organization of the university appears relativistic. It appears that each major, surely each division, constitutes a separate reality-world or, to borrow a recent phrase of Isaiah Berlin's, a "windowless box." The organization of the university seems intended to facilitate each student's discovering a reality-

world in which (s)he will feel comfortable, The departments, especially across divisional lines, are at best tolerant of each other, displaying in practice and in their requirements for their majors no great need of each other. Given these assumptions, they pay appropriately little attention to other departments or to general education, both because the major is believed to be self-contained and because there is little-to-no agreement on what might be significantly common across fields of inquiry. Indeed, the disciplines are often viewed, consistent with their historical origins, as correctives to each other.

From the point of view of the self-contained major, the liberally educated person is defined by the habits of mind appropriate to the particular department, From the point of view of the undeclared student, liberal education is de facto defined in a myriad of ways, and the message of the university as a whole seems to be: Define it whichever way you like.

**T**he university, of course, is only speciously relativistic. Hierarchy pervades the institution. Although messages of what is or is not important frequently escape a student's perusal of the catalogue or passage through the pork-barreled distribution requirements, the truth is that the university oozes with uncoded messages about centrality and marginality. While these messages vary from institution to institution, we are all familiar with the value judgments inherent in distinctions Eke the hard and soft sciences, graduate and undergraduate, required and optional. Discerning observers see the value judgments in the size of departments and buildings, in grading patterns, in the willingness or unwillingness to waive prerequisites, in the frequency of tenure-track appointments, and in the denial of departmental status and budgets to areas like women's studies.

Liberal education in the hierarchical university is spoken of in much the same individualistic terms that an outright relativist might employ: "Do what you're good at." But there is no mistaking the fact that, in the hierarchical university, all the disciplines are not equally valuable. By and large, it is believed by students and professors alike that the better and more serious students will be found in the prestigious departments. It is not a value-free observation to report that so-and-so majored in biochemistry at Johns Hopkins.

What about universalist or perennialist assumptions in the current organization of the university? These assumptions, of course, pervade the separate disciplines themselves (otherwise there would be no point to Geertz's critique). But the assumptions are not apparent in the organization of the university. General education, wherein one would expect the commonality of human experience or disciplinary paradigms to be addressed, is a poor stepchild in most colleges and universities. The university is organized to encourage research and teaching within unshared paradigms. If there are constancies in human cultures and disciplines, the traditional university is certainly not set up to encourage the boundary-crossings that might uncover them.

### **Democratic Pluralism?**

What about democratic pluralism and the conversations of respect upon which it thrives? To what extent is the traditional university grounded on those assumptions?

In my judgment, most universities are not grounded at all on these assumptions. I will make this point by sketching a few features of what a college/university so grounded might look like.

A college that looked upon diversity as a vital resource for learning and wished therefore to encourage conversations of respect under conditions in which unshared or disparate power would not inhibit those conversations would devote itself to three tasks. Two of the tasks are now being done in a token fashion; the third is not being done at all.

Such a college would make it the *highest priority* to recruit women, minorities, persons of color, and persons from other cultures to their faculties and student bodies as soon as possible. As a temporary measure, a measure of significant inadequacy, such colleges would undertake a massive retraining of their faculties (mis)educated in one discipline and one culture.

The second step is a prerequisite of significant multi-cultural education. Having hired some women and Persons of color from North America and around the world, it would thus be easy to claim, as many colleges now do, that they are giving diversity its due because they have a study-abroad program, because 10 percent of the faculty are tenured women, because they have a Nigerian in the history department, or because they require one course in non-Western culture. These colleges are still in the grips of the windowless boxes of relativism. In such colleges, it is still quite possible for the vast majority of students and faculty to happily go their independent ways with no experience of a conversation of respect—a transforming conversation of respect—with another culture.

Were a college or university truly committed to democratic pluralism, it would proceed to create conditions under which the representatives of different cultures need to have conversations of respect with each other in order to do their everyday teaching and research. As colleges are set up now, there is, except in the highly sequenced departments, virtually no interdependence of the various departments and frequently little of the members of the same department. A democratically pluralistic college would make war upon the ethos of self-containment, upon all boundaries that inhibit or make unnecessary conversations of respect between diverse peoples. General education would be radically reconceived to immerse students in such conversations, in full interaction with their majors. Team-taught programs and interdisciplinary/intercultural majors would become the central (though not the exclusive) mode of study.

The point requires even further elaboration. We would not have changed much if all we achieve is a sprinkling of multi-cultural courses in the departments: "Multi-cultural Cities" in the sociology department, five courses on the Far East in a 120-course history department, or a cross-listed elective for biology majors on the "History of Chinese Medicine." We need to reconceive and restructure the curriculum so that the inquiry cannot fairly be conducted without the contributions or even the presence of the currently marginalized. We would no longer find separate courses on health taught mostly by white males in separate departments of biology, sociology, and philosophy. But instead a team-taught program of 32 credits on "The Human Body in Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Perspective," or "Health and Sickness in Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Perspective," or "Self, Nature and World in Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Perspective. "

Marginalization will be perpetuated, in other words, if new voices and perspectives are added while the priorities and core of the organization remain unchanged. Marginalization ends and conversations of respect begin when the curriculum is reconceived to be unimplementable without the central participation of the currently excluded and marginalized.

This point was made in a different language by a team that visited Brown last year. It contrasted the idea of diversity-of mere diversity- with what I have been calling conversations of respect in democratic pluralism:

By contrast to the idea of [mere] diversity, which gives primary regard to the mere presence of multiple ethnic and racial groups within the community, pluralism asks of the members of all groups to explore, understand and try to appreciate one another's cultural experiences and heritage. It asks a leap of imagination as well as a growth of knowledge. It asks for a most difficult outcome: cultural self-transcendence.

Meaningful multi-culturalism, in other words, transforms the curriculum. While the presence of persons of other cultures and subcultures is a virtual prerequisite to that transformation, their "mere presence" is primarily a political achievement (which different groups will assess differently), not an intellectual or educational achievement. Real educational progress will be made when multi-culturalism becomes interculturalism.

What might such an exploration in intercultural education look and feel like to the student in a democratically pluralistic university? I have framed an answer in terms of the habits of mind I have seen developed by the most responsive students in experiments approximating what I am advocating.

Such persons have immersed themselves in a sustained learning community, a community that is intercultural and interdisciplinary. They have studied something of great human significance and have experienced how their understanding deepens with the additions of each relevant perspective of another discipline, culture, or subculture. They have mastered or at least internalized a feeling for more than one discipline, more than one culture. They know the value and indeed the necessity of seeking many and diverse perspectives, most particularly the inevitable *partiality* of those perspectives. They have mastered the skills of access to those perspectives. They have mastered the skills in understanding and integrating these diverse perspectives. They are comfortable with ambiguity and conflict. Tolerance, empathic understanding, awareness of one's own partiality, openness to growth through dialogue in pluralistic communities--all of these things have become a part of their instinctive responses to each novel situation they encounter. (They might even characterize those who proceed otherwise as uncritical tinkers.)

**T**here is one last point I wish to make about the organization of democratically pluralistic colleges. I return to the aforementioned port at Brown to preface the point:

The ideal of pluralism toward which we would have the University strive is one that can only be realized when a spirit of civility and mutual respect abounds, when all groups feel equally well-placed and secure within the community because all participate in that spirit.

I am less concerned at the moment with the "spirit of civility and mutual respect" than I am with its consequence: When all groups feel *equally well-placed and secure within the community.*" How would an institution make this happen for currently excluded or marginalized peoples?

In a previous age, we might have been content to say that such security would be provided by allowing all voices to have access to or be represented at the decision-making table. We are now too aware of the interplay of power and knowledge and of the partiality of our own listening to be satisfied with such an answer. Colleges serious about "equal placement and security" would have to be concerned with neutralizing the impact of unshared power in teaching and research as well as in personnel decisions.

I see no holding back from concluding that this suggests an end to the currently inhibiting system of rank, tenure, and promotion. I am not saying flatly that the whole system must be abandoned (though I have heard worse ideas), but if it is not, then ways must be found (as they were found in the Federated Learning Communities and its spin-offs) to conduct the conversations of respect fully within the curriculum but entirely without consequences one way or another for promotion and tenure decisions.

## **Six Objections**

Many reasonable objections might be raised to restructuring the university along the lines I have suggested. Less in the hope of responding definitively to them than in the hope of enhancing the plausibility of a democratically pluralistic vision of the university, I will respond briefly to the objections I have most frequently encountered.

1) Granted, we are living in a radically diverse world, runs the first objection. It is impossible, however, without undermining the coherence of the academic enterprise, to take all of that diversity seriously.

In reply: I am not suggesting that every institution has to mirror all the diversity in the world. The full diversity should be mirrored by the entire system of higher education, or (less so) by institutions in a region or state. What is important for a single institution is that a challenging, relevant diversity pervade the curriculum, and that its students are thereby exposed to the liberal-education experiences described above.

2) A second objection, inspired by the developmental view of human diversity: It is all well and good to acknowledge the explosion of diversity in our awareness. But all these diverse viewpoints are not equally worthwhile. It is romantic and unreasonable to believe that Native American society, pre-industrial Latin America, or the Gaelic-speaking people of the west of Ireland have as much to contribute to the understanding and shaping of the modern world as do Americans and Europeans and the Japanese.

In reply: I do not expect Native Americans to leap-frog in the near future over the Japanese and Americans in the production of smart bombs or compact discs. But by and large I will expect, until proven otherwise in sustained conversations of respect, that the marginalized cultures of the world have much to contribute to medicine, to agricultural science, to our understanding of the relationship of humanity and the environment, to child-rearing, to therapy, and to dozens of other important things. The advanced industrial nations of the world have cornered the market on neither wisdom nor science.

3) A related hierarchical objection: Can any education be serious that does not focus centrally on Western civilization? Even ignoring the fact that it is our heritage (and ought therefore to be the focus of our education), it is the most powerful and influential force on the planet.

In reply: I am not suggesting that we not study Western civilization, nor that it be marginalized or caricatured as the sole root of the world's many problems. I am suggesting, rather: a) that both in its origins (as Martin Bernal has urged) and in its current form it be studied in interaction with other cultures and with its own subcultures (which are also our heritage); and b) that this study take the form of a dialogue with members of those other (sub)cultures in situations of "equal placement and security." Political science majors, for example, ought regularly to encounter professors from Latin America and Africa in dialogue with North American professors on issues of democracy and socio-political organization. Biology majors likewise should participate in curricular-based dialogues with Chinese professors who question the assumptions of Western medicine. While students could scarcely come away from such experiences without some awareness of the partiality of Western approaches, they would also likely leave with as much or more appreciation of the strengths of our approaches than is fostered by the current non-comparative, sprawling, unfocused, and unconnected curriculum.

4) A universalist might object: There is no great need to study Buddhist psychology because the essence of it is available in Jung; and no great need to read Vine Deloria because his tribalism is not significantly different from the decentralist tradition in America or Russia.

In reply: If these intellectual phenomena are as similar as the objection supposes, that conclusion should emerge in a sustained conversation of respect with Buddhists and Native Americans. We are all too familiar with the distortions and depreciations that occur when a dominant culture or an isolated individual attempts to interpret another by incorporating it into what is already familiar. Additionally the objection presupposes, contrary to the assumptions of democratic pluralism, that the alleged similarities of these intellectual phenomena are more significant than their diversity.

5) A more general (and politically more difficult) version of the previous objection: One or another invasion of diversity has characterized the whole of at least Western history. Geertz and the multi-culturalists are exaggerating the significance of contemporary diversity. Diversity is already receiving its appropriate due.

In reply: In a democratic society, the issue under discussion is not only the philosophical issue of according diversity its proper due, but the politico-philosophical issue of how that judgment is made. Were the predominantly white and male establishment of higher education to decide what changes need to be made to accord contemporary diversity its due, the response would reflect the partiality of their experience and aspirations. Were that decision to emerge from a

democratic process in which the currently marginalized and excluded had participated from Positions of "equal placement and security," the judgment would understandably be of a different sort. Ultimately we come face-to-face with the depth or shallowness of what Dewey (in a text cited earlier) called "the democratic faith."

6) The last, and most frequently heard, objection: Changes of the sort being discussed would inevitably lead to a watering-down if not a complete collapse of standards.

In reply: There is little doubt that standards would change, just as the standards of the individual disciplines evolve in many interdisciplinary inquiries, or as the skills one values in tennis change from singles to doubles. Whether the new standards are as challenging as the old depends less on the intrinsic nature of these different intellectual enterprises than it does upon the integrity and respectfulness of the conversations.

## **Conclusion**

It is easy to read contemporary experience in the light of simpler times, of a more familiar order, and to regard the explosion of diversity as productive of fragmentation, incoherence, and conflict. From the standpoint of democratic pluralism, wherein diversity is a resource, the explosion is challenging and unsettling but highly welcome. I thus prefer the metaphor of inchoateness to the backward-looking metaphor of fragmentation. We are not staring wistfully at the fragmented ruins of a temple once whole, but poring over the recently discovered jottings for a novel whose form or plot has yet to emerge.

If higher education were to take as its role the creation of new structures of dialogue and invention and cooperative discovery (i.e., structures appropriate to an inchoate world), there may indeed emerge a new world order, I speak not of an order in which technologically powerful Americans try to bring the diversity of the world to heel, but of a new world order that empowers hitherto excluded peoples of our and other nations to contribute their experience on an equal footing to our collective understanding of ourselves, society, and the world.

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PATRICK J. HILL, while at Stony Brook in the SUNY system founded the Federated Learning Communities, a problem-focused interdisciplinary alternative to curricular organization, since replicated at a dozen or so colleges and universities From 1983 to 1990 he served as provost at the Evergreen State College, the institution which inspired the experiment at Stony Brook. He is now teaching at Evergreen. This article is adapted from an address given at the AA HE annual meeting this past March A lengthier version of the article. more focused on social philosophy than on education, will appear in the September 1991 issue of Revision, entitled "Knowledge, Diversity, and Human Solidarity."

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change July/August 1991

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