and one cannot appeal to a higher form of knowledge than the philosophical (since
the philosophy of the Great Books teaches that philosophy is the highest knowledge
man can possess).

The philosophy that teaches these liberations is Platonic philosophy, or a part of
it as interpreted by Bloom. According to this view, philosophy did not emerge until
Socrates discovered that religion is myth, and that myth is untruth. Again according
to this view, Socrates, or at any rate the philosopher as depicted by Plato in his Apology,
*Republic* (and in some few other, but, significantly, not all Platonic dialogues) is the
philosopher. Hence, philosophy as such and religion as such are irreconcilable. What
is more, since philosophy yields truth, religion, if there exist truth in it, cannot co­
exist with philosophic truth in one's mind. One, therefore, must choose, *a la* Pascal.
One must, with Averroes, deny as a philosopher what one believes on faith.

However, Scholastics and others who can be read in the Great Books have argued
that all truth, religiously, philosophically or however apprehended, is one, and that
not philosophy but theology must be the highest knowledge available to man as man.
It is doubtful that the American mind can fully be reopened, and American students
fully liberated, without considering that there might be a higher liberation than
philosophic knowledge.

These differences, like those in any family quarrel, run deep. But nothing is likely
to prevent deep divisions within the family that looks to the Great Books for inspira­
tion and truth. Those books do not teach only one lesson, even if, as Bloom and
I both believe, the right one is to be found in them. So lest I appear unwilling to
sup with him, let me say that Bloom has put supporters of the status quo on the
defensive, that he has done so forcefully and that he was right to do it!

Don Asselin

For several months now a book by University of Chicago professor Allan Bloom
was at the top of the New York Times nonfiction list. Surprising, indeed, not only
because "nonfiction" by a professor is usually not of the titillatory type, but also because
*The Closing of the American Mind* does little more than describe in voluminous chapters
the existing doomsday in the American system of education, offering little hope and
no solution. Perhaps the book, a criticism of the present social situation, pointing
an accusing finger at the educational trends of the sixties, owes its popularity to the
timeliness of its appearance — a time when the American public is disgruntled with
the apparent problems and inadequacies of the present system, but not yet sure on which scapegoat to lay the blame. Bloom provides three general areas of complaint: first, he describes the homes from which the students come as having no foundation of basic values. Next, in the middle and by far the largest section, he traces the present ignorance and cultural relativism to the vocabulary used by several German philosophers, and in the last part he complains that the universities to which the students go, no longer provide a basic liberal arts education.

At the beginning of The Closing of the American Mind, Bloom presents his main concern clearly, a concern that resurfaces periodically throughout the work: Americans have been so thorough in the excising of any prejudices in their search for a panacea of so-called “equality” that students today have “learned to doubt beliefs even before they believed in anything” (42). His chapter “The Clean Slate” describes, not the Lockeian-type of receptive young mind, but the mind of a typical American individual brought up in a milieu of “openness [that] has driven out the local deities, leaving only the speechless, meaningless country” (56).

Unfortunately, the further Bloom gets into his subject, the more he leaves behind any sense of purpose. For example, although in an earlier chapter he bemoans the American youth for his disadvantaged existence, as compared to the typical French student who from his beginnings understands the Cartesian-Pascalian tension (52). Yet in the second part, as the author continues his discussion of the current relativism of fundamentals, his original focus of concern shifts to the crisis involving all of Western civilization.

Through several long tedious chapters, Bloom suggests that Americans have assumed “bad” German philosophies that lack any firm beliefs, and he laments finally that they have lost the fundamentals of a platonic system — a belief in “a natural hierarchy of the soul’s varied and conflicting inclinations” (155). The author continues to lead the reader through several more loquacious chapters before he seems to be able to get up the courage to state simply, “Nietzsche was a cultural relativist . . .” (202). The Western world, from the Soviet Union to the United States, has incorporated his language, says Bloom, but not his superior thinking. The author summarizes his concerns at the end of the second part with the words:

There is a lifetime and more of study here, which would turn our impoverishing certitudes into humanizing doubts. To return to the reasons behind our language and weigh them against the reasons for other language would in itself liberate us. I have tried to provide the outline of an archeology of our souls as they are. We are like ignorant shepherds living on a site where great civilizations once flourished. The shepherds play with the fragments that pop up to the sur-
yet sure on
complaint: the
foundation
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tts his main
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of Western
all of his pretentious complaints ultimately go nowhere. In this respect Bloom's con­ contribution is decidedly inferior to the works of earlier spokesman on the same subject.

face, having no notion of the beautiful structures of which they were once a part. All that is necessary is a careful excavation to provide them with life­

We need history, not to tell us what happened, or to explain the past, but
to make the past alive so that it can explain us and make a future possible. This
is our educational crisis and opportunity. Western rationalism has culminated
in a rejection of reason. Is this result necessary?

After these words the reader has the right to expect that in the next section the
author will include somewhere some suggestions as to how the universities will be
able to correct the dilemma, but not so. For several more chapters Bloom continues
his lamentations, this time criticizing the universities for, among other things, not
being able to agree on the nature of a fundamental curriculum. Unfortunately, he
does not risk giving any suggestions either. Although he offers Plato's Republic as "the
book on education" (381), he makes no other recommendations. At one point he
mentions "the good old Great Books approach" as a solution but shortly thereafter
withdraws the suggestion, stating he has "objections to the Great Books cult" (344).

All of his pretentious complaints ultimately go nowhere. In this respect Bloom's con­tribution is decidedly inferior to the works of earlier spokesmen on the same subject.

Even though Bloom claims that the problem is a new one, a post-sixties one, much
of what Bloom presents is neither new nor unique. Earlier thinkers, such as Newman,
Eliot, Hutchins and Adler, have expressed similar complaints but with more eloquence
and more grace. Bloom's concepts are particularly close to those of Robert Hutchins
(whose name is not mentioned once in the volume) who in 1934 described the super­
ficial nature of the existing system of education: while Bloom judgmentally discusses
the ignorance of all others, Hutchins used the more gracious, traditional motif of speak­
ing "on my own ignorance, and incidentally, on that of many others!" Hutchins too
criticized the shallowness of existing values and the lack of interest in true education,
but he did so as an introduction to an affirmation of the liberal arts and to at least
some specific recommendations. When Bloom's phrases echo those of Hutchins, un­
fortunately the echo is a pretentious whine of Hutchins' bugle call to move forward.

Regretfully, I cannot recommend The Closing of the American Mind, although the
subject is a worthy one, and I am grateful to Bloom for bringing the subject to the
awareness of the American public. Maybe the present interest in the book will lead
to discussions beyond the book, possibly into the more positive territories of better
curricula as suggested by Hutchins in his Education for Freedom and The Great
Conversations.

Rita (Maria) Verbrugge