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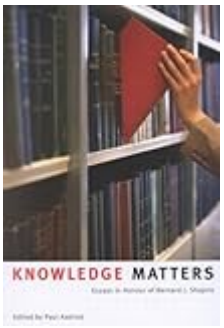

Paul Axelrod; ed. *Knowledge Matters: Essays in Honour of Bernard J. Shapiro.* Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004. xvii + 127 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7735-2831-4; $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-2830-7.

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Whither the Contemporary University?

In November, 2002, McGill University hosted a small colloquium of distinguished academics, university administrators and private-sector researchers, organized around the theme: "Knowledge Matters." The conference was convened to honor Bernard J. Shapiro, recently retired as McGill's principal. Among the presenters were Bruce Trigger, the noted McGill anthropologist, Janice Gross Stein, an acclaimed political science professor from the University of Toronto, and Chaviva Hosek, former policy research director for Prime Minister Jean Chretien. The nine papers delivered at this seminar, with some subsequent revisions, comprise the bulk of the volume, a *festschrift* dedicated to Dr. Shapiro. The editor, Paul Axelrod, is currently Dean of the Faculty of Education at York University. He has added a brief introductory overview, as well as an original chapter at the end, in which he sketches the life and career of Bernie Shapiro, and summarizes some key aspects of both his personal philosophy of education, and his dreams for the modern university.

The back cover identifies Shapiro as "one of Canada's most accomplished educators, academic administrators and civil servants, ... a visionary with a sustained belief in the power of education and the institution of the university." Readers of this review may be more familiar with his sometimes controversial tenure as Canada's first Parliamentary Ethics Commissioner. While this recent splash of media coverage may seem to some his perhaps overdue fifteen minutes of fame, in fact Shapiro has on several occasions throughout his career found himself undergoing public scrutiny, for words uttered and actions taken. Educated at Lower Canada College, McGill and Harvard, he has served over the years as department chair of humanistic and behavioral studies at Boston University, as dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario, as director of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, as Deputy Minister of Education and then Deputy Minister of Colleges and Universities for the province of Ontario, and as Secretary to the Ontario Cabinet. Along the way, he found time to conduct a one-person commission of inquiry into the issue of public funding for private schools in Ontario, and chair a panel investigating the status of teacher education facilities in Nova Scotia. Capping his pre-retirement career was an eight-year stint as Principal of McGill University

in Montreal. Not bad for the son of a Jewish immigrant who had, upon his death in 1958, bequeathed a thriving Montreal restaurant to Bernard and his twin brother, Harold, to run. After three years, the Shapiro brothers sold their business and went off to graduate school, having decided that an academic career was preferable to private entrepreneurship.

The focus question around which the McGill seminar honoring ex-Principal Shapiro was organized was a pertinent one for anyone concerned with the future of institutions of higher learning: "whither the contemporary university?" The dilemmas facing today's universities are well known. Crowded campuses, an aging infrastructure, rapidly evolving technologies, conflicting pressures for excellence and accessibility, an uneasy balance between teaching and research, competing claims about curriculum priorities, acrimonious debates over the appropriate relationship with business and government, and the haunting spectre of a rapidly diminishing autonomy, are challenges common to many academic institutions in North America, western Europe, and the Pacific Rim. Underlying all of these factors is the age-old problem of finances. Who should pay? Just as Israel Tarte, gifted election organizer for Wilfrid Laurier, once observed that elections are not won by prayers, so universities are not financed by ideals.

Given the long-time religious influence upon universities dating back to their conception in western Europe during medieval times, it is useful to gaze, briefly, into the past for clues as to where the modern descendants of Oxbridge and the Sorbonne should be headed. There is a tendency to mythologize earlier eras, imagining a golden age in antiquity when universities were pure havens of intellectual inquiry. The idyllic image does not match the harsh reality. Most universities, most of the time, have had to sing for their suppers. Whether the benefactor was the medieval Church, a handful of aristocratic donors, a clutch of parvenu robber barons, a paternal (or maternal) state, or global corporate business, the principle remains the same. The one who pays the piper, calls the tune. The French-language equivalent to this old proverb is even stronger: "qui paye commande" (p. 90).

Most of the essays in this collection address, some in a more focused way than others, one or both of the following key questions: what should a university be doing? And who will pay for it? Claude Corbo, rector of lâUniversitÃ© du QuÃ©bec Ã MontrÃ©al from 1986 to 1996, leads off with a perceptive paper derived from his recent book, *L'idÃ©e d'universitÃ©*. [1] Noting that the province of Quebec has a dual university tradition, one English-speaking and Protestant in heritage, the other French-speaking and Catholic, he proceeds to sketch an historical overview of the francophone institutions of higher learning. Corbo categorizes the five key models for an ideal university as follows: "theological, humanist, functional, utopian–and even revolutionary" (p. 4). While the theological tradition was paramount for over two centuries, Corbo contends that the two dominant approaches at the present time are the humanist and functional models. The essence of these two philosophies is neatly encapsulated in the Latin motto of my own undergraduate alma mater, the University of Western Ontario: *veritas et utilitas*. Truth and usefulness happily conjoin at the idealistic level, but are often wary adversaries in the real world. The search for truth, particularly from a humanist perspective, clashes easily with the utilitarian assumptions of a functional view of the university. Corbo deftly sketches the competing visions for universities in Quebec over time, providing a helpful template for the papers that follow.

Arnold Naimark, former president of the University of Manitoba, tackles the thorny issue of university-business-government relations. He sets the (under)funding of universities in the context of competing demands for scarce taxpayer-generated fiscal resources, and notes the trend to utilitarian or narrowly functional assessments of the university's value to society, or the polity. University administrators, he feels, have little choice but to acquiesce in the growing trend toward targeted funding and tripartite research projects that link the corporate sector, the state, and the university. He is mindful of the risks, however, and asserts that "universities must remain places for creating, communicating, and preserving knowledge in a climate of freedom and independence; for the synthesis of teaching and best practice; for the fusion of science and humanism; and for the conversion of new knowledge to beneficial application" (p. 61). That this is a tall order, he seems fully to realize.

A very readable article by William R. Pulleyblank, a Canadian ex-academic from the University of Waterloo who subsequently moved into research administration at IBM's head office, follows the Naimark piece, providing an interesting overview of the burgeoning academic-business partnership from the perspective of a large American corporation. His largely benign expository tone contrasts sharply with another essayist addressing the same issue, Bruce Trigger, who self-consciously tackles the topic "from the perspective not of an adminis-

trator but of a teacher and researcher." Trigger goes on to self-declare his bias even more firmly, as a partisan of Arts faculties. "The humanities and social sciences," he writes angrily, "are increasingly portrayed as irrelevant to the new social order and a parasitical luxury" (p. 74). No need, then, to ponder further as to Trigger's place on the humanist vs. functional axis set out by Corbo. On this scale he is a traditionalist, and makes no apology for it. Some of his harshest invective is saved for his fellow academics, who persist in narrow, self-serving yet ultimately pointless debates over such minutiae as the relative merits of the rationalist vs. postmodern paradigms. Working together, these two opposing schools of thought might tackle more fundamental issues, like the very survival of the university as a haven of independent inquiry. "We must try to convince not only governments, but the general public," Trigger argues, "whose servants in a democracy, both academics and politicians are supposed to be, that Arts faculties in universities can provide a unique setting for the production of general knowledge about human behavior, society, and culture that is no less important for realizing a sustainable future than what technologists, business people, and micromanagers have to offer" (p. 81). One imagines that Principal Shapiro heard an earful from an indignant Professor Trigger more than once during his years as McGill's administrative head.

Another stimulating essay comes from Janice Gross Stein, director of the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto. Early in her paper, she makes an important distinction between mere information and knowledge, noting that the former may be thought of as akin to a raw resource, while the latter is a value-added product, converted through the skilled processes of "analysis, interpretation, adaptation and refinement" (p. 27). She also describes the vital importance of knowledge networks in the modern world of globalized commerce and communication. In such a future, universities can link themselves to global knowledge networks, or be left behind. Categorizing knowledge six ways, into "formal and informal knowledge of what, why and how" (p. 29), Stein pleads with her academic colleagues to go beyond their traditional strengths in the formal "what" (theoretical expert) and formal "why" (informed critic) roles, thus becoming both active and fully engaged in public policy-making. As an example, she cites the "informal knowledge of learning by doing, discovering through implicit trial-and-error experimentation how outcomes can best be accomplished" (p. 31). In Stein's view, if academics would only leave their ivory towers of theory, and enter the world of practical policy-making, both the university and the broader community would be the beneficiaries.

Hanna Gray, president of the University of Chicago from 1978 to 1993, focuses on the challenges of university governance in her paper, particularly the role and potential of the university president (or principal, in McGill's case). She notes the inherent contradictions between ends and means, necessitating the nurturing of "an organized anarchy" within the university. "Its purposes of pursuing to the greatest possible extent the tasks of the discovery, preservation, and communication of knowledge create this paradox, which calls for securing an environment hospitable to the greatest flourishing of individual thought and expression while maintaining responsible commitment to the goals, and hence the processes, of a community of learning" (p. 96). Not surprisingly, Gray concludes that the role of president of such a complex institution "requires both courage and modesty" (p. 99), someone willing to learn, but also someone willing to lead.

Paul Axelrod's paper, a chapter-length biography of the symposium honoree, also serves as a case study of Gray's model for university leadership. Reading between the lines, one gathers the impression that Bernard Shapiro may have scored rather better on the courage scale than the modesty one. Certainly he had strong views, on both public and higher education, which he expressed with conviction whenever the occasion arose. On the necessity of public education, this graduate of Lower Canada College concluded that it was "our only option of creating for our young people the common socialization experience that is so vital if we are to have any hope of resisting the centrifugal forces so characteristic of modern, multicultural, technical and essentially urban societies" (p. xii). On the mission of higher education, Shapiro believes the university has "an obligation to engage with the wider community. We must be prepared not only to teach, to discover and to publish in ever more highly specialized learned journals but also to be public advocates for the research enterprise and to engage more actively in both its explanation and its application" (p. 121). Shapiro has been well served by the editor's biographical sketch, and Axelrod is perhaps overly modest in describing his paper as but "a preliminary glimpse" (p. xvi) at the life and career of the retiring McGill principal.

Three other papers round out the collection. Peter McNally, director of the McGill History Project, provides a cursory overview of McGill's institutional evolution,

viewed through the lens of three long-time principals: Sir William Dawson (1855-1893); Sir William Peterson (1895-1919); and F. Cyril James (1939-1962). McNally highlights McGill's traditional view of itself as a pan-Canadian and international university, thus confirming Corbo's depiction of two solitudes within Quebec higher education, at least until the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. Jean-Michel Lacroix, rector of l'AcadÃ©mie d'Aix-Marseille in France, provides a sweeping analysis over many decades of the struggle by French universities to preserve their autonomy amidst the ebb and flow of centralized control in Paris, mixed with periodic decentralization to the regional authorities of the country. Finally, Chaviva Hosek's paper on contending models of public health care in Canada serves as a case study of how a knowledge network, such as those noted in Stein's paper, operates to shape public policy, though she makes no attempt to link her contribution to the central theme of the evolving contemporary university.

Knowledge Matters is a stimulating collection of papers, one that provoked much thought about the present, past, and future of the university in this reader's mind. As is inevitable given the format, some papers match the theme better than others, and finding interrelated connections is occasionally a forced process. The reader might have benefited from a two- or three-paragraph overview prior to each article, providing some needed intellectual context for those of us unable to attend the original colloquium. Having said that, it should be noted that the papers by Stein and Trigger would be top-drawer contributions to any international symposium on the future of higher learning. Most of the others are not far behind, limited mainly by their more restricted scope on particular countries or individuals. Moreover, the blend of professional backgrounds represented by the contributors constitutes virtually a mirror-image of Bernard Shapiro's own career, which spanned the private sector, academic teaching and research, and elite public administration. Altogether, the book is a fitting tribute to him, and a welcome addition to our list of intellectual resources concerning the appropriate role of the university in the twenty-first century.

Note

[1]. Claude Corbo, *L'idÃ©e d'universitÃ©: Une anthologie des dÃ©bats sur l'enseignement superieur au QuÃ©bec de 1770 Ã 1970* (MontrÃ©al: Presses de l'UniversitÃ© de MontrÃ©al, 2001).

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