

Balanced curriculum could foster wholeness and truth

Mel Keiser
Guest Writer

I am concerned about the serious misunderstanding of the issues and the form of Bill Burris' full-page advertisement for the National Association of Scholars entitled "Is the Curriculum Biased?" (*The Guilfordian*, April 16).

Bill has presented us with an ad about issues we have been discussing for the last two years in the Curriculum Task Force, whether to institute a core co-requirement dealing with problems of sexism, racism and classism. Why has he chosen to advertise rather than to engage in dialogue, and at the very end of the academic year? In the language of his own ad, isn't this a "polemical" or "politicized" act that "undermines the possibility of a true community of discourse?" Such advertising violates our collaborative form of Quaker decision-making, working through issues rather than proclaiming a view.

The ad calls for "cogent argument" yet offers none itself. For instance, it affirms objectivity, yet fails to define what that is,

the reasons for it and why it is under criticism. It rather merely asserts that objectivity is subverted by multi-perspectives. It does argue against belief in the cultural conditioning of all knowing but merely calls it a name, "stereotypic."

The voice we hear in this ad is the voice of domination. Consider its combative language — attack, rebut, demand, reject, subvert. What this ad misunderstands is that the real issue is not whether Western culture or minority cultures are going to dominate our lives and curriculum, but whether the very mode of domination itself doesn't have to be changed, not only for justice and truth but for our very survival.

Presenting the issue as if it were about "proportional representation" of minority authors masks this fundamental issue of global transformation. It is not the West that is under attack but the Western mode of patriarchal domination. Equality and freedom are very important democratic virtues, but we presently adhere to them within a framework of competitive individualism that defines the self as basically separate rather than connected (to other selves, our fellow earthcreatures and the

Cosmos as a whole), and is interested principally in freedom from constraints rather than freedom for mutual interaction.

Within a society of dominators and dominated, the plea for objectivity and universalism transcending cultural particularities, such as "the special problems of women and minorities," is an endorsement of the dominators' point of view. The dominant culture of power and privilege defines the self and what it needs to learn, and because it has the power, calls its view "universal." Studying the marginalized of our own culture as well as of non-Western cultures can open our eyes to this mistaken identification of our particular perspective with the universal.

Of course objectivity in this sense is subverted in affirming that different peoples see things differently. The position of this ad is to rule out the different perspectives borne of different experiences to the degree that they do not conform to the dominator's viewpoint. It is willing to "draw upon" and be "enriched by" other cultures but only if it can maintain its hegemony.

The affirmation of objectivity is central to modern culture. But what is at issue is whether we can go beyond modern cul-

ture which splits the objective and subjective, mind and body,² to a new way of being that affirms our interrelatedness, eschews violence and aggressive control, and works toward the mutual good of the whole. Modernity's objectivism and dualism has contributed brilliantly to our understanding of self and world, but it has also brought us to the brink of nuclear and environmental annihilation. Philosophers in our own day have worked hard to redefine objectivity, to show that all "objective" truths are grounded in human passions and commitments. The truths of math, science, and history are all the result of "personal knowledge" (Polanyi), based on passionate commitments to the intelligibility of things, the pursuit of personal hunches in discovery, and the upholding of standards for confirmation that we believe in.

"Postcritical" objectivity embraces rather than denies "the special problems of women and minorities." We all speak from passionate commitments and see certain aspects of reality from our particular perspectives. We need to listen to those aspects that others see from their

see KEISER on page 6 >

Western "canon" is limited

Martha Cooley
Guest Writer

In spite of its claim to support ethnic studies, the study of non-Western cultures and the study of special problems of women and minorities in our society, the statement by the National Association of Scholars still sounds after four or more readings like an advertisement to put an end to studies going on which interfere in any way with the "canon." I have long felt that we are not doing an adequate job of teaching the background to our Western heritage and I would urge us as a group to decide what the principles are which must be taught and to decide how we wish to teach them, *but* the statement beyond this point implies that there is a simple answer to some very complex issues. Unfortunately, to respond to each point or nuance in the article would require many pages. I will therefore respond in a more general way to a few topics.

The tone of the statement implies that "other nations are rapidly adapting Western practices to their own situations" because of the values identified with Western tradition. I believe this attitude continues the Eurocentric, ethnocentric

perspective we have toward the rest of the world. Out of the Western hemisphere have emerged an area which became technologically more advanced than the rest of the world after Western expansion began in the late 15th century. The non-Western cultures (and even some Western if you include Russia) viewed Western modernization as a non-cultural process and wished to emulate it in order to compete with the West and/or throw off control by the West. There is some disagreement over whether one can modernize without adopting Western institutions. Whether this is or is not the case, it is still true that other cultures when adopting modernization and some Western institutions do put the stamp of their own culture and traditions upon the process and therefore change the character of what they adopted.

The statement's approach also fails to take into consideration, it seems to me, the length of existence of some non-Western civilizations and the level of existence of some non-Western civilizations and the level of achievement of those civilizations before 1500. In addition, this approach appears to assume that the Western domination of the world will continue to exist at a time in our history when there

see COOLEY on page 6 >

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