

St. John's Collegian

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Timeo Danaos

Mr. Finley's lecture on Thucydides opened with an outline of the program which consisted of three parts: (a) the form of Thucydides, (b) his style, and (c) his subject matter. His introduction to this program was an interesting parallel, similar to those of Spengler, which compared the Hellenic civilization with that of the Romans. Both civilizations after having periods of decline in the Mycenaean and Rovennean ages, respectively, were overwhelmed by the onslaught of hordes of invading barbarians. This onslaught, in both cases, introduced a so-called "dark age." To continue his parallel, he compared the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" to "The Song of Roland" and "Beowulf." In both groups the author was looking back upon a glorious past, while he himself was living in a "dark age." He pointed out the rebirth that both civilizations underwent; the rebirth of the Greek civilization being the "Golden Age," and that of the Roman, the world of these last three hundred years. This rebirth was in both cases marked by a rise of patriotic or nationalistic feeling. The product of this feeling was, in the one case, the city state, and in the other, the national states of today. The comparison was made even more clearly, since in both cases, the component parts of these reborn civilizations grouped together and made alliances; the Delian Confederacy, and the European alliances.

The style and form of Thucydides were strongly affected by the literary developments preceding him. Since early Greece had little or no science, and a highly unorganized religion, compared with today's, the poets and poetry held a much higher position than in any other comparable period of history. Consequently, Thucydides, although he was writing prose, imitated poetry a great deal. This poetic background also caused Thucydides to generalize his events and happenings. He has often been called the first scientific historian, but actually his ac-

curate observation was only the means to the end of generalization. Basically, his style was one of antithesis, the major contrast being the differences between Athens and Sparta. Woven into this main theme are many other contrasts, some moral, some tragic, and some political. The tragic contrast would be the potentiality of Athens, and what she actually realized in the war. The moral and political ones could have been in the description of the strife at Corcyra. Another point which was mentioned in connection with style, was that of the intelligibility of Thucydides to his contemporaries. If Pericles had given his funeral oration as Thucydides records it, the Athenians would have been bewildered, much the same as Shakespeare's contemporaries were supposedly baffled by his speeches in certain plays. The lecturer was inclined to disagree with this view and stated that Thucydides represented the trend in Greek expression, and therefore his version of the funeral oration would have been intelligible to Athenians.

The third and final part of the lecture was a summary of the history, done in the light of what was set down earlier in the lecture, and with an attempt at discovering the political implications of the various events. The main theme of the history is the greatness and weakness of Athens, the greatness being shown by her innovations to warfare, and the weakness, by her strategic shortcomings. Foremost among the Athenian innovations was the new type of sea warfare which she inaugurated. She also introduced the hoplite which was primarily an economic creation. The reason for this was their value in attacking and retaining farm land, of which there is so little in Greece. The Athenian discipline was based on a system of granting privileges for meritorious service, thereby increasing daring and initiative among the troops. This was in direct contrast to the Spartan system of rigorous barrack life along a conservative pattern. As to the war itself; in the beginning, Sparta was the leading

power, and seeing the rising force of Athens, she made war upon her. The Periclean policy was to carry on the war in a defensive manner, thereby defeating the hopes of the Spartans; but when Athens took the initiative at Syracuse, her fortunes began to crumble, resulting finally in the collapse of Athens and the Athenian culture. This fatal expedition was compared to the German attack on Russia.

A question was raised in the discussion period as to the interpretation which may be placed on the funeral oration in particular, and on the implications of the book, in general. It was pointed out that the ideal democracy which is eulogized in the oration was not in operation in Athens at that, or at any previous, time. *Thucydides* is thought by some to have been deeply ironical in his account; and in the despair and destruction at the defeat of Athens to realize the pathos of Athens and Sparta, victorious and defeated; and to take as his hero, *Alcibiades*.

The historical analogy, which may be drawn with the present, was presented; and similarities were described between the participants in the ancient and modern wars. Perhaps the irony which Thucydides discovered in the political conditions of his time may also be found in ours. For are we "lovers of the beautiful, yet with economy," and "we cultivate the mind without loss of manliness"? If we do, then we are certainly the objects of a pathetic name, and of a *History*; if not, then we are, perhaps, unworthy of such an irony.

If we are to have an Alcibiades, the lecturer might say, we should hope that the inexpressability of our pathos might be lightened a little by our works. For in the words of Pericles: "*Such was the end of these men; they were worthy of Athens, and the living need not desire to have a more heroic spirit, although they may pray for a less fatal issue. The value of such a spirit is not to be expressed in words.*"

M. V. R.

St. John's Passion

Last Sunday the St. John's College Community Chorus, under Mr. Nabokov's direction, gave a performance of excerpts from Bach's St. John's Passion at St. Anne's Church. The soloists were Mrs. Elisabeth Cronin, soprano; Miss Thelma Viol, alto; Mr. Harrison Sasser, tenor, and Mr. William Harper, bass. The instrumentalists were: Mrs. Virginia Benac, 1st violin; Mr. John Van Doren, 2nd violin; Mrs. Madeleine Weiser, viola; Mrs. Alyce McCleary, cello; Mr. Allen Goldstein, flute; Mr. Scott Desjardins, clarinet; Miss Helen Howell, organ.

The task of saying that the performance as a whole was not too successful is made easier by the fact that Mr. Nabokov and several of the executants to whom I had occasion to talk have been the first to criticize it. Bad luck had its part in it. There were last minute changes in the membership of the chorus and the soloists; there were the acoustic conditions in the church which were very difficult; there was the necessity of limiting the orchestra to six persons where there should have been three times as many. But the question also arises whether the St. John's Passion is not simply too great an enterprise for a group of amateurs with relatively limited rehearsing time. And another question arises with respect to playing excerpts. Granted that the music can be understood independently from the drama as a whole, the drama is destroyed when parts are taken out of it.

But all this general criticism does not mean that there were not parts which were done extremely well. To mention only examples: The Chorales no. 21 (Christ Who knew no sin nor wrong) and no. 65 (Help, O Christ, solo, which seemed to me a sort of climax of the whole performance, and Mrs. Cronin's aria, "From the bondage of my vices to liberate me," were both they might not be able to master it), done with great expression.

These examples could be multiplied. And in view of all the criticism a final question arises: Perhaps it is better to hear a work like the St. John's Passion in an imperfect performance than

to have no opportunity of hearing it at all. And certainly it is better for the musicians to get acquainted in study with such a work (although they might not be able to master it) than shunning its difficulties and not get acquainted with it at all.

E. L. A.

"Liberty and Union— One and Inseparable"

World Federation was Mr. Barr's subject in Sunday night's war meeting. Men are, and should be concerned with the problem of averting future struggles such as this present world conflagration, but this concern does not cease, even while supremely devoted to the fight itself. Perhaps rather, the issues are accentuated, and people are not wrong in demanding clearer statements now, of the aims and aspirations of their governments after the coming of victory.

Mr. Barr's first procedure was to outline concisely the two main opposing philosophies. It is his belief that men may, in the future, look at this war as a conflict between the principle of unity or union, and the philosophy of "laissez-faire" applied to national groups. (This latter is identical with the Spartan concept of the nature of freedom—the "independence of the state.")

In tracing the course of this universal problem, Mr. Barr pointed to its presence in the great histories we read at St. John's. In Herodotus, the Persians represent the unifying, law-giving force; the Ionian states being the separatists. In Thucydides, it is the Athenian empire in place of the Persian. Both these empires, although somewhat tyrannical, are justified because of the law and peace brought to such great areas; yet they failed in the end, for there was lacking the underlying philosophy of true union, which the speaker soon showed to exist in Republican Federation. The great political treaties on our list show concern over this struggle: Hobbes, Locke, Machiavelli, and Plato, but the U. S. Constitution and the Federalist Papers are, however, the clearest and most eloquent statements of the issue and are the chief proponents of the now-proved solution; Federation.

Examination of this theory will show how fully it meets man's needs, and man certainly has needs on a world-wide scale. Man lives in the "community of the world" as well as in his national and other communities. As long, then, as there exists this community of men, there is the problem of preserving both the similarities and differences which prevail between the individuals of the species. It is in trying to resolve certain differences, that the dialectical process enters the scene. War is a degenerate dialectic, for it comes after the breakdown of goodwill.

The problem can now more clearly be seen. How do you prevent the dialectic from falling into war? How do you keep it verbal? It has been the rise of the "national state" system which has brought about the present European anarchy. Clearly the solution lies away from that. "International Law" is a deceptive phrase; law cannot exist without government, and so-called "international law" has merely been weak convention. Disarmament is no answer; the problem is the problem of government—for war need not have shooting, and peace is not always the laying down of arms.

In recent years, there have been many attempts to restate the position of the Federalist Papers, and to apply that same theory to the world as a whole. Notable in this country for the force and simplicity of their reasoning, are Clarence Streit and Robert Humber. Our own Mortimer Adler has recently joined their ranks as a proponent of Federation.

Between Humber and Streit, there is one great difference, and it is to me personally, important enough to disqualify one of these two plans. Streit proposes a federal union of only those nations which already are maturely republican. He lists fifteen such states, all Atlantic nations, but others may be taken in if it can be shown that they are thus worthy. The speaker prefers this plan. Humber, however, would unite all states in an unrestricted world federation. Its republican constitution, and the benefits thereof, shall be extended to all states and peoples, regardless of whether they have already enjoyed the blessings of democratic society. The outside extremes,

such as Germany, can be helped along by us, the victors, for an adjustment period, and with proper handling, they too should join the union of the world. That is the true underlying spirit of federation. Streit appears to me, to be merely advocating "power politics" on a grand scale, instead of true federalism.

Romanticism is holding us in its spell. It is most romantic to believe that we can exist healthfully under the "national states" system; and we are fighting, as Mr. Barr said, "An essentially romantic war—with typically romantic mistakes."

The world is searching for a solution. Without law in the world community, we face continual and increasingly destructive wars. History has proved the merits of federation. The world shall have it!

E. V. T.

GRANVILLE HICKS
GRAFTON, N. Y.

To begin with, let me say to you, as I have said to Mr. ———, that I am sure the majority of St. John's students get far more in the way of an education than the majority of students in other colleges. I am in complete agreement with most of Van Doren's criticisms of the American college, and I am almost willing to say that any plan would work better than the planlessness that is now prevalent. The St. John's plan has a tremendous asset in the enthusiasm and faith of Barr, Buchanan, and, no doubt, the other teachers. Teachers who believe in what they are doing—most American college teachers do not—are bound to give their students something. Moreover, the students are a selected group, many of them coming to the college, I assume, because they already believe in the plan. Finally, even if it is not the best plan, it is certainly a good plan, in that no student could read the required books without some profit, whereas many students acquire little more than confusion in the chaos of the average liberal arts college.

But you will remember that Van Doren believes that the St. John's plan should be adopted by all liberal arts colleges, and that is where I quarrel with him. In the hands of average teachers and average students, the plan,

I believe, would soon degenerate into a perfectly sterile pedagogical exercise. The exceptional student has always been able to get an education for himself, no matter what college he attended and even if he attended none. Our problem is what to do for the ordinary student, the student who doesn't know what he wants out of college or out of life. Mr. ——— tells me that you have such students even at St. John's, and that no miracles happen. What you must try to imagine is a college in which such students predominate. How do you think the St. John's plan would work there?

The point that Van Doren seems to me to overlook is the extent to which our educational problem grows out of a broader social problem. As I said briefly in my review, the rapidity of change in our society has placed upon the colleges many burdens traditionally carried by home, by church, and by other social institutions. The load is too much for the colleges, and most of them are staggering. Van Doren seems to believe that Stringfellow Barr has produced a panacea. What I would say, on the contrary, is that the problems of education cannot be satisfactorily solved until many basic questions of social organization have been taken care of. It is true, as Mr. ——— reminds me, that re-education is essential to social reconstruction, and therefore I welcome what is being done at St. John's or at any other college that has an idea and a hope. But it is unsafe to believe that the St. John's experiment or any other yet attempted shows us the way and the only way to the reform of education.

Specifically, I have two criticisms of the St. John's plan. In the first place, it seems to me excessively schematic. It sticks to the great books when some other approach might be better. It assumes, for instance, that the best approach to science is to read certain scientific classics, but works of science are never final in the sense that works of art are. You can hear every piece of music written in past century, and you still will know next to nothing about Mozart and Beethoven, but it seems to me purely pedantic to insist on students' reading Huygens, La-voisier, and Fourier.

My second objection is related to my first: the plan seems to me to place far too much emphasis on ideas. I can illustrate by referring to my correspondence with Mr. ———. In enlarging on the point made above, I objected to the idea of giving students the Constitution to read and then telling them nothing about American history. He made two replies: 1. Anyone who has read Thucydides, Tacitus, and Gibbon knows that there is nothing new under the sun, and therefore he doesn't need to study American history. 2. One can understand the Constitution better if one does not know its history, for that history is largely a record of misunderstandings. As to the first of these statements, it seems to me as gross a fallacy as the contrary assumption, much more common today, that everything contemporary is brand new. Practically speaking, it would be extremely perilous to act in any concrete American situation—and you will have to act in many such situations—on the basis of Thucydides et al. The second statement Mr. ——— makes bears me out. If you want to understand the Constitution as some body of ideas that miraculously got itself born in the year 1789 and has no bearing on anything that has happened since, the St. John's plan is fine. But if you have the remotest interest in the government of your country in 1944, you had better read Beard's Economic Interpretation and his The Republic and Thurman Arnold's Folklore of Capitalism as well.

As you will recognize, to justify in detail what I have been saying would require a general outline of my opinions. Perhaps, however, I have managed to suggest what was behind my all too brief remarks in Common Sense. In general, I am afraid that St. John's is likely to turn out students who are ill-fitted to deal with the world in which they will find themselves, and who may therefore develop a kind of aloofness that could become intellectual snobbery. I still say, nevertheless, that you are as likely to get an education at St. John's as anywhere in the country.

Sincerely,

GRANVILLE HICKS.

Art Show

The painting and speculation have been tremendous. The lives of completely disinterested individuals have been complicated by paint and clutter, shavings and wire. Then, too, one has only to ponder for a moment over the social implications of Open House at an aesthetic display of this type, to fall into a reverie of a dangerous sort. Rumor, a priceless commodity, has it that the members of the Cotillion Board as a part of the entertainment will deliver a series of short interpretive talks on the connotations and intentions of the art on display.

One could comment wily on the courage of these gentlemen, and wish them all success.

As to an art show; there seems to us at least, a delightful ambiguity in the name. We think we know what art is in this connection. (We assume, of course, that what is meant is fine, or imitative art.) We had heard in the past that this was the season for the "aesthetes" to howl, and we are fairly sure that the singed and sobbing plaint of the timorous contributor will be heard through the vast and dusty reaches of the gymnasium. What troubles us, however, is the show part. We immediately think of museums, old and new, and of display cases containing the dying gasp of the artistic dabbler from the recent past. The curiously disturbing quality of the amateurs production slips through this thought; and we shudder and wake up with a bad taste in our mouths.

The part that the fine arts may play in the program has, to our knowledge, never been satisfactorily explained. Music, alone, as a fine art has been used as an integral part of the curriculum. This problem may have no solution; but the Art Show remains a successful substitute.

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CALENDAR

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

Fri., Apr. 21 — Sat., Apr. 29, 1944

Friday, April 21:

3:00-5:00 P. M.	Athletics	Back Campus
3:00-5:00 P. M.	Recorded Concert	Book Shop
7:00 P. M.	Chorus Rehearsal	Humphreys Hall
8:00 P. M.	Formal Lecture— <i>Rhetoric</i> —Stringfellow Barr	Great Hall

Saturday, April 22:

10:30 A. M.-12:00 M.	Athletics	Back Campus
8:30 P. M.	Movie— <i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i> —followed by a square dance	Iglehart Hall

Sunday, April 23:

8:00 P. M.	Piano Recital—Shura Dvorine	Iglehart Hall
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Monday, April 24:

3:00-5:00 P. M.	Athletics	Back Campus
3:00-5:00 P. M.	Records by Request	Book Shop
7:00 P. M.	Chorus Rehearsal	Humphreys Hall

Tuesday, April 25:

3:00-5:00 P. M.	Athletics	Back Campus
3:00-5:00 P. M.	Records by Request	Book Shop
7:00-8:00 P. M.	Bible Class	McDowell 22
8:00 P. M.	Mathematics Club	McDowell 21

Wednesday, April 26:

3:00-5:00 P. M.	Athletics	Back Campus
7:00-8:00 P. M.	Bible Class	McDowell 22
7:30 P. M.	Boat Club Meeting	McDowell 21
8:00 P. M.	Chamber Music Group Rehearsal	Humphreys Hall
8:00 P. M.	Recorded Concert	Book Shop

Thursday, April 27:

3:00-5:00 P. M.	Athletics	Back Campus
3:00-5:00 P. M.	Records by Request	Book Shop
7:30 P. M.	College Meeting	Great Hall

Friday, April 28:

3:00-5:00 P. M.	Athletics	Back Campus
3:00-5:00 P. M.	Recorded Concert	Humphreys Hall
7:00 P. M.	Chorus Rehearsal	Book Shop
8:00 P. M.	Formal Lecture— <i>Biology and the Periodic System</i> —George Wald, Harvard University	Great Hall

Saturday, April 29:

10:30 A. M.-12:00 M.	Athletics	Back Campus
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