

KENNETH W. THOMPSON  
Commonwealth Professor  
Government and Foreign Affairs  
University of Virginia  
Charlottesville

## The Last Quarter-Century: Change as Challenge—or as Catastrophe

Because most of us are “little conservatives” or “little liberals,” we are baffled, divided and troubled by change. Most of our judgments about change reflect in some measure our varying temperaments and styles. Either we function best with things as they are in familiar surroundings where stimuli and responses are predictable and routine, or we demand bold new challenges and large opportunities to make life worth living. It is the beginning of wisdom to recognize that in our response to change we are not the same, and we do not help one another by blind insistence that we are. There is no such thing as one objective response to change; each of us responds from the ground on which he or she stands.

In the late 1960s, a whole generation, not given to modest formulations, confronted the rest of society saying that they were not, and did not intend to be, merely their fathers’ children. Given the excesses and self-indulgences of some phases of the youth movement, we are tempted to view this rebellion as a rather unhealthy aberration not in keeping with the untroubled advance of the civilization. Our response might be more constructive if, for this somewhat painful era, we could separate the wheat from the chaff and use it to gain an important lesson. Confronted with change and coping in various ways with the contradictions and inconsistencies of our culture, we are pilgrims striving to hold to an uncertain and essentially uncharted course. As Lincoln put it, “We would know better what to do if we knew whither we were tending” — but for today this seems largely denied and beyond us.

It is, of course, a truism that change for all men is the first law of the

universe. The histories of those of our parents and grandparents who were immigrants refute the proposition that the past was a succession of known, predictable and settled events. These people made their way across a continent with its languages, customs and people as strange as its vast expanse and unexplored frontiers. Some triumphed over suffering and adversity and are celebrated as "giants in the earth"; others, including those who had known success in other lands, fought valiantly to cope with change only to succumb to forces beyond their control. They went to their graves with unfulfilled hopes and the dream of a promised land which, for them, had proved too harsh and demanding to realize. They were victims of a new world for which they were unsuited, unlucky and unprepared; they left to their successors the rewards of achieving "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." For both those who found success and a new life and those who failed to do so, existence was grounded on certain fixed points and assumptions. Most of them had faith that hard work would bring both material and spiritual rewards. They prayed to the same God; read the same historical texts; held to the same attitudes toward church, state and society; and struggled to preserve family loyalties and community structures. Their doubts centered more on the capriciousness of nature than on the unpredictability of human nature. They knew enough to respect the violence and destructiveness of winds and weather — but not so much that they were immobilized and helpless before man's uncontrolled passions and the fury of storms unleashed in civilized mass societies. They knew the pain (if not all the possible causes) of individual breakdowns, but not the cataclysmic effects of society's breakdown in holocausts, total wars, thermonuclear peril, and worldwide economic disruptions. The immigrants grew to have national pride, but not that degree of fanatic national self-righteousness which justified the wholesale slaughter of millions of German Jews or Russian kulaks to further a single national cause. There was wrongdoing, blood spilled, and lives were taken of native peoples who blocked their march across the continent, but their cruelty was less rationally organized or totally sanctified than nazism or Stalinist communism (in which religion, historical inevitability, and nationalism were inextricably joined). "If we had done for ourselves what we did for the state, what scoundrels we would have been," wrote an Italian nationalist. In earlier generations, countervailing powers kept imperial conquest and national ambition in check. More importantly, men's lives were anchored in a set of unchanging beliefs and convictions.

Some of us have known the majesty of such a faith in our parents and grandparents. My mother ended her 95 years this summer, and having spent 42 days at her hospital bedside I wrote the following lines:

Her joy was in service to others — service given with such selflessness and grace that no one could say she made them dependent — the curse of so much self-conscious giving. . . . She became a brilliant concert pianist performing in Europe and the United States. The success of her pupils, though, gave even more satisfaction. She was unsparing of them and herself as they prepared for recitals, but when they faltered she shielded them from crippling disappointment. Her discipline was painless because her love was so vast.

When she was ill, friends came to cheer her up, but left having been cheered up by her. She knew how to forgive, hundreds and thousands of times. I know, I led the list of those forgiven.

She praised God, not by words but through the example of her life. . . . She taught that anything worth doing was worth doing well — from perfecting a concerto to counseling a child. . . . Her sympathy was boundless. . . . By the power of gentleness and kindness, she drew out some of the pain from raw open wounds; her love was a poultice, her concern a source of healing. Whatever the problem, she listened and understood and, for me at least, the warmth of her living room took the place of the minister's study or the psychiatrist's couch.

Trust was for her a way of life. . . . She spent less time questioning intentions and motives, more time looking for good works that needed doing, good thoughts that needed thinking. . . . Yet all her gentler virtues could never explain her 95 years. She was driven by an inner fire. Her determination had roots in deep-seated spiritual resources and her tireless heart sustained a frail body until the very end. . . . She remained busy even in her final reveries, concerned for others when confused, aware of human pathos when perplexed about her own.

What crowned all her hard work, patience and sympathy, trust and determination, and made her loneliness tolerable was her love of God, family and friends, life and music.

Love led to service to others, to the search for worthy ends, to doing for herself by doing for others.

A very wise physician who called on her two or three times a day during her final illness observed, "They don't make them like that anymore." He might have added that the structure of faith and values that nurtured her and provided the fixed points in her life had also died for most of the culture decades before her passing. The serenity she felt in life and death, which gave her the will to live, is not present today for most of us — and this, as much as the kaleidoscope of change, is the major source of our problem. Neither cynicism about values nor easy moral rhetoric can remove the predicament. It is a predicament which can lead either to a sense of catastrophe or to a

heightened awareness of challenges to man's innermost resources. Quiet reflection and intellectual honesty prompt the recognition that most of us, at one time or another, experience alternately quiet desperation and renewed resolve in facing the future. It will not do for educators either to teach opportunity and ignore the crisis or to talk only of the crisis. It is vital that we see the problem of change through the eyes of both those who anticipate catastrophe and those who are awakened to new and unprecedented challenges by change.

### CATASTROPHE

The most poignant moment of the 1976 Republican national convention was a late-evening conversation televised from Kansas City between Vice-president Nelson Rockefeller and Senator Barry Goldwater. Bitter political foes through the 1950s and 1960s, they found themselves embracing one another in 1976 and on most major issues were in substantial accord. Probing for an explanation for their new-found unity, Walter Cronkite asked Rockefeller to explain the reasons. The former governor of New York, whose administration had brought the powers of government forcefully to bear on the economy, education, public works, and the building of a vast transportation network for the state, acknowledged rather plaintively that most, if not all, of these interventions had failed. It was his experience, he confessed, that government lacked the know-how, the resources, and the will to solve or even to mitigate the great intractable problems of the day. What flashed through the mind of at least one viewer was another political convention in Chicago eight years earlier, at which lines of young protesters chanted that the system was not working and at best should be given only one more chance. We hear that "the government is not working" too often for those melancholy words not to give us pause.

If partisan political declarations were the only indicators of crisis and catastrophe, we might have less cause for alarm, but the root causes run deeper. They extend from the first signs that the nation's civilization may be going the way of past civilizations (about which historians from Gibbon to Toynbee have written), to the breakup and decline of long-established social and political institutions, such as the nation-state, the family and the church. When Secretary of State Kissinger in a moment of political indiscretion noted that America's position as the one preeminent world power might be passing, he unleashed a small army — and navy! — of critics. Yet Kissinger may have been more prophetic than those who denounced him.

What is unique about the present crisis, whether seen as a whole or only as it touches specific institutions, is that old values and patterns appear



to be losing their hold, although new ones are not taking their place. The nation-state for all practical purposes is inadequate if not obsolete in an interdependent world; but neither world government (of which one hears less and less) nor strong regional political systems are having much success. The family is in decline, or is being bent and reshaped to a point that scarcely resembles its basic and integral character. As one young man observed, the trouble with the alternatives is the almost total absence of rules and dependable mutual responsibilities. Religion and tradition, across a broad spectrum ranging from art to reverence for life, have been brought into question or recast in postmodern terms where anything goes. Art without standards, however, is no better than life without values, not because goals and worthy purposes are ever fully realized (this was the fallacy of the mass indictments leveled by middle-class young people against their parents in the late 1960s), but because human potential is realized in some measure only in the tension between the ideal and the real.

According to an ancient Indonesian saying, it is a terrible thing to have a reasonable father. For young people, the need has never been greater to test their ideas against firmly held parental ideals, not against a moral and intellectual vacuum. Because there has been too much authoritarianism in contemporary society (whether exhibited in the imperial presidency or the authoritarian father), we have tended to assume that no one need ever be in charge. Instinctively, we know that a leaderless society brings little happiness and peace of mind. When a president such as Truman takes charge and makes decisions, he grows in stature as historians review and reassess his administration. Because society has lost faith that it can solve its problems, it celebrates those who rise to meet the challenge.

For most Americans, however, the moments of celebration are few and far between. Kenneth Clark tells us that the heaviest toll taken by the ghetto in American cities is the destruction of all hope for its inhabitants. The sense of impotence to effect change is, however, no monopoly of black people in urban areas. If there was political apathy in the 1976 presidential election, it stemmed in part from doubts that anyone in high office could make a difference. As one journalist observed in the *Washington Post* after the election, the best efforts of the last four presidents had ended in disaster, disgrace or defeat. What reason was there to expect that a successor, whatever his promises, could make a difference? Society was out of control and it seemed that nothing could be done to bring it under control.

If we look beyond both the election and individual leaders to the more general causes of despair and apocalyptic thinking, other factors are contributory. Some may continue to elude our best thought and imagination, but others are not beyond repair. One has to do with what René DuBois

calls the autonomy of science. Science by its own momentum makes policy decisions for mankind. Technology provides the means for building larger and faster airplanes, automobiles which demand more gasoline and highways and produce more pollution, and armaments increasingly lethal and destructive. Physicist Herbert York explains that for armaments, the line separating research and development from procurement and production is virtually indistinguishable. Once scientists have demonstrated that the latest armaments are feasible, they will have begun their procurement. The ability to produce new weaponry becomes tantamount to its production. It becomes more and more difficult for the citizen decision-maker to break into the process and arrest the building of new defense systems once scientists establish their feasibility. The SST decision by Congress may be the exception to what has seemed to be an irreversible chain of events. The decision whether or not to build the B-1 bomber may prove to be another test case, the results of which now remain open to speculation and the weight of contending experts and interest groups.

Another contributing factor to the public's sense of impotence is the lack of a relevant framework for understanding the rapidly moving events that whirl around bewildered citizens. For the future it will not be enough to say "trust the people," and then to bury them in a blizzard of reports of seemingly unconnected and unexplained events. Political messages in election campaigns, as well as the daily barrage of rapid-fire evening news items, are delivered in 30-second capsules interspersed with 45-second commercials, leaving context and background to the citizen's ignorance, uncertainty and prejudice. What is needed at every point are anchors for the culture, and neither politicians, newsmen, nor model-building social scientists or philosophers are filling the void. Consequently, society, tossed about by the winds of change, is bereft of moorings and grounding.

Finally, education, which for most of mankind has been its last best hope, is itself contributing to the present malaise. In the 1960s, a leading American foundation announced it was prepared to assist scholars who proposed to study major foreign policy problems anticipated two to five years ahead but which were not currently on the agenda of the secretary of state. The announcement brought less than a handful of responses — in contrast with a flood of proposals on simulation studies, model-building and decision-making theories.

In moments of candor, we educators who feverishly pursue our interests need to admit that no area of human endeavor is more dominated by fads and fashions than ours, more controlled by old and new establishments and cliques, and more swept along by currently acceptable dogmas and methodologies. We need to recognize that there is a perfectly astounding amount

of intolerance in the scholarly world. I have repeatedly observed the process at work, whereby the "outs" became the "ins," and heterodox and unorthodox thinkers created their own new orthodoxies. Once they had influence, those who were long denied entrance to the corridors of power slammed the doors to others coming after them. Indeed, it is difficult to name more than a very few academic thinkers whose influence on public policy, broadly conceived, has made a difference. The fragmentation of education and research leads to the isolation of one aspect of a problem — and to the pretense that understanding it means understanding the whole. The rash of investigations of human sexuality (some undoubtedly long overdue), which equate statistical evidence on the percentage rate of sexual gratification of white urban females aged 23 to 27 with long and happy marriages, is only the latest example of such fragmentation of knowledge.

It is not surprising, therefore, that from no group more than the educators have lamentations been greater concerning the impending catastrophe. One publicist wrote that while scholars have fiddled, the cities and bomb-packed world are burning. Although this indictment is probably too severe, those of us who live our days in the cloistered academic world need to acknowledge that, all too often, major initiatives for response to change come not from intellectuals but from the man on the street. Education, which ought to be in the vanguard, often brings up the rear. The great issues of values, of justice and peace, equality and order, are evidently too large for academics to chew. Although there are signs that the prevailing school of value-free social science is dispirited and divided, its numbers and influence persist. Paging through the journals will quell any doubts. The scholarly world stands fragmented and divided, atomized and quantifying, and counting and refining in the face of life-and-death decisions that call for profound value choices.

There is deep pathos in education's tragic failure to see change as challenge rather than as catastrophe. The root cause of man's problem in coping with change is one for which educated thinkers have what economists call a comparative advantage. We tend to see the apocalypse in each new expression of change because we are crippled by a sense of powerlessness. The great choices which lie before us seem to require some form of collective action. Faced by this, the solitary individual resigns himself to a sense of impotence and inertia. Our problems are so immensely complicated and difficult that individuals conclude there is little or nothing they can do. Questions of justice and a just society lie beyond the reach, for instance, of logical positivism and linguistic analysis; for the contemporary philosopher, in comparison with William James or Reinhold Niebuhr, justice loses its sense of urgency. Once-hallowed issues of moral reasoning are pushed aside in the

practical management of large hospitals, prisons and schools, to say nothing of big government. Apathy and inertia thus take the place of compassion and social conscience. Educators put the capstone on a moral and intellectual atmosphere which accepts the possibility of catastrophe. Reality is too large for microtheory. Nevertheless, it is precisely in the area where mind and spirit meet that classical education has traditionally made its most lasting contribution.

## CHALLENGE

Fortunately, the failure of education and of society in general to meet novel and apparently insoluble problems of change is not universal. Often, on the periphery of establishment groups in education and public policy, there are signs of a qualitatively different approach. Harvard's greatest legal scholar, Paul Freund, calls for a return to the ancient tradition of moral reasoning. John Rawls through his *Theory of Justice* has stirred discussion and controversy reminiscent of the debates that went on in the Harvard of James, Hocking, and Royce. The literature of the past several decades in international relations has thrown the spotlight on the conflicting imperatives of national interest and world order. In its report, the Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences at the Hastings Center deals with such topics as "The Right to Die in California," "Sterilizing the Poor and the Incompetent," and "The Legal Right to Health Care." New journals on philosophy and public policy are springing up, and a 7-university consortium fellowship program has chosen world order and world politics as its organizing theme. Jimmy Carter has conducted a winning campaign unashamedly centering on "love and justice," and the electorate apparently finds a note of credibility in the claim that too few people have acquired too much power within the geographical confines of one city.

The road ahead is long and tortuous, and there is as much reason to fear as to rejoice over the first faint signs of response. It is one thing to write or talk of justice and another to point the way to implanting justice. The French philosopher Paul Ricouer has helped to crystallize our thinking by suggesting that the day of the lonely individual "good Samaritan" has passed, and that what we are witnessing today is the effort to filter such justice and compassion, as we know them, through vast sprawling networks of public and private bureaucracy. For health care, old-age retirement, and unemployment, this is the machinery by which society seeks to give each man his due. Our ethicists implore us to understand that ethics must be spelled out in different contexts for differing circumstances and for quite specific situations. All this occurs within the exigencies of time and change. Trying to do what



is right involves making choices under circumstances of flux. The policy-maker must act, as does the hunter following a bird in flight. If the aim is wrong or the prey is not led, the only rewards for the trouble are tail feathers.

Moreover, today's changes are legion and multifaceted and have ramifications in all directions. Government must help us to meet our more pressing problems, some of which can be dealt with only for society as a whole. Government, however, has had its chance since the days of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and if we have learned nothing else from nearly five decades of experience with big government, we know that no sector, whether public or private, has a monopoly on wisdom and justice. Moreover, the warning signs have flashed that a healthy economy atrophies when an overly large segment of wage-earners draws a too-great percentage of income from the taxes of an ever-smaller segment of the producers of goods and services. Volunteerism, which writers from de Tocqueville to Riesman have singled out as unique to the American system, is threatened when powerless men resign themselves to letting John Doe do it, especially when John Doe is in far-off Washington, D.C. Therefore, the future promises a host of ever-shifting and experimental patterns of governmental relations, some highly centralized, but others marked by the type of decentralized efforts which John Gardner and others have advocated. In every field of public endeavor, including diplomacy, innovations are likely. We have tried public diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral negotiations, quiet diplomacy, and shuttle diplomacy; and, depending on the interests at stake, each has its merits and its problems. If we are able to keep personal vanity and pride of authorship in check, we may still discover the most appropriate diplomatic machinery and techniques to meet new challenges and to prevent worldwide self-destruction.

It is obvious that another of the most severe challenges in the years ahead will come in the workings of the economy. If one issue predominated in the 1976 elections, it was that of inflation/unemployment. No branch of the social sciences takes greater pride in the rigor of its methods and the precision of forecasting than economics, yet none was brought up short more dramatically by dominant economic trends. It is "infra dig" among economic scientists to urge that some of the concerns of what once was called political economy deserve reexamination. Econometrics and microtheory have evolved tools of analysis which are far more sophisticated than policy-oriented studies of an earlier day. With the manifold forms of interaction between government and the economy, however, the focus of economics must, at least in part, be addressed once more to the politics of the economy. At the same time, the oil crisis has helped us to see that a national approach to economics is not enough. Large corporations which make use of political consultants are conscious of the need, and it is our best economists who should look be-

yond national boundaries if they are to achieve their fondest hope of making the study of economics operationally relevant. Some younger economists are manifesting an interest in the economics of education, cities and oil, and while the terminology may offend the more orthodox economists, the need is too pressing to justify the arguments of the purists.

Change is also expressed in demands that more attention be given to the quality of life. In every one of the developing countries, national leaders with whom I have worked have explained that increasing gross national product, though a worthy national goal, was not sufficient. They have been frank to say that they did not wish to run the cycle of industrialization-commercialization-pollution and urban blight which developed countries have followed — although trends in the richer developing countries point that way. Leaders of developing countries are in search of innovative educational structures more appropriate to their needs. They are coming forward with rural development strategies designed to increase the use of intermediate technologies, lifelong learning, indigenous entrepreneurs, and technical/vocational training. The twin goals of the so-called poorer nations are to gear education more directly to community problems closing the gap between work and study, and to define national goals to generate support among the people. The forms and structures through which the poorer countries are working hardly correspond to those of the richer countries, and the best way to earn stripes as an “ugly American” is to judge the social and political life of one’s hosts during the first day or two of a visit.

Instead, there is much that Americans can learn from these nations (e.g., regarding education for development); a possible meeting ground is a common heightened awareness that the quality of life deserves greater emphasis. Within the United States, changing work patterns and lifestyles demand reconsideration. The 4-day workweek is becoming increasingly common, and early retirement for various occupations occurs as often in one’s fifties as in the sixties. The mechanization of certain work tasks puts lively and energetic people in the position of looking for satisfaction outside their places of major employment. In my youth, leisure time was in short supply for most people; now almost every community has its adult education program, its recreational offerings, and numerous community programs of varying importance. For adults returning to school to complete their education, the community colleges (which Harold Howe II considers the single great twentieth-century educational innovation) are filling an urgent need. Repertory theaters have sprung up in many communities, and local symphonies and dance groups provide a richer cultural life.

Viewing the advanced and developing countries, I find the crucial role that cultural development has come to play. In developing countries, it is

the route to national integration. Most of the new nations lack the main requisites of nationalism. They are at best loosely organized collections of tribes brought together by the accident of colonial settlements. For such peoples, culture has a paramount role in national unification; without it they are likely not to know what it means to be a Nigerian or a Tanzanian.

In the developed countries, culture faces a different challenge. Here the identity crisis is less national and more individual. With more people spending more time away from their work, and with work itself (as the late Hannah Arendt wrote) taking on attributes of drudgery and unrewarding labor rather than of the dignity of work, the individual must find meaning outside his job. Here he comes to a fork in the road, a point at which the choice must be made between cultural and civic activities capable of producing continued personal growth and the endless repetition of childhood adventures guaranteeing a permanent state of adolescence.

A related social problem which may be the greatest challenge must be mentioned here. America leads the world in its scandalous treatment of the aging. Driven from their homes, they languish in second-class nursing centers which at their best are an invitation to perpetual loneliness. It is scant consolation that the other developed countries have fallen one by one into similarly disgraceful patterns. Japan had been a country in which 75 percent of the aged lived with and were revered by their families. The Japanese now house most of their older people in public establishments. Recently, a dying woman who had been a longtime resident in such a paradise left all her earthly belongings to her television set, the only object with which, according to her will, she had had any communication in the last fifteen years of her life.

This leads to the last item on the agenda: our communications network. No one can fault the United States for its technological achievements. Modern television is the most powerful instrument known to man for the instantaneous communication of the nation's business. It is capable of bringing art and education into the living room of the poorest family. Potentially it is the world's greatest educator and human equalizer. Yet for many of our citizens it has become the opiate of the people, a substitute for civic participation. We are drenched in soap operas, schooled in the latest forms of violence, and deprived of the deepest mysteries of the human drama. Television offers the public the lowest common denominator of American life. It claims to provide what the people want. It simplifies and corrupts the nation's most basic dialogues, including the political and international.

This is plain talk and not pleasant to relate. Any balanced treatment would hasten to give credit for those occasional national services that television has rendered, such as its coverage of Watergate, the walk on the moon,

and of the war in Vietnam. The challenge posed, however, is that we are capable of doing so much better, not only with communications but with the care of the aged, cultural development, the quality of life, the workings of the economy, and the ordering of political life. It is defeatist to think and act as if improvements lay beyond human will. We need to reorder priorities and to restructure institutions. Profits and power may be essential in society, but so is a renewed sense of service. Rights are a part of the heritage, but so are responsibilities. If self-esteem requires that we think more about the self, then a good society implies a nonneglect of the common good. In rejecting the traditional forms of Western values, we have abandoned what is far more important: their substance.

Is there a way out? Is there a way to renew the essence of the heritage? I suggest that the answer lies in a return to moral reasoning. Moral reasoning is the discipline of weighing and considering competing and sometimes conflicting goods. Moral choice involves the ordering of rights that compete with other rights and the limitations which one places on the other. The right of freedom of speech, the Supreme Court says, does not entail the right to cry "Fire!" in a crowded theater. The rights of the majority can never justify extinguishing all rights for the minority. If we could restore this type of thinking in all the manifold areas in which we must respond to change, we might proceed within a coherent framework of thought. We might then see change as a challenge, not as a catastrophe.

No one can forecast with assurance the directions which history will take in the next quarter-century. As H.L.A. Fisher argued in a brilliant essay, no task is more uncertain and bewildering: "We know more about the world in which we live and are in a better position to gauge the forces which move it. Our statistics are more complete, our knowledge of the past is fuller. . . ." Fisher then warned, however:

Although we have gained in precision, the factors to be assessed have increased in number and complexity. In place of the isolated rivalries of the past, we are now faced with struggles in which the whole habitable globe is either directly or indirectly involved. The problems have become so vast, their solution depends on a forecast of so many imponderables and concurrent factors, upon so vast a complexus of doubtful contingencies, that statesmanship . . . has become three parts guesswork.

With all the refinements of methods and technology, we still depend on social imagination, political judgment and human wisdom. Fisher demonstrates in a review of political prophets the greater prescience of a small group of political thinkers, including Burke, Polybius, de Tocqueville, and Seeley. He offers a longer list of those whose historical judgments were far from the mark. If we consider present-day thinkers and rank them as Fisher did, we



must note that Lippmann warned of the risks of a land war in Asia, Niebuhr prophesied that the United States would not be accepted or admired everywhere in the Third World, and Morgenthau proclaimed that foreign policy had to reflect the national interest, not a moral crusade. It remains true even in the age of the computer that all human intelligence, as it reaches out to comprehend the future, is not equal. In Fisher's words, "the higher gifts of divination . . . depend upon an insight into the fundamental moral forces of the world." In this sense the poet Wordsworth was superior to statesmen such as Pitt or Napoleon, for he foresaw in the rise of Spain an instrument for thwarting French imperialism, the need to curb the abuses of child labor and other evils of industrialism, the emergence of national compulsory education, and the corruption of the popular press. The goal in these complex human areas is, as the British say, to get it right, and rightness here encompasses both justice and clarity.

I would thus advocate a call for greater openness and sympathy for the thought and writings of the exceptional few whose minds bring us closer to the truth and are more than compilers, conceptualizers or classifiers. These few can be recognized by their words, especially the quality of them more than the quantity. But to know them one must know oneself — the gravity of one's commitments, concerns and questions — and one's resolve to seek the truth. I challenge anyone with deep and abiding concerns and questions on democracy to read de Tocqueville without sensing that here is such a mind. I ask anyone with a commitment to progress to read Carl Becker without a similar enlightenment. One cannot study Hannah Arendt's writing without gaining a new understanding of totalitarianism. You will not find such writers and prophets on the list of bestsellers nor reported — as a rule — prominently in *Publishers Weekly*. It is unlikely that large publishers will have pulled out all the stops of their public relations machinery for these writers — at least while they are alive (I have been told that Carl Becker's books sold an average of 800-1,000 copies). I recently finished a volume called *Interpreters and Critics of the Cold War* — a review of the four or five most penetrating thinkers whose interpretations help me, more than either the official or revisionist historians, to comprehend the Cold War. Several publishers have responded that because two of my chosen interpreters are dead, their work has been superseded.

When it comes to interpreting the future or comprehending any historical period, our only recourse is to the exceptional few publishers notwithstanding. Where we see catastrophe or contradictions, they may bring to light some neglected source of explanation. If change is considered a challenging opportunity, they may help to plan the way to meet it and respond. It remains true that behind every major policy direction, there is, as Keynes

so graphically put it, some "oftentimes obscure academic scribbler." Behind understanding, there is often a book. The great challenge is to seek out the interpreters and critics who provide this resource. Unless we find them and ponder their thought, insights, and conclusions, we will probably remain suspended between dreams and despair, between challenge and catastrophe, between resolve and resignation when faced with a dangerous, uncertain, but awesome future. It will not do to condemn the system and fall into a deep and self-righteous sleep, for in Herbert Butterfield's words: "Like our forefathers, we may feel that the world was spoiled before ever we were born. . . . It is pointless for us to blame our predecessors, for they handed down to us a world of patches and compromises, because they too had their desperate moments wondering sometimes whether they could keep the world on its legs at all."

If we are to do more than blame others and condemn our fate, however, we shall need all the accumulated resources both of ancient and modern mankind. Of all professions, your profession can help to point the way to these rich treasure-houses of wisdom and understanding.

JESSE H. SHERA

Dean Emeritus  
Case Western Reserve University  
Cleveland, Ohio

### **Response**

I have two immediate reactions to Thompson's paper. The first is that if, as we Irish say, his sainted mother had not been such a distinguished musician, what a magnificent librarian she would have made! The other is that by simply rereading his paper and substituting the word *librarianship* for *education*, my paper would scarcely be needed at all.

We have a tremendous task ahead of us. The situation of the librarian and the library is very much like that of education. I have said repeatedly that the library is a creature of society, and that it came into being because society needed libraries; and the goals of the library were the goals of society.

But what are the goals of society? Society is floundering in a morass of skepticism, doubt, uncertainty, disbelief. In this environment the library is very much like the university. President Goheen of Princeton once said, apropos of the student activist movement in the late 1960s, that "the students set out to destroy the university, when suddenly they discovered how easy it would be to destroy it, and they pulled back in terror." I think this is true. The library, too, is a very delicate thing, and it would be very easy to destroy it. Yet we need libraries, we must have libraries, we have had libraries ever since the time of Ashurbanipal and even before. Obviously, they fill a need, but the library, I think, is by nature (and I have been criticized for this statement) not a dynamic institution. The reader must seek it out for himself. We cannot force people into the library and make them read. We hold our lamp beside the golden door, and those who seek it out can seek it to their benefit.

Society is not intellectual. Libraries began and had existed almost to the middle of the nineteenth century for the elite, for those whom the sociologists call the "elect." They were needed by the ministers, the lawyers, the teachers, the people for whom books were necessary to their work. There were people like Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, who said the library is a nest to hatch scholars (which it is).

In the 1830s there was a great spontaneous outpouring of enthusiasm for the improvement of the "common man." I think one of the greatest achievements of the library in this country is recorded in numerous autobiographies of second-generation immigrants whose parents fired the enthusiasm for this new land of opportunity and the good things it offered, and admonished their children to go to the New York Public Library and read: "Educate yourself, discover your opportunities." We've lost this enthusiasm somehow, again because of some of the elements that Thompson has cataloged — the breakup of the family, the loss of children's respect for their elders, rejection of the past. But the past must not be rejected. Alex Haley's book *Roots* (about the descendants of an exslave) brings home, I think movingly, the devastating effect upon a people who have no roots, who have been literally torn from their homeland. They do not know anything about their remote backgrounds and ancestors; they do not know who they were. The library is the memory of society in more ways than one; what is past is prologue.

You will recall that the Red Queen told Alice that a memory should



work both ways. Alice said that she was afraid her memory did not work in that fashion; she could not remember things before they happened. The Red Queen replied that it must be a very poor memory that works only backward. We must think of history in terms of its meaning for the future.

Thompson has referred to the tremendous advances in communication, and the library has shared in these in a variety of ways. Within the past quarter-century science has "invaded" the library and, largely through the computer and allied technologies, is bringing to the library many changes that promise increasingly efficient operations. I have often said that I wished I were thirty years younger and a great deal smarter so that I might experience the results of all this effort. It may not be long before the library will be a quite different kind of institution from that which all of us have known. Whether it will be a "better" institution is for us and our immediate successors to determine.

In all this change we must not forget that change only for the sake of change is not good; that it is not efficient to do efficiently that which should not be done at all. Abraham Kaplan in one of his essays speaks of the "law of the instrument," by which he means that every invention tends to bring with it the conviction that it is just the machine that is required to do whatever it is that we need done.<sup>1</sup> To say it another way, the instrument creates its own uses. A boy given a hammer immediately concludes that everything needs to be pounded, and an executive who has acquired a copier for the first time comes to the conclusion that all his thoughts must be immortalized in multiple copies. (Indeed, executives have been known to conjure up "immortal thoughts" just so they can be reproduced.) The greatest danger of machine technology in the library, however, is that it can lead to the dehumanization of the library's services. We must take great care that we do not lose a certain rare quality of the "good" librarian epitomized by that perceptive "little old lady in tennis shoes" who, with all her idiosyncracies, knew her materials and knew her clientele.

Several years ago at a conference at the University of Maryland, a tough-minded, very unsentimental professor of economics related that when he was a boy he was a frequent visitor to the town's public library. On one occasion the lady librarian — of the type I have just described — told him that she had some books that she thought would be of interest to him. She added that they were in the adult book collection, but nevertheless she thought that he was "ready for them." He concluded his story with an emphasis on the influence that her statement that he was ready for adult books had on his morale and self-confidence. I would not deny that the little-old-lady librarian is inefficient by modern standards of administrative management, but in losing her we are losing something of the same quality



that the medical profession is losing with the disappearance of the family doctor. Perhaps a machine can be devised which will tell little boys when they are ready for the adult books, but at best this appears to be unlikely.

I have no desire to use science as a whipping-boy; the other disciplines have their own shortcomings and excesses. I have emphasized science, however, because for so many centuries the humanities were the "highway" to librarianship, and librarians were so steeped in the humanistic tradition, that there is now some danger of their being misled by the glamor of science *qua* science. I do not want machines to be in the saddle and to ride librarianship; I do not want librarians to be lured by the bright light of the "instrument." I yield to no one in my enthusiasm for what the machine, properly understood and controlled, can do for the improvement of library service; indeed I have myself played some part in the "scientific revolution" that has come to the library — but I want the machine's limitations, as well as its benefactions, to be thoroughly understood.

The library must operate on two levels: with science as it relates to its own operations, and with science as it relates to the society the library serves. The library as a creature of society has been influenced by science in ways other than the alteration of its technical processes and procedures. Science has been, in large part, responsible for the population problems created by a continually rising birthrate and, at the other end of the spectrum, a greater life expectancy. The physical sciences have become sorcerer's apprentices, gobbling up our finite natural resources at an ever-increasing rate and presenting us with problems such as the conservation of energy, the preservation of our natural resources, the control of pollutants in our environment, the cult of bigness for its own sake, and our confrontation with a transportation system adapted almost solely to the automobile. The list could go on and on. We are besieged on all sides by the problems of living in a society where change is rapid beyond any previous experience.

The problems are mountain high; they reach to the sky. I can remember sitting in the college library one snowy afternoon as an undergraduate, reading Edward A. Ross's *Introduction to Sociology*, and particularly the concluding sentence of one of his chapters in which he said: "Humanity has a perilous knife-edge to travel and humanity may fail." I still remember the shudder that went through me at that time, and the thought still makes me shudder.

I see it as the responsibility of the library to make available, in a variety of ways, resources which will enable people to form educated decisions about how they collectively should try to solve these modern-day problems. The solution will take a lot of good people who have the courage and the perceptiveness to take a critical look at what passes for progress these days.

Libraries cannot fulfill this responsibility alone, even though they may benefit by having at their disposal the most modern of technological systems. Libraries must have super-librarians who have a social awareness, if not a "social conscience." This brings us to a consideration of the qualities which must be developed and encouraged in the training of good librarians.

Throughout my career in library education, I have pondered the questions of the characteristics of the "good" librarian, and of which of these characteristics can best be learned in the classroom environment. I believe there are four elements: (1) a sound general, or liberal, education; (2) substantive knowledge, expressed as the mastery of a subject field; (3) the ability to communicate that knowledge to others; and (4) a sense of humor. Let us look briefly at each of these qualities.

Of all professionals, the librarian most needs a good general education in order to be aware of the multiplicity of forces and concerns that comprise the complex society that he or she will serve. Indeed, a liberal education is important to free people everywhere, but it is especially important to the librarian, who must be familiar with the currents and crosscurrents that shape and reshape the culture.

The second element, substantive knowledge, is exemplified as a mastery of a specific subject field or cluster of closely related fields. A field, its bibliography, its technical vocabulary, its landmark works, the problems it attacks, and its current trends should all be mastered by the librarian. The field chosen must be a recognized academic discipline. This is the area that has been most neglected by library education, and that has been sacrificed to make room for an ever-expanding body of library technology. The "good" librarian should have at least a master's degree in a subject field, and the academic librarian should have a doctorate. The current dual-master's program at Case Western Reserve's School of Library Science is a step in the right direction — but only a step. Since the early 1950s the school has had such a program at the doctorate level, but at the master's level there is some danger that both the substantive field and librarianship are getting short-changed. Some shrinkage in library technology can be tolerated and even beneficial, but the subject courses are basic and need all the attention that a full master's curriculum makes possible.

Third is communication, for all the knowledge in the world is valueless if it cannot be communicated to others. The librarian is, or should be, no Fafner guarding jealously the golden hoard that is his bibliographic collection. As part of the communication process, librarianship should make its practitioners competent in communication itself, and this is done largely through a mastery of the subject specialization. We must learn to meet our

respective clienteles on their own levels; this requires a flexibility that few in the profession now seem to possess.

Finally, there is a sense of humor. Some of my friends tell me that this is the most important of all. I do not agree, but it is important. A sense of humor — which really is a sense of proportion, a sense of values — cannot be taught in the classroom, but an atmosphere can be created that encourages its development. "I hasten to laugh at everything," said Figaro in Beaumarchais' *Barber of Seville*, "for fear of being compelled to weep over it." Christopher Morley wrote that it is all very well to have a crown of thorns, and indeed, every sensitive person carries one in secret; but the times when it should be displayed to public view are very few, and even then it should be worn cocked over one ear. Librarians have their own professional crowns of thorns, but they should be kept discreetly from public gaze.

There are doubtless those librarians who will argue that the financial rewards being what they are, no librarian can afford the kind of professional education I have suggested here. I think that this logic places the cart before the horse, and that librarians prepared as I have proposed would experience, even in today's market, little difficulty in securing appropriate remuneration. We cannot ignore the fact that we are not attracting to the field of librarianship young men and women in sufficiently large numbers who have the potential to become the kind of "good" librarians that I have described. Inadequate financial reward is only a partial explanation; even more important is the absence of intellectual challenge that librarianship seems to present. This failure is clearly the fault of the library schools. Our accrediting procedures have thrown open the floodgates to mediocrity. We have continued to accredit schools not because of excellence, but because they are no worse than schools already enjoying accreditation. The standards in and of themselves are reasonably adequate, but it is their enforcement that is lax. We do not know the optimum number of schools that are needed, but we go blindly forward accrediting more and more, without regard to the market for their graduates.

Despite the proliferation of library schools and the pretended dedication to research, we are still plagued by a multitude of unanswered questions. For example, we continue to admire the growth of circulation, particularly the growth in circulation of nonfiction, without understanding the artificiality of the distinction in terms of social values or utility. We continue to dedicate ourselves to the growth of the book collections over which we preside on the assumption that "bigger is better," without regard to the optimum size of a library for any given clientele. I remember well from personal experience how much easier it was to use the unusually well-selected collection

of my undergraduate library than the millions of books stacked in the Library of Congress. With all the new instrumentalities for communication (such as electronic networks) that science has given us, this race for bigness has lost what little rationale it may once have had. Finally, the fear of censorship still haunts us, despite the fact that publishing innovations have put inexpensive "trash" within the financial reach of all who want to read it. While subscribing to the belief that the librarian is an educator, we have not stopped to define what that role implies with respect to acquisition policies.

I think that librarians are the last to realize the power of the library. The public that the library serves may be numerically small in terms of the total population, but that public is far more important in the making of social policy and the betterment of society than its numbers suggest. I think it is good that the library is an "elitist" institution, for it is the "elite" who make public policy.

Today's college students present a strange spectrum of competence and motivation. At one extreme, they are the most brilliant and intellectually developed young men and women we have ever had, as the science fairs sponsored by the National Science Foundation testify. At the other extreme, droves of students attend college because "it is the thing to do," because it brings prestige; they are lazy, indifferent, untouched by intellectual curiosity. Between these two extremes stands the middle group, which in an earlier era would be known as "gentlemen scholars" and which now seems to be shrinking. As library educators we must look to the talented for recruits, but we are getting recruits from the vanishing middle group in larger quantities than will have job opportunities. We have not employed the right intellectual appeals or given the student an intellectually challenging program of study.

We must not sell ourselves short with an inadequate educational program. We must believe in ourselves and the importance of what we are doing. We must stop arguing from poverty. Librarianship is what we make it, and recognition of that fact is the first essential step toward making it what it should be. Roy Jenkins, head of the European Commission, although speaking in a different context from that which concerns us here, has nevertheless made some observations that are relevant to the task that confronts the library profession. Speaking before the representatives of the 9-nation European community, he said:

If our community cannot be made to work, what can? If we among the richest and certainly among the most favored and talented of the populations of the globe, cannot learn to work together, what prospect is there for humanity, or for a decent, civilized life for ordinary men and women? These are the stakes and these are the issues. Let us approach



them with an awesome sense of responsibility, but also with a courageous and determined optimism.

At the dedication of the new library of York University in Toronto, Archibald MacLeish told his audience:

The library, almost alone of the great monuments of civilization, stands taller now than it ever did before. The city — our American city at least — decays. The nation loses its grandeur, becomes what we call “a power,” a Pentagon, a store of missiles. The university is no longer always certain what it is. But the library remains: a silent and enduring affirmation that the great Reports still speak, and not alone but somehow all together — that, whatever else is chance and accident, the human mind, that mystery, still seems to mean.<sup>2</sup>

Thus I am brought back to Thompson’s analysis and the perilous knife-edge of E. A. Ross. There is an ominous note of the inevitable in Hamlet’s prophetic warning:

If it be now, ’tis not to come;  
 If it be not to come, it will be now;  
 If it be not now, yet it will come;  
 The readiness is all.

Those of you who have specialized in library service to young people are undoubtedly familiar with Rosemary Sutcliff’s magnificent series of historical novels, and particularly *The Lantern Bearers*, which treats of the devastation in Britain after the departure of the Roman legions and at the time of the coming of the barbaric hords. You may recall that at the end of the book, Aquila, who sees despair closing in around him, wonders “if they remember us at all, these people on the other side of the darkness,” and observes:

I sometimes think we stand at sunset. The darkness will close over us in the end. But I believe the morning will come again. The morning always grows again out of the darkness, but maybe not for those people who saw the sun go down. We are the Lantern Bearers, my friend; for us to keep something burning, to carry what light we can forward into the darkness and the wind.<sup>3</sup>

“To keep something burning, to carry the light . . . forward into the darkness and the wind” — that is the apotheosis of librarianship, that is what librarianship is. It was not electronics that prompted MacLeish to say that “the library, almost alone of the great monuments of civilization, stands taller now than it ever did before.”<sup>4</sup> The time may well come when we must be the lantern bearers shielding, like the monastic librarians of the Middle Ages,

the flickering lamp of learning from the winds of a barbaric storm. The library, either with or without the benefit of technology, must carry the light as best it can and proclaim itself a storage place for the memory of the human race. The library just might make the difference between an uninhabitable planet and a world that holds the possibility of the continued existence of humanity; "the readiness is all."

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