

National Humanities Bulletin

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President's Comment

Joseph Baldacchino



The National Humanities Institute— Should It Continue to Exist?

An Emergency Appeal to Our Friends

For sixteen years the National Humanities Institute has sought to stimulate and disseminate the kind of ideas and imagination that is needed to reverse the decline of contemporary intellectual life, culture, and politics. The Institute was founded to meet the need for an independent entity working at the highest intellectual level to challenge the quasi-sophistication and perversion of so

many institutions, including leading universities, that shape the mind, the moral sensibility, and the imagination of society.

Despite extremely limited resources, the Institute's influence has grown steadily, nationally and internation

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NHI Notes . . .

The development of NHI's **multimedia constitutional history curriculum** is progressing rapidly. More than half the historical narrative has been written, and scholarly reviews of the writing to date have been highly favorable. The collection and digitizing of voluminous source materials that will accompany the completed text is also well underway. The multimedia history will trace the evolution of American constitutionalism from its beginnings in England soon after the Norman conquest (1066 A.D.) to its precarious existence in our own time. The curriculum project has received generous support from the Armstrong Foundation and the Harvey M. Meyerhoff Fund. . . . In conjunction with its development of the constitutional history curriculum, NHI sponsored two **scholarly panels at the American Political Science Association** meeting in Washington on August 31. Panel One, "On Early American Constitutionalism: From Pre-Founding to Reconstruction," was chaired by Gregory S. Butler of New Mexico State
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NHI Chairman Distinguished Foreign Lecturer at Beijing University

Unity Through Diversity: Humanity's Higher Ground

Can conflict between China and the West be avoided? Claes Ryn, Chairman of the National Humanities Institute, believes that it can be avoided, but a great deal needs to be done to avert growing tension.

Ryn gave a series of lectures May 15–19, 2000, on ethics, culture, and politics (including constitutionalism) at China's leading institution of higher learning, Beijing University. The lectures will be published in the university's book series "Distinguished Foreign Scholars." Like the lecture series, the book will be titled *Unity Through Diversity: Humanity's Higher Ground*.

Ryn, who is professor of politics at The Catholic University of America,

makes a case for humanism and for unity through diversity. He addresses the need to avert major conflict by having different cultures cultivate their highest common ground.

Excerpts from the lectures follow:

From Lecture One Humanism as the Cultivation of Mankind's Highest Ground

• There is an urgent need to explore in depth possibilities for minimizing tensions and to undertake efforts to reduce them. . . . Many in the West and elsewhere trust in scientific progress and general enlightenment to reduce the dan-

See **China**, page 2

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ger of conflict, but we need only look to the century preceding this one—the most murderous and inhumane in the history of mankind—to recognize that the spread of science and allegedly sophisticated modern ideas does not reduce the self-absorption or belligerence of human beings. It only provides them with new means of asserting their will. Others in the West trust in political and economic schemes to alleviate tensions, “democracy” and “free markets” being the two most popular at the moment. These prescriptions for how to promote good relations between peoples give short shrift to a subject that may in fact be far more important . . . : the moral and cultural preconditions of peace. . . . [A]ttempts to avoid conflict among peoples and individuals are not likely to be successful without a certain quality of human will and imagination. That this subject is receiving so much less attention than proposals for introducing technology and manipulating political and economic institutions is a sign that our societies are not now well-equipped to deal with the most pressing problem of the new century.

• No serious examination of the question of peace can avoid its moral dimension. The fact that political, economic and other social circumstances strongly influence human behavior does not excuse us from considering the character of individuals as a source of conduct. Only by examining man's basic moral predicament is it possible fully to understand the origins of conduct that reduces rather than increases the danger of conflict or how society might assist in fostering such behavior. Our frame of reference in trying to determine the terms of moral existence will be the evidence offered by our own selves, as augmented and elucidated by the historical experience of mankind. . . .

Nationalistic arrogance and economic ruthlessness endanger international harmony in a direct, palpable manner. But these are only particularly troublesome instances of a more general threat to good relations among cultures, namely that, instead of interacting on the level of what is morally, aesthetically and intellectually noblest in each, cultures encounter each other on the level of the mercenary, the grasping, the crude, the vulgar, and the shoddy. Whatever the momentary benefits to be derived

from such interaction, it does not form a basis for peace. Much of the popular Western culture that is absorbed by non-Western societies today creates a superficial commonality across borders, but it does not elicit among discerning elites the respect that might forge ties of lasting friendship. Cultures coming into closer contact while displaying their least admirable traits may in time recoil from each other, a reaction that is bound to be exploited by opportunists on all sides looking for excuses to exercise their will to power.

Here we must face the central problem that all societies and all persons are torn within between their own higher and lower potentialities. The obstacles to realizing the values of goodness, truth and beauty and to achieving peaceful relations among individuals and groups are ubiquitous. Historical and social circumstances may aggravate the problem, but its most fundamental cause is that human beings tend to shrink from the necessary effort, prone as they are to less commendable desires. Progress requires protracted exertions. To the extent that a people falls short of what is best in its own culture, its members will exhibit such examples of self-indulgence as greed and intolerance. This will threaten its own social cohesion, but it will inevitably undermine international harmony also.

The view of human nature and society alluded to was until the last century or two wholly dominant in the Western world. It is similar to beliefs long influential in the East. A central feature of the traditional Western understanding of the human condition is the just-mentioned belief that human nature is in tension between desires that will enhance and complete existence and ones that, though they may bring short-term satisfaction, are destructive of a deeper harmony of life. To realize the higher meaning of life—what the Greeks call *eudaimonia*, happiness—the individual needs to discipline his appetites of the moment, try to extinguish some of them, with a view to his own enduring good. By happiness was meant not a collection of pleasures, but a special sense of well-being and self-respect that comes from living responsibly and nobly, as befits a truly human being. The person aspiring to that kind of life must frequently say no to pleasures and advantages of the moment, namely those that are inimical to a more deeply satisfying existence.

• The good life has many aspects and pre-

requisites—economic, political, intellectual, aesthetical, and moral—but there was widespread agreement in the old Western society, whether predominantly Greek, Roman or Christian, that the orientation of character, specifically, the quality of a person's will, is crucial to realizing life's higher potential. A person who lacks the moral strength required for right conduct could

the religious life, there is no substitute for protracted, sometimes difficult moral striving. "I am the way and the life and the truth," proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity has assumed that the validity of this claim could be confirmed only by one willing to undertake the kind of actions entailed by that statement. The East offers many examples of a very similar outlook.

tion in the understanding of morality and social existence. To summarize the change, virtue ceases to be an attribute of character and right willing and becomes instead an attribute of feeling and imagination, a matter of the "heart."

The old measure of goodness was responsible individual action. The new measure of goodness is tearful empathy, "pity." No longer is moral virtue thought to result from sometimes discomfiting self-scrutiny and a diligent working on self. Since man is by nature good, there is no need for man to guard against his own lower impulses of the moment or to undertake a difficult disciplining of self. Neither is there any need for civilized norms or for social groups and institutions to buttress morality. Liberate man from traditional constraints, and goodness will flow spontaneously from human nature. . . . Man being good, Rousseau and his followers transfer the most significant struggle of human existence from the inner life of the person to society, where evil forces must be defeated by the virtuous to make a good society possible. Rousseau's redefinition of morality has had a profound influence in the modern Western world, where it soon began to invade even the Christian churches. . . .

• But the traditional view of human nature and society has been undermined also by another powerful force, the kind of rationalism that seized the initiative in the West with the Enlightenment. Representatives of that broad intellectual movement have rejected the older view of man as unscientific. Their conception of reason is heavily slanted in the direction of natural science methodology and has little room for what might be called humane wisdom. A better life, they argue, depends on man's applying science and rationality, as they define them, to the problems of life. Improving human existence is a matter of restructuring society in accordance with scientific insights. The issue of moral character as traditionally defined seems to the Enlightenment rationalists marginal or irrelevant.

Rousseauistic sentimental virtue and Enlightenment rationalism might seem to represent entirely different approaches to life, but they share elements that have made them frequent allies. . . . Both move



Yue Daiyun (right), Professor of Chinese and Director of the Institute of Comparative Literature and Culture at Beijing University, opens the floor to questions for National Humanities Institute Chairman Claes Ryn.

not secure happiness by dint of intellectual brilliance, imaginative power or economic productivity. Christianity has regarded man's cleft will, his often desiring what is contrary to his own higher good, as the crux of human life. Though the individual should always strive to contain his selfish and shortsighted inclinations and try to act responsibly, his human weakness makes him heavily dependent on God. Protestant Christianity has been especially concerned to emphasize that not even the best of men are able to overcome their sinful inclinations on their own, but need to have their higher will reinforced by divine grace.

The Western tradition, then, has for the most part regarded moral character and the performance of good actions as the primary measure of human goodness. The moral and religious wisdom of the West has explained and encouraged the kind of working on self that in time will build real meaning and worth into human existence. Whether the aim has been achieving the happiness and nobility of a worldly, civilized life of the type that Aristotle advocates, or achieving the special peace of otherworldliness and saintliness that Christianity regards as the very culmination of

In Buddhism, the right Way is the diligent working on self to extinguish needless worldly desire. In *The Dhammapada*, the holy text attributed, at least in its general spirit, to the Buddha, we find these words about the path to Nirvana: "You yourself must make an effort."

• In the West, perhaps the most radical and influential challenge to this view of human nature has been that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau was, for example, the main intellectual inspiration for the French Jacobins, who spearheaded the French Revolution of 1789. For Rousseau, the view of human nature just described is profoundly mistaken. There are in man no lower inclinations, no original sin, as Christianity believes. Man is born good, and his nature remains good. Man as he once existed in his primitive state, before the appearance of society, was a pure, simple, peaceful and happy creature. Such evil as exists in the world is due not to some perversity in man, but to wrongly constructed social norms and institutions. Destroy the bad society, Rousseau contends, and man's goodness will flow.

The view of Rousseau and related thinkers represents nothing less than a revolu-

From *Investor's Business Daily*, July 25, 2000

Chinese Communists Discover Hope In Forgotten American Conservative

By Brian Mitchell
Investor's Business Daily

The intellectual Left hated him. He was a killjoy, a moralist, an aristocrat of the "genteel tradition."

"I wonder how genteel he will be when he dies," smirked Ernest Hemingway.

British socialist Harold Laski, in a mid-century review of American politics, banished him to oblivion: "Irving Babbitt won no disciples."

Tell it to the Chinese. In China, long-dead conservative American scholar Irving Babbitt is making a comeback. And some of his biggest fans are Communist Party leaders.

Communism as an ideology is dead in China. The power structure remains, but the search is on for a new way out of China's age-old identity crisis.

Should China embrace the modern West and all its ways? Or should it find its own way between the rocks of Western commercialism and immorality?

The same debate raged 80 years ago in China between the disciples of Irving Babbitt of Harvard (1865-1933) and John Dewey of Columbia University (1859-1952).

Babbitt and Dewey advanced rival brands of humanism. Dewey's was secular, pragmatic, science-oriented and anti-traditional. Babbitt's was traditional, ethical, aesthetic, and religious.

Dewey's views won out in China, paving the way for the anti-traditional materialism of Marxist-Leninism.

That having failed, some Chinese thinkers are turning back to Babbitt as a possible bridge to the West, but one that won't

lead to an outright surrender to Western culture.

"They do not want to be swallowed up in another wave of Westernization," said Claes Ryn, professor of politics at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. "They do not like Western commercialism and cultural debauchery, our moral irresponsibility and political opportunism."

Ryn is also chairman of the National Humanities Institute, an independent think tank keeping Babbitt's ideas alive. In recent years, Chinese scholars have invited Ryn to speak at China's two leading universities, Beijing and Tsinghua. He also co-chaired the keynote panel at a national meeting of the Chinese Comparative Literature Association.

Ryn's lectures will soon be published in China, along with a book by Ryn on Babbitt and a collection of articles from *Humanitas*, the institute's journal. The diaries of Wu Mi, Babbitt's chief apostle in China, are also being published in ten volumes.

State-owned stores already boast books by or about great Western thinkers such as John Locke, Adam Smith and Edmund Burke. Later luminaries such as Friedrich Hayek are also popular.

Freedom is in fashion in China, but so is the fear of it. The crucial questions on every thinking man's mind are: how much is too much and where will it all lead?

"You can say almost anything in China, except for two things," said a Western diplomat in Beijing. First, you can't question China's claim to Taiwan and Tibet or side with outsiders in their claims against China.

"Second," he said, "you must not question the right of the Communist Party to rule. You can question the ideology of the Party. The party doesn't even preach its ideology, but it will not allow its right to rule to be challenged."

Chinese intellectuals now distinguish between "liberals" and "democrats." Democrats want to change the political system—

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Issues & Insights

By Brian Mitchell
Investor's Business Daily

The intellectual left hated him. He was a killjoy, a moralist, an aristocrat of the "genteel tradition." "I wonder how genteel he will be when he dies," smirked Ernest Hemingway. British socialist Harold Laski, in a mid-century review of American politics, banished him to oblivion: "Irving Babbitt won no disciples." Tell it to the Chinese. In China, long-dead conservative American scholar Irving Babbitt is making a comeback. And some of his biggest fans are Communist Party leaders. Communism as an ideology is dead in China. The power structure remains, but the search is on for a new way out of China's age-old identity crisis. Should China embrace the modern West and all its ways? Or should it find its own way between the rocks of Western commercialism and immorality? The same debate raged 80 years ago in China between the disciples of Irving Babbitt of Harvard (1865-1933) and John Dewey of Columbia University (1859-1952). Babbitt and Dewey advanced rival brands of humanism. Dewey's was secular, pragmatic, science-oriented and anti-traditional. Babbitt's was traditional, ethical, aesthetic, and religious. Dewey's views won out in China, paving the way for the anti-traditional materialism of Marxist-Leninism. That having failed, some Chinese thinkers are turning back to Babbitt as a possible bridge to the West, but one that won't

are also being published in 10 volumes. State-owned stores already boast books by or about great Western thinkers such as John Locke, Adam Smith and Edmund Burke. Later luminaries such as Friedrich Hayek are also popular. Freedom is in fashion in China, but so is the fear of it. The crucial questions on every thinking man's mind: How much is too much, and where will it all lead? Freedom is always outside the individual. It's an economic or political system. It's an oppression of some people by other people. It's a culture of ignorance and superstition. The anti-Babbitt solution is always revolution — a forced change in external conditions. For Babbitt, the real problem is inside the individual, in the struggle between each person's "higher and lower will." Also, not his self religious. Babbitt had "higher will."

in plainer words, to overthrow the party. Liberals just want the party to open up a little more.

"Openness in China is always more important than reform," said Liu Junning, a self-described "classical liberal" and fellow of China's Ministry of Culture. "Reform without openness will lose its momentum and direction."

The hope, or fear, in China is that openness leads inevitably in the direction of Western-style social democracy. China's problem is how to have openness without destroying the present order and abandoning traditional Chinese moral values.

That's where Babbitt comes in.

For some Western thinkers—from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Karl Marx and Dewey—the problem is always outside the individual. It's an economic or political system. It's oppression of some people by other people. It's a culture of ignorance and superstition.

The anti-Babbitt solution is always revolution—a forced change in external conditions.

For Babbitt, the real problem is inside the individual, in the struggle between each person's "higher and lower will."

Although not himself religious, Babbitt endorsed religion's "inner check" on conscience. He believed "the good, the true and the beautiful" were transcendent norms, not relative values. His "New Humanism" urged people to honor those norms and cultivate the best in themselves.

"The secular humanism of John Dewey does not recognize any transcendent aspect," Ryn said. "[Secular humanists] believe that the good, the true and the beautiful are something we make up as we go. We simply find out from social and

cultural experimentation what works."

But will what works in the West work in China? Some people in China don't think so. "In the 1990s, as in the 1930s and before, there were certain intellectual trends stressing that China is different and that it has to take its own way to modernity," said Axel Schneider of the Institute for Chinese Studies at the University of Heidelberg in Germany.

"The topics Babbitt was discussing in the 1920s and that Claes Ryn is into now are the questions of universality and ethical standards, and that's what the Chinese are interested in now," Schneider said.

Some see a link between Babbitt's New Humanism and Confucianism. Babbitt himself held the ethical aspects of both Buddhism and Confucianism in high regard.

Ryn speaks to the Chinese of "unity through diversity," stressing the common moral ground of the traditional East and traditional West.

He also contrasts constitutional democracy with plebiscitary democracy. The former allows democratic expression within a fixed moral framework. The latter admits no fixed truths and votes on everything.

"Those two are really incompatible forms of rule, and we really shouldn't even call them by the same name," he said.

Dewey's ideas are still alive in China, through the works of his disciple, Hu Shi. Renewed interest in other thinkers has broadened the intellectual debate in China.

"The Western media missed the story because they were looking more at democracy rather than liberalism," said James Dorn of the Cato Institute. "And there's a huge difference between the two from the Chinese viewpoint."

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ments abandon the idea of the morally divided self and belittle the need for moral self-discipline. Selfishness, ruthlessness, avarice and conflict are not due to any chronic weakness of humanity to be moderated by self-restraint, but can be overcome by intelligently remaking the social and political exterior.

• To be conducive to good relations in the long run, political, economic, scientific and other contacts need to be informed and shaped by a morality of self-control and by corresponding cultural discipline and sensibility. . . . What the world most seems to need is for a cosmopolitanism to develop that simultaneously affirms cultural uniqueness and pancultural unity and that does so on the basis of complete moral realism. The needed ethos would be much different from the kind of ecumenism that seeks to promote harmony by having different societies erase whatever is distinctive in favor of an abstract homogeneity. A humanistic cosmopolitanism would, on the contrary, encour-

age particular peoples to be themselves in the sense of living up to their own highest standards.

• It must be noted here that all of human life is for good or ill and that often cultural diversity is not a power for good. It can manifest narrow-minded provincialism, egotistical partisanship, decadence, recklessness and brutality and thus be a cause of conflict. Variety that is not humanized by concern for the higher life but that expresses mere arbitrary willfulness or eccentricity can give rise to great volatility and worse. Nationalistic self-absorption and arrogance has been a great and frequent source of trouble for mankind in the last two centuries.

The great trouble with what is ordinarily called multiculturalism today is that it is quite unable to distinguish between diversity that ennobles and diversity that degrades human life. Postmodernists reject the distinction between good and evil. Many of them advocate a merely "playful" approach to life. They might consider that children are taught not to play with matches.

It is for the sake of peace but also for the sake of a more rewarding life for all that the elites of different societies need to cultivate a common ground in regard to what is most humane in each culture. It should be clear from the argument presented here that the proposed humanizing discipline is very different from trying to replace particularity with an amorphous abstract or sentimental universalism.

Cosmopolitan humanism recognizes that distinctive, historically formed cultural identities can manifest one and the same effort—more or less successful in particular cases—to achieve a truly satisfying existence. Representatives of different cultures can reach each other as fellow human beings *through* their cultural individuality, as shaped by the shared higher striving.

• Humanism simultaneously and indistinguishably cherishes the unity of purpose associated with life's highest potential and the diversity that must of necessity characterize particular attempts to realize it. At their best, moral and cultural creativity af-

firm the unity by ordering and dignifying the diversity and affirm the diversity by varying and enriching the unity.

From Lecture Two Preconditions for Transcultural Conciliation

• *The Past as a living force.* There can be no question of societies giving up their distinctiveness. The history of a people profoundly affects its demeanor and its potential, shaping it in countless ways, most of which are not even visible to the superficial eye. A people's past is a source of social cohesion, strength and creativity, a heritage whose greatest achievements need to be understood by each new generation and to be made relevant to new circumstances. . . .

Each people has less than admirable traits and inheritances of which it would do well to try to divest itself, but it also cannot give its best without being itself, without its present efforts somehow expressing, or being genuinely adapted to, its historically evolved cultural identity. Every other kind of effort would be mechanical imitation of alien patterns, an artificial appendage possibly destructive of that identity.

• *A complication.* Those who would like to foster a spirit of humanism today must face a special complication within and among cultures in the modern world—a tension between traditional ways of living and thinking associated with a religious and moral heritage and anti-traditional ways of living and thinking associated with modern scientific and technological civilization. In the Western world especially, it has long been widely assumed that a culture of enlightenment of the sort that took hold in the West in the eighteenth century will eventually reconstitute all societies on an allegedly rational basis. . . .

The Enlightenment mind underestimates the depth of the moral and cultural problems of civilized life, specifically, the difficulty of achieving self-restraint and order. Though they are in some ways parasitic on an older moral and religious heritage, Enlightenment progressives do not accept what that heritage assumes about man's moral condition. According to that view, what is necessary for the individual and society to become more harmonious and civilized is for individuals to resist the self-indulgence that puts them at odds with

other human beings and to make the best of their own gifts. . . . According to the traditional understanding, the moral struggle with self, the slow development of character, is only a part of the protracted work of humanizing existence, but it is the part on which all the others—intellectual, aesthetic, political and economic—ultimately depend for their health. Sociopolitical arrangements can aid but not take the place of the inner moral striving.

• *A common ethical center.* Though cultures are bound to differ in how they approach and express goodness, truth and beauty, there is among them, as previously discussed, also an historical confluence of moral and cultural sensibility of great potential significance for the future. The ancient civilizations of the world have been in far-reaching agreement about what constitutes admirable human traits. Of particular relevance in a discussion of prospects for peace is the widely shared belief that self-restraint and humility are defining attributes of the exemplary person. That theme was long pervasive in the West. The ancient Greeks warned against the arrogance of *hybris*, against believing yourself the equal of a god. . . . The danger of pride has been stressed even more in Christianity, which has also emphasized that our primary moral obligation is not pointing out weaknesses in others and asking them to change, but diligently to attend to our own weaknesses. Christianity roundly condemns the conceit and moral evasiveness of finding fault in others. In the words of Jesus of Nazareth,

Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will be able to see and take the speck out of your brother's eye.

From Lecture Three The Union of Universality and Particularity

• It has been suggested in these lectures that life contains intrinsically valuable potentialities that can be realized through effort. The notion of universality associated with this view contains no implication that all individuals and societies ought to conform to a single model of life or that universality can be imposed from without through political engineering. To explain further the conception of universality that is being advanced, it may be helpful to contrast that conception with a universalist ideology that assumes precisely what is

here rejected. The ideology in question is influential in the West, perhaps especially in the United States. Its representatives believe that a single political system is appropriate for all societies, and they are prone to advocating intervention in societies that do not conform to their preference. . . .

It is important to understand that this form of triumphalist universalism, though influential in the West, especially in America, is not without its critics and that it is in essential respects alien to the older Western tradition. Specifically, the new Jacobinism is hard to reconcile with the view of life and politics held by the Framers of the U.S. Constitution, men who are widely revered still, even as the older American political tradition erodes. Although proximate in time, the ideas behind the U.S. Constitution adopted in 1789 and those behind the French Revolution of the same year are widely divergent. The U.S. Framers had a view of human nature and society radically different from that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

• Philosophical wisdom is for Plato not a product of Jacobin-type rationality but is indistinguishable from a soundness of moral character built up over many years through a subduing and ordering of the passions. Jacobin reason and virtue, by contrast, are blatantly political. They provide a justification for giving power to persons who claim to want to act for the good of mankind. Reason and virtue of this kind do not mainly manifest a desire to control and improve self but a desire to control and improve others. Jacobin universalism, wherever it occurs, does not have the effect of curbing the will to power but of stimulating it.

• It is important to understand that the Neojacobin interpretation of America's "founding principles" is willfully misleading. Unlike the leaders of the French Revolution of 1789, America's leaders at the time of the war of independence from England in 1776 and the adoption of the Constitution in 1789 were not interested in ideological crusading. Americans hoped to set a good example for others, not impose their will on other peoples. A central purpose of the U.S. Constitution is to restrain power, both that of the people and that of their representatives. . . .

The Neojacobin fondness for abstract homogeneity and deprecation of historical

particularity in fact runs counter to old American attitudes and actual American history. . . . The Federal system set up by the Constitution granted the central government only limited and shared sovereignty, leaving power for the most part where it had previously resided, in State and local institutions and, above all, with the people themselves in their private capacities. The aim of the new constitutional arrangement was unity *in* diversity or, as it might be even better phrased, unity *through* diversity. The union of States would help *harmonize* diversity and draw strength from diversity, not abolish it.

• Peaceful relations among individuals, groups and peoples require a robust and resilient check on human arrogance and self-absorption. Besides humility and moderation, genuine mutual respect among cultures presupposes a sense of shared higher humanity and a recognition that this higher humanity can manifest itself in diverse ways. . . .

Abstract universalism means, in practice, a lack of respect for individual human beings and groups in their distinctiveness and for their special needs and opportunities. It does not follow that postmodern "historicism" offers a humane alternative. True, we must recognize the inevitable historicity of human existence, its contextual and contingent character, but postmodern-

ism turns even history into a meaningless notion by its frantic and therefore disingenuous denial of universality. Without some unity or "oneness" of human experience, no consciousness could exist, and without a continuity of human consciousness there could be no history, only disjointed, meaningless fragments.

• *Synthesis of universality and particularity.* The postmodernists share with the anti-historicist universalists the assumption that universality and particularity are incongruous. The new Jacobins attack historically evolved cultural identities in the name of abstract universality. The postmodernists attack universality in the name of radical historicity. Neither side is able or willing to consider the possibility of synthesis of the universal and the particular. . . .

The dialectical and syncretical relationship between universality and particularity may be explained in the most general terms. The good, the true and the beautiful do in a sense not exist; they are always unfinished. They are qualities that an infinite number of not yet completed acts, thoughts, and works of art may have. But the good, the true and the beautiful do at the same time already exist, as values that spur human beings. Goodness, truth and beauty also have already been created in countless acts, thoughts and works of art—in loving, morally responsible behavior, wise books and lectures, outstanding poems and compositions. These creations are among the influences that now inspire individuals to new creativity.

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ally. But now, at the time of its greatest success, NHI is in danger of being forced by the U.S. Government to close its doors. Unless enough of our friends act immediately to help keep the Institute operating, this *Bulletin* will be among the last publications ever released by NHI. We would also be forced to cease publication of *Humanitas*, our one-of-a-kind academic journal that has become the interdisciplinary hub of efforts within higher education to breathe new life into a culture in decay.

Why would the government shut us down? The danger stems from of a provision of the Internal Revenue Code that requires a non-profit organization to meet a formula to show it has a "broad base" of financial support. It is otherwise not allowed to remain in existence.

From the beginning, NHI has had a hard time meeting this formula because of a vicious circle. NHI was founded to help revitalize a culture in crisis, but in precisely such a culture few people, particularly persons with the means to make significant donations, are able to understand the strategic significance of the kind of advanced philosophical thinking that NHI sponsors.

One result of this dilemma is that we have been forced over all these years to make do on a minuscule budget. Think of it! The Institute has rented its offices, published its journals and newsletters, maintained its Web site, sponsored scholarly panels and research—all on a budget smaller than many individuals earn in yearly salary. As described elsewhere in this issue, the Institute's work has even struck a chord with important audiences in China. NHI's ideas may help to reduce tensions between that country and the West while improving the cultures of both societies. Obviously, achievements so extensive would not have been possible with so few resources all these years without a great deal of personal sacrifice by a handful of people. They've persevered because of a strong commitment to the purposes of the Institute.

But now, because of the IRS formula, the Institute has reached the point where it can no longer continue on perseverance and commitment alone. The problem is that too large a proportion of the total amount donated to NHI in recent years has

NHI Notes . . .

University. Participants were Gregory Ahern, NHI; Joseph Baldacchino, NHI; and Jeff Polet, Malone College. Panel Two, "On the Evolution of American Constitutionalism: From Reconstruction to Reconstitution," was chaired by Claes Ryn, The Catholic University of America. Participants were Michael P. Federici, Mercyhurst College; Richard M. Gamble, Palm Beach Atlantic College; and Baldacchino. . . . NHI Chairman Claes Ryn directed a **conference on "Liberty, Constitutionalism, and Culture in the Writings of Irving Babbitt"** in Savannah, May 25-28. The conference, sponsored by the Liberty Fund, was attended by scholars from North America, Europe, and Asia. NHI President Baldacchino was a participant, as were such NHI scholars as Peter Stanlis, Rockford College; James Seaton, Michigan State; Paul Gottfried, Elizabethtown College; George Carey, Georgetown; Bill Byrne, CUA; Linda Raeder, Center for U.S. Studies, Germany; and Richard Gamble.

New Edition of Croce Classic

Liberty Fund has published a new edition of *History as the Story of Liberty*, the classic work on philosophy, history, and liberty by the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866-1952). The book was first published in Italy in 1938. The new edition has a foreword by NHI Chairman Claes Ryn. An older English translation has been revised for this edition by Ryn and the late philosopher Folke Leander. Available in both cloth (\$17) and paper (\$9), the book can be ordered from the publisher at (800) 955-8335.

come from too few significant donors to meet the IRS formula. At present, a very high percentage of our total budget comes from only about a half-dozen individuals and foundations. Some of these donors would provide more, but we cannot take more from them, under the IRS requirement, until their grants and donations are balanced by similar donations from others who have not given to NHI in the past or have given only small amounts.

As things stand, NHI will be forced to close down by the end of the year unless we can raise about \$16,000 within the next few weeks. This amount must be raised, moreover, from donors who have not already given more than \$4,000 over the past four years.

Realistically we must receive several donations ranging from \$1,000 to \$4,000 in order to reach the needed total, but smaller amounts including contributions from those who have given in the past are much needed.

I should add that a major contribution much beyond what is immediately necessary to satisfy the government formula would be a godsend. It would put NHI on a different financial footing. The IRS makes exceptions for such unusually large donations.

Unless we get the necessary help, we'll need two months to terminate operations in an orderly manner by December 31.

If you believe that NHI should continue its work, please help by contributing to whatever extent you can. If you know other

potential donors, please speak to them on our behalf. NHI will be happy to follow up with necessary information.

Assuming that NHI is able, with the help of generous friends, to surmount the immediate danger, the problem of the IRS formula still will have been solved only temporarily. As mentioned, at present NHI only has about a half-dozen donors who give thousands of dollars each year. To attain the broad support that will enable us comfortably to meet the IRS formula on a continuing basis, we will need to find twenty to thirty individuals, foundations, and corporations who give annually at those levels.

In case you are wondering, the experts tell us that this ridiculous funding formula is kept on the books because of the political clout of a few very large "charities," who want the law to remain as it is because it prevents competition from smaller organizations.

Some organizations solve the problem of the IRS formula by conducting massive direct-mail fund-raising campaigns that seek small donations from hundreds of thousands or even millions of contributors. Many organizations actually spend more to conduct such "junk mail" campaigns than the campaigns raise. These organizations are forced to conduct these wasteful campaigns—which convince many elderly people to part with donations they can ill afford—just so they can meet the IRS requirement for "broad support," although they continue to get the money to fund

their actual programs from a relatively few large donors.

At NHI we long resisted the temptation to conduct such large-scale and expensive fund-raising appeals, viewing them as yet another symptom of the corruption of our society that NHI is working to overcome. More recently, fund-raising specialists have informed us that such mass mailings would not work for an organization like NHI in any case. It is virtually impossible for us to raise "broad-based" funding, the experts explain, because the nature of our work is beyond the understanding of all but a few.

Finding the base of support NHI needs among that select few is so difficult that professional fund-raisers won't even consider taking NHI as a client. It is so much easier and more profitable to solicit funds for lobbying groups, politicians, and public-relations-oriented think tanks, whose efforts are only marginally effective in the long run. Because NHI's insights are difficult to understand and therefore to "sell," we must face a most unpalatable prospect: that our civilizing mission—which we believe to be central to any hope of reviving American society and culture—is a mission impossible.

But we have struggled too long to give up. We are making one last effort to secure the critical mass of financial supporters that will put an end to the Institute's annual struggle to remain within the requirements of the IRS formula.

Do help NHI in this hour of acute need.

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