

On Alan Bloom's "Closing of the American Mind".

In Part Three, Alan Bloom brings his reader to the peak of the intellectual mountain he has enjoined them to climb. Here at its summit once stood the center of philosophy and liberal education, the university. Great men thought great thoughts and shared an intellectual camaraderie founded upon the quest for truth. These were men "not affected by abstraction", whose ideas once served as a vantage point for present and future good thinkers – for philosophers. Bloom re-engages the necessity of returning to "the Books", a theme introduced in Part One. A number of critical shifts however, have taken place since those early philosophers.

Enlightenment philosophers had a zeal for truth and appealed to rationale and reason as the supreme adjudicator of reality. Unlike their ancient predecessors, they esteemed the philosophic enterprise as powerful to direct and steer all of mankind. In their time, natural science rose to prominence as it addressed a range of issues, which proceed from mankind's passionate fear of death. Only the philosophers face death and mortality. But philosophers also saw the passion of men as a means to philosophizing. Natural science and philosophy newly wed soon gave birth to scientific tyranny. Men like Kant argued to recognize limits to the utility of scientific rationale, knowing that there are things that science simply cannot grasp, nor should it ever endeavor to. Science though, had become a powerful ally to those with influence and agenda.

What happened to the universities in Germany began to happen here in America, as particularly in the sixties, reason was overturned in a "dismantling of rational inquiry." University administrations gave way to the growing discontent of the student bodies, who sought to direct and influence society unhindered and without personal cost. The university became an emporium of lifestyle choices, as students became excited about the university for things of no good consequence to the university - the disconnect has fed modern elitism.

Bloom begs the hope of the university to return to a place of genuine learning and love for it. Fragmented departmentalization, a lack of unifying intention to grasp the role of man in nature, and the meaningless MBA (as to scholarship) characterize much of the university today. A return to philosophy as a main and cohering discipline, to its "architectonic" status, will be difficult. Philosophy is not indigenous to America. And having rid herself of much of what it imported philosophically, America has a tough row to hoe. Bloom concludes on a note of considerable doubt that garden will grow.