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How Bloom Did It: Rhetoric and Principle in *The Closing of The American Mind*

WILL MORRISEY

At least two questions arose in the early reviews of Allan Bloom's book. Given its extraordinary popularity (outstripping even the confessions of Patty Duke during the long, hot summer of 1987), how much has the "American mind" really closed? A citizenry that buys hundreds of thousands of copies of a twenty-dollar volume whose longest chapter is titled "From Socrates' *Apology* to Heidegger's *Rektoratsrede*" deserves some credit for open-mindedness at the very least. The American bourgeoisie could have bought more copies of the new picture album about Elvis, but no: it preferred to read "The Nietzscheanization of the Left or Vice-Versa," "Rousseau's Radicalization and the German University," and "Swift's Doubts." Does the Enlightenment really work, after all? Are Americans quite so decadent as Bloom appears to contend?

And then there is the matter of Allan Bloom's mind. Cultivated, powerful, incisive, witty—no one denies its virtues. But what does it really think? Most reviewers assumed that what they saw on the surface was what they were getting: a defense of the classics grounded firmly upon ancient Greek philosophy. But a more interesting and challenging view was urged by those who noticed the literally central place of Nietzsche's argument in the book, and decided that this, and other details, betray a nihilist's hand within a puppet Plato. Does Bloom secretly revel in the very decadence he decries?

These questions about both minds in question, America's and Bloom's, were raised tellingly in the one truly intelligent early review, "The Closing of Allan Bloom's Mind: An Instant Classic Reconsidered" by Charles R. Kesler.¹ Professor Harry V. Jaffa in a public talk given in Washington, D.C., in July, 1987, developed many of the same points, more amply, and added some, as did Professor Thomas G. West in remarks delivered at the 1987 American Political Science Convention. These critics agree that Bloom fails sufficiently to appreciate politics: he has little to say about civic, as distinguished from liberal, education; he speaks eloquently of eros but not enough of thymos; he preaches without having recourse to any discernible religion; a true son of the University of Chicago, he ignores gymnastic, and therefore exaggerates the effects of music; he fails to appreciate the statesmanship of the American founders, instead regarding them as mere practical Lockeanes. Some suspect Bloom of harboring a politic nihilism, or wonder if Bloom can choose between Socrates and Nietzsche.

1. In *The American Spectator*, Vol. 20, No. 8, August 1987, pp. 14–17. For the most stupid review by an intelligent man, see Paul Gottfried: "A Half-Open Mind," in *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 9, September 1987, pp. 30–33.

These substantial objections deserve careful study because there seems to be so much truth in them. Bloom does indeed avoid any thorough discussion of civic education. Far from apolitical (he introduces political considerations on almost every page), Bloom nonetheless gives few indications of how America might educate citizens, as distinguished from cultivating decent intellectuals. Bloom seems to want the rose without its protective thorn. He does not seem to appreciate the virtues of the thorn.

As Leo Strauss taught, when competent men make glaring errors, readers should search for some underlying intention before sighing, ‘Homer nods.’ Has the translator and interpreter of Plato’s *Republic* and Rousseau’s *Letter to D’Alembert* suddenly forgotten what makes a political man? Has he forgotten the need for, even the nobility of, some political men, and the consequent need for civic education? Some twenty years ago, Bloom wrote:

Today religion, philosophy, and politics play little role in the formative years. There is openness, but that very openness prepares the way for a later indifference, for the young have little experience of profound attachments to profound things: the soil is unprepared. Previously a professor had to free his students from prejudices: now he must instill prejudices in them if he wishes to give them the experience of liberation.²

Has Bloom now simply given up on religion and politics, leaving philosophy to live by its wits alone?

Both civility and prudence ought to give us pause, here. A book titled *The Closing of the American Mind*, with a subtitle about failing democracy and impoverishing souls, most likely has more than a pinch of rhetoric in it. But although critics charge Bloom with confusing politics with rhetoric, neither Bloom’s critics nor his defenders have shown adequately how Bloom’s rhetoric works—how a semiobscure professor managed to galvanize the American mind with energy from his own not-simply-American mind. Only after seeing how Bloom writes can one guess why he writes that way, and what he really thinks. Only then does criticism make sense.

Judge this book by its cover, for a moment. The title appeals primarily to contemporary ‘liberals,’ secondarily to ‘conservatives.’ To assert that “the American mind” has done anything so drastic as to close, will surely distress persons who pride themselves on keeping their minds open and broad. This matter of failing democracy must also trouble and intrigue them. Could there be a new *social problem* to address? These locutions are just enough to overcome the contemporary liberal’s repugnance to any mention of souls. “Souls” appeals rather to conservatives, who also worry about education failing democracy. “Foreword by Saul Bellow” ropes in just about everyone, too: liberals,

2. Allan Bloom, “The Crisis of Liberal Education,” in Robert A. Goldwin, ed., *Higher Education and American Democracy*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966, pp. 121–40.

because prominent artists must have our respect; conservatives, because Bellow is one of us, sort of. The back cover endorsements cover a similarly wide range: liberals will trust Conor Cruise O'Brien and a woman professor from Harvard (they won't suspect she's no liberal); conservatives, or at least 'neo-conservatives,' can gaze happily at words of praise by Walter Berns and Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.

Bloom dedicates the book to his students. But a dedication need not reveal a book's real audience: the preface here gives a better look at that. There Bloom speaks as a teacher, to teachers. He lets them know he is one of them ("no real teacher can doubt that his task is to assist his pupil to fulfill human nature against all the deforming forces of convention and prejudice"). He also tactfully lets them know he knows a bit more about teaching than they do (look at what makes your students angry, he advises, and—this, subtly—don't concern yourself too much with charges of 'elitism'). Centrally, he suggests that the "small number" of students who "will spend their lives in an effort to be autonomous," undertaking the "solitary quest" of philosophy, are "models for the use of the noblest human faculties and hence are benefactors to all of us, more for what they are than for what they do." (When reviewers call Bloom a philosophic and not a religious man, they are simply telling us what he says of himself in his first four pages.) Though solitary, philosophers are not apolitical, paradoxically enough; Bloom concludes the argument of his preface by observing that in modern regimes, politics and "reason in its various *uses*" (emphasis added) cohere more tightly than in traditional regimes. This raises the question of the relations among the reason that discovers theories, the reason that finds uses (abetting economic production, among other things), and politics—including *the* political passion, anger, to which Bloom has directed the attention of his 'fellow' teachers, soon to become his students.

For years, Allan Bloom has been an untimely man. But the success of *The Closing of the American Mind* depends upon a rhetorician's good timing. The Introduction, "Our Virtue," resembles certain writings by Professor Jaffa, or perhaps the early Paul Eidelberg; its far greater popular success owes something to the second thoughts old 'liberationists' now are having about liberation.

Bloom identifies moral relativism as a symptom of moral egalitarianism, and says that such relativism has replaced "the inalienable natural rights that used to be the traditional American grounds for a free society." Observing that "every educational system has a moral goal that it tries to attain," the formation of "a certain kind of human being," Bloom calls the new goal "the democratic personality," characterized by "openness." Although liberalism as such has a "tendency" toward "indiscriminate freedom," the American founders, and the modern political philosophers they read, finally insisted on the natural basis of certain discriminations: e.g., the distinction between freedom and slavery,

determined not by public opinion or popular sentiment but by the self-evident truth that all men are created equal by God. The Creator-God of the Declaration of Independence gets left out of Bloom's account, perhaps for philosophic reasons but surely also for rhetorical ones. Bloom is not addressing an audience for whom traditional piety counts. Whereas Jefferson and Franklin, who privately denied the divinity of Jesus, nonetheless appealed to God in the Declaration, knowing how their countrymen would conceive of God, Bloom's rhetorical problem is different. He must address secularized individuals suspicious of any mention of God, especially in political discourse.

Bloom is nonetheless firm on the moral point. Moral relativism denies the existence of the common good and (here the language turns necessarily moral) "extinguish[es] the real motive of education, the search for the good life." "Openness" closes the mind: contemporary or relativist liberalism defeats itself. Only reason enables men to transcend the cave, which relativism merely digs deeper and wider. Reason-as-modern-science does not transcend the cave, because it cannot drive us or lure us 'up.' It is anerotic. The American regime in its original form does not say, simply, "Liberty!" It says, "Liberty to reason," in politics, religion, and education. "What makes its political structure possible is the use of the rational principles of natural right to found a people, thus uniting the good with one's own," the general with a particular people and place.

Bloom claims no gift of prophecy. He knows he cannot plausibly assert some ennobling, entirely new prejudice that will help to point his readers toward the truth. Instead he more prudently argues—shrewdly appealing to the remnants of generosity and to the strong will-to-gullibility in contemporary liberalism—for "respectful treatment" of "error," the myths that inculcate real virtues (and sometimes real vices) in people. Moral relativism often does rest on more than moral egalitarianism; there is a certain civility involved, however dim; Bloom will avail himself of it. By "respectful" treatment, however, he means not merely living-and-letting-live, but examining these myths as if they might be true, or contain some truth, as determined by reason—"to seek the good by using reason." Showing that moral relativism refutes itself in theory (relativism unjustifiably exempts itself from its own strictures) and in practice (fostering extremism, not toleration, 'left' and 'right'), Bloom aims to reassociate reason and morality in the minds of men accustomed to segregating 'facts' from 'values.' To moralize about the Creator-God or the natural law would not work with such individuals. In order to liberate them from their unexamined assumptions or prejudices, Bloom begins with those prejudices, appealing to some features of them while dissolving others.

Bloom divides the body of his book into three parts: "Students," "Nihilism, American Style," and "The University": the taught, the teaching, the teaching institution. He does not have a section called "Teachers," preferring to mea-

sure his criticisms of his readers in small, sometimes concentrated doses. In “Students,” he begins not with criticism but nostalgia. He invokes the period 1955–1965, when students were really students—and, more usefully for his purposes, when so many of today’s senior faculty were students. “The old was new for these American students, and in that they were right, for every important old insight is perennially fresh.” But there were also *victims*, victims of the university, which failed to give them a truly liberal education. Bloom thus begins skillfully to alternate complaints about today’s wayward youth with subtle flattery and apparent sympathy for their elders.

During the course of these assessments, Bloom does indeed commit the error seen by his best critics: he talks books, not the Book; he almost ignores gymnastic. That is to say, he dampens spiritedness. But this is not nihilism; it is rhetoric, concededly for a philosophic not a religious purpose. Bloom is deliberately bookish because his audience is accidentally bookish. To put it another way—as Bloom does in his commentary on Plato—he “abstracts from the body,” not because he has forgotten it, but because (as Socrates does) he wants his auditors to forget it. He wants to get them beyond their materialist historicism—that supreme combination of the bodily and the bookish, tending toward too much or too little thymos. Bloom uses the bookishness of historicist ideology against materialism, and thus finally against historicism itself, which tends to regard books as mere epiphenomena. Far from believing books merely artificial, as some contend, Bloom clearly regards them as written speeches, partly artificial but also originating in nature and pointing at nature. “Without books there is nothing to see” is a rhetorical exaggeration; surely no one imagines that, without Bloom’s book, there would be no crisis of the university to see. Least of all does Bloom succumb to the illusion that the American mind would not be closing if he had not said it was.

Physical eros characterizes the student generation. Bloom exploits the tendency of the middle aged and the elderly, inclined to other vices, to deplore this state of affairs, now aggravated by ‘liberation’ ideology. He also manages to attack the eroticism of the young without making his audience feel too old-fashioned; after all, some of them grew up on Elvis.³ This too has much to do with timing; at this stage of the game it might even become fashionable to be unhip. Mesmerized by Bloom’s discussion of eroticism, some reviewers overlook his introduction of philosophic and political themes into this account of music. He shows how music can prepare the soul for reasoning, or very nearly spoil it. He remarks that the Enlightenment believed it could do without such preparation, only to find it had removed a good defense against irrational-

3. Professor Kesler does object to Bloom’s “old-fogeyish” characterization of rock music as having “the beat of sexual intercourse.” “Could this really be said . . . of the Beatles, Bob Dylan, the Four Tops?” No, but—*pace*, Professor—folksinging and ‘soul’ aren’t rock, and, as for Paul McCartney’s cutesy little melodic hooks—if that’s rock, it’s pumice. And even it induced erotic paroxysms in the girls of its day.

ism by forgetting how to tame rougher passions with subtler ones—yielding bad consequences for education and politics. He even gets in a few rhetorical jabs by associating rock music with that horror, capitalism. That will make excounterculturites stop and think—no small achievement.

Rock music makes a solipsistic world, but one with social consequences; they are called by an oddly prim latinism, ‘relationships.’ Here Bloom observes what happens when a nation makes equality a social fact instead of a moral and political principle considered self-evidently true in a carefully defined sense. Young people are “spiritually unclad, unconnected, isolate, with no inherited or unconditional connection with anything or anyone.” Again, Bloom deliberately exaggerates in a bookish way, claiming that “America is actually nothing but a great stage on which theories have been played as tragedy and comedy.” Speaking to a generation of teachers for whom ‘concrete’ and ‘abstract’ represent respectively the apogee of praise and the nadir of blame, he shows how ideas matter even with respect to the stubborn and ever-fascinating nature of sexuality. Teacher, in your liberalism had you supposed social equality and sexual passion to be twin goods? Professor Bloom has a sobering thought for you: egalitarianism and liberation yield “passionlessness,” the re-conceiving of sexual activity as “no big deal.” Even com-*passion*, the very fuel of social liberalism, gets diluted by the colorless fuel of egalitarianism. For if all are the same, why pity? And why desire? Self-protectiveness (anger and fear) replaces eros. Lacking firm natural attachments, young people attach themselves to themselves, fearful of anything much beyond that. Hectored by moralists who do not know how to educate either the reasonable or the passionate parts of the soul, students blink uncomprehendingly—not even “last men” but last persons. Because all but the youngest teachers have at least some dim memories of old eros, Bloom’s rhetoric effectively appeals to their sense of superiority to their students, while carefully teaching teachers of their own longstanding errors.

The book’s central part, “Nihilism, American Style,” uncovers the moral and intellectual foundations of those errors: Nietzschean egalitarianism, a concept no one anticipated. Bloom clearly states that the American founders do not teach relativism or historicism. But he also says, “The great mystery is the kinship of [relativism and historicism] to American souls that were not prepared by education or experience for it.” This point receives no adequate response among Bloom’s critics. Critics rightly complain that such American authors as Cooper, Hawthorne, Emerson, Whitman, and Howells never find their way into the book. But to take the central name on the list, Emerson was the man who popularized German historicism in the United States; the first American ‘intellectual’ adumbrates nothing less (or more) than Hegelianism with the rationalism cut out. And Emerson was one of Nietzsche’s intellectual heroes. This means that Americans have been somewhat vulnerable to such corruption almost from the beginning.

Bloom does offer an explanation, albeit a problematic one. He describes

John Locke as an Enlightenment man who intends “to extend to all men what had been the preserve of only a few: the life according to reason.” This is not theoretical reason but primarily the subspecies of useful reason that serves production, the conquest of nature. Eros and thymos do not disappear, but they are tamed, subordinated to modern natural rights—that is, to the *self*-centered. Nor is this ‘self’ a soul in either the classical or the Christian sense; when Lockean man finds his quest for joy too joyless, he looks not to ‘Greek’ happiness or Christian salvation, but eventually to “creativity,” as anticipated by Rousseau and perfected by Nietzsche. In his central chapter (the eighth of fifteen), titled “Creativity,” Bloom attacks the nihilists’ exaltation of making at the expense of thinking. Democratic America shrinks from the pride of these philosophers. Rather, “there is in America a mad rush to distinguish oneself, and, as soon as something has been accepted as distinguished, to package it in such a way that everyone can feel included.” Bloom deplores this vain egalitarianism, in part because it affords so little solid ground for statesmanlike prudence, and for politics generally. After the founding generation, genuine statesmen are rare in America, and these few do not much engage Bloom’s attention here.

Hence modern political philosophy, even in its soberest forms, leaves itself vulnerable to the thrust of Nietzsche’s terrible swift sword. ‘History’ cannot replace divine providence because scientific progressivism is a lie with respect to the soul, if not with respect to the body. Insofar as the Founders partake of that philosophy—and, rhetoric aside, let’s face it: Jefferson, Madison, and Franklin all did, deeply if not exclusively—their work is also vulnerable, although perhaps not in the same ways; founding a political regime is not philosophizing. In the book’s central passage, Bloom summarizes Nietzsche’s refutation of rationalist egalitarianism and describes Nietzsche’s irrationalist elitism, his warlike will to power. Peaceful commercial republicanism stands perennially threatened by those who reject its philosophic premises. Then, in a passage publicly unnoticed by his critics, Bloom writes,

a cultural relativist must care for culture more than truth, and fight for culture while knowing it is not true. This is somehow impossible, and Nietzsche struggled with the problem throughout his career, perhaps without a satisfactory resolution.

Bloom parts company with Nietzsche precisely on the issue of the rational pursuit of truth. While conceding the force of Nietzsche’s objections to Enlightenment rationalism, he concedes nothing to Nietzsche’s attack on Socrates and Plato. He also insists that the Enlightenment, “whatever its failings,” at least kept reason “at the center” of the soul—praising what Nietzsche condemns.⁴

4. It is true that Nietzsche wants spiritedly to defend not culture for its own sake, but culture for the sake of life. The real antagonism of truth, for Nietzsche, is not culture but life. Bloom never agrees with Nietzsche that truth, or the rational quest for it, are somehow incompatible with life. (If one denies that the quest of *unaided* reason serves truth, or life, one gets on the road not to Germany or Athens, but to Jerusalem.)

Nihilism in the American style takes the egalitarianism of commerce and democracy while breaking the natural and conventional limits on that egalitarianism. The problem, of course, when Nietzsche goes to Fort Lauderdale, is that neither may survive the experience. One of Bloom's best rhetorical arguments has attracted criticism: "It is not the immorality or relativism I find appalling. What is astounding and degrading is the *dogmatism* with which we accept such relativism, and our easygoing *lack of concern* about what it means for our *lives*" (emphases added). Does no one see the wit, here? Having already addressed the moral defects of relativism in "Our Virtue" and "Students," in this chapter, "Our Ignorance," he does not speak to his audience simply as a moralist. This would make his book just another 'conservative' tract with limited circulation. In this passage he initially downplays the moral defects of relativism to deplore "dogmatism"—surely no good teacher will demur?—and (remoralizing, now) invites us to shake our heads over the lamentable unconcern about our young, our very lives, that relativism evinces. Can there be a heart in the National Educational Association so far gone in bourgeois bolshevism as to remain untouched by this? Then Bloom goes for the knockout: "As an image of our current intellectual condition, I keep being reminded of the newsreel pictures of Frenchmen splashing happily in the water at the seashore, enjoying the paid annual vacations legislated by Léon Blum's Popular Front government. It was 1936, the same year Hitler was permitted to occupy the Rhineland." These are not the words of a man who doesn't understand political rhetoric, or who fails to see that politics consists of more than mere rhetoric.

"Western rationalism has culminated in a rejection of reason. Is this result necessary?" The book's third part, "The University," contains the longest chapter in the book, "From Socrates' *Apology* to Heidegger's *Rektoratsrede*," suggesting a sort of history of reason as embodied in educational institutions.

But he begins with America. Citing Tocqueville on the danger of "enslavement to public opinion," Bloom echoes the sentence in the preface, on knowing oneself only by one's students. Democracy increases this danger, and modern democracy increases it still more, by making popular consent legitimate and insisting that it can be rational. "Reason transformed into prejudice is the worst sort of prejudice, because reason is the only instrument for liberation from prejudice." Then there is a sentence Bloom's critics overlook, a sentence that challenges their criticisms in two ways: "For modern men who live in a world formed by abstractions and who have themselves been transformed by abstractions, the only way to experience man again is by thinking these abstractions through with the help of thinkers who did not share them and who can lead us to experiences that are difficult or impossible to have without their help." The bookish or 'abstract' character of Bloom's argument throughout his book is, in his judgment, dictated by the character of contemporary Americans, particu-

larly those of the ‘intellectual’ classes. Bloom’s critics apparently do not perceive Bloom’s understanding of modernity, and this prevents them from effectively challenging it, except on the issue of whether or not the American *founding* was nearly so ‘abstract’ as Bloom contends. The question of the effectiveness of civic as distinguished from liberal education in today’s climate, necessarily depends not only on whether Bloom’s rhetorical argument portrays the founders accurately, but on the extent to which he portrays today’s Americans accurately.

Bloom calls “the best of the modern regimes,” liberal democracy, “entirely [the] product” of Enlightenment rationalism, which he describes as “perhaps not even primarily, a scientific project but a political one.” Again he does not acknowledge the Declaration’s language about the Creator-God. “The authors of *The Federalist* hoped their scheme of government would result in the preponderance of reason and rational men in the United States.” But this kind of reason, Bloom continues, is rudderless. Here the Kesler–Jaffa–West critique makes sense. Put somewhat differently, if you ignore the fact that the Declaration admits no inconsistency between reason and the Creator-God, and if you therefore ‘bury’ that God in the name of reason, it is no surprise that you find reason rudderless. In my opinion, although not professedly in the opinion of Bloom’s critics, the founders were well aware of the distinction between reason and revelation. Their Declaration is a politic and political synthesis of the two, a synthesis that in time made America quite safe for individuals of varying religious and even irreligious hues.

However, given the nature of Bloom’s audience, which ranges from religious-latitudearian to atheistic, perhaps he must remain silent on the Creator-God of the Declaration, knowing that the Creator-God will not be resurrected in such minds by Allan Bloom’s rhetorical powers, formidable though these are. If intellectuals will not be brought to believe, however, perhaps they may be brought to think, to reason in a new (in fact very old) way, a way that enables them to discover the ends of human life instead of reducing those ends to the subhuman. Bloom begins by arguing that Enlightenment philosophers are not ideologues but true philosophers, men who attempt to give “the rational account of the whole.” “Philosophy is not a doctrine but a way of life”—notice, here, Bloom’s ultimate defense of genuine “openness”—“so the philosophers, for all the differences in their teachings, have more in common with one another than with anyone else, even their followers.” Modern philosophers differ from Socrates not in their nature but in their political program. But they too know that philosophy can never be truly popular, for it inspires no awe, benefits no populace, consoles no person. Reason will never truly enlighten nonphilosophers, and Enlightenment philosophers know that, even as they pretend otherwise. The modern university reflects the Enlightenment political program, whereby “the powerful are persuaded that letting the professors do what they want is good”; instead of educating aristocrats, as Socrates does, the

Enlightenment educates the populace. *This pretended enlightenment is the modern version of civic education.* “The fact that popularized rationalism is, indeed superficial is not argument against the philosophers. They knew it would be that way.” Bloom takes the half-understood Enlightenment prejudices of his audience of demieducated educators, and teaches them what those premises are, and what they logically entail. He thus imitates Enlightenment rhetoric even while showing its limitations. Speaking of ancient philosophy, Bloom observes: “ . . . philosophy’s response to the hostility of civil society is an educational endeavor, rather more poetic or rhetorical than philosophic, the purpose of which is to temper the passions of gentlemen’s souls, softening the hard passions such as anger, and hardening the soft ones such as pity.” Substitute “contemporary teachers” for “gentlemen” and you will not find a better summary of what Bloom is doing in *The Closing of the American Mind*. Like the gentleman of antiquity, the modern professor has tenure and therefore need not work too hard; he is often prey to thymotic passions, crystallized in modern rationalist fashion as ideology; a post-Christian, he makes much of compassion and *noblesse oblige*. He needs a civic education but now in true modern fashion, he is allergic to civility. His patriotism has atrophied. He is not a true aristocrat. Hence his civic education must appear to be (and may be if his abilities and temper allow it) liberal, that is, liberating. A man whose political ambitions have gone underground, or so far aboveground as to lose sight of the ground, must be brought back to *political* thought while remaining under the illusion that he has transcended it by the force of his intellect and the greatness of his heart. It helps if recently he has bruised his foolish head on some reality, and is ready to listen to a more sober voice. This voice asks him a question: “Does a society based on reason necessarily make unreasonable demands on reason, or does it approach more closely to reason and submit to the ministrations of the reasonable?” To prepare modern intellectuals to think about that question is a small step in the right direction. And to suggest that “perhaps” Nietzsche and Heidegger “did not take seriously enough the changes wrought by the modern rationalists and hence the possibility that the Socratic way might have avoided the modern impasse,” conveys the thought of Leo Strauss in a way Strauss rediscovered—namely, without bringing Strauss’s name to public attention. Finally, to warn that one way to force reason and egalitarian dogma to cohabit may be seen in Soviet tyranny, and to do this so that contemporary ‘liberals’ may find it plausible, is a public service.

In his final chapter, “The Student and the University,” Bloom shows how he would reintroduce the prudent study of politics. “The apolitical character of the humanities, the habitual deformation or suppression of the political content in the classic literature, which should be part of a political education, left a void in the soul that could be filled with any politics, particularly the most vulgar, extreme and current.” Here Bloom uses the snobbery of cultivated souls against their current political egalitarianism. At the same time he manages to suggest

that a 'coverup' has occurred, that Enlightenment has not fully enlightened certain political matters. And there is more: "Political science is more comprehensive than economics because it studies both peace and war and their relations"; it is "the only social science which looks war in the face." "Most unusual of all, political science is the only discipline in the university (with the possible exception of the philosophy department) that has a philosophic branch." Not only moderation, justice, and courage, then, but even the love of wisdom may be found among members of the American Political Science Association, although they do not constitute the majority of the Association. Bloom would reintroduce politics and the prudent study of stern justice and anger, by the means of flattery and curiosity—seduction, the art of eros. In Bloom's judgment, for his chosen audience, that is the only effective way to do it.

Neither Nietzsche nor any nihilist says, as Bloom does, "Philosophy is still possible." A nihilist would say, as Bloom does, "It is the hardest task of all to face the lack of cosmic support for what we care about." But this does not in itself reveal nihilism; much depends upon who "we" are. Are we beings animated first and last by love of our own—our lives, children, cities? Is death the king of terrors for us, at best to be courageously overthrown? Or are "we" convinced that philosophy means "learning how to die"? Do we regard "the intense pleasure of insight" to be sufficient compensation for the knowledge that we must die? Those are the principal alternatives for the Socratic philosophers. Among their successors, the Epicureans come closest to nihilism, but are not nihilists. Nihilists find insight painful, and fight the pain with self-assertion. Epicureanism might be a plausible charge against Bloom, were he to leave sufficient evidence to decide the issue. He does not. Part of the antidote to mental closure is more the raising of questions than the delivering of answers.

It is right to regard civic education as prior to liberal education. Unfortunately, too many modern intellectuals imagine themselves liberated from civic matters, even from the obligations of civility. 'Conservatives' who see the folly of this simply are not part of the problem. They can be addressed in a different way. Students can be addressed in yet another way; even the most sophomoric among them are only junior ideologues. It isn't hard to disillusion them. Many have some of the right passions: patriotism, a desire for some sort of love beyond the universe bounded by Sesame Street and MTV. A more directly civic education may reach them. But someone has to give them that education, and there are not enough teachers who can do so. Bloom speaks to the unable majority of his profession. *Mirabile dictu*, some are listening.