

scholarship making a contribution to a “research program” in the style of the natural sciences, the book has baffled some reviewers, who cannot quite fathom what, or who, the book is *for*. It is certainly a very curious book, and not the least curious is the title: *Smiling Through the Cultural Catastrophe*. Nowhere does Hart explain or even make reference to that amusing title, but there is a clue to its meaning offered in the subtitle: *Toward the Revival of Higher Education*. Clearly Hart intends the book as a general cultural intervention at a time when higher education and the humanities are in crisis—indeed, are undergoing a catastrophe. When other men of letters have attempted such an intervention, they have proceeded with meta-arguments which “point to” the value of the humanities, and with policy proposals. Hart’s book seems to indicate that this is a mistake. In effect, what he says is that the way to win the culture wars is to ignore them. The books remain. The way to smile through what is certainly a cultural catastrophe is to get on with the serious business of humane learning, humane reading and writing—the serious business of sorting out what is important and what is not, and what it all means. The best defense of the humanities is the activity itself—an activity that now takes place only sporadically within humanities faculties. The way for humanists to recover their cultural authority is by doing what they do best: reading and explaining and criticizing the old books.

By eschewing fashionable methodologies and having the confidence to conduct an authentically humanistic inquiry into the question of the West, Hart has written a book that is worth reading. His book instructs both by argument and by example, and its instruction is often a delight as well. If one were to encounter an undergraduate who had just finished the latest work of, say, Stanley Fish, and who found in him an example to emulate,

we might wonder about the state of the young man’s soul. But if, upon reading this book, an undergraduate conceived a desire to follow Hart, we would, I think, be witnessing the refreshment of the humanities, at last.

Humility and Method

THOMAS AUSTENFELD

The Humanities in the Age of Technology by Ciriaco Morón Arroyo, Washington, D.C., *The Catholic University of America Press, 2002. xiv + 263 pp.*

The Humanities in the Age of Technology is a profession of faith in the humanities as a mental disposition: a disposition which employs rigorous discourse, favors holistic over partial truths, and thus contributes to an ethically grounded companionship of human beings. The author’s lofty aim of proving his case for the abiding, indeed the indispensable, presence of humanistic thought is balanced by his intellectual humility (in an Erasmian sense), by his respect for the range of human achievements and human dispositions, and by his careful methodology.

Employing classification, description, and literary examples, the author develops his case over the course of fifty-five sections grouped into larger chapters, of which the ones entitled “The Interdisciplinary,” “Reading,” “Understanding,” and “Knowing”—the latter three forming the core of the book—deserve special atten-

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tion. If the method employed in setting up the topic appears labored at times—the description of the individual humanistic disciplines in Chapter II is almost necessarily less brilliant than the claim about their shared discourse at the end of Chapter I—the professions of faith that punctuate this book and breathe life into its pages are, remarkably, devoid of dogmatism and fired by conviction and intellectual maturity. The author nimbly negotiates the borderlines between literature and philosophy, politics and ethics, life and the metaphysics of life.

Ciriaco Morón Arroyo is a professor of Hispanic Studies and comparative literature at Cornell University. Besides making important contributions to scholarship on perhaps the greatest Spanish authors in theater and prose fiction, Calderón de la Barca and Miguel Cervantes, Morón has also investigated the larger questions of the humanities over the course of his career. The ideas underlying *The Humanities in the Age of Technology* were generated in the mid-1970s, and the first complete manuscript publication was in Spanish (Oviedo: Ediciones Nobel) in 1998. This new English edition from the Catholic University of America Press is a translation of the Spanish original, cast in language that stands on its own. And in a general way, Morón takes into account the turn to theory that has dominated literary studies in the past thirty years.

Morón's intellectual patrimony is European. He consciously places himself in the tradition of Ernst R. Curtius and Erich Auerbach, scholars who sought to synthesize the European literary tradition in its various lines, reaching from the epics of Homer to the political pragmatism of the Roman Empire, and from the Catholic Middle Ages through a humanistic Renaissance and Reformation up to the threshold of the twentieth century. Among modern thinkers, Morón acknowledges his debt to Martin Heidegger, both

for the latter's linguistic subtlety and for his comprehensive view of the responsibility of humanists. Morón attempts to rescue Heidegger from the possibility of odious association with totalitarian thought by pointing out that Heidegger, by defining human life as *Da-sein*, "substitutes existence for life" and thus "preclude[s] any biological approach to human existence and therefore any possibility of racism." Yet Heidegger's important contributions notwithstanding, and even agreeing that racism is essentially absent from his philosophy, it remains difficult to dissociate Heidegger from his choice of having accepted a comfortable university post while refraining from openly criticizing the Nazi regime.

Morón's practice of drawing his "proof texts" largely from the Spanish literary tradition makes for truly enjoyable reading in a comparative context, even if the reader's literary training has concentrated on other national literatures than those of the Iberian peninsula. In every case, Morón references aspects of his texts which point to his larger aim, the illustration of humanistic discourse, allowing the reader to multiply the experience with texts originating in his own literary tradition. The wide net cast in this manner signals that the author's assertions about the shared discourse of the humanities have their basis in fact.

Morón defines the shared discourse of the humanities as encompassing three ingredients: (1) a holistic approach, (2) the subject as a whole, and (3) the ethical dimension. The first two provide correctives to the ambitions of self-proclaimed humanists who are really technocrats and who, with their specialized knowledge, however admirable it may be, never take the time to contemplate the human being as a whole—who is after all the agent, the subject, and finally the legitimizing authority of the humanistic enterprise.

The "holistic approach," in particular,

refers to the state of mind desirable in humanistic search: a generous mind that is cognizant of the ultimately *personal* vision it presents and offers up for inspection. The “subject as a whole,” Morón postulates, must remain in the searcher’s eye, and any particular work performed on some part of it—say, a precise metrical analysis of a poem, in itself not humanistic work in a strict sense—must eventually give way to the larger view. For Morón’s humanist, it is axiomatic that the whole poem will be more than the sum of its parts. “Ethics,” finally, is the necessary acknowledgment that all humanistic discourse results in acts of valorization, of valuing. Beyond description, classification, and analysis—the purview of the “natural” sciences and of most “social” sciences—humanistic disciplines come together in the ethical sphere, the place where human beings transcend their monadic singularity and act as members of the species.

At first reading, Morón’s vision has the utopian appeal of Schiller’s “Ode to Joy”: a grand conspectus of humanity, sweeping away doubt with the broad brush of optimism. The charge of grandiosity inevitably suggests itself, but Morón is fully aware of that possibility. Never obscuring his own rootedness in a traditional Catholic faith, Morón clear-headedly realizes that religious sectarianism is so potent and so virulent that any ethical system based on faith “may unfortunately divide.” In its place, Morón suggests a pluralistic world ethic “at the honorable level of ideas” that would be “apt to unite.”

Morón defends against a second charge of grandiosity—that “holistic approaches” and “subjects as a whole” will be intuitive rather than precise—by repairing to the humility and method that characterize his entire book: “We human beings are limited...[b]ut we know the ideal, and can grope for it.”

In his chapter entitled “Reading,” Morón demonstrates the complexity and

contextuality of humanistic work in a focused interpretation of Calderón’s *Life is A Dream* (1635). A cursory comparison with, respectively, Mortimer Adler’s and Harold Bloom’s meditations on “how to read” reveals Morón’s predilections: no matter what the formal complexities of a text may be, humanistic reading begins when the reader transcends the formal qualities of the text and begins to engage the human questions evoked by it. In the case of Calderón’s play, such questions range from the nature of human identity and integrity to those of appearance and reality, freedom to choose, and the limits of external determination.

In the chapter entitled “Understanding,” Morón makes his best case for the legitimate variety of readings a text can elicit in different readers. He holds that these differences need not be mutually exclusive and that their abundance is an instance of the rich “perspectivism” that characterizes human thought. Such perspectivism is not to be mistaken for relativism, however. In the intelligent curiosity that characterized the thinking of the Renaissance Morón sees the most effective antidote to the contemporary scourge of relativism. Yes, “[t]ruth, as a human experience, is limited. Total truth is outside of man’s reach, and this limitation makes all conquered truth a springboard for further research. But this experience of limitation, far from evoking relativism, shatters it—because the very experience maintains us in a longing search for greater knowledge and clarity.”

In the chapter entitled “Knowledge,” finally, Morón recovers the systematic character of humanistic knowledge that proceeds, not in a linear fashion as in the sciences, but in a circular or spiral form. Morón here essentially follows Gadamer’s concept of the “hermeneutic circle.”

In a few instances, Morón invites criticism. For example, in section 15, he anatomizes the titles of some books and finds them wanting because of the divergence

between their titles and their contents, implicitly inviting the reader to perform the same operation on his book. Indeed, while the humanities are explained, classified, and praised in Morón's book, the section of the title that refers to the "Age of Technology" seems to remain an unfulfilled promise. The author asserts that we live in an age of technology, and that technology's self-evidence has freed it from the need to justify itself, which in turn makes the justification of the humanities necessary. But not all readers will agree with this initial position.

The overwhelming presence of technology in our contemporary world may, after all, only be instrumental rather than essential (in the Thomistic sense). In its own way, the late nineteenth century in Europe was as much enthralled by technology as our own time, even while the humanities still strove for encyclopedic completeness of self-expression. Technological advances compelled Walter Benjamin in one of the twentieth century's darkest moments to offer a cogent analysis of the politicization of art in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." The English translation of the title is notoriously misleading: Benjamin was referring to the work of art "in the age of its mechanical reproducibility." He sought to make an argument about authenticity in a technological age, not about mechanics.

Morón reasonably excludes the arts from his discussion of the humanities but, *mutatis mutandis*, similar questions of legitimacy arise in the two fields. By attending only marginally to the political relevance of humanistic studies in *this* technological age—funding, the public's sense of their importance, the current tendency of some to indulge in private pleasure rather than public use—Morón risks at times the charge of unfounded optimism. His description of the life of a contemporary humanities professor, "not formally tied to more than ten hours of

class and office hours per week," does not conform to my or my colleagues' experiences of the teaching life at American four-year colleges and universities, even though the author is correct to praise the intangible rewards of our line of work. Morón's penultimate chapter on the "Usefulness" of the humanities is the shortest of all, except for one other.

In the final analysis, these decidedly minor shortcomings are not completely Morón's. The humanities simply must not be measured with the yardstick of technological usefulness: doing so inevitably shows them wanting. The humanities are, in essence, an invitation to human beings to become themselves more fully. Ciriaco Morón Arroyo's passionate and reasoned explanation of the spirit and the method of the humanities on their own terms constitutes the high merit of this thoughtful book.

A Weaver Treasury

JOHN ATTARIAN

In Defense of Tradition: Collected Shorter Writings of Richard M. Weaver, 1929-1963, edited by Ted J. Smith III, *Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000. xlviii + 813 pp.*

UNTIL NOW, A SCHOLARLY EDITION OF Richard M. Weaver's writings has been lacking. Edited by Virginia Commonwealth University professor Ted J. Smith III, this splendid volume from Liberty Fund, also the publisher of *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver* (1987), goes far in rectify-

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