

The position of the Classics in most countries of the world is precarious and this has led to much soul-searching among classical scholars. One of the most interesting examples of this is a book on the state of the Classics in the United States of America entitled *Classics: a discipline and profession in crisis*, edited by Phyllis Culham and Lowell Edmunds (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989). In this book more than thirty contributors discuss a great variety of topics e.g. the assessment of doctoral programs in Classics, computers and research in the Classics, the problems of those teaching ancient philosophy and archaeology, and the controversial question of discrimination against women in Classics departments.

The most stimulating papers are those dealing with the role of Classics in modern education. W.R. Connor describes the differences between what he calls the Old Classical Humanities and the New. In the former, which flourished during the fifties and sixties, it was power that was emphasized: "The teaching of the classical humanities came to concentrate on power, the individuals who wielded that power, the principles that ought to govern the use of power and the effects of power on society Since our universities advanced the public good by educated citizens and (it was to be hoped) leaders, these future power-holders should study power and its implications within the intensely political cultures of the Greeks and the Romans" (*op. cit.*, pp.28-29). In the New Classical Humanities there is a shift from the public to the private realm, to the study of texts that describe the personal feelings of the individual. This has enriched classical studies but has also created a problem: "... it is much more difficult for the classical humanities to claim a central role in liberal education. And if the claim is made, it is much more difficult to deliver the goods. How precisely does one construct a course or series of courses that presents coherently to undergraduate students or to culture at large the richness of experience available from the study of the ancient world and especially those aspects now being illumined by the new classical humanities? What do we have to put in the place of the old educational rationale that selected, presented and interpreted a canon of classical writers chosen because of their central concern with power and the holders of power?" (*op. cit.*, p.34).

David Konstan concentrates on the critical approach to classical civilization which is typical of the New Humanities. The Old Humanities he describes as "celebratory". The wisdom of the ancient world "was presumed to be of eternal value ... and it seemed self-evidently desirable that students be exposed to it, discuss it, and come to understand it But in the New Humanities, the virtues of the classical world are not taken for granted but are subjected in principle to a searching criticism What is more, the aim of interpretation is to reveal precisely this boundedness of the classics in the class and other antagonisms of ancient society. Far from being repositories of timeless wisdom, the great books of antiquity ... are through and through ideological in the sense that they promulgate, even as they mask or disguise, unequal social relations" (*op. cit.*, pp.45-46).

Stephanie Katz also takes up a critical position towards ancient civilization, but she distinguishes (simplistically, as she admits) between the good and the bad: "Among the bad things are various forms of elitism, economic structures resting on the base of slavery, institutionalized discrimination against women and inegalitarian social structures. Among the good things are standards of excellence, cultural homogeneity and continuity, and a treasure of human experience and expression all of which function as both measures of the present and inspiration for the future." In view of this the classical scholar has a special duty to take into consideration the educational ideals of our own time: "The goal and the problem of education in our own age and country has been to avoid the elitism inherent in the tradition of liberal learning while transmitting the tradition democratically to subsequent generations. For classicists the problem is both immediate and dramatically clear - philology versus culture" (*op. cit.*, p.40).

Although the position of the Classics in South Africa is very different from that in the United States, these are fundamental questions which must also be discussed in a South African context.

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