



Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Summer 2005

on
professions &
professionals

comment

David Greenberg The new politics of Supreme Court appointments 5

Howard Gardner
& Lee S. Shulman The professions in America today 13

William M. Sullivan The civic promise of professional education 19

William Damon, Anne
Colby, Kendall Bronk
& Thomas Ehrlich Passion & professionalism in balance 27

Harvey Goldman Good work, from Homer to today 36

Howard Gardner Compromised work 42

Lee S. Shulman Signature pedagogies 52

Jeanne Nakamura &
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi The case of undergraduate teaching 60

Geoffrey Galt Harpham The case of literary studies 68

poetry

W. S. Merwin To the present tense 76

fiction

Robert Coover Grandmother's nose 77

dialogue

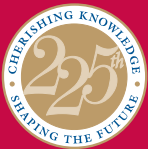
Leszek Kolakowski
& Danny Postel on exile, philosophy & the horror of modernity 82

notes

Gustavo Pérez Firmat on bilingualism & its discontents 89

Richard Stern on how the stories changed from 1955 to 2001 93

Donald P. Green on evidence-based political science 96



Comment by David Greenberg

The new politics of Supreme Court appointments

In all probability, George Bush will soon fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court, and for all his rhetoric about bipartisanship, he is clearly spoiling for a fight. Not only has Bush pledged to appoint justices in the mold of the Court's most conservative jurists, but at the start of his second term he also renominated several controversial lower court judges whom Democrats had successfully opposed.

Senate Democrats also show no signs of backing down. Their opposition to Bush's appellate court nominees has hardly been as obstructionist as Republicans have claimed, but they did noisily contest several of his most ideologically extreme first-term choices, once resorting to a filibuster.¹ Their rare unity on the issue, coupled with Bush's resolve, all but guarantees a partisan brawl over a future Supreme Court nomination.

Should such a showdown occur, it seems likely that antagonists will staunchly – and implausibly – deny that the nominee's ideology is at issue. Despite the patently ideological nature of so many recent judicial appointment fights, the participants now routinely profess to be assessing the nominees solely on their professional merits. This phony premise goes largely unchal-

lenged in the news media – seemingly in an effort to uphold an unwritten rule that nomination fights shouldn't be waged on ideological grounds, lest the judiciary, the branch of government that's supposed to stand above the fray of partisan politics, be politicized.

A fictive discourse of appointments has thus emerged: a nominee's advocates make his case in the ideologically neutral language of merit, as if the candidate's views had no bearing on his selection, while critics find extrapolitical reasons in which to root their objections – a reputed character flaw, the performance of some unsavory act way back when, or some alleged lack of credentials. These rhetorical sleights on both sides have solidified the fiction that ideological differences aren't the issue.

Yet for all the attention paid to recent nominations, little effort has been made to explain, historically, how this peculiar condition came to pass. In fact, at least five trends converged in the late twentieth century to forge the current dynamic: the expansion of presidential power and the resulting desire to restrain it; the growing frequency of divided gov-

David Greenberg was a Visiting Scholar at the American Academy in 2002 – 2003. Now a professor of journalism, media studies, and history at Rutgers University, he is the author of "Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image" (2003).

© 2005 by David Greenberg

¹ During Bill Clinton's presidency, the parties' roles were reversed. Republicans regularly held up or fought liberal appellate court nominations. Clinton avoided Supreme Court nomination fights mainly because he vetted his candidates beforehand in the news media and privately with Republican leaders such as Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch. See Orrin Hatch, *Square Peg: Confessions of a Citizen Senator* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 180.

ernment; the increased cultural cachet of professional experts; the rise of identity politics in a more pluralistic political sphere; and the culture of scandal that pervaded Washington after Watergate. Together, these trends created the situation in which politicians fight vigorously over high court appointments even as they deny ideology any rhetorical place in the debate.

The distinctiveness of the current moment stands in sharp relief next to earlier periods in American politics, when different norms obtained. Traditionally, the Senate was assumed to have a strong say in Court appointments. The Constitution gives the president the power to nominate justices only with the “advice and consent” of the Senate, placing no clear-cut bounds on that advice and consent. In its first century, the Senate was deeply involved in the appointment of judges and justices. Then as now, senators often objected to nominees for political reasons – between 1794 and 1894, twenty-two of eighty-one nominees failed to make it onto the high court – though unlike today, they didn’t hesitate to say so.²

That regular combat surrounding Court appointments has been forgotten because a markedly different pattern of political behavior crystallized in the first

2 The tally is based on Henry J. Abraham, *Justices, Presidents, and Senators: A History of the U.S. Supreme Court Appointments from Washington to Clinton* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), which is indispensable to any discussion of the history of Supreme Court appointments. A persuasive and influential argument that ideology played a role in confirmation battles is Laurence H. Tribe, *God Save this Honorable Court: How the Choice of Supreme Court Justices Shapes Our History* (New York: Random House, 1985). Tribe, however, does not write historically, instead furnishing examples from disparate eras to support his points.

two-thirds of the twentieth century. Despite controversy over a few appointments during this time (notably Woodrow Wilson’s selection of Louis D. Brandeis in 1916 and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s choice of Hugo Black in 1937), between 1894 and 1968 only one high court candidate failed to gain Senate approval: Herbert Hoover’s nominee John J. Parker of North Carolina, whose candidacy foundered on his antilabor rulings as an appellate judge and on racist remarks he had made while running for governor of his home state a decade earlier. This seventy-four-year period coincided with an era of unparalleled growth in presidential power that augmented the mystique of the executive branch and muted congressional resistance to judicial appointments. In recent decades, by contrast, the Senate has again become assertive in its treatment of Supreme Court nominations.

To understand this resurrection of serious, vibrant senatorial debate – and to appreciate the ironies of the present moment – it is useful to recall the events of 1968, when the Senate’s long era of deference to presidential wishes came to a dramatic end. In 1968, the South’s discontent with the liberalism of Lyndon Johnson and the Warren Court boiled over when Johnson sought to elevate his old friend Abe Fortas from associate justice to chief. Fortas’s nomination – and not, as later commentators have suggested, that of Robert Bork in 1987 – ushered in the new era of contention.

It’s frequently remembered that Fortas was forced off the bench in 1969 for his shady financial dealings. That memory, though accurate, obscures a battle a year earlier over his nomination to be chief justice. When on June 13, 1968, Earl Warren announced his intention to resign from the bench, Johnson chose Fortas almost immediately as Warren’s succes-

sor. A distinguished lawyer and a liberal associate justice since 1965, Fortas also served as a close adviser to LBJ on all manner of politics and policies.³

But Johnson, having declared he wouldn't seek reelection, was a lame duck. Senate Republicans expected that their party's candidate, Richard Nixon, would win that November's presidential election, and Minority Leader Everett Dirksen ultimately joined forces with Georgia's Richard Russell, the leader of the Southern Democrats, to block Fortas's elevation. (Several Southerners waited until Nixon secured the Republican nomination before stating their hostility to Fortas.) But whereas a few years earlier, in 1959, Southerners had explicitly opposed the appointment of Potter Stewart because of Stewart's support for black civil rights, the reasons many senators gave for opposing Fortas weren't baldly ideological. Rather, they tried, if sometimes perfunctorily, to hide their political motives behind talk of ethics and merit.

Fortas, it emerged, had accepted fifteen thousand dollars to lead a university seminar, and his critics inflated this petty offense into a disqualifying crime. They also made much of the counsel Fortas gave to Johnson, although the practice of justices advising presidents was a long-standing, if waning, tradition.⁴ The real bone of contention, everyone knew, was the liberal orientation of the Warren Court on subjects from racial integration to school prayer to the

3 On the Fortas nomination, see Laura Kalman, *Abe Fortas: A Biography* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990); and John Massaro, *Supremely Political: The Role of Ideology and Presidential Management in Unsuccessful Supreme Court Nominations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 32–77.

4 Fortas's plight may have helped make such relationships less acceptable.

rights of the accused. Indeed, so controversial had the Court become that in 1964 its makeup loomed as a major issue in a presidential campaign for the first time since just after Franklin Roosevelt's failed 1937 Court-packing plan. In 1964, both Barry Goldwater and George Wallace railed against the Court's activism, and in 1968, Nixon followed suit.⁵ Nominated at this ill-starred moment, Fortas became the lightning rod for pent-up rage toward the Warren Court's expansive rulings. Strom Thurmond denounced him for defending rapists, criticizing the decision *Mallory v. United States* (1957), which let a confessed rapist go free because police kept him in custody too long before his arraignment – and which also happened to have been decided before Fortas joined the bench. Thurmond also set up a film projector to show to interested lawmakers and reporters the pornographic movies that Fortas had supposedly deemed to be legal under the First Amendment.

Fortas won the Judiciary Committee's recommendation, but a coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats carried the fight to the Senate floor. On September 25, these senators began a filibuster, during which they beat back a cloture motion. Acknowledging a rare defeat, Johnson, the erstwhile master of the Senate, withdrew the nomination. As a consequence, he also had to withdraw a second nomination, that of Homer Thornberry, a Texas judge (and another friend) whom he had picked to replace Fortas as associate justice. Not since John Parker's discomfiture in 1930 had a president failed to appoint his man; Johnson, in the space of a few days, failed twice.

5 William G. Ross, "The Role of Judicial Issues in Presidential Campaigns," *Santa Clara Law Review* 42 (2002): 391–482.

The Fortas debacle was a watershed. Not only did it mark the first defeat for a president in thirty-eight years, but it also certified a new willingness on the Senate's part to challenge presidential prerogative. This assertiveness was echoed in other challenges to political (particularly presidential) authority during this period – from the antiwar protests that brazenly derided government leaders to the new viciousness in satire, from the string of assassinations to the unprecedented back-to-back resignations of a vice president and president. Various segments of society felt an urgent need to restrain the imperial presidency, and nominations to the Court offered an occasion for senators to do so.

In the following years, senators began to boldly oppose presidential appointments. Yet the arguments used to defeat two of Nixon's high court nominees – Clement Haynsworth in 1969 and G. Harrold Carswell in 1970 – also confirmed the reluctance of critics to ground their opposition in plainly political terms. The search for more salable rationales for striking down nominees, introduced with the opposition to Fortas, took root with the fights against Haynsworth and Carswell. A comparison of votes on the nominations of Fortas and Haynsworth (who as an appellate judge had twice failed to recuse himself in cases involving companies in which he owned stock) proved what seems intuitively obvious: most senators' invocations of ethical concerns were, if not wholly insincere, highly expedient. Fortas's opponents, ostensibly offended in the summer of 1968 by his honoraria, supported Haynsworth the next year despite his ethics violations – their purported high moral standards conveniently vanishing. Conversely, Fortas supporters, who overlooked his infrac-

tions in 1968, waxed indignant about Haynsworth's misdeeds and voted against the Nixon nominee. Of the seventy-eight senators who voted in both cases, only eight followed a consistent pattern of support or opposition. Ethics, in short, was typically offered as the reason for a no vote, but ideology predicted how the votes went.⁶ Here, then, was the real beginning of the fictional discourse that would thereafter surround nomination fights.

This reluctance to invoke ideology was not, of course, entirely new. Politicians have always avoided needlessly antagonizing one ideological faction or another, and taking the high road of endorsing a well-qualified nominee despite some differences can even give a senator an aura of statesmanship. But that truism begs the question of why an aura of nobility first came to grace politicians who appear to be above partisanship.

One answer lies in the century-long rise in respect for expertise. Progressive Era reformers helped establish professional authority as a basis for making judgments about governance, in matters of jurisprudence as elsewhere. By 1945, the American Bar Association (ABA) had founded the Standing Committee on Federal Judiciary to help choose nominees to the lower court,⁷ and the committee's role was seen as a natural extension of the Progressive vision of government by experts. Dwight Eisenhower augmented the ABA's importance, telling Attorney General Herbert Brownell that he would not appoint anyone who didn't earn the body's approval. Starting in 1956, the attorney general's letter to

6 Massaro, *Supremely Political*, 1–24.

7 Abraham, *Justices, Presidents, and Senators*, 23; Sheldon Goldman, *Picking Federal Judges: Lower Court Selection from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 86.

the president recommending a nominee began to include that candidate's ABA rating.⁸

But the sword of expertise cut both ways. In time, senators found that impugning a candidate's fitness for the bench could substitute for criticism of his ideology. Carswell, for example, was widely derided as mediocre. To this line of attack, his defenders struggled to reply. ("So what if he is mediocre?" Nebraska Senator Roman Hruska said of Carswell, to much laughter. "There are a lot of mediocre judges and people and lawyers. They are entitled to a little representation, aren't they?") After the Senate rejected Carswell, Nixon, who initially had spurned the ABA, believing it to be run by liberals, asked it to consider and approve his nominees before he even nominated them. The depleted president realized that the august body's imprimatur could help him ease future nominations through a truculent Senate.

No one would argue that excellence shouldn't count in selecting justices. Neither, however, should the obvious need for skilled jurists obscure the problems of the fetishization of 'expertise' that took hold after the Carswell affair. For the consensus over the paramountcy of expertise inadvertently helped drive considerations of ideology further underground. A nominee's strong résumé – a long stint as an appellate judge, an appointment at a prestigious law school – could be wielded to intimidate senators from opposing him, even though that opposition might be warranted on other grounds.⁹ Talk about

8 Goldman, *Picking Federal Judges*, 115.

9 Many liberals, for example, harbored concerns about Judge Antonin Scalia's views when President Ronald Reagan nominated him to the Supreme Court in 1986 but found it hard to oppose him given his strong résumé. See, for

qualifications became a largely phony discourse deployed for strategic reasons, not a genuine effort to assess the relative merits of potential justices.

If expertise or merit emerged as one false discourse used to discredit opposition to a nominee, references to his or her identity represented a second. During the years of the new contentiousness in Court appointments, multiculturalism swept across American society. With the proliferation of ethnic, racial, and gender consciousness in the late 1960s and afterward, politicians considered the potential electoral gains in making appointments from key constituencies. Confident that the tide of public opinion had turned against white supremacy, Johnson sought acclaim for naming Thurgood Marshall as the first African American justice. Nixon's deliberations, as his Oval Office tapes reveal, were consumed by questions about how the gender, religion, and ethnicity of prospective nominees would play politically.¹⁰

Ronald Reagan similarly understood the advantages to be gained from playing identity politics. In his 1980 campaign for president, Reagan polled better among men than women, partly because he opposed the Equal Rights Amendment. In an effort to close the gender gap, Reagan first said he would probably name a woman to the Supreme Court, then all but promised to.¹¹ Then,

example, Anthony Lewis, "The Court: Rehnquist," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1986, A15.

10 See, for example, John W. Dean, *The Rehnquist Choice: The Untold Story of the Nixon Appointment that Redefined the Supreme Court* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

11 Douglas E. Kneeland, "Reagan Pledges Women on Court; Carter Challenges Foe on Economy," *The New York Times*, October 15, 1980, A1.

in the spring of Reagan's first term, Justice Potter Stewart retired, precisely at a moment when polls were showing that the administration's belligerent El Salvador policy was eroding Reagan's female support. By nominating the conservative Sandra Day O'Connor to replace Stewart, Reagan fused the apparatus of public opinion polling to the selection of high court nominees. "It was done to help us with the woman problem," said Reagan's Chief of Staff James A. Baker, "and to keep a campaign pledge."¹² Similar calculations, of course, lay behind George H. W. Bush's decision to nominate Clarence Thomas to replace Thurgood Marshall in 1991; although most black civil rights leaders opposed the choice, Democrats were still hard put to oppose an African American nominee.¹³ This logic also underpins the current administration's inclination to appoint a conservative Hispanic, such as Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, when a vacancy next arises on the Court.¹⁴

The readiness of Nixon, Reagan, and Bush Senior to pick justices from traditionally excluded groups spoke to the extent to which 'diversity,' in the age of multiculturalism, had come to be seen as a social good with broad public support; even politicians who opposed affirma-

12 Sidney Blumenthal, "Marketing the President," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1981, 43ff.

13 Initially, those who opposed Thomas, including seven of the eight Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee, rested their opposition on what they characterized as a lack of experience – little more than a year as an appellate judge. Eventually, they would seize on allegations that he sexually harassed women who worked for him.

14 See, for example, Elisabeth Bumiller and Neil A. Lewis, "Choice of Gonzales May Blaze a Trail For the High Court," *The New York Times*, November 12, 2004, A1.

tive action and related policies for redressing racial and gender imbalances engaged unofficially in such practices. But the conservative use of race, gender, and ethnicity in the appointments process also contained a cynical element. Like expertise, identity constituted a sort of immunity talisman with which presidents outfitted nominees whom they feared might otherwise falter. Indeed, by the time of the current Bush administration, one occasionally heard conservatives leveling at liberals the charge of racial or religious discrimination when they opposed right-wing nominees.¹⁵ It seems unlikely that anyone – even those making the charges – took them seriously. But within the boundaries of the new fictive discourse, in which ideology was pushed underground, the ease with which such absurd charges were proffered revealed the confident assessment, even by those historically most opposed to the sharing of power by Protestants, whites, and men, that, to borrow a phrase from the sociologist Nathan Glazer, we are all multiculturalists now.

The lone apparent exception to the emerging rule of euphemistic cynicism in senatorial jousting over Supreme Court nominations was the frankly ideological debate over Reagan's nomination of Robert Bork in 1987 to replace the retiring Lewis F. Powell. But even this

15 The charge was used in 2002 in the case of William Pryor, a Catholic nominated for the appellate court, and more recently in the general charge that Democrats oppose "people of faith." See "Washington in Brief," *The Washington Post*, April 11, 2002, A9; Robin Toner, "Washington Talk: Accusation of Bias Angers Democrats," *The New York Times*, July 27, 2003, 18. For a more recent use of the tactic, see David D. Kirkpatrick, "In Telecast, Frist Defends His Efforts to Stop Filibusters," *The New York Times*, April 25, 2005, A5.

apparent exception to the unspoken ban on invoking ideology ultimately served to reinforce it. Bork's liberal critics, after all, chose not to label him 'too conservative'; they depicted him, rather, as a wild-eyed, bushy-bearded zealot holding radical views alien to most Americans. As the Senate Judiciary Committee put it in its report, "Judge Bork's philosophy is outside the mainstream of such great judicial conservatives as Justices Harlan, Frankfurter and Black, as well as such recent conservatives as Justices Stewart, Powell, O'Connor and Chief Justice Burger."¹⁶

Although the open discussion of Bork's views on abortion, affirmative action, and other issues made the debate, in some undeniable sense, about ideology, the focus on the eccentric aspects of Bork's personality and his mind allowed his opponents to maintain they were not applying narrow litmus tests in rejecting him. "I supported Justices O'Connor and Scalia as well as Chief Justice Rehnquist," said Senator David Pryor of Arkansas. "But the question of Robert Bork is not an issue of a person being conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat. It is a larger question of temperament and understanding." Bork's critics convinced the public that they were concerned about his character and even something like his sanity – aspects of a nominee that, unlike ideology, everyone agreed merited serious attention in the choice of a justice.

The ideologically charged Bork case, ironically, solidified the taboo on opposing a nomination on ideological grounds. When Douglas Ginsburg, the Reagan administration's next choice to fill Powell's seat, turned out to have

16 Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Nomination of Robert H. Bork to be an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court*, 100th Cong., 1st sess., October 13, 1987, p. 13.

smoked marijuana as a law professor, participants in the confirmation fracas retreated from the precipice of invoking ideology that they had approached with Bork, heading back to the safer terrain of 'scandal' and 'character.' But the failure of the successive nominations (the administration withdrew Ginsburg's name once the news of his drug use surfaced) gave rise to a round of public soul-searching and blue-ribbon panels, with various solutions put forward to try to lower the temperature.

The most commonly heard prescription held that the appointments process had to be 'depoliticized.' A post-Bork task force convened by the Twentieth Century Fund, comprising nine leading lawyers, professors, and retired politicians, urged that candidates no longer testify at their own Senate confirmation hearings (a process that began in 1925, well before the current dynamic took hold). If nominees did testify, the task force added, they should not be asked about how they would rule on cases before the Court.¹⁷ Such prescriptions went nowhere. The public, understandably, held to its demand that its representatives vet lifetime appointees to a body increasingly distrusted for its unaccountability, even in the face of dismay at hearings that often seemed staged or circuslike. For presidents or senators to have returned to the dynamic that held sway in the early twentieth century would have been to turn back the tide of history.

More recently, another proposal has come from the other direction. Law professor Randall Kennedy of Harvard, Senator Charles Schumer of New York, and others have called for participants in the confirmation process to admit that ide-

17 Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Judicial Selection, *Judicial Roulette* (New York: Priority Press Publications, 1988).

ology inevitably plays a role and to bring it out of the shadows. “Many people sneer at the notion of litmus tests for purposes of judicial selection or confirmation – even as they unknowingly conduct such tests themselves,” Kennedy wrote early in the current Bush administration. But litmus tests, Kennedy added, were actually commonly accepted ways of sizing up a nominee’s views. The real problem, as he saw it, was that the taboo on discussing ideology led to a search for scandal. “A transparent process in which ideological objections to judicial candidates are candidly voiced,” he concluded, “is a much-needed antidote to the murky ‘politics of personal destruction.’”¹⁸

Of the two prescriptions, Kennedy’s seems more likely to offer a way out of the thicket, for at least it strives toward transparency. But where those favoring depoliticization fail to reckon with half of the current dynamic – the ineradicability of politics – those favoring greater candor neglect the other half: the tenacity of the fictive discourse that has emerged over thirty-five years. Indeed, though it seems counterintuitive, it may well be the very frequency of the nomination fights that has made senators eager to reassure themselves that they’re not putting parochial preference above national comity. Every so often, a high-stakes congressional vote, such as on

whether to go to war, leads politicians to talk about ‘a vote of conscience’ – implying that conscience plays little role in ordinary votes. Just so, the chance to oppose or confirm a nominee in language that affirms a dedication to the common good affords politicians a measure of absolution for all those other occasions on which they fail to do precisely that.

– April 26, 2005

18 Randall Kennedy, “The Case for Borking,” *The American Prospect*, July 2 – 16, 2001, 26. Schumer, a member of the Judiciary Committee, made a similar argument: “The taboo [on invoking ideology] has led senators who oppose a nominee for ideological reasons to justify their opposition by finding non-ideological factors, like small financial improprieties from long ago. This ‘gotcha’ politics has warped the confirmation process and harmed the Senate’s reputation.” From Charles E. Schumer, “Judging by Ideology,” *The New York Times*, June 26, 2001, A19.

Howard Gardner & Lee S. Shulman

The professions in America today: crucial but fragile

Whether one sees the professions as a high point of human achievement, or, in George Bernard Shaw's piquant phrase, as a "conspiracy against the laity," there is little question that they have played a dominant role in industrial and postindustrial society since the early twentieth

Howard Gardner, John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, devised the theory of multiple intelligences, a critique of the notion that there exists but a single human intelligence that can be assessed by standard psychometric instruments. His most recent books are "Changing Minds" (2004), "Making Good" (with Wendy Fischman, Becca Soloman, and Deborah Greenspan, 2004), and "Good Work" (with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and William Damon, 2001). Gardner has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 1995.

Lee S. Shulman, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2002, is president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University. His latest books are "Teaching as Community Property: Essays on Higher Education" (2004) and "The Wisdom of Practice: Essays on Teaching, Learning, and Learning to Teach" (2004).

© 2005 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

century. It is difficult to envision our era without the physicians, lawyers, and accountants to whom we turn for help at crucial times; or the architects and engineers who shape the environments in which we live; or the journalists and educators to whom we look for information, knowledge, and, on occasion, wisdom.

Some forty years ago, in a *Dædalus* issue devoted entirely to the professions, guest editor Kenneth Lynn declared, "Everywhere in American life, the professions are triumphant." He went on to comment, "Given this dramatic situation, it is truly extraordinary how little we know about the professions."

We appear to know much more about the professions now than we did forty years ago; certainly there is no paucity of scholarly and popular literature on specific professions, if less on the professions in the aggregate. But the professions themselves have not remained frozen over that time. Indeed, they have recently been subjected to a whole new set of pressures, from the growing reach of new technologies to the growing importance of making money.

In recent years, the professions have not always had good press. Worried by evidence of incompetence and dishonesty, the general public seems to have lost its uncritical admiration for the pro-

fessional. Some in higher education see creeping professionalism as the enemy of liberal learning. Perhaps most dramatically, potent market forces, untempered by forces of equivalent power, have made it increasingly difficult to delineate just how professionals today differ from those nonprofessionals who also have power and resources in the society.

Triumphant on the one hand, under critical scrutiny on the other, the professions stand in need of fresh attention today. In the essays that follow, our authors review the professions in contemporary America – and the very idea of having a vocation or calling. We raise the question of whether the professions will survive in their recognizable form, evolve into quite different entities, or dissolve entirely; and whether the methods that have been developed for educating professionals are adequate to the current intellectual, practical, and ethical demands of these roles.

Generically, professions consist of individuals who are given a certain amount of prestige and autonomy in return for performing for society a set of services in a disinterested way. At mid-century, American sociologists like Bernard Barber, Everett Hughes, Robert Merton, and Talcott Parsons limned the defining characteristics of the professions. Barber, for example, identified four attributes: a high degree of generalized and systematic knowledge; a primary orientation to community interest rather than personal interest; a high degree of self-control of behavior through a code of ethics; and a system of monetary and honorary rewards that symbolize achievements of the work itself. In more recent times, important studies of specific professions have been carried out by Andrew Abbot, Howard Becker,

Elliot Freidson, Anthony Kronman, and Paul Starr – just to name a few who have approached the professions from a sociological perspective. These authorities have stressed the role of explicit training regimens, formal licensure, and procedures whereby untrained, incompetent, or unethical individuals can be excluded from practice.

In our view, six commonplaces are characteristic of all professions, properly construed: a commitment to serve in the interests of clients in particular and the welfare of society in general; a body of theory or special knowledge with its own principles of growth and reorganization; a specialized set of professional skills, practices, and performances unique to the profession; the developed capacity to render judgments with integrity under conditions of both technical and ethical uncertainty; an organized approach to learning from experience both individually and collectively and, thus, of growing new knowledge from the contexts of practice; and the development of a professional community responsible for the oversight and monitoring of quality in both practice and professional education.

The primary feature of any profession – the commitment to serve responsibly, selflessly, and wisely – sets the terms of the compact between the profession and the society. The centrality of this commitment defines the inherently ethical relationship between the professional and the general society. It also sets up the essential tension between the two poles of professional responsibility: the duty to serve the interests of one's immediate client and the obligation one has to the society at large. The lawyer's dual responsibilities of serving as both an officer of the court and as a zealous advocate for her clients exemplify this tension. Failure to deal responsibly with

this tension frequently creates the conditions that we have termed ‘compromised practice.’

Second, every profession lays claim to a theoretical knowledge base – a body of research, conceptions, and traditions that is the normative touchstone for its efforts. Whether that knowledge base is a body of biomedical research and theory, a collection of sacred texts, or a body of laws, regulations, and legal decisions, professions rest much of their authority on knowledge that, to some degree, develops both independently of the practice of the profession and in conjunction with it. For this reason, most of the professions, properly understood, have a place in the academy, the world of higher education. Both during professional education and through the course of one’s career, the practicing professional is expected to remain current with the growth and changes in that knowledge base.

Third, the defining characteristic of any profession is its mastery of a domain of practice. Professions are essentially practical performances. It is no accident that we regularly refer to professional ‘practitioners’ and professional ‘practice.’ The technical skills of analysis and argument, treatment and ritual, deliberation and diagnosis, action and interaction, are the hallmarks of any profession. We typically identify professions by the very practices in which their members engage. These practices have often developed quite independently of the putative knowledge base and ethical norms of the profession. There is thus a predictable conflict in practice between the norms of the academy and the norms of the professional practice community. How that conflict plays out in defining the standards for competent practice and malpractice, as well as the conditions for approved professional educa-

tion, is a drama that unfolds regularly in every professional domain.

Fourth, the hallmark of all professions, even beyond the prototypical practices of each, is the ubiquitous condition of uncertainty, novelty, and unpredictability that characterizes professional work. While much of professional practice is routine, the essential challenges of professional work center on the need to make complex judgments and decisions leading to skilled actions under conditions of uncertainty. This means that professional practice is frequently pursued at or beyond the margins of previously learned performances. That circumstance creates two related challenges for professional practice and education: professionals must be trained to operate at the uncertain limits of their previous experience, and must also be prepared to learn from the consequences of their actions to develop new understandings and better routines. They must also develop ways of exchanging those understandings with other professionals so the entire professional community benefits from their insight.

The need for professional judgment and action under conditions of uncertainty gives rise to the fifth commonplace of professions: the continuing need to learn from one’s experience – to grow smarter, wiser, and more skilled through the very experience of engaging in professional practice thoughtfully and reflectively. But no single practicing professional can accomplish that end and adequately aggregate and judge the lessons of practice while working in isolation. The conditions of professional practice and professional learning demand the establishment and smooth functioning of professional communities.

The sixth feature is therefore connected to learning to practice as a member of

*The
professions
in America
today:
crucial but
fragile*

a professional community, charged with responsibility for establishing and renewing standards for both practice and professional education, for critically reviewing claims for new ideas and techniques and disseminating the worthy ones widely within the community of practice, and for generally overseeing the quality of performances at all stages of the career.

At the present time, few would dispute the claim that physicians, lawyers, architects, accountants, engineers, and clergy are professionals. Most would consider nurses, social workers, and teachers as members of critically important, albeit less prestigious, professions. (The lower prestige of the latter group of practitioners is generally attributed to the status of those whom they serve, and to the fact that their ranks have long been populated primarily by women – a situation that may be changing.) Other practitioners such as politicians, journalists, and foundation program officers have some claim to professional status. We would not consider artists, entertainers, athletes, or businesspersons to be professionals in the usual sense; but it is worth noting that any individual or group may choose to behave as a professional. And we can suggest as well that some groups of workers, like engineers, have improved their standings as professionals, while others, such as accountants in recent years, have undermined the status of their profession.

Whatever the fine points of definition, the professions date from ancient times – the Hippocratic oath, for instance, has been with us for millennia. Aspects of training, expertise, membership, and exclusion were characteristic of the medieval guilds. When universities were created centuries ago in Europe, they were intended primarily as institutions for

the preparation of professionals: physicians, theologians and clergy, lawyers, and teachers of the disciplines. It was already clear in the late Middle Ages that preparing young people (and they were unimaginably young!) to ‘profess’ was a serious challenge, and that a new institution – the university – needed invention to accomplish that end.

Across the centuries, controversies have swirled around the ways the professions organized themselves for practice. Varieties of guilds and professional societies, as well as diverse educational institutions, set standards of quality and licensure. Their purpose has been to ensure quality through controlling access, thus protecting the public from the dangers of incompetent practitioners, and to safeguard the professions against the slings and arrows of outraged clients, political leaders, and organized (as well as disorganized) competitors.

At the start of the twentieth century, various authorities wrote foundational works on the professions. From the sociological perspective, Max Weber emphasized a moral, as well as a technical and pragmatic dimension, across the learned professions. Surveying the medical profession in the United States, educator Abraham Flexner emphasized the critical connections between the medical profession and the recent explosive growth of science; this trend called for the embedding of professional education within the universities. In the United States, the Progressive movement of the era both enhanced the prestige of the professions and conferred upon them an elite status. Professionals were expected to put aside personal motivations and to behave in a selfless and socially responsible way.

At midcentury, as documented in the earlier *Dædalus*, the professions had attained the heights of status, and the best

in each profession were admired as role models. However, admissions policies and licensing predilections largely barred the professions to women and those who lacked a privileged background. The trends of egalitarianism in the 1960s opened up the professions to a much wider pool of talent; at the same time, however, the ideal of the disinterested professional became more elusive, and criticism of the 'elite' professions mounted.

It is worth noting that now, at the very time when professions are being challenged in America and other Western societies, attempts are being made to consolidate them in other parts of the world. In contemporary China, for example, strenuous efforts are underway to establish the law as a realm independent of the state, and to train lawyers to see themselves as officers of an independent judiciary. Controversy swirls in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland about the degree to which journalists should defend the state, engage in self-censorship, report in a neutral manner, or serve as a counterweight to official propaganda. It would be ironic if professions were to gain credibility in East Asia even as they are becoming delegitimized in societies where they once thrived.

Roughly a decade ago, reflecting trends in psychology and education, two groups – the Preparation for the Professions Program and the GoodWork Project – embarked on large-scale studies of professional life in America today. The goals of these empirical investigations were to survey a number of American professions and to draw broader conclusions about the status and prospects of professional training and life. Both studies include a comparative dimension and have turned out to be syn-

ergistically complementary to one another. Most of the thematic essays in this issue of *Dædalus* grow out of these two research groups' decision to collaborate on a set of papers that draw lessons from the groups' joint efforts.

Led by scholars at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the Preparation for the Professions Program has sought to understand the nature of professional training today in a variety of fields, including medicine, law, engineering, teaching, nursing, and the ministry. Scholars at Carnegie are also studying the Ph.D. as a professional degree that prepares individuals for careers in the academic professions of mathematics, history, neuroscience, chemistry, English, and education. Thinking of the Ph.D. as a program of professional preparation sheds entirely new light on the concept of a 'doctor of philosophy.' The work of the Carnegie team looks primarily at the period leading up to professional practice, most of which occurs in formal educational settings. The commonplaces laid out above have emerged during the first phases of the Carnegie study.

Under the direction of scholars at Claremont Graduate University, Harvard University, and Stanford University, the GoodWork Project examines more mature practice – the experiences of both new and veteran professionals as they attempt to cope with changing conditions and powerful market forces. The GoodWork Project has investigated journalism, genetics, theater, law, philanthropy, and higher education, among other fields. As currently conceptualized, good work consists of three facets: excellence in practice of the profession; an enduring concern with the social and ethical implications of one's work; and a feeling on the part of the practitioner that he or she is en-

*The
professions
in America
today:
crucial but
fragile*

gaged in work that matters and that feels good.

Much of the impetus of the Good-Work Project came from our realization that unchecked market forces constitute a strong challenge to the professions. When no line remains inviolate save the bottom line, the distinction between professionals and 'mere workers' disappears. It is our observation that the current emphasis on market models and principles, in the absence of significant counterforces of a religious, ideological, or communal sort, constitutes an enormous challenge to all professions. This observation is confirmed by our studies of young workers. While all acknowledge and applaud the features of good work, a significant number of young professionals feel unable to pursue good work at this time. And so they console themselves with the belief that once they have attained monetary success they will be able to pursue it – a prototypical triumph of ends over means.

Taken together, the essays in this collection attest to the continuing importance of the professions in America and elsewhere; to their perennial fragility, particularly in the face of powerful and relatively uncontested forces; and to the need both for excellent and ethical training during formation and for strong educational and institutional support throughout one's professional life. It took centuries for professions to achieve their central role in a complex society; it would take far less time to undermine their legitimacy. As a society, we need to decide whether we value our professions enough to provide sufficient continuing popular and institutional support.

Dialogue between Leszek Kolakowski & Danny Postel

On exile, philosophy & tottering insecurely on the edge of an unknown abyss

DANNY POSTEL: You've been living outside of Poland since 1968. Two decades ago you wrote an essay titled "In Praise of Exile," though in it you don't discuss your own exile. Do you feel that

A Fellow of the American Academy since 1970, Leszek Kolakowski is Senior Research Fellow Emeritus at All Souls College, Oxford. In 2003, the Library of Congress awarded him the first John W. Kluge Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Human Sciences. His books include "The Individual and Infinity" (1958), "The Philosophy of Existence, the Defeat of Existence" (1965), "Husserl and the Search for Certitude" (1975), "If There is no God" (1982), "Metaphysical Horror" (1988), "The Two Eyes of Spinoza and Other Essays on Philosophers" (2004), and "My Correct Views on Everything" (2005). In October, W. W. Norton will publish his celebrated three-volume "Main Currents of Marxism" (1976 – 1978) in a single-volume edition.

Danny Postel is contributing editor of openDemocracy.net and a member of the editorial board of "The Common Review." His work has appeared in "Philosophy and Social Criticism," "The Chronicle of Higher Education," "The Washington Post Book World," "The Nation," "The American Prospect," and "Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture."

© 2005 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

your exile has shaped the way you think about and relate to the world?

LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI: Yes. Yes, I think so. I love the British, of course. But I don't feel British. I'm not an Oxonian. Britain is an island. Oxford is an island in Britain. All Souls is an island in Oxford. And I am an island in All Souls. I'm a quadruple island. But I don't complain. Only I don't feel that I belong to it. In fact, when I go to Paris, I feel more at home than in London, even though I've never lived there for more than six months at one time.

DP: Why do you think that is?

LK: Well, probably because I know French literature and poetry better. I learned French early. I would say French is my best second language. And I think that you really feel another culture when you read its poetry, in the original. The languages in which I could read poetry in the original when I was young were French and German and Russian – not to speak of Polish. But not English, of which I was ignorant.

DP: Speaking of poetry, do you have any thoughts on the death of your countryman Czeslaw Milosz?

LK: I met him on my first trip to Paris, at the end of 1956. Later on, I saw him on various occasions here and there. I have a very, very high opinion of his poetry. He was a great writer. He was overwhelmed by sadness, sadness about the world around him. Not political, but cultural. He had no feeling of belonging. Although he was Polish, he had no motherland. He was homeless in some way. Perhaps it was the memory of his young days in Vilnius, where he was brought up, which had been Polish between the wars but then became Lithuanian. And I liked his book *The Captive Mind* very, very much. He speaks about people whom I knew – but without mentioning their names. He was, during his lifetime, strongly attacked from various sides. He had worked for some years in Polish diplomacy, in Paris and in Washington. He knew what Communism was about. At a certain point, he decided to defect. He stayed in Paris. Then he was terribly attacked by Polish journalists and the Polish government – writers and apparatchiks. But he was never accepted by Polish exiles – first of all, because he had been in Polish diplomacy, so they regarded him as an agent of the Communists. But also because he was very critical of prewar Poland.

DP: You mean the right-wing culture of prewar Poland?

LK: Yes, the right-wing culture of Polish Catholicism – a special kind of Catholicism, full of bigotry, anti-Semitism, nationalism. Of course, not everything in Polish Catholicism was like that. But the general atmosphere in the Church was very distasteful to him, as was Polish political culture in general in those years.

DP: This is an outlook you shared with Milosz.

LK: Yes, except that we weren't quite from the same generation. He was a young writer before the war, whereas I was a boy, not even twelve. But yes, I had this feeling. I strongly disliked a certain current in Polish culture – the nationalism, bigotry, anti-Semitism. And yet I've always been Polish.

DP: Your less than euphoric feelings about the Western Left were strongly colored by your year in Berkeley in 1969 – 1970. Tzvetan Todorov describes a similar experience, of fleeing a Communist country – in his case, Bulgaria – only to find himself in a heavily Communist intellectual milieu in Paris. What was Berkeley like for you?

LK: I found the so-called student movement simply barbaric. There are of course ignorant young people at all times and in all places. But in Berkeley their ignorance was elevated to the level of the highest wisdom. They wanted to 'revolutionize' the university in such a way that they wouldn't have to learn anything. They had all sorts of silly proposals. For instance, they wanted professors to be appointed by students, and students to be examined by other students. I remember one leaflet issued by the black student movement asserting that the libraries contained nothing but "irrelevant white knowledge."

DP: What about the student movement's opposition to the Vietnam War?

LK: I believed there were several good reasons for America to withdraw from Vietnam. But one reason which was nonsense was the claim of many opponents of the war that once America withdrew, South Vietnam would be liberated. Everybody even minimally acquainted with Communist politics knew that

*Exile,
philosophy
& tottering
insecurely
on the
edge of an
unknown
abyss*

when the Viet Cong took over South Vietnam it would be a disaster – oppression, despotism, massacres – as it was, of course. It was bound to be. Everybody should have expected that.

DP: As you know, Theodor Adorno's encounter with the New Left was similar to yours. He was horrified by the behavior of the radical students in Frankfurt. Did you ever meet him?

LK: Once. It was 1958. I was allowed to go for one year to Holland and to France, and I was also in Germany for a short time. So I met Adorno. I didn't know his work then. I remember him taking a manuscript from his desk and waving it furiously – a Lukács manuscript, as it happened.

DP: Why were you expelled from the Polish Communist Party in 1966?

LK: For many years my Party membership had been a joke really. But I believed, and so did many friends – probably wrongly – that there were reasons to stay in the Party, as it gave us more opportunity to express unorthodox views. A number of my friends, most of them writers, left the Party in protest against my expulsion. But even then I could teach whatever I wanted at the university. Nobody interfered with my teaching. But in 1968, I was expelled from the university, as were a few of my friends. There was a slander campaign against us in the press and so on. Nothing pleasant. Nevertheless, I should always remember it could have been much worse.

DP: What was it like to watch one Communist regime after another come tumbling down in 1989 and after?

LK: Very gratifying, of course. I was in Poland at the end of 1988, on a British passport. This was my first visit after twenty years. But I knew what was going on inside the country, since I was a member of this committee which was formed in the 1970s, after the riots – the Committee in Defense of Workers. I gave many interviews in support of this movement.

DP: Were they published in Poland?

LK: No, no. It was forbidden to mention my name in the Polish press, unless it was to attack me. I couldn't publish. I was an 'unperson.'

DP: When you went to Poland in 1988, why did the Polish authorities let you in?

LK: Because the regime was crumbling. It was very weak. But I was still interrogated by the secret police.

DP: On what grounds?

LK: Because on the visa application for myself and my wife, I wrote that I was going for private reasons. And then I took part in a meeting in which the Citizens Committee was formed, with Lech Walesa. And I had lectured at a philosophical society in the university as well. There were many people in attendance. And so I was accused of lying by an officer who interrogated me: I had said I was in the country for private reasons, but then my interrogator said, referring to the meeting with the Citizens Committee, "You participated in a secret meeting." I said, "What secret meeting? Everybody heard about it. Nothing was secret." My meeting with Walesa was discussed in the press. In Poland during that period, the distinction between le-

gal and illegal was unclear. I asked him, “Why do you have people follow me all the time? Wherever I go, they follow me in a car.” I went to the cemetery, for instance, to the graves of relatives. And then I went to visit my very old aunt, and everywhere they followed me. But why? He said, “They’re protecting you.” Protecting me from whom? It was ridiculous.

DP: You’ve made the point that liberalization and openness are not necessarily an effective way of preserving a totalitarian regime; on the contrary, they often lead to revolutionary upheaval and the complete dismantling of regimes.

LK: Think of Gorbachev’s *glasnost* – it was supposed to make Communism better but instead it ruined it.

DP: Do you think that having to resort to a certain kind of Delphic or esoteric idiom of writing under Stalinist rule added a dimension to the style of writers like yourself that might never have been developed in a free society?

LK: When I was in Poland, all of us who were intellectuals were compelled to use a certain code language, a language that would be acceptable in the established framework. So we had an acute sense of the limits of what could be said, of censorship. Of course. Occasionally our works were confiscated. But we tried to be intelligible without being transparent. In this period there were only a few cases of people publishing in émigré journals. There was a journal in Paris, *Kultura* – a very good and very important journal; obviously it was prohibited in Poland. Nevertheless, a few copies always circulated. The members of the Writers’ Association were even able to read it in the library, legally. And occa-

sionally, people brought it in from abroad. But people were afraid to publish. There were people arrested for publishing in such journals. But later on, at the very end of the 1960s, some people published books in Paris under their own names.

DP: The opening line of *Metaphysical Horror* reads: “A modern philosopher who has never once suspected himself of being a charlatan must be such a shallow mind that his work is probably not worth reading.” Have you ever suspected yourself of being a charlatan?

LK: Certainly. Many times.

DP: Did you see Roman Polanski’s film *The Pianist*?

LK: Yes. It was very well done. I was in Poland [when the film is set, during World War II], though not in the ghetto, of course. But I lived among people who helped the Jews and who lived with the Jews in hiding. I remember Warsaw during the ghetto uprising. I lived for some time in a flat which was a hiding place for Jews who were saved from the ghetto. Not long ago I learned that once the Gestapo came to search all the flats, one after another. There were two groups of Gestapo people searching. And they failed to visit this very flat where I was because one group believed that it was already searched by another group, and vice versa. So my flat was spared. Had it not been, we wouldn’t be talking today; I would be a crumbling skeleton. A friend of mine, Marek Edelman, was one of the very few survivors of the ghetto uprising, and one of the leaders, actually, of the uprising. He’s still in Poland. He saw the film and said that it was true.

*Exile,
philosophy
& tottering
& tottering
insecurely
on the
edge of an
unknown
abyss*

DP: Do you think that the experience you were just describing – living as a young man amongst Jews in hiding, people fearing for their lives – do you think that influenced you and your worldview?

LK: Probably, but I cannot say exactly in what way. It was, as you can imagine, a very bad experience. I was this young boy. I knew many people, of course, of various persuasions. My strong feeling was that the most dedicated and the most courageous were on the left.

DP: Is this what attracted you to the Left as a young man?

LK: Among other things, yes. And as I said, my strong negative feelings against a certain current in Polish culture – the chauvinism, nationalism, anti-Semitism, clericalism. I disliked it very strongly.

DP: In the title essay of your collection *Modernity on Endless Trial*, you describe the orthodoxy of our age as a kind of “patching up.” “We try to assert our modernity,” you write, “but escape from its effects by various intellectual devices, in order to convince ourselves that meaning can be restored or recovered apart from the traditional legacy of mankind and in spite of the destruction brought about by modernity.” Do you view the revival of humanism going on today – I’m thinking of Todorov’s recent work, for example – as an attempt at this kind of patchwork?

LK: I think so. There are attempts to restore humanism very simply through intellectual efforts. You can always repeat some old slogans, but I don’t expect them to have a big impact. At the same time, there is a revival of religious sentiments and ideas going on as well. There

is a feeling that we lack something important. I had many discussions with American students who had this feeling, even if they were not brought up in a religious tradition. They were attracted to this tradition quite independently of their upbringing. They felt they lacked something in life. Not necessarily the Church. But the need for something spiritual goes beyond our consumerist society. I think it’s widespread, all over the world. So I don’t expect, as many people did expect in the eighteenth century and beyond, that religion will vanish. I don’t believe it will vanish. And I hope it will not.

DP: You also wrote, in that same essay, that “[t]here is something alarmingly desperate in intellectuals who have no religious attachment, faith or loyalty proper and who insist on the irreplaceable educational and moral role of religion in our world and deplore its fragility, to which they themselves eminently bear witness . . . I do not blame them . . . either for being irreligious or for asserting the crucial value of religious experience; I simply cannot persuade myself that their work might produce changes they believe desirable, because to spread faith, faith is needed and not an intellectual assertion of the social utility of faith.” I suppose we can surmise from this that you yourself are a man of faith.

LK: This I don’t want to discuss.

DP: May I ask why?

LK: I could say why I do not want to answer this question only by actually answering it.

DP: You’ve long defended European civilization and the European “project” against its anti-imperialist and Third

Worldist critics. But today Europe is being attacked by the American nationalist Right. American conservatives rail against European sensibilities about global power; American religious conservatives attack Western European secularism; and so on. As a Europeanist, how does it make you feel to see these attacks on Europe coming from America?

LK: I feel uneasy about it. This is to say, I believe the European tendency toward unification is a good thing – to a point. I don't believe that it will forge a super-state. France especially would support this only on the condition that it would be the dominant power in such a formation, but I don't find this desirable. National feelings are there. You cannot destroy them. I'm against the new European Constitution, but not the European Union. One of the reasons – though not the only one – is Russia. The Roman Empire, Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Empire, British Empire – they all fell. So did the Soviet Empire. Nevertheless, Russia today is awash in strong imperialist nostalgia. It is a Great Power. It can use its resources to blackmail its neighbors. And I think that for Poland and other countries previously in the Soviet Bloc, it is important for this reason to belong to the European Union. But this is not the only reason; it is one of several. So yes, I support the European Union. But I don't support its tendency to act as one state – one European state. You can see how furious, for example, Chirac was about Poland supporting the Iraq War. Apart from the question of whether it was a good idea or not, he was furious that Poland dared to do that. He preferred to make the target of his fury a weaker country like Poland, and not the United States.

DP: Did you think it was a mistake then for the Polish government to line up with the United States?

LK: No, I don't think so. Just days before the war started I was asked by a newspaper what I thought about the war. I said I was very happy that I'm not an American president and I don't need to decide anything. Because I've got ambivalent feelings about it.

DP: Would you share your thoughts on the state of philosophy today?

LK: I don't follow what's going on in today's philosophy. I have been reading very little. Unfortunately, my eyes are very bad. If something very important appeared, perhaps I would know, but I don't believe there are any great philosophers alive.

DP: None?

LK: Well, there are intelligent people, of course, very clever, full of intellectual vigor. But not a great philosopher.

DP: Are there any philosophers writing today whom you read with interest?

LK: I read Rorty with interest, though I don't share his views.

DP: In *Metaphysical Horror* you conjured an image that I found arresting: "It is perhaps better for us to totter insecurely on the edge of an unknown abyss than simply to close our eyes and deny its existence." Not merely to totter insecurely on the edge of an abyss, but an *unknown* abyss at that.

LK: *Metaphysical Horror* was an attempt to show that metaphysical ambitions,

*Exile,
philosophy
& tottering
insecurely
on the
edge of an
unknown
abyss*

*Dialogue
between
Leszek
Kolakowski
& Danny
Postel*

metaphysical yearnings, metaphysical needs are still with us, and whenever we try to formulate them, they either fall apart or we run into contradictions. There is no good solution. That's our predicament.

DP: Do you see any way out of that predicament?

LK: No. We're living in a world which is, after all, ruled by Manichaeism, hostile gods.

Gustavo Pérez Firmat

*on bilingualism &
its discontents*

In a letter written toward the end of his life, the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev remarked that a writer who did not write only in his mother tongue was a thief and a pig. Although Turgenev did not explain the epithets, it's not difficult to figure out what he meant. Since a language is a form of cultural property, a writer who uses words that do not belong to him is a thief; since his theft of the words of others entails the neglect of his own, he is a pig. As it happens, Turgenev wrote his letter in German,

Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2004, is David Feinson Professor of Humanities at Columbia University, where he teaches Spanish, Spanish American, and Latino literature. His books of literary and cultural criticism include "Literature and Liminality" (1986), "The Cuban Condition" (1989), and "Life on the Hyphen" (1994). He is also the author of a memoir, "Next Year in Cuba" (1995), and of several collections of poetry in English and Spanish, including "Carolina Cuban" (1987) and "Cincuenta lecciones de exilio y desexilio" (2000).

© 2005 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

his third language. And even though his letters are often every bit as literary as his novels, apparently for him the use of other languages in correspondence did not count as an infraction against his mother tongue. Indeed, it is revealing that Turgenev, in spite of his mastery of several European languages and his many years of residence outside Russia, never seized the opportunity, or succumbed to the temptation, of writing fiction in a language other than Russian. Once, when a reviewer incorrectly stated that one of his novellas had been written originally in French, an offended Turgenev pointed out – in flawless French – that he would never stoop to something so base.

Turgenev's attitude toward the Russian language offers an instance of the phenomenon that Uriel Weinreich termed language loyalty – that powerful, deep-seated attachment that many of us feel toward our mother tongue. Although feelings of language loyalty go back to the ancient Greeks, who stigmatized users of other languages as 'barbarians,' it is only more recently that individual languages have acquired the pull and prestige that they now enjoy. Unlike Turgenev, a sixteenth-century neo-Latin poet felt few qualms about not using his mother tongue for literary composition. Even writers who worked primarily in the vernacular also wrote, without apparent damage to their self-esteem, in other languages: Milton composed Italian sonnets; Garcilaso de la Vega wrote Latin odes. It was not until the rise of modern nation-states that native languages became national languages, and thus a privileged cultural possession. For most of us, as for Turgenev, the language that we speak is a fundamental component of our nationality, and hence of our sense of who we are. That is why when we want to question someone's claims

about his nationality, we often take aim at his language habits: “Oye, chico, pero tú no suenas cubano.” Or, “Funny, you don’t sound like an American.” As Andrée Tabouret-Keller puts it, language acts are acts of identity. Who we are is what we speak.

As for myself, I have always felt a mixture of regret and remorse that I have not done more of my writing, and my living, in Spanish. Sometimes I have even thought that every single one of my English sentences, including this one, hides the absence of the Spanish sentence that I wasn’t willing or able to write. And that if I handle English more or less well, it is because I want to write such clear, clean prose that no one will miss the Spanish that it replaces (and that it can never replace). Why I haven’t tried to write more in Spanish is something that I’ve wondered about, something that I’m wondering about right now, but that I don’t entirely understand. I know all about the practical reasons for my use of English, but I also suspect that there are other, more murky motives of which I’m only half aware: anger, fear of failure, maybe even a little self-hatred. If you say “tomato” and I say *tu madre*, the code-switching expletive may be a symptom of the speaker’s unhappiness with his mother tongue, with his other tongue, and most of all, perhaps, with himself. And if you say “Latino” and I say *la tuya*, this expletive may reflect his unwillingness to accept his switch in loyalties.

It’s been said that our mother tongue is the only one in which we have a right to make mistakes. But for many of us whose mother tongue is Spanish but who spend our lives on the hyphen, exactly the opposite is true: Spanish is the only tongue in which we *cannot* make mistakes. And not necessarily because we have mastered English better than

Spanish – I haven’t mastered either one; both have mastered me – but because our deficiencies in English do not undermine our sense of self. For most of my adult life, the language I have felt uneasy about has been Spanish, my mother tongue, rather than English, my second language. When I’m speaking English, my Cuban accent doesn’t faze me, and I don’t feel guilty about my occasional lapses. But if I’m speaking Spanish and I hear myself fumbling for words, I cringe. Every time I commit an inadvertent Anglicism, every time I say *consistente* instead of *consecuente*, or *aplicación* instead of *solicitud*, I want to run and hide.

Since a crucial component of our self-image is the idea we have of ourselves as language users, one of the most disabling forms of self-doubt arises from the conviction that we cannot speak our native language well enough. In my Spanish classes, I have witnessed this fear many times in students of Hispanic background. I have seen how they squirm and look away when I call on them, when they think I think they should speak like natives. I have often squirmed and looked away myself, feeling that no matter how good my Spanish may be, it is just not good enough, not what it should be for somebody born and raised in Cuba.

The complexity of these feelings suggests that the notion of language loyalty, useful as it is in some contexts, doesn’t do justice to an individual’s attachment to his or her languages. It is not enough to explain, as Uriel Weinreich does, that language loyalty is nationalism applied to language. For one thing, tongue ties don’t always correspond to national borders. For another, tongue ties antedate national allegiances. Psychologists have found that already in the first weeks of life infants can distinguish the sounds of their mother tongue, even when they are

not uttered by their mothers. That is to say, even before we can recognize those pockets of sound that we call words, we are bound to one language by ties too primal, too irreflective, to be subsumed under the notion of loyalty.

Languages not only inspire loyalty; they also provoke fear, resentment, rage, jealousy, love, euphoria – the entire gamut of human emotion. From the undergraduate whose difficulties with the subjunctive make him complain that he “hates Spanish,” to the exile who clasps her mother tongue in a tight embrace, tongue ties are every bit as knotty as our other affections. And not only because of the role of language in shaping our conscious identity, but also because languages serve to act out and work through conflicts whose origins lie elsewhere, in groups and individuals who not only speak a given language, but – what is much more important – for whom that language speaks. The Spanish poet Pedro Salinas, in a letter to Katherine Whitmore, the American muse of *La voz a ti debida*, perhaps the greatest volume of love poetry ever written in the Spanish language, writes, in English: “If I like English, if I read English, it is only by its similarity with you. I read English as I would look at a picture of you.” Falling in love with an American is falling in love with the English language. Having it out with *un español* is having it out with *el español*.

Entrenched as it is in all the European languages, the idea of a ‘mother’ tongue simplifies a much more complicated situation. Mother tongues are forked or folded into father and sister tongues, spouse and lover tongues, friend and enemy tongues. Among bilinguals and multilinguals, language kinship is not restricted to the maternal. The philosopher George Santayana, who was born and raised in Spain, identified Spanish –

his ‘mother’ tongue – with his father, and English – the language in which he wrote all his work – with his half sister Susana, who was his first English teacher. Unlike Santayana, the Cuban writer Calvert Casey, who was born in Baltimore of a Cuban mother and an American father, wrote in both Spanish and English, but assigned them to incompatible emotional registers. In Casey’s stories his mother’s Spanish serves as the language of disguise, of dissimulation – indeed, his most famous story is called “Notas de un simulador.” But English, Casey’s father’s tongue, was an instrument for self-revelation, the only medium in which he could express his desire for the male body, which he ultimately identified with his father’s body.

My point is that many nonlinguistic factors, some nearly impossible to detect, determine a bilingual’s engagement with languages. In the course of their lives, bilinguals shape – and are shaped by – their own language family, which does not quite fit the model of the Freudian family romance. In the Freudian scenario, the child is caught between the male and female parent; in the linguistic family romance, the bilingual subject oscillates – sometimes gleefully, sometimes gloomily – between languages that are not always distinguished so neatly. Although the other tongue may indeed be the father’s, there will be times when both tongues will be regarded as motherly. In these instances, the competition involves aspirants to the maternal slot, as if the child, rather than having to negotiate between parents of opposite sexes, had to choose between a parent and a stepparent, or decide which of his mothers is the legitimate one.

Because we tend to think about bilingualism in terms of the dichotomy ‘mother-other,’ we sometimes overlook that the ‘other,’ like the mother, has a

gender: there are he-tongues as well as she-tongues. The person I am closest to is an American woman; the person who had the biggest impact on my life, and to whom I was never close, was a Cuban man. The language of my inner discourse, the taunts and endearments I whisper only to myself, is shaped by these and other emotional entanglements. While I talk to myself both in Spanish and English, when I hear Spanish voices in my head, they are usually male; when I hear English voices, they are usually female. Like these voices, my languages are gendered – not intrinsically but circumstantially. For me English is a loving and accessible she-tongue; Spanish, a distant but beloved he-tongue. The true bilingual is not someone who possesses ‘native competence’ in two languages, but someone who is equally attracted to, or torn between, competing tongues.

Contrary to some reports, there is no bilingualism without pain. Although bilinguals are often playful, bilingualism is not a game. More often than not, the interlingual puns of bilingual writers are ill-tempered, nasty, aggressive: have pun, will travel. Etymologically, puns are *pullas*, jabs; when we go for the jocular, we go for the jugular – even if it is our own. The bilingual muse is a melancholy muse; it divides and does not conquer.

I should make clear that I am not talking about casual or classroom bilingualism, about the tourist, the scholar, or the student, but about those of us who live shaping events in our lives – growing up, falling in love, surviving illness, enduring loss – in more than one language. In these circumstances, the celebration of bilingualism is not the dominant mode. For every moment of bilingual bliss, there is a corresponding moment of bilingual blues. For every merry bilingual who feasts on wordplay – all roads lead

to roam – there is a somber bilingual who bites his tongues, someone for whom, as Santayana once remarked, language belongs to the dark side of life.

It may be heretical for a Spanish professor to say this, but I think we are sometimes too quick in singing the praises of bilingualism. Steven Kellman, the author of a book entitled *The Translingual Imagination*, writes: “If identity is shaped by language, then monolingualism is a deficiency disorder.” Yes and no. Yes, identity is shaped by language; but no, languages are not like vitamins. The blurb on the jacket of Kellman’s book sounds a similar note: “Monolingualism is a form of oppression. Join the future, read this book.” I don’t deny the damage done by coercive monolingualism, which sometimes results in the extirpation of a mother tongue, but bilingualism can engender its own forms of oppression. Calques and barbarisms are only the surface tremors of rifts that reach deeper than syntax or vocabulary. Among bilinguals, nostalgia for monolingualism is at least as common as its repudiation. A Czech proverb teaches: “Learn a new language, get a new soul.” Is it always a blessing to be multisouled?