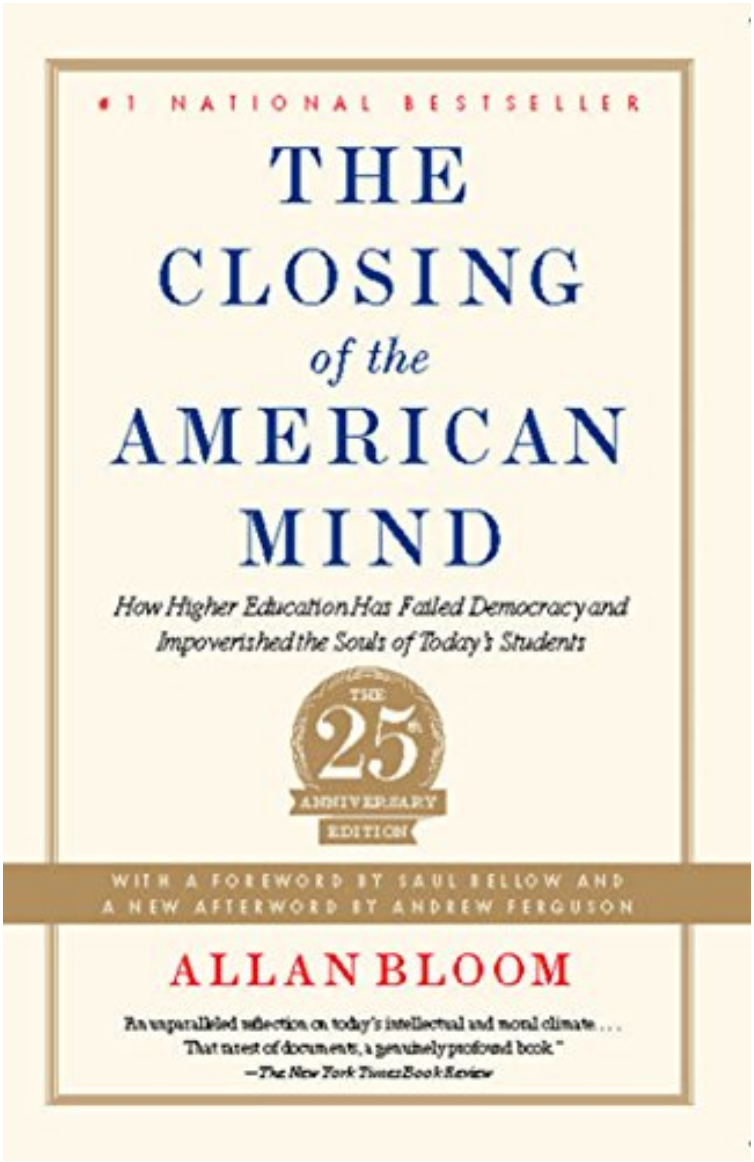
Closing of the American Mind (English Edition)



Par Allan Bloom
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Par Allan Bloom : Closing of the American Mind (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Closing of the American Mind (English Edition):

Description : Description du produit The Closing of the American Mind, a publishing phenomenon in hardcover, is now a paperback literary event. In this acclaimed number one national best-seller, one of our country's most distinguished political philosophers argues that the social/political crisis of 20th-century America is really an intellectual crisis. Allan Bloom's sweeping analysis is essential to understanding America today. It has fired the imagination of a public ripe for change.

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distinguished political philosophers argues that the social/political crisis of 20th-century America is really an intellectual crisis. Allan Bloom's sweeping analysis is essential to understanding America today. It has fired the imagination of a public ripe for change.ExtraitTHE CLEAN SLATEI used to think that young Americans began whatever education they were to get at the age of eighteen, that their early lives were spiritually empty and that they arrived at the university clean slates unaware of their deeper tires and the world beyond their superficial experience. The contrast between them and their European counterparts was set in high relief in the European novels and movies into which we were initiated at the university. The Europeans got most of the culture they were going to get from their homes and their public schools, lyces, or gymnasiums, where their souls were incorporated into their specific literary traditions, which in turn expressed, and even founded, their traditions as peoples. It was not imply or primarily that these European schoolchildren had a vastly more sophisticated knowledge of the human heart than we were accustomed to in the young or, for that matter, the old. It was that their self-knowledge mediated by their book learning and that their ambitions were formed as much by models first experienced in books as in everyday life. Their books had a substantial existence in everyday life and constituted much of what their society as a whole looked up to. It was commonplace for children of what they called good families to fill their imaginations with hopes of serious literary or philosophic careers, as do ours with hopes of careers in entertainment or business. All this was given to them early on, and by the time they were in their late teens it was part of the equipment of their souls, a lens through which they saw everything and which would affect all their later learning and experience. They went to the university to specialize.Young Americans seemed, in comparison, to be natural savages when they came to the university. They had hardly heard the names of the writers who were the daily fare of their counterparts across the Atlantic, let alone took it into their heads that they could have a relationship to them. "What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?" They belonged to the whole world, using their reason to see the things all men have in common, to solve the problems of survival, all the time innocently and unaware trampling on the altars sacred to the diverse peoples and nations of the earth who believe themselves constituted by their particular gods and heroes rather than by the common currency of the body. This American intellectual obtuseness could seem horrifying and barbarous, a stunting of full humanity, an incapacity to experience the beautiful, an utter lack of engagement in the civilization's ongoing discourse.But for me, and for many better observers, this constituted a large part of the charm of American students. Very often natural curiosity and love of knowing appeared to come into their own in the first flush of maturity. Without traditional constraints or encouragements, without society's rewards and punishments, without snobbism or exclusivity, some Americans discovered that they had a boundless thirst for significant awareness, that their souls had spaces of which they were unaware and which cried out for furnishing. European students whom I taught always knew all about Rousseau and Kant, but such writers had been drummed into them from childhood and, in the new world after the war, they had become routine, as much a part of childhood's limitations as short pants, no longer a source of inspiration. So these students became suckers for the new, the experimental. But for Americans the works of the great writers could be the bright sunlit uplands where they could find the outside, the authentic liberation for which this essay is a plea. The old was new for these American students, and in that they were right, for every important old insight is perennially fresh. It is possible that Americans would always lack the immediate, rooted link to the philosophic and artistic achievements that appear to be part of the growth of particular cultures. But their approach to these works bespoke a free choice and the potential for man as man, regardless of time, place, station or wealth, to participate in what is highest. It would be a sad commentary on the human condition if the brotherhood of man is founded on what is lowest in him, while the higher cultivation required unbridgeably separate "cultures." The American disposition gave witness to an optimistic belief that the two universalities, of the body and of the soul, are possible, that access to the best is not dependent on chance. Young Americans, that is, some young Americans, gave promise of a continuing vitality for the tradition because they did not take it to be tradition.The enchanting prospect provided by the American student was particularly powerful when I first started teaching good undergraduates in this country in the years just after Sputnik. In 1965 I wrote:The current generation of students is unique and very different in outlook from its teachers. I am referring to the good students in the better colleges and universities, those to whom a liberal education is primarily directed and who are the objects of a training which presupposes the best possible material. These young people have never experienced the anxieties about simple physical well-being that their parents experienced during the depression. They have been raised in comfort and with the expectation of ever increasing comfort. Hence they are largely indifferent to it; they are not proud of having acquired it

and have not occupied themselves with the petty and sometimes deforming concerns necessary to its acquisition. And, because they do not particularly care about it, they are more willing to give it up in the name of grand ideals; as a matter of fact, they are eager to do so in the hope of proving that they are not attached to it and are open to higher callings. In short, these students are a kind of democratic version of an aristocracy. The unbroken prosperity of the last twenty years gives them the confidence that they can always make a living. So they are ready to undertake any career or adventure if it can be made to appear serious. The ties of tradition, family, and financial responsibility are weak And, along with all this, goes an open, generous character. They tend to be excellent students and extremely grateful for anything they learn. A look at this special group tends to favor a hopeful prognosis for the count's moral and intellectual health.There was, at that moment, a spiritual yearning, a powerful tension of the soul which made the university atmosphere electric. The Soviets' beating us into space shocked the nation and, for a moment, leveling education was set back on its heels. There seemed to be no time for that nonsense. Survival itself depended on better education for the best people. External necessity injected into the easygoing educational world the urgency that should always be there. Money and standards emerged in the twinkling of an eye. The goal was to produce scientific technicians who would save us from being at the mercy of tyrants. The high schools concentrated on math and physics, and there was honor and the promise of great futures for those who excelled in them. The Scholastic Aptitude Test became authoritative. Intellectual effort became a national pastime. The mere exercise of unused and flabby muscles is salutary, and the national effort both trained and inspired the mind. The students were better, more highly motivated.Then I began to notice strange things. For example, for the first time, American students were really learning languages. And there were the signs of an incipient longing for something else. Science had been oversold. The true scientific vocation is very rare, and in the high schools it was presented in technical and uninspired fashion. The students apparently learned what they were asked to learn, but boredom was not wholly compensated for by great expectations. The new mental activity and desire for achievement had not quite found their objects. I observed that many of the best students' dedication to science was very thin. The great theoretical difficulty of modern natural science -- that it cannot explain why it is good -- was having its practical effect. The why question was coming close to the surface. As a result, although the sole interest of the public officials was in natural science, social science and the humanities also began to profit (inasmuch as the universities could not avoid saying they counted too). A little liberal learning easily attracted many of the most gifted away from natural science. They felt the alternatives had been hidden from them. And, once in the university, they could, this being a free country, change their minds about their interests when they discovered that there is something in addition to science. It was a tense moment, full of cravings that lacked clearly perceived goals.I was convinced in the early sixties that what was wanted was a liberal education to give such students the wherewithal to examine their lives and survey their potential. This was the one thing the universities were unequipped and unwilling to offer them. The students' wandering and way. ward energies finally found a political outlet. By the mid-sixties universities were offering them every concession other than education, but appeasement failed and soon the whole experiment in excellence was washed away, leaving not a trace. The various liberations wasted that marvelous energy and tension, leaving the students' souls exhausted and flaccid, capable of calculating, but not of passionate insight.It may very well be that I was wrong, that what was building up in the early sixties was only a final assault on the last remaining inhibitions, that the appearance of intellectual longing was really only a version of the most powerful of modern longings -- for the overcoming of necessity, tension, and conflict, a resting of the soul from its eternal travail. I still think, however, that there was much of true intellectual longing, and it only ended in relaxation as a result of our wasted opportunities.But the students who have succeeded that generation of the late fifties and early sixties, when the culture leeches, professional and amateur, began their great spiritual bleeding, have induced me to wonder whether my conviction -- the old Great Books conviction -- was correct. That conviction was that nature is the only thing that counts in education, that the human desire to know is permanent, that all it really needs is the proper nourishment, and that education is merely putting the feast on the table. At the very best, it is clear to me now that nature needs the cooperation of convention, just as man's art is needed to found the political order that is the condition of his natural completeness. At worst, I fear that spiritual entropy or an evaporation of the soul's boiling blood is taking place, a fear that Nietzsche thought justified and made the center of all his thought. He argued that the spirit's bow was being unbent and risked being permanently unstrung. Its activity, he believed, comes from culture, and the decay of culture meant not only the decay of man in this culture but the decay of man simply. This is the crisis he tried to face resolutely: the very

existence of man as man, as a noble being, depended on him and on men like him -- so he thought. He may not have been right, but his case looks stronger all the time. At all events, the impression of natural savagery that Americans used to make was deceptive. It was only relative to the impression made by the Europeans. Today's select students know so much less, are so much more cut off from the tradition, are so much slacker intellectually, that they make their predecessors look like prodigies of culture. The soil is ever thinner, and I doubt whether it can now sustain the taller growths.Consider by contrast the education that still persists, in very attenuated form, in France. To overstate only a bit, there are two writers who between them shape and set the limits to the minds of educated Frenchmen. Every Frenchman is born, or at least early on becomes, Cartesian or Pascalian. (Something similar could be said about Shakespeare as educator of the English, Goethe of the Germans, and Dante and Machiavelli of the Italians.) Descartes and Pascal are national authors, and they tell the French people what their alternatives are, and afford a peculiar and powerful perspective on life's perennial problems. They weave the fabric of souls. On my last trip to France I heard a waiter call one of his fellow waiters "a Cartesian." It was not pretentiousness; he was just referring to what was for him a type. It is not so much that the French get principles from these sources; rather they produce a cast of mind. Descartes and Pascal represent a choice between reason and revelation, science and piety, the choice from which everything else follows. One or the other of these total visions almost always presents itself to the minds of Frenchmen when they think about themselves and their problems. These great opponents whom no synthesis can unite -- the opposition between bon sens and faith against all odds -- set in motion a dualism that we recognize when we speak both of French clarity and of French passion. No country has had such a persistent and irreconcilable quarrel between the secular and the religious as France, where the two parties find no common ground, where the aspirations of citizens who share the same country have such different senses about the meaning of life. Shakespeare provided a mediation of these two poles for the English, but no one succeeded in doing it for the French, although Rousseau, a Swiss, made a noble attempt. Both Enlightenment and Catholic thought have found their special home in France for more than three centuries. Descartes and Pascal gave accounts for the French of the West's common faith, Christianity, and at the same time situated them with respect to that other, more distant, source of inspiration, Greece. The succeeding generations of writers who began from the Descartes-Pascal tension developed and varied their themes, and the essential spiritual experiences are repeated in Voltaire, Montesquieu, Constant, Balzac and Zola, on the one hand, and Malebranche, Chateaubriand, De Maistre, Baudelaire, Proust and Cline, on the other, each aware of the others and carrying on a dialogue with or confronting his opposite number.It was, therefore, very French of TocqueviIle to say that the Americans' method of thought was Cartesian without their ever having read Descartes, and to wonder whether they could understand a Pascal or produce one. America was not for him a people with a book A Frenchman was a creature of sentiments informed by a literary tradition, while an American was a man of rational principles. These principles were first elaborated, of course, by writers but were such, as Kant said about his own moral philosophy, as to express what every well-brought-up child knows. Reciprocal recognition of rights needs little training, no philosophy, and abstracts from all differences of national character. Americans were, in effect, told that they could be whatever they wanted to be or happened to be as long as they recognized that the same applied to ail other men and they were willing to support and defend the government that guaranteed that dispensation. It is possible to become an American in a day. And this is not to make light of what it means to be an American. The cooperation of natural passion and natural reason defies the ancient maxims that insisted that a city be like an organic unity, generated by the motherland, with a citizen's relation to it like a leaf's to a tree. It is, however, impossible, or it was until only yesterday, to become a Frenchman, for a Frenchman is a complex harmony, or dissonance, of historic echoes, from birth on. The French language, which the French used to learn very well, did not exist for the sake of conveying information, for communicating men's common needs; it was indistinguishable from a historical consciousness. Frenchness is defined by participation in this language, its literature and the entire range of effects it produces. Somehow the legalistic arguments about rights do not touch the privilege conveyed by participation in it. In America there are in principle no real outsiders, while in France persons who, although citizens, are marginal to this tradition, for example, Jews, have always had to think hard about what it is they belong to. In France, the Jew's relation to what is constitutively French is a great and complex literary theme. The response to the issue is not universal and causes the development of an interesting spectrum of human types. A Jew in America, by contrast, is as American as anyone; and if he is singled out or treated differently, unconditional outrage is the appropriate response.The lack of American equivalents to Descartes, Pascal, or, for that matter, Montaigne, Rabelais,

Racine, Montesquieu and Rousseau is not a question of quality, but of whether there are any writers who are necessary to building our spiritual edifice, whom one must have read, or rather lived with, to be called educated, and who are the interpreters and even makers of our national life. One can think of American writers and writings that should be read and frequently are read; but, to the extent that Americans are readers, the whole world is their bookshelf; there has not been the deep necessity to absorb their own country's writings that citizens of other nations experience. A phenomenon like Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk, a high work of art which is intended to be wholly German, of Germans, for Germans and by Germans, and is an expression of collective consciousness, is inconceivable to Americans. And it is astonishing how little a Frenchman knows, or has a feeling for, things that are not French. But to Americans, Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe belong to everyone or to "civilization." And perhaps they do, in the long run. But this was not the view of Greeks, Romans, Italians, Englishmen and Germans, or of the Jews with their book that belonged to them, that told their story, and embodied, so to speak, their instinct. Americans believe in equal access. Mortimer Adler's business genius recognized this and made a roaring commercial success out of the Great Books. He was not even concerned about the translations he used, let alone about learning languages. Most writers in older lands despaired of being understood by those who had not lived their language. Heidegger, who desperately tried to maintain and revitalize this view, thought that "Language is the house of Being," that it is the height of superficiality to suppose that translation is even possible.Yet my early experience of American simplicity had persuaded me that we were right, that we could begin with nothing, that uncultivated nature sufficed. I had not, however, paid sufficient attention to what students actually used to bring with them, the education that was once in the air that helped launch them. Most students could be counted on to know the Bible, that ubiquitous source of the older traditions. In America it was not filtered through great national interpreters, but approached directly in the manner of early Protestantism, every man his own interpreter. The Bible was thus a mirror of that indifference to national cultures inherent in the American method. Most students also participated in a remarkably unified and explicit political tradition that possesses one writing known to everyone and probably believed by most, the Declaration of Independence.Contrary to much contemporary wisdom, the United States has one of the longest uninterrupted political traditions of any nation in the world. What is more, that tradition is unambiguous; its meaning is articulated in simple, rational speech that is immediately comprehensible and powerfully persuasive to all normal human beings. America tells one story: the unbroken, ineluctable progress of freedom and equality. From its first settlers and its political foundings on, there has been no dispute that freedom and equality are the essence of justice for us. No one serious or notable has stood outside this consensus. You had to be a crank or a buffoon (e.g., Henry Adams or H. L. Mencken, respectively) to get attention as a nonbeliever in the democracy. All significant political disputes have been about the meaning of freedom and equality, not about their rightness. Nowhere else is there a tradition or a culture whose message is so distinct and unequivocal -- certainly not in France, Italy, Germany, or even England. There the greatest events and the greatest men speak for monarchy and aristocracy as well as for democracy, for established religion as well as for tolerance, for patriotism that takes primacy over liberty, for privilege that takes primacy over equality of right. Belonging to one of these peoples may be explained as a sentiment, an attachment to one's own, akin to the attachment to father and mother, but Frenchness, Englishness, Germanness remain, nonetheless, ineffable. Everybody can, however, articulate what Americanness is. And that Americanness generated a race of heroes -- Franklin, Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lincoln and so on -- all of whom contributed to equality. Our imagination is not turned toward a Joan of Arc, a Louis XIV or a Napoleon who counterbalance our equivalent of 1789. Our heroes and the language of the Declaration contribute to a national reverence for our Constitution, also a unique phenomenon. All this is material for self-consciousness and provides a superior moral significance to humdrum lives as well as something to study.But the unity, grandeur and attendant folklore of the founding heritage was attacked from so many directions in the last half-century that it gradually disappeared from daily life and from textbooks. It all began to seem like Washington and the cherry tree -- not the sort of thing to teach children seriously. What is influential in the higher intellectual circles always ends up in the schools. The leading ideas of the Declaration began to be understood as eighteenth-century myths or ideologies. Historicism, in Cad Becker's version (The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas, 1922), both cast doubt on the troth of the natural rights teaching and optimistically promised that it world provide a substitute. Similarly Dewey's pragmatism -- the method of science as the method of democracy, individual growth without limits, especially natural limits -- saw the past as radically imperfect and regarded our history as

irrelevant or as a hindrance to rational analysis of our present. Then there was Marxist debunking of the Charles Beard variety, trying to demonstrate that there was no public spirit, only private concern for property, in the Founding Fathers, thus weakening our convictions of the truth or superiority of American principles and our heroes (An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution, 1913). Then the Southern historians and writers avenged the victory of the antislavery Union by providing low motives for the North (incorporating European critiques of commerce and technology) and idealizing the South's way of life. Finally, in curious harmony with the Southerners, the radicals in the civil rights movement succeeded in promoting a popular conviction that the Founding was, and the American principles are, racist. The bad conscience they promoted killed off the one continuing bit of popular culture that celebrated the national story -- the Western.Thus, openness has driven out the local deities, leaving only the speechless, meaningless country. There is no immediate, sensual experience of the nation's meaning or its project, which would provide the basis for adult reflection on regimes and statesmanship. Students now arrive at the university ignorant and cynical about our political heritage, lacking the wherewithal to be either inspired by it or seriously critical of it.The other element of fundamental primary learning that has disappeared is religion. As the respect for the Sacred -- the latest fad -- has soared, real religion and knowledge of the Bible have diminished to the vanishing point. The gods never walked very tall in our political life or in our schools. The Lord's Prayer we mumbled in grade school when I was a child affected us less than the Pledge of Allegiance we also recited. It was the home -- and the houses of worship related to it -- where religion lived. The holy days and the common language and set of references that permeated most households constituted a large part of the family bond and gave it a substantial content. Moses and the Tables of the Law, Jesus and his preaching of brotherly love, had an imaginative existence. Passages from the Psalms and the Gospels echoed in children's heads. Attending church or synagogue, praying at the table, were a way of life, inseparable horn the moral education that was supposed to be the family's responsibility in this democracy. Actually, the moral teaching was the religious teaching. There was no abstract doctrine. The things one was supposed to do, the sense that the world supported them and punished disobedience, were all incarnated in the Biblical stories. The loss of the gripping inner life vouchsafed those who were nurtured by the Bible must be primarily attributed not to our schools or political life, but to the family, which, with all its rights to privacy, has proved unable to maintain any content of its own. The dreariness of the family's spiritual landscape passes belief. It is as monochrome and unrelated to those who pass through it as are the barren steppes frequented by nomads who take their mere subsistence and move on. The delicate fabric of the civilization into which the successive generations are woven has unraveled, and children are raised, not educated.I am speaking here not of the unhappy, broken homes that are such a prominent part of American life, but the relatively happy ones, where husband and wife like each other and care about their children, very often unselfishly devoting the best parts of their lives to them. But they have nothing to give their children in the way of a vision of the world, of high models of action or profound sense of connection with others. The family requires the most delicate mixture of nature and convention, of human and divine, to subsist and perform its function. Its base is merely bodily reproduction, but its purpose is the formation of civilized human beings. In teaching a language and providing names for all things, it transmits an interpretation of the order of the whole of things. It feeds on books, in which the little polity -- the family -- believes, which tell about right and wrong, good and bad and explain why they are so. The family requires a certain authority and wisdom about the ways of the heavens and of men. The parents must have knowledge of what has happened in the past, and prescriptions for what ought to be, in order to resist the philistinism or the wickedness of the present. Ritual and ceremony are now often said to be necessary for the family, and they are now lacking. The family, however, has to be a sacred unity believing in the permanence of what it teaches, if its ritual and ceremony are to express and transmit the wonder of the moral law, which it alone is capable of transmitting and which makes it special in a world devoted to the humanly, all too humanly, useful. When that belief disappears, as it has, the family has, at best, a transitory togetherness. People sup together, play together, travel together, but they do not think together. Hardly any homes have any intellectual life whatsoever, let alone one that informs the vital interests of life. Educational TV marks the high tide for family intellectual life.The came of this decay of the family's traditional role as the transmitter of tradition is the same as that of the decay of the humanities: nobody believes that the old books do, or even could, contain the truth. So books have become, at best, "culture," i.e., boring. As Tocqueville put it, in a democracy tradition is nothing more than information. With the "information explosion," tradition has become superfluous. As soon as tradition has come to be recognized as tradition, it is dead, something to

which lip service is paid in the vain hope of edifying the kids. In the United States, practically speaking, the Bible was the only common culture, one that united simple and sophisticated, rich and poor, young and old, and -- as the very model for a vision of the order of the whole of things, as well as the key to the rest of Western art, the greatest works of which were in one way or another responsive to the Bible -- provided access to the seriousness of books. With its gradual and inevitable disappearance, the very idea of such a total book and the possibility and necessity of world-explanation is disappearing. And fathers and mothers have lost the idea that the highest aspiration they might have for their children is for them to be wise -- as priests, prophets or philosophers are wise. Specialized competence and success are all that they can imagine. Contrary to what is commonly thought, without the book even the idea of the order of the whole is lost.Parents do not have the legal or moral authority they had in the Old World. They lack serf-confidence as educators of their children, generously believing that they will be better than their parents, not only in well-being, but in moral, bodily and intellectual virtue. There is always a more or less open belief in progress, which means the past appears poor and contemptible. The future, which is open-ended, cannot be prescribed to by parents, and it eclipses the past which they know to be inferior.Along with the constant newness of everything and the ceaseless moving from place to place, first radio, then television, have assaulted and overturned the privacy of the home, the real American privacy, which permitted the development of a higher and more independent life within democratic society. Parents can no longer control the atmosphere of the home and have even lost the will to do so. With great subtlety and energy, television enters not only the room, but also the tastes old and young alike, appealing to the immediately pleasant and subverting whatever does not conform to it. Nietzsche said the newspaper had replaced the prayer in the life of the modern bourgeois, meaning that the busy, the cheap, the ephemeral, had usurped all that remained of the eternal in his daffy life. Now television has replaced the newspaper. It is not so much the low quality of the fare provided that is troubling. It is much more the difficulty of imagining any order of taste, any way of life with pleasures and learning that naturally fit the lives of the family's members, keeping itself distinct from the popular culture and resisting the visions of what is admirable and interesting with which they are bombarded from within the household itself.The improved education of the vastly expanded middle class in the last haft-century has also weakened the family's authority. Almost everyone in the middle class has a college degree, and most have an advanced degree of some kind. Those of us who can look back to the humble stations of our parents or grandparents, who never saw the inside of an institution of higher learning, can have cause for serf-congratulation. But -- inevitably but -- the impression that our general populace is better educated depends on an ambiguity in the meaning of the word education, or a fudging of the distinction between liberal and technical education. A highly trained computer specialist need not have had any more learning about morals, politics or religion than the most ignorant of persons. All to the contrary, his narrow education, with the prejudices and the pride accompanying it, and its literature which comes to be and passes away in a day and uncritically accepts the premises of current wisdom, can cut him off from the liberal learning that simpler folk used to absorb from a variety of traditional sources. It is not evident to me that someone whose regular reading consists of Time, Playboy and Scientific American has any profounder wisdom about the world than the rural schoolboy of yore with his McGuffey's reader. When a youngster like Lincoln sought to educate himself, the immediately available obvious things for him to learn were the Bible, Shakespeare and Euclid. Was he really worse off than those who to find their way through the technical smorgasbord of the current school system, with its utter inability to distinguish between important and unimportant in any way other than by the demands of the market?My grandparents were ignorant people by our standards, and my grandfather held only lowly jobs. But their home was spiritually rich because all the things done in it, not only what was specifically ritual, found their origin in the Bible's commandments, and their explanation in the Bible's stories and the commentaries on them, and had their imaginative counterparts in the deeds of the myriad of exemplary heroes. My grandparents found reasons for the existence of their family and the fulfillment of their duties in serious writings, and they interpreted their special sufferings with respect to a great and ennobling past. Their simple faith and practices linked them to great scholars and thinkers who dealt with the same material, not from outside or from an alien perspective, but believing as they did, while simply going deeper and providing guidance. There was a respect for real learning, because it had a felt connection with their lives. This is what a community and a history mean, a common experience inviting high and low into a single body of belief.I do not believe that my generation, my cousins who have been educated in the American way, all of whom are M.D.s or Ph.D.s, have any comparable learning. When they talk about heaven and earth, the relations between men and women, parents and children, the human

condition, I hear nothing but cliches, superficialities, the material of satire. I am not saying anything so trite as that life is fuller when people have myths to live by. I mean rather that a life based on the Book is closer to the truth, that it provides the material for deeper research in and access to the real nature of things. Without the great revelations, epics and philosophies as part of our natural vision, there is nothing to see out there, and eventually little left inside. The Bible is not the only means to furnish a mind, but without a book of similar gravity, read with the gravity of the potential believer, it will remain unfurnished.The moral education that is today supposed to be the great responsibility of the family cannot exist if it cannot present to the imagination of the young a vision of a moral cosmos and of the rewards and punishments for good and evil, sublime speeches that accompany and interpret deeds, protagonists and antagonists in the drama of moral choice, a sense of the stakes involved in such choice, and the despair that results when the world is "disenchanted." Otherwise, education becomes the vain attempt to give children "values." Beyond the fact that parents do not know what they believe, and surely do not have the self-confidence to tell their children much more than that they want them to be happy and fulfill whatever potential they may have, values are such pallid things. What are they and how are they communicated? The courses in "value-clarification" springing up in schools are supposed to provide models for parents and get children to talk about abortion, sexism or the arms race, issues the significance of which they cannot possibly understand. Such education is little more than propaganda, and propaganda that does not work, because the opinions or values arrived at are will-o'-the-wisps, insubstantial, without ground in experience or passion, which are the bases of moral reasoning. Such "values" will inevitably change as public opinion changes. The new moral education has none of the genius that engenders moral instinct or second nature, the prerequisite not only of character but also of thought. Actually, the family's moral training now comes down to inculcating the bare minima of social behavior, not lying or stealing, and produces university students who can say nothing more about the ground of their moral action than "If I did that to him, he could do it to me" -- an explanation which does not even satisfy those who utter it.This gradual stilling of the old political and religious echoes in the souls of the young accounts for the difference between the students I knew at the beginning of my teaching career and those I face now. The loss of the books has made them narrower and flatter. Narrower because they lack what is most necessary, a real basis for discontent with the present and awareness that there are alternatives to it. They are both more contented with what is and despairing of ever escaping from it. The longing for the beyond has been attenuated. The very models of admiration and contempt have vanished. Flatter, because without interpretations of things, without the poetry or the imagination's activity, their souls are like mirrors, not of nature, but of what is around. The refinement of the mind's eye that permits it to see the delicate distinctions among men, among their deeds and their motives, and constitutes real taste, is impossible without the assistance of literature in the grand style.So there is less soil in which university teaching can take root, less of the enthusiasm and curiosity of young Glaucon in Plato's Republic, whose eros makes him imagine that there are splendid satisfactions in store for him about which he does not wish to be fooled and for knowledge of which he seeks a teacher. It is much more difficult today to attach the classic books to any experience or felt need the students have.