

## Book Reviews

*No Neutral Ground: Standing by the Values We Prize in Higher Education.* Robert B. Young. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997, 231 pages.

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*No Neutral Ground* attempts to provide guidance in answering the question "What is your institution?" Young argues that values form the identity of a college or university and also represent the institution to the public. As values guide the academy and ultimately help determine the beliefs and behaviors of society, it is a fundamental responsibility of institutions of higher education to identify the values they prize. Value neutrality in higher education is revealed as an illusion. Values need to be identified and transmitted. Before values can be transmitted, however, it is important for institutions, just as it is for individuals, first to find their own identity and then develop integrity, which is given when institutions act on the values they prize in specific contexts.

Values are shown to interact in various ways. Although some values are explicit and found in mission statements and similar documents, others remain implicit, that is, they are demonstrated through action or performance rather than statements. According to Young, the major responsibility of the academy is to serve society. Such fundamental altruism, however, is only one of seven so-called middle-sized values that the institution prizes. The remaining six values discussed in the book are truth, freedom, individuation, equality, justice, and community. In the preface the reader is informed that "Previous surveys of private higher education, cabinet administrators, department chairs, students affairs leaders and nursing educators have supported the notions that all seven values are essential in the academy" (p.xiii). The stage is set for the main part of the book, and the reader can stop wondering about why these and not other values were chosen.

Each of these seven values is discussed in a separate chapter in the first part of the book, which is concerned with exploring how these seven values relate to and help build scholarship and democracy. The reader is reminded that truth can be discovered only in a free, open, and fair environment and that democratic processes need to allow for both individuation and community. Scholarship values and democratic values—truth, freedom, equality, justice, individuation, and community—are seen to need to work together for the betterment of the academy and its nation. "The academy must fulfill its timeless obligations of scholarly and democratic service" (p. 170). Although the

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seven middle-sized values need to be treasured, the author argues that they need to be guided by the two “universal values” of aesthetics and spirituality, the relationships of which are discussed in part two. Here the book becomes more interesting as the author now turns to the challenges faced by the academy in relation to its seven values. The academy is shown to be (mis)guided by capitalist values such as materialism, narcissism, competitiveness, vocationalism, conformity, and consumerism. When these capitalist values are joined with more democratic values, however, the outcome seems less bleak. The pure capitalist values then become transformed into bourgeois values including altruistic egoism, enterprise, and the notion of bourgeois community.

Spirituality and aesthetics are discussed in terms of their contribution to unity. Spirituality brings home the message that having attained wisdom is more than having accumulated knowledge. Aesthetics is seen as providing guidance in nurturing emotional depths and creativity (e.g., as I understand this, through the appreciation of literature). As such, aesthetics allows for integration and unity of emotion and intellect. The third part of the book includes suggestions for manifesting each value.

The writing style makes the arguments at times somewhat difficult to follow. Sentences such as “Organizations and societies that are not free cannot suffer individuals who have earned their freedom to serve” (p. 54) require the reader to pause, reread more carefully, and reflect—the desired insight may come during a conversation with a friend or colleague a day or two later!

Perhaps some diagrams illustrating the interrelatedness of the various values discussed in the book would have made the arguments easier to follow. After a first careful read of the book the reader has acquired a general sense of the ideas presented. A certain degree of confusion, however, is also present, which makes it necessary to go back and reread each chapter separately to gain a clearer understanding of what exactly is argued in each. Although rereading was a worthwhile endeavor with most chapters (I would particularly recommend Chapter 4, “Freedom: Choice with responsibility” for an interesting and thoughtful discussion of academic freedom), it felt rather disappointing with others. Perhaps instead of discussing each of the seven values in a separate chapter, the book might have been more enjoyable had the content been organized differently.

The text is certainly thought-provoking in two ways. First, the points made are clearly timely and worthy of further consideration (e.g., how to counter capitalist values that impinge on the idea of a university). Second, what is *not* explicitly stated warrants even more consideration. I continue to wonder, for example, whether the emphasis on aesthetics is the solution if the goal is to invite more cultural diversity. Have the challenges to unity been discussed in sufficient depth? Young observes, “the diversity of people and values is valued beyond their unity” (p. 145) and argues that “after acknowledging the prevalence of pluralism, it is important to find a moral and benevolent meeting ground” (p. 150) and “the spiritual community deals with moral justice. No individual determines this justice; the assemblage does” (p. 150). Related to this point is his discussion of aesthetics: “The exposure to aesthetics advances

alternative ways of thinking as well as the satisfaction that can come from encountering diversity" (p. 164). Aesthetics is seen as enabling individuals to find their emotional depths and thus enhancing their understanding of cultural diversity.

Aesthetics provides a unique way to improve cultural diversity on campus both through explicit activities and through aesthetic analysis. Aesthetics belongs to no single cultural group, sex, or cultural cohort. It can be used to enhance, justify, and gain acceptance for cultural diversity efforts in classrooms students centres and residence halls. (p. 185)

Young concedes that aesthetics is at present not visible enough in the academy, but he clearly suggests that turning to aesthetics has significant consequences for constructively responding to diversity. Nevertheless, the reader is left wondering if the liberal values the author describes will be sufficient to fight racism, sexism, and heterosexism in our institutions and society.

Several good points are made. For example, the academy is encouraged to continue to learn about social problems, and faculty are motivated to alter their role from expert to learner. As faculty are mentors and models, the author suggests they should never give up on their own learning. Both faculty and students should be involved in continually questioning, reflecting on, and advancing scholarship and democracy. Higher grades and numbers of publications in refereed journals should not be more highly prized than learning. The author challenges the notion of students as consumers and proposes that at times even democratic practices such as letting students decide what to study may not be very educational. The continual study of affirmative action is encouraged as it relates "to cultural, economic and political equality not just educational opportunity" (p. 179).

The book is certainly timely. In responding to both the challenges and opportunities offered by globalization, it seems paramount that the academy identify, reflect on, and act on the values it prizes. *No Neutral Ground* is a stimulating and thought-provoking—although not necessarily easy—read for everyone concerned with the goals and purposes of our colleges and universities.