

BOOKS

The University: The Anatomy of Academe

Murray G. Ross. *The University: The Anatomy of Academe*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976. Pp. 310. \$13.25 (cloth).

Professor Murray Ross makes the following observation in his study of the university:

The traditional university devoted to scholarship and excellence had, therefore, many assets in modern society. The dominance of populism and the state in educational policy was related not only to shifts in popular mood but also to weaknesses within the university. Even if there were no shifts in public attitude, the university's position could be improved if it could present its case from a strong unified base. Indeed, one could postulate a theory that the greater the internal coherence and strength of the university, the greater its independence and autonomy. (P. 279)

The statement is a fitting conclusion to an attempt at presenting "a brief but comprehensive picture of the university as a whole" (p. ix). It encapsulates a theme which runs throughout Ross' four part examination of the western university tradition.

Part One reviews the background and evolution of the modern university. In this section Ross introduces the format which governs the organization of his study. A brief introduction to the medieval university is followed by a discussion of historical developments in higher education in England, Canada and the United States. Part One concludes with an overview of the university's role in society with attention to the functions of teaching, research and community service as well as to changes in the university during the last twenty-five years.

The second part investigates the roles and expectations of the student and professor through the period of the turbulent sixties. Special attention is given to the idea of *in loco parentis* which until recently has characterized the university's student-teacher relationship. Also of significance is the professor's commitment to scholarship and communication that over time has led to a dual and sometimes conflicting affiliation. On the one hand he looks toward his field of study and a discipline which, more often than not, directs his attention beyond that of his university. On the other hand he is engaged with local concerns that are vital to his career in his home institution. These matters have been further complicated by many in the university community who have questioned the institution's traditional orientation to rational, empirical thought.

Ross singles out the "critical issues" of goals, governance, academic freedom and the connection between the multiversity and the state in Part Three. This section concentrates on the present, exploring such topics as student representation in university government, challenges to academic freedom, the influence of populist democracy, and the matter of state coordination and planning in higher education. Discussion in the last part of the book focuses on speculation about the future. The author summarizes his position arguing that the shape of tomorrow's university depends not only on its capacity to resolve its internal problems but "the attitude of society to the university and the value it will place on higher education" (p. 273).

Does Ross achieve his objective? There is no question that he has brought considerable understanding to the study of universities and especially their formation in the second half of the twentieth century. Drawing upon a cross section of opinion and research from history and sociology, he examines the roots and delimits the boundaries of the university's role in society. Selectively exploring the changes of the "Redbrick" university in England and the social and economic factors forcing the almost inevitable growth of the American multi-versity, he advances an explanation of the development of the Canadian institution as a near but unique offspring of the two. The author advances a thesis which he forcefully argues throughout.

However, the book has shortcomings which, apart from a difficult style, reflect in the main a problem with general organization. The book might have been improved by more careful editing. In dividing the work into ten chapters and conducting an analysis that in each chapter draws upon events from England, Canada and the United States in order to clarify the development of related yet divergent issues, Ross disrupts the continuity of argument and oversimplifies the influence of certain historical factors, forcing the reader into intellectual gymnastics in following explanations. This multifaceted approach complicates the very nature of his task, notably in the manner of determining both the conceptual framework and the data. Ross writes:

"This is not a history of the university, although of course, historical materials are used. Nor is it a strictly sociological study of the university, although we draw upon some sociological insights to sharpen our analysis. The aim is less pretentious. It is simply to give an account of the development of the university. . . . (P. ix)

Such a conceptual mix results in analysis which on occasion is misleading. The somewhat random interweaving of sociological and historical perspectives detracts from, rather than reinforces, the continuity and strength of the author's position, as in the first pages of the discussion on the functional nature of university goals (pp. 139ff).

Ross' cursory reference to the cathedral schools of the medieval period short-changes a most important development in the history of higher education (p. 5). Their influence could have been more carefully detailed insofar as they were forerunners of the idea of the university.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, the book is on balance a successful study of tradition and change in higher education. It brings together a vast array of secondary source materials exploring how man has managed his quest for knowledge. Perhaps more importantly, it engages the insight of a man who has been instrumental in the founding of a university.

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