

# THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE UNIVERSITY MULTICULTURAL CURRICULUM DURING THE 1980S: THE PRAGMATIST POLEMICS OF SIDNEY HOOK

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## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the American philosopher, political thinker, and activist Sidney Hook (1902-1989). It concentrates the analysis on his polemics over the university curriculum in the 1980s, the period when the intellectual community in the U.S. split over clashing approaches to the emerging cultural and educational politics of Multiculturalism. The advocates of Multiculturalism have demanded radical changes in study programs based on politics of ethnic, racial, and gender diversity. In justifying this politics, they have intellectually relied on postmodernist theories and scholarship that criticize the idea of objectively superior value of the Western canon. Until his death, Hook led the campaign against Multiculturalism. The article discusses the politics of the campaign, while it illuminates the contribution Hook made to it through employing the philosophy of Pragmatism. The essay shows how that made Hook and the Neoconservative analysis distinct from the attack on Multiculturalism waged by other right-wing critics.

KEY WORDS: Sidney Hook, multiculturalism, curriculum, universities, Pragmatism, humanities, neoconservatism.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo se centra en el filósofo, pensador político y activista norteamericano Sidney Hook (1902-1989). El análisis se enfoca en la polémica contra el currículum universitario de los años ochenta, el período durante el cual la comunidad intelectual en Estados Unidos se dividió en torno a los enfoques en pugna sobre la emergente política cultural y educacional del multiculturalismo. Los defensores del multiculturalismo han requerido cambios radicales en programas de estudio, basándose en la política de la diversidad étnica, racial y de género. Al justificar esta política, ellos han dependido, en lo intelectual, de teorías postmodernas y de investigaciones que critican la idea del valor objetivamente superior del canon occidental. Hasta su muerte, Hook encabezó una campaña contra el multiculturalismo. Este artículo se centra en la dimensión política de su campaña, al tiempo que ilumina la contribución que Hook hizo a esta campaña, a través de su empleo de la filosofía del pragmatismo. El ensayo muestra cómo lo anterior convirtió el análisis de Hook y de los neoconservadores en algo distinto de los ataques librados por otros críticos de derechas, contra el multiculturalismo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Sidney Hook, multiculturalismo, curriculum, universidades, pragmatismo, humanidades, neoconservadurismo.

The heated controversy over “Multiculturalism” that began in the mid-1980s, and is still central among the American academic and intellectual communities, has generally been perceived as a struggle between ideologically monolithic camps. The first camp is of “radicals,” those who have been promoting “Multiculturalism,” and their opponents, the “traditionalists” or “conservatives.” There are, however, differences within the rival camps that are worth discussing. By focusing on the critique of the late prominent intellectual Sidney Hook (1902-1989) on the university Humanities curriculum during the second half of the 1980s, this article will demonstrate the uniqueness of his conservative point of view. His discourse, along others he influenced and with whom he allied, had elements in common with other conservative critics. Yet, because he utilized certain philosophical and ideological arguments that they did not, his critique, which we may describe as pragmatist philosophically, and orthodox liberal or Neoconservative politically, was distinct.

Hook was a political thinker, activist, and philosopher at New York University from 1927, and a member of Stanford University’s Hoover Institution since 1970.<sup>1</sup> For decades he exercised great impact on a group of American intellectuals and academics involved in cultural and political criticism, particularly anticommunist liberals and Neoconservatives, as some of them have become to be known since the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Hook’s philosophical and political critique of higher education had inspired them since the 1940s. During the late 1980s, some of them joined Hook engaging a war against what they considered was the ideological heresies and educational failures of the omnipotent left-wing promoters of multiculturalism in American universities.

In addition to other things, one major reason makes the study of Hook’s rhetoric against multiculturalism in American universities important. Scholars on the Multiculturalist side have mostly analyzed the conservative position in the simple terms of their opponents’ interest in maintaining the elite positions they had achieved years ago through their traditional scholarship. According to those critics on the left, the conservatives, who mostly belong to the older generation of scholars, are committed to protect the academic status quo. They are unable to accept both new intellectual trends and demographic-sociological changes in American society that have affected higher education in recent decades and that require curricular reforms.

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<sup>1</sup> There is no comprehensive biography of Hook. Christopher PHELPS, *Young Sidney Hook* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1997) is on the early years. Edward S. SHAPIRO, *Letters of Sidney Hook: Democracy, Communism, and the Cold War* (Armonk, New York: Sharpe, 1985), is a selection of Hook’s letters, written from 1929 to his death, that are deposited at the Hoover Institution. For the autobiography, see Sidney HOOK, *Out of Step: An Unique Life in the 20th Century* (New York: Carrol & Graf, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> On the development of Neoconservative ideology in the 1960s, see Avital H. BLOCH, *The Emergence of Neoconservatism in the United States, 1960-1972*, Ph.D. Dissertation Columbia University, 1990.



The Multiculturalist advocates, however, have overlooked the more complex history of ideological and intellectual thinking that has characterized a liberal Neoconservative thinker such as Hook and the scholars however close to him. There are more profound and complicated elements in their opinions than their critics like to admit. Thus examining his critique, which, more than anything else, is founded upon Pragmatism's philosophical principles and antitotalitarian ideological premises may be illuminating. And since Hook has influenced other liberals and Neoconservatives highly active in the Multicultural debate, this analysis sheds light on their way of thinking about academic curricular issues as well.

Hook's life-long interest in education and philosophy of the curriculum can be attributed to the enormous influence the American philosopher and educator John Dewey had on him. Dewey was his teacher and mentor as a graduate student at Columbia University from 1923 to 1927, and for decades to come Hook saw himself as his intellectual successor. In his numerous books on education, Hook both modified and applied Dewey's concepts of elementary education to the university level. This became the focus of Hook's own pedagogical interest. Most importantly, like Dewey, Hook's political discussion on education used the tools of the philosopher and reflected the philosopher's thought.<sup>3</sup>

The two most important elements in Hook's thought, which he committed his life to promote, were Pragmatism, which he inherited it from Dewey, and "Antitotalitarianism" and "Anticommunism." In these last he, the former student, from the 1930s through the 1950s eventually influenced his own teacher.<sup>4</sup> Hook combined Pragmatism, as a philosophical method, with antitotalitarianism. He considered antitotalitarianism a political belief that is the imperative conclusion of a Pragmatist examination of politics. By mixing pragmatism and antitotalitarianism, Hook blended his philosophical analysis and political rhetoric until the distinctions between philosophy and ideology became practically blurred. Thus, what characterized much of Hook's thought was its transformation into political-ideological discourse, or indeed "polemics."

Hook's Pragmatism in the tradition of Dewey, which he called "Scientific" or "Critical Method," rejected metaphysics with its stress on absolute dichotomies of true and false, good or bad. "Good often conflicts with good and right with right," said Hook, a situation that always forces one to make choices.<sup>5</sup> Thus Prag-

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<sup>3</sup> Bella K. MILMED, "Hook's Theory of Education," *Sidney Hook and the Contemporary World: Essays on the Pragmatic Intelligence*, ed. Paul Kurtz (New York: John Day, 1968) 181-199; John P. DIGGINS, "John Dewey: Philosopher in the Schoolroom," *Wilson Quarterly* (Autumn 1989): 76-83.

<sup>4</sup> On Dewey, see Alan RYAN, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), and Robert B. WESTBROOK, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1991). In addition to Dewey, the American philosophy of Pragmatism that was developed in the late 19th and early decades of the 20th century is also associated with philosophers Charles S. Peirce and William James.

<sup>5</sup> Sidney HOOK, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life* (New York: Basic, 1974); Sidney HOOK, *The Metaphysics of Pragmatism* (New York: AMS, 1977). See also Milton K. MUNITZ, "Hook



matism provided a method that enabled one to select a true or correct option from a variety of alternatives. Hook's main contribution to Pragmatism, also influenced by Marxian pragmatism, was the solution of praxis problems by choosing among alternatives, based on their different possible consequences, or the costs of pursuing each choice. We must judge what is best under specific circumstances and choose what results in the least harmful consequences. This includes the idea that "evil... [is] tolerated for a time in order to avoid a greater evil," and that good can cause evil if pursued at any cost.<sup>6</sup>

Thus choices are determined by what is useful and valuable in the given conditions, using history, experience, and empiricism, and after applying strict standards of evidence and reasoning, subjecting all ideas and alleged facts to critical inquiry. The practicality of the alternatives to choose from, however, should also be judged by applying during the consideration procedure the constantly changing social, intellectual, and scientific values and principles. Therefore, the process of Pragmatic judgment among alternatives — "the crucible of experience" — is a moral practice done in the realm of values. And what is eventually chosen is acted upon, and thus becomes "truth."<sup>7</sup> Hook connected education with Pragmatism by arguing that conflicts over education should be seen not as insurmountable disagreements over fundamental metaphysical doctrines, but over values upon which consensus can be reached by applying the Pragmatist method. After passing the Pragmatic test, values that are widely accepted by society should be judged as suitable to be translated into curricular content.

In politics, antitotalitarianism, one of whose "founding fathers" Hook became in the late 1930s, grew out of its proponents' observation that Stalinist communism, defined as "Totalitarianism," was distinct from, and even worse than both fascism and capitalism.<sup>8</sup> For Hook and his intellectual-political disciples, throughout more than five decades totalitarianism in general, and communism in particular, were evil. Totalitarian systems violated individual liberties and free culture, whose protection was for Hook the primary condition for any political order calling itself a democracy. In order to protect democracy and prevent totalitarianism, which he understood as a consequence of wrong political choices made by misguided radical ideological movements, Hook recommended conducting Pragmatist tests for competing platforms before any political change is pursued.

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and Metaphysics," *Sidney Hook and the Contemporary World* 283-295; Richard M. GALE, "Hook's Views on Metaphysics," *Sidney Hook and the Contemporary World* 308-333; Paul KURTZ, "Pragmatic Naturalism and First Principles," *Sidney Hook and the Contemporary World* 337-351.

<sup>6</sup> Sidney HOOK, "The Closing of the American Mind: An Intellectual Best-Seller Revisited," *American Scholar* (Winter 1989): 128.

<sup>7</sup> DIGGINS, "John Dewey" 79.

<sup>8</sup> On Anticommunist politics, see Judy KUTULAS, *The Long War: The Intellectual People's Front and Anti-Stalinism, 1930-1940* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995).



In the McCarthy period of the early 1950s, Hook and the liberal anticommunist intellectuals he influenced—especially in their primary organization, the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF)—fully applied for the first time a combined rhetoric of Pragmatism and antitotalitarianism in education.<sup>9</sup> They used the Pragmatist antitotalitarian rhetoric and promoted it through the ACCF during the controversy over the exclusion of communist teachers and university professors, as in that era their fear of the penetration of communism in America reached its peak. In his position during the debate, Hook's utilized the concept of "academic freedom." He inherited this notion from the philosopher Arthur O. Lovejoy who had first developed it in the 1910s and, together with Dewey, applied it as the primary principle of the newly founded American Association of University Professors (AAUP).<sup>10</sup>

During the following decades Hook continued working on the issue of academic freedom. He defined it as "the freedom of professionally qualified persons to inquire or investigate, to discuss, publish or teach the truth as they see it in the discipline of their competence subject to no religious or political control or authority, except the control of standards of professional ethics or the authority of the rational methods by which truths and conclusions are established in the discipline involved." To Hook this did not mean so much the freedom to teach anything as much as the freedom to constantly seek the truth. And since, according to Pragmatism, what is accepted as truth always changes, scholars have the "right to heresy" of what is considered at the moment as the truth in the field of their competence.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, according to Hook, academic freedom is not a human, civil, or constitutional right given to anybody in a democratic society. Academic freedom is reserved only to the qualified professional persons who have earned it and it carries with it the duty to pursue the truth and the responsibility to express and teach only what has been freely discovered as truth.

According to Hook, in the McCarthy era the value of academic freedom, as he had defined it, was determined to be superior through Pragmatist selection because it protected cultural liberties and prevented totalitarianism at the university. He claimed that since it had been proven that Communist professors severely vio-

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<sup>9</sup> Sidney HOOK, *Heresy, Yes - Conspiracy, No* (New York: John Day, 1953). Hook was one of the founders of the ACCF in 1950 and a major authority in it until this anticommunist liberal organization ceased its activities in 1957. Along with European Anticommunist intellectuals, he was also a leader of its international umbrella organization, Congress of Cultural Freedom (CCF). See Avital H. BLOCH, "The Anticommunist Campaign of the 1950s: The American Liberal Intellectuals and the Idea of Intellectual Freedom," *Novecento: Rassegna di storia contemporanea* (January-June 2000): 55-65.

<sup>10</sup> Dewey was the first President of the AAUP and Lovejoy was its Secretary. Hook was a member of the AAUP Council in the 1930s.

<sup>11</sup> Sidney HOOK, "The Principles and Problems of Academic Freedom," *Convictions* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus, 1990) 105, 107.

lated the rules of academic freedom. They conspired to undermine American basic liberties and in this way they themselves lost the right for such freedom. Academic freedom and Pragmatism as virtually the sole rationale of the liberal university would indeed be at the core of Hook's discussions on higher education.

In the 1960s, to Hook the academic freedom issue shifted from the legitimacy of educational dissent toward the separation of the university, as a cultural-intellectual institution, from politics. For him, as it was for the orthodox liberals and other anti-radical critics, the New Left students' assaults on the university meant a quest to transform the university's basic goals and functions. They hoped to achieve that by involving it in a broad range of social and political issues —economy, foreign and social policies— as if the institution was a microcosm of society. Hook argued that the university's objective was merely to focus on research and learning, totally detaching itself from society's political concerns.<sup>12</sup> While in the 1930s, he said, with the help of liberals such as himself the university successfully achieved its "depoliticization" through accepting the principle of academic freedom, in the 1960s radicals once again sought its "politicization."<sup>13</sup>

The ad hoc network University Centers for Rational Alternatives (UCRA), which Hook created in the late 1960s, intended to mend the campus situation by articulating a critique of the academy by concerned "responsible," antiradical liberal academics.<sup>14</sup> Their goal was to restore the university's autonomy and integrity. That implied defending the original idea of academic freedom and the exclusive rights of faculty professors to dominate learning and construct the curriculum based on traditional values of liberalism. The intellectuals and scholars who were active with Hook in defense of the liberal university according to those guidelines —Harvard sociologists Daniel Bell and Nathan Glazer, City University of New York historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, and editor and New York University professor Irving Kristol, City University of New York historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., among many others— increased their antiradical criticism as they turned into what became to be known since the 1970s as "Neoconservatives."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On the Neoconservative criticism of the New Left and radical mobilization at the universities, see BLOCH, *The Emergence of Neoconservatism* 95-118, 148-178, 236-285.

<sup>13</sup> HOOK, "In Defense of the Humanities," *Convictions* 182-183. Hook failed to mention the politicization of some American campuses in the 1930s. On this issue, see Robert COHEN, *When the New Left Was Old: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> UCRA sponsored a large conference with the participation of numerous scholars in 1972. The proceedings are in Sidney HOOK *et. al.* eds., *The Idea of a Modern University* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1974). See also Sidney HOOK, ed., *The Philosophy of the Curriculum: The Need for General Education* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus, 1975); Sidney HOOK, "Introduction: The Rationale of the Problem," *The Idea of a Modern University* xviii-xix.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Gertrude HIMMELFARB, *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1987); Diane RAVICH, "Multiculturalism: E Pluribus PLURES," *American Scholar* (Sum-

Hook declared that the UCRA's efforts succeeded in the 1970s, as the universities regained peace and independence, but the 1980s presented the campus with a new crisis. What characterized that decade in American universities, as Hook saw it, was an attempt to "politicize the curriculum itself." This time, it was by students and even more, by professors—the "academic left," "Multiculturalists," or as their critic Roger Kimball described them, "tenured radicals."<sup>16</sup> Motivated by the concept of "Multiculturalism," they demanded changes particularly in the liberal arts, the traditional Western Civilization course, and the American Studies curricula. The Multiculturalists rejected those programs in their existing form, which were basically modeled after the Universities of Chicago and Columbia core Humanities programs. Those programs went back to as early as 1919 at Columbia and further developed during the postwar period. They were considered by liberal educators as the means to reinforce liberalism in the university through European-oriented humanistic education.<sup>17</sup> The advocates of Multiculturalism, however, asserted that liberal education's "Eurocentrism" did not reflect the racial-ethnic-gender composition of the country and they described white- male-dominated America as racist and sexist. They demanded the elimination of the supremacy of Western content in the curriculum, inserting instead more works by minorities, women, and writers of developing world and non-European origins. Along with that, they also criticized the dominance of "highbrow" —high culture— works in the liberal arts programs and emphasized the importance of the study of popular culture as well. Legitimacy to such demands was given by a variety of influential innovative postmodernist theories, particularly French "Poststructuralism" and "Deconstruction," identified usually with Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan, and American Neo-Pragmatism,<sup>18</sup> articulated mainly by philosophers Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam.

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mer 1990); Arthur SCHLESINGER Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Whittle, 1991). See also Avital H. BLOCH, "Gertrud Himmelfarb: Against the 'New History,'" *Historia y grafia* 4 (1995): 293-313, and Paul BERMAN, ed., *Debating the P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses* (New York: Dell, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Roger KIMBALL, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Higher Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel BELL, *The Reforming of General Education: The Columbia College Experience in Its National Setting* (New York: Columbia UP, 1966). See also Sidney Hook ed., *The Philosophy of the Curriculum: The Need for General Education* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1975).

<sup>18</sup> It is important to distinguish between Hook's traditional Deweyan Pragmatism and the recent Neo-Pragmatism, which began to flourish in the 1980s. Neo-Pragmatism evolved from the original American Pragmatism, but it is especially its departure from traditional Pragmatist philosophy and its new postmodernist substance that has made it influential also in other fields, such as literary and legal criticism. And because of its strong postmodernist tendencies Neo-Pragmatism has usually been supportive of multiculturalism. However, Rorty, the most prominent Neo-Pragmatist, has considered himself a postmodern "ironist" who is also a "bourgeois liberal." The idea of "anti-anti-ethnocentrism," which he has articulated, is indeed a position between Hook's liberal traditionalism and the radical multiculturalists. See Richard RORTY, "On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford



The growing acceptance of such theories in American universities in the 1980s has shaped the new concept of “cultural studies.” In turn, it has forced radical changes in a whole range of Humanities and social science disciplines and accelerated the development of a variety of women’s, black, ethnic, and gay studies sub-disciplines and departments. Rejecting the idea of ultimate epistemological sources and analyzing discourses as socially and politically constructed, postmodernism has proved to Multiculturalists that the Western canon and its restrictive notion of cultural standards has no superior objective value over minority and popular cultures.<sup>19</sup>

While those critics attacked the established canon, Hook and his various orthodox liberal and Neoconservative colleagues closed ranks, resurrecting the campaign to “uphold the traditions of humanism and intellectual freedom.” They were again guided by the notion that “the academic health of the university and the integrity of the academic ethic can only be upheld by faculties themselves.”<sup>20</sup> To encounter the new trends they used the UCRA, and its new parallel group the National Association of Scholars (NAS). Hook was its “spiritual leader,” as his followers recognized him as “the spiritual leader for any organization devoted to free, unfettered inquiry and the search for truth.”<sup>21</sup> In the front of the campaign were also the government’s National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and ideologically supportive journals: *Academic Questions*, which was founded by the NAS to lead that campaign, *Measure*, *Minerva*, and the better known and established *American Scholar*, *New Criterion*, *Encounter*, *Public Interest*, and *Commentary*.<sup>22</sup> Affiliated with those organizations and journals, the following scholars and critics in various disciplines were among the leaders in this struggle: City University of New York historian Gertrude Himmelfarb; art critic and the editor of *New Criterion* Hilton Kramer; University of Chicago sociologist and *Minerva* editor Edward Shils; Columbia University’s Teachers College professor Diane Ravitch; NEH Director Lynne V. Cheney; Rutgers University political scientist Irving Louis Horowitz. In

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GEERTZ,” *Michigan Quarterly* (Summer 1985): 525-534, and “Two Cheers for the Cultural Left,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, (Winter 1990): 227-234. See also Richard RORTY, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982); Giles GUNN, *Thinking Across the American Grain: Ideology, Intellect, and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992); Robert HOLLINGER and David J. DEPEW, eds., *Pragmatism: From Progressivism to Postmodernism* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995); and Cornel WEST, *The American Invasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Henry GIROUX, ed., *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics: Redrawing Educational Boundaries* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> The Manifesto of *Academic Questions* 1 (1987); HOOK, “The Principles and Problems of Academic Freedom” 115.

<sup>21</sup> “Obituary for a Friend, Sidney Hook,” *Academic Questions* (Summer 1989): 93.

<sup>22</sup> Hook was on the editorial board of some of those publications, and especially important for *Academic Questions*, where he was a member from 1987 to his death, and *Encounter*, for which he wrote since its foundation in the 1950s.



1984 Hook was the honorary NEH Jefferson Lecturer, and Himmelfarb in 1991. Their official addresses were in defense of traditional learning as also reflected the Endowment's policies.<sup>23</sup>

Hook's critique in regard to the crisis focused primarily on the situation at Stanford University where, between 1987 and 1989 radical changes in its Western Culture core curriculum took place. The new freshmen course "Culture, Ideas, and Values" replaced the old one, "Western Culture." What was elaborated at the University went under scrutiny in academic communities all across the country and as a member of the Stanford faculty Hook was familiar with. Unsurprisingly, the reforms in this institution became the targets of his criticism as representatives of an educational trend in American higher education. He understood the challengers' demands as political and saw the current pressures on the curriculum as simply another form of politicization of American campuses.<sup>24</sup> Like the rebelling students in the 1960s, the critics' intention was to achieve change in the socio-political structure of society through transforming the university, perceiving it as the microcosm of the larger society. Specifically for the current crisis, Hook and his ideological allies warned that the university might turn into an arena for groups seeking a cure for their sense of alienation and a transformation of the general ethnic-racial-gender power structure in society through curricular change. The role of the university as an apolitical body, however, is limited to pure scholarship and the abstract pursuit of knowledge. "The professor is a scholar not a propagandist," Hook stated.<sup>25</sup>

His concerns were rooted in his philosophy of the curriculum and the concept of academic freedom. There was no question in his mind that curricular decisions were the prerogative of the faculty, who he thought, should enjoy complete legal protection and immunity from any institutional or other interventions. Only professors reserve academic freedom rights and only they possess the authority for scholarship and teaching. The choices in the Western Humanities curriculum are based on professors' scholarly reasoned judgment of the academic value of the material and its functions for the students. Selections of curricular material that are made as a result of pressure by students or by professors who have violated the responsibilities of academic freedom with considerations that are unrelated to academic truth, are a sure beginning of totalitarianism at the university. Thus, according to Hook, while the wrong choices of the radicals are directed by their unreasoned

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<sup>23</sup> Hook's Jefferson Lecture is in Sidney HOOK, "Education in Defense of a Free Society," *Commentary* (July 1984): 17-22.

<sup>24</sup> Sidney HOOK, "Curricular Politics," *Partisan Review* (Spring 1989): 200-213; HOOK, "An Open Letter to the Stanford Faculty," *Convictions* 133-138; HOOK, "In Defense of the Humanities" 182-190. See also Daniel GORDON, "Inside the Stanford Mind," *Perspectives: American Historical Association Newsletter* (April 1992): 1-8. For a collection of Hook's writings on the Stanford curriculum, see Sidney HOOK, "Reflections on the Obligation of Honesty in the University," *Minerva* (Winter 1989): 505-534.

<sup>25</sup> HOOK, "The Principles and Problems of Academic Freedom" 109.

political passions, responsible rational professors should apply a scientific Pragmatist method in their decisions.

In his stance on university education, Hook came closer to Dewey's notion of education for democracy, according to which teaching was meant to develop the power of students to pragmatically judge and choose themselves among relative values and ends. Thus, Hook argued, what guide professors is the requirement that general education should provide all students with "basic categories of thought, conceptual tools, sentiments, and dispositions with which we approach the central problems of a reflective life." In order to fulfill this requirement, professors appropriately decide to integrate into study programs material of irrefutable value: classical works and other creations of unquestionable excellence. True, these works are elitist, as the critics charge, but what counts to Hook is that they have been a "source of delight, intellectual stimulation, and challenge."<sup>26</sup> They are essential for the educational process because they help students understand contemporary culture and provide them with the necessary preparation to analyze it and comprehend their own place in it. The importance of such materials might not be absolute or eternal, but since they have influenced history and the present direction of society, it has been the Pragmatist test that has proved their importance.

To a certain degree, and in relationship to his idea of education for democracy, Hook also advocated some role the university had to take to educate for loyalty to the nation, although not to the same degree that he recommended such a role for the primary and secondary schools. He saw nothing wrong with education "*in the tender years*" as indoctrination that aims to achieve "social cohesion and solidarity," so the United States could survive the challenge still posed to it by the "global expansion of Communism."<sup>27</sup> He did encourage training of university students for national loyalty too, demanding that the Humanities curriculum be "unitary" for all students so as to familiarize them with their common legacy.<sup>28</sup>

For sure, Hook said, the curriculum should take into account diversity and conflicting cultural traditions. But for him, as it has been for intellectuals of his generation and ideological orientation, the Pragmatist selection process recognizes as common for all Americans, and thus is true value, only the European Western heritage. Inclusion of mediocre works of merely temporary or particularistic merit contributes very little to unitary education. For the same reason, according to Hook, pressures to recruit minority faculty in an Affirmative Action policy are absurd. The Humanities possess a unifying power as they transcend all differences: everyone,

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<sup>26</sup> HOOK, "An Open Letter to the Stanford Faculty" 189; Hook, "In Defense of the Humanities" 184-190.

<sup>27</sup> HOOK, "Education in Defense of Free Society" 21. On the early years of schooling Hook refers to his *Education for Modern Man* (New York: John Day, 1946). See HOOK, "The Closing of the American Mind," 132; Sidney HOOK, *Soviet Hypocrisy and Western Gullibility* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> HOOK, "Curricular Politics" 211.

regardless of ethnic or racial origin and political taste can understand and teach them. The American liberal pluralism of Hook and his traditional liberal allies never rejected diversity and competition in the political realm. But because the conservatives never recognized the university as part of that realm, but viewed it as a part of the cultural realm, they never did allow the cultural preferences of minorities to shift away from what they perceived as the unifying European core of American culture.

In this sense, because the Humanities that “have no flag or creed” go far beyond differences and “temporalities of politics,” they crucially proved to Hook their value in university education.<sup>29</sup> Humanities texts, he stated, are not “political documents” and their cultivation enriches the mind in any time or social climate. Furthermore, unlike the claim of ignorant critics, the Pragmatic, almost timeless truth of the humanities is that teaching them does not imply glorification of the status quo. On the contrary: examining the humanities shows that “Western civilization has been the most critical of itself, that its history has largely been a succession of heresies.” This is precisely the material that has always provided radicals all over the world with guidance without involving it in the learning process itself. In Hook words, to do so “is to dilute it into a very thin soup of social matter.”<sup>30</sup>

The Western humanist tradition, then, contains a conservative element of respect to the past cultural heritage. It is so important for Hook as a moderating force, while at the same time its critical sources allow room for rebellion. This idea about the relationship between the Humanities and radicalism has its analogy in the Modernist thought deeply rooted in Hook and the critics of his generation, especially Lionel Trilling, and their intellectual followers. Modernism had its origins in the Western avant-garde and its antibourgeois protest. Yet, deposited in Modernism itself lay the seeds of a conservative adversity against this very rebellion. The conclusion may be that Modernism and humanistic scholarship, both of the same Western roots, are politically safe and unsafe at the same time. Depending on how they are applied, as history has shown, they can lead to either peaceful liberalism or violent totalitarianism. But what is crucial for Hook’s analysis is that the ways Modernism and the Humanities are actually used or abused is an issue of the political process. As much as it is an important issue, it is still not at all in the university’s only interest, which is “the dissemination of wisdom.”<sup>31</sup>

The Humanities, therefore, might generate political danger, but according to the logic of Pragmatism, it is possible and imperative to select the lesser evil.

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<sup>29</sup> HOOK, “Education in Defense of Free Society” 19.

<sup>30</sup> HOOK, “In Defense of the Humanities” 186.

<sup>31</sup> HOOK, “In Defense of the Humanities” 184-188. On liberals’ Modernism see Lionel TRILLING, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Viking, 1949) and Irving HOWE, *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and Arts* (New York: Horizon, 1967). See also John P. DIGGINS, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994).

Despite the risks, Hook argued, the Humanities constitute by far a better choice than what the left proposes. According to him, the reason that the established curriculum is the best alternative is not only its moderating power. It is precisely the radical interpretations the Humanities created in the past and the possibility that such will be created again in the future. This demonstrates the practical elasticity of the Humanities and their usefulness in changing circumstances. In sum, the Western canon of arts and literature is superior due to both its scholarly and Pragmatist values, but not because of any political values. Those are to be determined and used outside of the campus.

In order to distinguish his position in the debate over Multiculturalism and the canon, it was important for Hook to demonstrate that his philosophy of Pragmatism differed from left-oriented postmodernist theory, exactly as it differed from conservative metaphysics. He insisted that the refusal to take a political stand in the curriculum controversy was not a subjective political stand in itself, as radical critics maintained, and that his judgments had nothing to do with power-relationship thinking. In contradiction to Postmodernist “subjectivism,” Hook’s philosophy argued that by means of evidence and what he called “objective relativism,” in which validity or objectivity of relational truth can be determined, it is possible to ground some statements as better than others.<sup>32</sup> Common agreement upon fixed meanings of cultural discourses do exist, although those meanings would pragmatically change through time due to new evidence or in order to fit them into new needs.

While Hook fought against radicals, he also rejected the conservative philosophy of people such as Allan Bloom, whose absolutism rejects the relationality of truth altogether because of its subjectivity. Although Hook thought that in his successful book *Closing of the American Mind* Bloom rightly evoked the intellectual bankruptcy of the American left, he nonetheless proposed an curriculum based on “metaphysical truths about nature of man and society.”<sup>33</sup> Hook thought that a curriculum built on absolutes could never reach consensus peacefully because in education there is no place for conflicts on fundamental doctrines. Thus Hook understood as naive Bloom’s remedy of social evils in education through altering the curriculum so it would transmit ultimate moral truths. Hook would prefer the Pragmatist approach of educating students for a better understanding of the varying causes, conditions, and consequences of values which can not all be regarded “inalienable, indefeasible, or absolute.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> HOOK, “The Closing of the American Mind” 127.

<sup>33</sup> Allan BLOOM, *The Closing of the American Mind: Education and the Crisis of Reason* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988). HOOK, “The Closing of the American Mind” is a review on Bloom’s book. See also James SEATON and William F. BUCKLEY, eds., *Beyond Cheering and Bashing: New Perspectives on the Closing of the American Mind* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1992).

<sup>34</sup> HOOK, “The Closing of the American Mind” 130.



In the curricular debate between postmodernism and metaphysics this view corresponded with Hook's typical political attitudes and involvement. Throughout decades of activism, he and the Anticommunist liberals and Neoconservatives he was associated with tried to position themselves between the conservative right and the radical left. Precisely as they claimed that their liberalism was distinct from and superior to those extremes, Hook attempted to show that pressures on the curriculum by either the Postmodernists or the traditionalists were equally dangerous, even though they were guided by contradicting philosophies. Neither of them would be able to avoid the destructive consequences of totalitarian situations that the penetration of ideologies and passions into the university might generate.<sup>35</sup>

As much as Hook preached the isolation of the university from ideologies, he could not hide that his "liberal education" concept of preparing an analytic, open minded, knowledgeable student really had a political dimension. Not only primary but also higher education in Hook's opinion had to respond to the persistent Communist threat. It posed a great danger above all because it was combined with what he perceived as the "eroding allegiance to the ideals of a free self-governing society itself," and thus created "a crisis that threatened the very survival" of a liberal United States. He suggested it was important to inspire loyalty to the democratic community not only through its honest inquiry, but also by "celebrating its heroes, and noting its achievements."<sup>36</sup>

The critics on the left see training students for "membership in a liberal society" by preparing them "to defend principles of a free society against enemy from any quarters" as a form of indoctrination. But Hook repudiated that criticism. He argued that in a democracy such educational methods are always subordinate to "honest doubt" and "methods of reflective, critical thought" by mature students.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, his view did put limits on criticism. Hook discredited any group inside the university—and occasionally outside the university too—active against his ideal of liberalism, defining its people as "the enemy." Indeed, so he labeled Communists in the 1950s, new-left radicals in the 1960s, and Multiculturalists in the 1980s.

Hook could insist that defending liberalism was not at all a political position. For him, only liberalism was a neutral non-political notion. This notion was a central part of the antitotalitarian liberal "End-of-Ideology" school of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>38</sup> The fundamental idea of those associated with this school—especially

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<sup>35</sup> The position Hook and the Neoconservatives took between the extremes is illustrated with their critique on the right-wing Accuracy in Academia, which monitored classroom material. The claim was that the group violated academic freedom. See HOOK, "The Principles and Problems of Academic Freedom" 114-115. On the Neoconservatism as a position between conservatism and liberalism, see BLOCH, *The Emergence of Neoconservatism* 286-318.

<sup>36</sup> HOOK, "Education in Defense of a Free Society" 20-21.

<sup>37</sup> HOOK, "Education in Defense of a Free Society" 22.

<sup>38</sup> DANIEL BELL, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Free, 1962), and DANIEL BELL, ed. *The Radical Right* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964).

sociologists Daniel Bell, Edward Shils, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Nathan Glazer, among other scholars who later became leaders of the intellectual Neoconservative movement— was the illegitimacy of extreme ideologies in the United States. They particularly disliked radical left ideologies. They claimed that irrational passions and unrealistic political expectations characterized those ideologies. As the rise of the Communist regimes exemplified, they eventually lead to violence and totalitarian systems. While such ideologies were feared as a dangerous phenomenon, liberalism, these scholars thought of liberalism as a pragmatic, reasoned, scientifically selected political choice. And in order to protect universities, liberalism as a non-ideology was legitimate—in fact the only legitimate—”ideology” at those institutions of higher learning.<sup>39</sup>

What underlies the fear of ideologies and the radical manifestations at the academia is what liberals and Neoconservatives loyal to the anti-ideological philosophy have understood as the politicization of phenomena and categories that are essentially cultural—race, ethnicity, and gender. Politicization means the penetration of ideology and politics into the cultural domain. This has implied forcing cultural substances of curricula and learning, which are not measurable in political terms, into the game of economics and power. The danger is forcing cultural categories out of the separate “corporate” domain of the university learning community into the public domain of the state.

Hook applied Dewey’s argument regarding the use of science in politics in the debate over politicization of learning. According to Hook, Dewey had warned against such use: “Scientists are united in one overriding interest—the interest in the pursuit of truth; human affairs, on the other hand, are a field of conflicting interests.”<sup>40</sup> Mixing together what is related to the academic search for truth, namely learning, with what is based on the quest for conciliation, namely politics, can cause a risky clash between those distinct realms and the loss of the capacity of each one of them to fulfill its distinct goals. The politicization of the contemporary university, which implies the penetration of ideological politics, including its emotionalism and moral absolutism, into the cultural institution, clearly presents a danger to its basic functions. According to Hook, loosening the boundaries between politics and culture at the university, that is, permitting the invasion of considerations of politics into learning seriously threatens the processes of rationalism and scientific Pragmatism in a community devoted to the impartial pursuit of truth.

Confusing the cultural and political realms, however, and failing to ensure that they function separately also presents a permanent danger to society at large. Orthodox liberals and Neoconservatives like Hook, who subscribed to the End-of-Ideology rationale, indeed understood any manifestation of extremism and insta-

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<sup>39</sup> On the connection between Pragmatism and liberalism, see Charles W. ANDERSON’S, critique, *Pragmatic Liberalism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990)

<sup>40</sup> HOOK, “Education in Defense of a Free Society” 18.



bility that results from mixing the cultural and political processes as destructive for either process and the institutions responsible for it. If the ultimate function of the major cultural and political institutions in a democratic society is to preserve democracy, each group of institutions, either political or cultural, must administer only matters that are within the boundaries of the sphere to which they are designated. The role of the university, as a community that is removed from the immediate considerations of a public society, is to protect the freedoms of inquiry and learning. Thus, in order to ensure the independent work of its faculty, it should disallow consideration of political interests. Hook believed that the purpose of government was to guarantee freedoms as well, but unlike the university, the government must protect different kind of freedoms, mainly citizens' rights to pursue their interests and compete for power in the public domain.<sup>41</sup> The government has to compromise among rival groups in order to respond to the demands of the majority. Therefore, while the university's concern is the search for the final truth, government must not only avoid the application of any final truth to its work. It has to also minimize the responsibility it takes for people's particularistic cultural needs.

Since the 1960s, the Pragmatist approach of Hook and the orthodox liberals toward the university and government, including the emphasis on separating the realms of politics and culture, has become more and more problematic. Hook himself found it difficult to distinguish between the cultural and the political in respect to liberalism. To him liberalism was a concept that guides at once universities, as cultural organizations, and governments, as political ones. He tried to articulate liberalism as the foundation of both politics and culture by attempting to make it pragmatic, to neutralize it and keep it untouched by what he considered as harmful passions and intense moral questions. Radical students and revisionist scholars have rejected the idea that this was possible. First, they have insisted that neither liberal politics nor the liberal curriculum at the university were neutral in their ideological intentions, and asked the traditionalists to acknowledge this. Second, they have seen limitations in strictly separating the cultural and the political anywhere. Thus they have been prepared to politicize culture in order to benefit certain disadvantaged social groups. And in their attempts to better comprehend the reality of human life, they have sought to reconcile the political and cultural realms on the epistemological and theoretical level. It is these endeavors to contradict the notions of traditional Pragmatism, and the educational and political philosophies it guides, that intellectuals such as Hook tried to defeat.

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<sup>41</sup> On the centrality of the concept of freedom in Hook's thought, see Milton R. KONVITZ, "Sidney Hook: Philosopher of Freedom," *Sidney Hook and the Contemporary World* 17-27.