

Letters.....

Opinion

In Defense of the Arts

This weeks personal opinion column is by Political Studies student, Robert Bodrog.

I don't know about you, but I've reached a saturation point with certain science majors and other people who somehow believe that a mark of 80 in a philosophy or political studies course has considerably less value than an 80 obtained in physics or chemistry. As we've so often heard, "those aren't real; those are just artsie marks." Well, I think its time to set the record straight.

The last time I looked at the calendar of this institution, it asserted that in terms of goals, it was "a community of scholars engaged in the pursuit of truth." Therefore what we have here is not a question of qualitative nor quantitative values in terms of numbers upon our transcripts, but rather a question of the value of truth — truth encountered in the sci-

ences, compared with truth encountered in the liberal arts. So then we must ask ourselves is there such a thing as superior and inferior truth, and if so, why is this the case?

With the emergence of the Enlightenment or the "Age of Reason" of the eighteenth century, man began to expand his knowledge of the world and see it in a different light. Newton's laws of motion showed us that the universe was in ruled by discernable laws which were comprehensible. This, along with other discoveries helped to give rise to the pursuit to uncover "scientific" knowledge to explain man's political arrangements. Hobbes, Rousseau, and later Marx would all look to science for at least partial grounding and foundation for their respective theories of social and political order — or lack of it.

I think it is important to bear in mind that in so inte-

grating two such different types of knowledge, we first acknowledge and sufficiently comprehend that there are indeed two kinds of knowledge present, and also how they differ. In the physical sciences one is dealing with universal theories for a given set of conditions. Under those conditions that theory will presumably always be valid and unchanging for all time. The length of the hypotanuse of a right-angle triangle will always be the sum of the squared length of the other two sides. It's a known content and that's it. Once that, or any other scientific phenomena and its laws are discovered, they are known and not subject to debate. One cannot argue $2+2=4$.

However, in the liberal arts, answers do not come as easily and incontrovertably. One cannot 'prove' something like Marx's theory of dialectical materialism universally as one could with a law of physics. This is the fundamental con-

trast one encounters in differentiating teleological thinking from scientific analysis.

What this comes down to is simply that since within the confines of the arts there is no such thing as perfect knowledge, they do not offer defined limits or the security of mind one encounters in the mathematical world of the sciences. Therefore, although it might be possible to get 100% on a lab or a biology exam, even the best dissertation or essay on the Hellenic notion of justice could never be expected to score an incontestable 100.

And therein lies the basis of my argument. As I have said, it is not my purpose here to assign value to, nor judge, superior or inferior epistemes. But what I am asserting is that it is important to bring a greater inter-disiplinary understanding between the various academic faculties in terms of not only grading, but furthermore, a fundamental realization that in our respective pursuits for truth and understanding, the numbers on transcripts are not a definitive uniform scale to rank learning or achievement. They should be thought of as relative; a guide to gauge our own respective progress in our chosen field of study, while keeping in mind that they, as the philosophers of the Enlightenment came to learn, like everything else in the universe, are ultimately relative.



The Letters Page

The Gem gets a lot of letters to the Editor signed with that old favourite "Anonymous". Unfortunately, for legal and other reasons, these cannot be printed without the Editor knowing who wrote it.

The Gem gladly will withhold names from publication, but to prove the authenticity of the letter, IT MUST BE SIGNED BY THE AUTHOR. Just write at the bottom of the page "please withhold name", or "sign me Anonymous" and the author's identity will be known only to the editor. It will be kept confidential even from other staff members.

Letters to the editor or other submissions can be sent free of charge through campus mail, dropped off at the SU office in the Barn, or through our Gem-Slot 2000, rm.401 Main.

Editorial! Ignorance or Apathy?

The old joke goes "Two things are wrong with this place; ignorance and apathy. Well I don't know what apathy is, and I don't care."

'Apathetic' is a word often applied to UPEI students. Every year there are problems getting people to run for elected student positions. The year-book, winter carnival committee, and student newspaper all just cannot get enough students to participate. Apathy. Students just don't give a damn about anything but their marks, right?. But is apathy the problem?

There's an ignorance theory used to explain apathy that says "students would care more if they were properly informed." Since students aren't told about all the things going on at UPEI, they don't feel a part of it and don't get involved.

Then there's the impotence

theory. "Student don't suffer from apathy; they just gave up because they feel they can't change a thing." Last week, CFS Chair Tony Macerollo expressed that same opinion.

The theory's advocates feel that if students only knew the path to take, UPEI would be a hotbed of student activity.

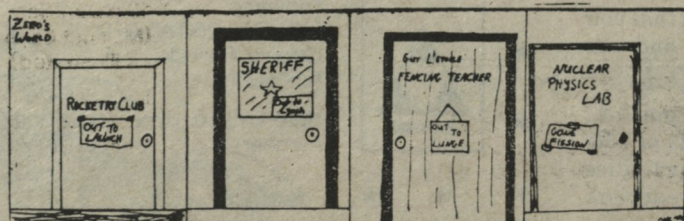
So which of these theories is right? Well, thinking of the number of students I know how ARE involved around campus, I can't agree with the pure apathy theory. Most student care very much about the institution they are part of. I

think truth about student apathy lies halfway between the ignorance and impotence

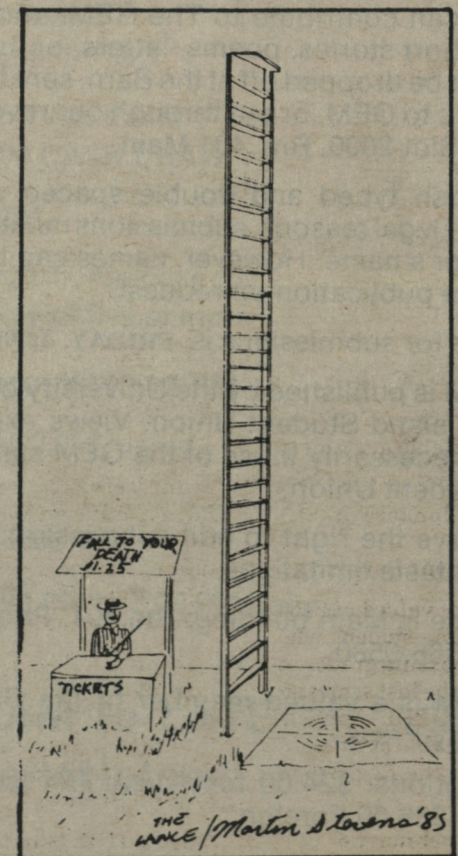
theories. No, the flow of information around campus is not enough, and yes, I think that students who have tried to be more involved but get nowhere may have stopped trying.

Well, the Gem wants to help in one of those areas. This paper wants to keep students as informed about events and concerns at UPEI as we humanly can. I think that with more information about what goes on right here at this university, the greater student awareness will lead to greater involvement. We try to identify channels through which the individual student can be heard with reports on the Student Union. And we try show what's going on elsewhere like the recent education wake at U of Alberta. Student newspapers are also traditionally a forum for student discussion, through letters to the editor. Armed with a greater sense of belonging to the university, and with information about how other students are tackling their own problems, we hope we can help some students get rid of that apathetic attitude.

A good way to start is to write a reply to this editorial.



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