



PROGRAMMA

A Newsletter for Graduates of the General Program of Liberal Studies

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University of Notre Dame

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The View from 318

For a couple of years, we have had a year-closing faculty meeting on the day following Commencement Sunday. It is a good time to catch the faculty momentarily free of classes, bluebooks and papers and not yet off on vacation or buried in summer research projects. It is an opportune time to try to wrap up some of the common business of the year and to take a close common look on the usually intense life in the Program in the preceding nine months. And we do try to raise some issues for reflection during the summer and hopefully departmental action in the next year. Among those issues which I raised on this occasion was that of the name of the Program. The time has come to make a decision, for the idea of such a change has lingered in the air for the last four or five years. Many of you will recall an inquiry in Programma about the name and the possibility of change. The response was very small, but it was in favor of change. Faculty thought and discussion on the name has gained momentum in the last few years.

Whatever is done, it does seem that the matter should be settled for the era or epoch ahead. The issue is not approached out of necessity. Quite the opposite -- the Program is remarkably healthy in the numbers and commitment of students, in the quality and morale of the faculty, in alumni interest and support, in understanding and appreciation for the Program in the University and of course in its very special idea of liberal education and a coherent curriculum refined over thirty-one years. In fact, one might honestly wonder how in the light of that situation any proponent of change can respond to the down-to-earth wisdom that I recall John Kennedy using as a Senator opposing change of the electoral college. His injunction went something like this: "When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change."

Yet it is from a strong position that one should make improvements that for one reason or another are difficult to make. Notre Dame's Great Books program can and perhaps will continue to prosper as the General Program of Liberal Studies, but the time is at hand to weigh seriously and pass judgment on the problems posed by that title for a proper understanding of the Program and in turn for the credentials of alumni, students and faculty associated with it. Many will recall from the earlier discussion of the name that it is the word "general" which tends in the public mind to associate the Program with the general education movement that is so often focused on the first two years of college and so often concerned with an array of introductory courses to various specialized fields. The special classic character, the coherence, the rigor and the communal aspect of Notre Dame's General Program are done an injustice by such an association. I expect to report a decision on this matter in the next issue.

When all Notre Dame alumni gathered in early June, two GP classes ('71 celebrating a 10 year reunion and '56 celebrating a 25-year reunion) held special social meetings and seminars. These provided occasions to meet with the faculty and seemed to be a very valued part of reunion weekend. The Class of '56 included in the festivities the giving of a substantial gift to the Program. It will be used to subsidize the initial publication of a series of Great Books that are no longer available in inexpensive paperback. The Committee that emerged to plan events for the Class of '56 in fact left a file that amounts to a kit for the Class of '57 to follow the tradition of special reunion events and a gift for the Program. Please do let me hear from members of the Class of '57 interested in the planning and organization of next June's 25 year class reunion.

Our monthly meetings for faculty and students (and occasional alumni visitors) have continued to serve the Program and the University well. There is usually a featured lecture, and this past year's fare began with a probing and uplifting talk by Professor Katherine Tillman on "Magnanimity and Liberal Education." As the year wound down, we were listening in an overflowing Library Auditorium to Sir John Eccles lecture on "The Self Conscious Mind and the Meaning and Mystery of Personal Existence." John Eccles, a Nobel Prize winner for Physiology and Medicine, also provided several stimulating sessions for the faculty. The past year was highlighted by a number of appearances by Visiting Professor and Poet-in-Residence Paul Roche whose presence was celebrated in part in the previous issues of Programma. Dr. Brian Dibble (Program graduate of '64) who resides and teaches in Australia was in the States this autumn and read from his work to students, faculty and friends gathered at the traditional dinner after November's Memorial Mass.

With this issue Linda Ferguson lays down the responsibilities of editor. I thank her for her careful, thorough and imaginative service in this capacity over the last three years. I must especially thank her for her patience with a chairman who can't meet his own deadlines. Phillip Sloan returns from a year's leave and will assume the editorship of Programma. In the background are other changes taking place in the University; a search for a new President is launched as Father Hesburgh assumes a newly formed office as Chancellor; a search for a Dean for the College of Arts and Letters will shortly begin as Dean Isabel Charles, the College's Dean since 1975, steps down for a two-year research leave.

I close by noting that Alumni support for the Program through the Campaign for Notre Dame has been as gratifying as the success of the Campaign itself. Thank you from all of us currently active in the Program. It is also gratifying to see so much evidence at the reunions and in your correspondence that the General Program does foster the truth that the only real education is a continuing education. By the way, the lines are still open for contributions to the previous issue's feature "What Makes a Great Book?"

Walter Nicgorski
Chairman

Programma (the Greek word meaning "public notice") is published toward the end of each academic semester by the General Program of Liberal Studies for its graduates.

Faculty Editor: Linda Ferguson
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Editor's Notes

As noted elsewhere, this issue of Programma is my last to edit. My friend and colleague Phillip Sloan has accepted the appointment, and I am grateful. It is not a big job; in fact, the burden of work falls more often on the Chairman and on Mrs. Rees, the department secretary, than on the faculty editor. The only real problem of editing Programma is its coincidence with the ends of academic semesters, the most harried seasons for faculty as well as for students. As editor I met and circumvented that problem by consistently publishing behind schedule - a worthy tradition, and no doubt one which will perpetuate itself!

But for the better part, working with Programma has given me a fuller sense of the intellectual community in which I work and live. I am relatively new to the General Program family: I have taught here five years, and have made the personal acquaintance only of the classes of '77 through '83. But through Programma correspondence and business I have come to perceive a broader idea of the department and its presence in the lives of many people I will never meet personally. Participation in the department faculty nurtures this understanding to a degree. But interaction, even if sporadic, with alumni, helps fill in the picture - a picture that was colorfully and warmly highlighted by the 25-year reunion in June. Greetings to all alumni, especially to the class of '81, who now number among my own special memories. And best wishes to Phil as the next editor of this publication.

- L.C.F.

Introducing Professor De Pascuale

As is our tradition, we have invited a new faculty member to contribute an essay of personal introduction and reflection in order that our alumni may keep attuned to the make-up of our diverse and unique faculty. Professor De Pascuale has now weathered his first year and has known the rigors of Seminars III and VI, Concepts of Man, and Philosophical Inquiry. His remarks follow. (LCF)

Most people who enter philosophy, I suppose, do so as a result of academic study. I, however, entered philosophy because I am a light sleeper. Once I wake up I can't go back to sleep again even if I close my eyes and pretend to be drifting off into dreams.

My rude awakening occurred on board the ship Libertad, when I left Argentina with my family for New York City at age eight. Since that time everything has seemed so strange to me that I have not been able to sleep nor take anything for granted. Among the first things that perplexed me was the question of origins. I knew how I had gotten to New York (on board that ratty cargo boat Libertad), but I didn't know how I had gotten to Argentina in the first place. Although I didn't know it at the time, my asking this question was a sign that I had become afflicted with the metaphysician's disease. Metaphysics is a dis-ease that afflicts the seat of your soul. It makes you as uncomfortable as a man in a fever who shifts around searching for a comfortable position. As it peaks the fever leads you to seek a unification of experience which will allow a more integrated and fuller life. It can't be cured but in learning to live with it you learn to live.

When I entered Queens College in 1968 and had to choose a major, it seemed only natural for me to exploit the situation and receive credit for doing what I was already preoccupied with. So I double-majored in Philosophy and Psychology and spent my time healing my wound by wondering about the sorts of questions that pierce the mind during the twilight hours of metaphysical delirium: death, God, meaning, alienation and the like. My experience at Queens College was happy largely because I had caring and inspiring teachers. From a crusty old Irishman I learned to swallow large chunks of Aquinas and spit out syllogisms. From a ramrod-postured German I learned how to balance my diet with helpings of Plato, Spinoza and Heidegger. From these two and some others I learned the importance of preserving passion in the intellectual life and about the secret ways to avoid contracting academic anemia while working in a university.

After graduation, I went off to Belgium to study Philosophy at the Higher Institute of Philosophy of the University of Louvain. It rained all the time in Louvain, but aside from learning to be a duck I learned a lot about ancient philosophy and Phenomenology and Existentialism. I spent two wonderful years drenched in the thought of Husserl, Heidegger, and Kierkegaard and eventually wrote a thesis in defense of the phenomenological method. Feeling homesick, I decided to return to the United States to finish my Ph.D. at Brown University. There I fought duels with the analytic philosophers while I continued with my work in Phenomenology and the history of philosophy. Not knowing what to do with this European-contaminated philosopher, the faculty decided to get me out of their hair by allowing me to teach undergraduate courses in Existentialism, Oriental Philosophy and Philosophical Psychology. I taught at Brown for three years before providence caringly called me to leave Providence, Rhode Island for Notre Dame and the General Program, where I now live in glee among friends teaching things that matter greatly to me in the way I think they should be taught.

-- Juan De Pascuale

The scholarly work of Professor Sloan of the General Program faculty never fails to demonstrate the benefits of bringing humane and spiritual values to bear on scientific ideas. In the following article Professor Sloan shares some of his thoughts, as well as his enthusiasm for his current area of research. In the true GP spirit he has written substantially and responsibly for the non-specialist. (LCF).

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A CONVERSATION WITH DARWIN

In one of the pure masterpieces of the Platonic dialogues, the Phaedrus, Socrates does a curious thing. Phaedrus eagerly engages Socrates on a walk on a warm summer day with the merits of a discourse by his friend, the Sophist Lysias, in which calculating friendship, based on rational self-interest, is preferred to the irrational madness of love. We immediately sense an unease on Socrates' part with the drift of the discussion, yet after patiently waiting through Phaedrus' enthusiastic reading, Socrates does not proceed to engage in the expected dialectic immediately, but insists on rewriting the speech. Lysias' obvious weak points are improved, the argument is tightened, and greater logical rigor is added. Then, when both Socrates and Phaedrus are satisfied that a stronger case has been made, Socrates begins the critique. In the end, love emerges as something divine, which only by sophistic confusion has been made into the sordid passion depicted by Lysias.

A sabbatical leave this year has made it possible for me to do something I have wanted to do for many years--to begin an exploration in depth of Darwin's formation and conceptual sources that I hope in the future will enable me to "rewrite" at least some aspects of Darwin's discourse. To do this, however, is to be a long and challenging task.

Discussion of Darwin's work, as it has come to constitute a veritable mountain of books, articles and discussions, has too often suffered from uncritical adulation by scholars and admirers (typically the better informed of the discussants), and uninformed criticism by opponents. Because of this dichotomy, I have been first concerned to understand the man and his work, and substantive criticism I feel must first await comprehension, a task that will take me several years.

When I first approached Darwin studies, after several years of work in science, philosophy, the history of science and the GP curriculum, I initially passed through a phase where I thought Darwin was going to be somewhat simple to deal with. Obvious faults in his reasoning; the undeveloped character of his great work, the Origin of Species; his own descriptions of his modest intellectual endowments in his Autobiography; and his obviously painful struggles with the deeper questions of ethics, consciousness and political obligation in the Descent of Man, left me somewhat puzzled as to the reasons for his great historical and scientific significance.

After spending much of the Fall, 1980 term in Cambridge and London, exploring his original manuscripts, notebooks, letters and personal annotations on his books, I have been forced to revise this early assessment. Rather than revealing a somewhat second-rate mind, they showed instead an enormously fertile and systematic thinker, one whose reading ranged a continuous spectrum of issues from music and literature to the most detailed technical treatises on chemistry,

minerology, botany and anatomy. These documents also revealed a very engaging and likeable individual who at the same time had the two rare gifts which in some way seem to characterize all the scientific greats--Aristotle, Copernicus, Harvey, Newton, Buffon, Faraday and Einstein--namely, remarkable powers of sustained focus and concentration on highly detailed questions that are ignored by the communality of mankind; and unusual powers of synthesis which enable them to unify diverse classes of facts, explore fruitful analogies, and see communality in apparent diversity. Consequently, from his earliest days as a student, Darwin is perceiving issues that intelligent contemporaries were missing.

My specific focus of study has been to work out a book on Darwin's concept of species, exploring the precise factors which led Darwin to deny what others had accepted--the obvious fact that species do seem to show a recurring permanence over time, with this permanence subjected only to "accidental," but never to "essential" alterations. It has always seemed a commonplace that like begets like in the organic world, yet one Darwin chose to deny.

To deal with this central concept is itself a formidable task, particularly if it is to be done in any critical detail, which is precisely the level where Darwin dealt with it. Because Darwin had such sustained focus on this question over a long period time, none of us has the time to master the equivalent body of reading and empirical detail which Darwin explored for over twenty-five years before the publication of the Origin of Species in 1859. As a consequence, the understanding of his entire activity must remain always partial and incomplete (envison over 14,000 letters alone on these issues still surviving among the Darwin papers at Cambridge). Critical to understanding the issues directing Darwin's reflections and readings is also the recognition that very early in his inquiries Darwin saw that the key to the problem was to look very closely at that "accidental" variation which others took for granted as irrelevant, and as a consequence, enormous amounts of Darwin's reading are in all the detailed literature on the whole question of variation.

From my inquiries, two general points have, however, emerged that at least in a preliminary way give some light on the development of his thinking. The first of these concerns Darwin's endorsement of an "active" conception of matter, which can be traced to the reigning chemical and biological theories of the 1800-1850 period. In common with the mainstream thought of his time prior to the formulation of the concept of the conservation of energy in the 1850's, Darwin began by asserting a sharp distinction between "living" and "non-living" matter, and this difference was due to special properties of life that were presumably not explicable in non-living terms. In this sense Darwin began from a point very different from Cartesian-Newtonian science, in which all matter is assumed to have simply "inert" properties, and must be acted upon by outside forces for any changes in its state (recall law one of Newton's Principia). Secondly, the kinds of inherent properties Darwin granted to living matter--"irritability," "sensitivity," and even a protosentience--in his earliest manuscripts, have important ramifications for how he finally dealt with larger questions of teleology, consciousness and vital activity. If such actions are in matter from the beginning, it is not remarkable that more complex combinations of such living matter might result in dynamic change and even consciousness.

In some respects, this is all not too far distant from some of Aristotle's reflections in the De Anima, where living things were considered as dynamic

conjunctions of matter and substantial form, with form in living things identified with psyche or "soul" in Aristotle's sense. The difference lies in the consequences Darwin drew from this idea. Rather than seeing in the distinction of living and non-living beings a basis for asserting a fixity of species, due to the restriction of life within the limits of Aristotle's form, Darwin's notion of life is a much more general property of living matter that gives it an essential unity at its very simplest stages. Consequently, rather than seeing living beings as endlessly reproducing themselves within the limits of fixed natural species, as Aristotle suggested, Darwin saw an inherent plasticity of life. An important issue that seems to show the difference is the process of embryological formation. Both Aristotle and Darwin were fascinated by the process by which beings seemed to arise from non-being, an event readily accessible to all who will simply take the time to watch a chicken egg develop. But where for Aristotle this was always a model of how the individual organism comes to be, for Darwin it revealed a microcosmic model of a much more general phenomena--the change of all form through time. "The generation of species is like the generation of individuals" he writes in his earliest notebook on the transformation of species in July of 1837. By this he meant that just as the individual organism develops from an undifferentiated single cell into a highly diversified set of structures and functions in time, so all species can be seen developing from a primordial species into the great panorama of life-forms we have around us.

These early conclusions and metaphors, it should be noted, are far from the finished theory that emerged in 1859, and do not take in to account the great importance of his concept of natural selection that emerged for the first time in 1839. But by beginning with a concept of active matter and the embryological metaphor, Darwin was in a position to explore in great detail a refined explanation of the development of life through evolutionary categories which enabled him to give some account of how species could arise from each other in time.

The philosophically interesting problem in Darwin's work concerns, of course, how far this model could be extended. It is common knowledge that Darwin ultimately saw no fundamental difference in the formation of other animal species and man. If matter is itself possessed of proto-consciousness, the problem of dealing with consciousness in evolutionary terms was, of course, much easier for Darwin, and we can see this operative in the conclusions he draws in the Descent of Man. Yet one cannot but feel that it is in this part of the argument that we find Lysias speaking, and intuition tells us, if nothing else, that a large number of issues dealt with in the Descent are not so much being explained, as explained away.

After what were only preliminary reflections on my part in my actual research, it was then particularly valuable for the General Program to have as a visitor this semester Sir John C. Eccles, a distinguished neurophysiologist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology in 1963. Eccles is also a committed Catholic thinker who has reflected on these same questions for over fifty years. In a faculty seminar with the department, Eccles specifically addressed the issue of the relation of animal consciousness and human self-consciousness in light both of Darwin and also more recent work on animal learning. Although very much an evolutionist, Eccles' point was to draw out the implications of the distinction between an animal level of awareness, which he felt might have a plausible Darwinian explanation, and the remarkable presence in the order of nature of self-consciousness, a feature

he sees only in man. The failure to make a marked distinction of these two orders of consciousness Eccles felt was the closet-skeleton in common versions of evolutionary naturalism, and suggested that once this is factored in, the autonomy of a human order becomes an undeniable fact. Language for man ceases to be simply pragmatic, related only to immediate needs, as one sees in language of the chimpanzees, and becomes instead symbolic in its function, able to convey abstract ideas and concepts; the awareness of death that accompanies self-reflection, again manifests itself in man's concern for questions of religion, value and meaning, issues evidently never encountered in even primitive ways with the highest primates. To this domain of human discourse and concerns, biology becomes, Eccles seemed to suggest, irrelevant and even is extended to these issues only with self-destructive paradox.

Darwin, as I feel I have come to perceive, was too great a thinker not to perceive some of the difficulties in his positions, and I have sensed in many of his mature discussions and letters a great personal discomfort with the answers to which he was coming. Perhaps the real problem over Darwinism is best able to be understood as a product of the inadequacy of nineteenth-century formulation of the issues, not simply by Darwin, but also by those who opposed him. Too often the latter group failed to take to heart the Socratic lesson that one might first have to write as good or even better discourse before engaging in criticism.

John Eccles' visit raised for many of us a series of issues that will surely engage us for some time. I look forward to rejoining the dialogue next fall.

Phillip Sloan

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The following alumni have recently indicated that they would like their old friends and teachers to know their whereabouts:

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