

Where Wisdom Begins— The Urgent Necessity for the Classics

Authors Victor Hanson and John Heath are dedicated teachers of the Classics, who have written a horrifying, but true indictment of the immorality of virtually all of today's professional, academic so-called "classicalists." Indeed, it turns out, that there are some very prominent men among this pack of vile frauds, who must actually be classed as grossly *criminal*, rather than merely completely immoral. (Oxford's Sir Kenneth Dover, for instance, who admitted in print that he *murdered* his academic rival, yet who bears a knighthood granted by Queen Elizabeth, for his research on the Ancient Greeks, and does not lack for hordes of sycophantic students!) Their very moving "Catiline Oration," is further combined with a sketch of just what it is that we must learn from Ancient Greece. And to this, they have added an outline of the sorts of academic reforms that they believe would be required, to bring these Greek truths to today's students, and thus, through them, to American society generally.

I have learned some significant things from this book, of particular interest to students of Classical studies. Moreover, I share with its authors, knowledge of certain unpopular but very important truths, which we three are not ashamed to teach publicly, even though they earn us academic ridicule. And finally, there are many things in their book, which I must view as errors, even serious ones. (Especially, but not only, in the chapter entitled, "Thinking Like a Greek.") But, as a would-be teacher myself, I recognize unerringly—as do all teachers—the agapic love characteristic of every man and woman who is a teacher in the true sense of the word. Given this insight into the minds of the authors, I know that theirs are errors honestly come by, in the course of a decades-long search for truth and justice—a quest in which they have not shrunk from personal sacrifice.

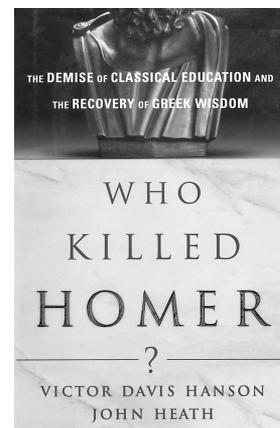
Thus, for me, the most inspiring passage in *Who Killed Homer?*, is one that begins, "We both have been guilty—insidiously and flagrantly so—of many of the professional crimes we rebuke here. . . ." Whatever nonsense the philistines may imagine to the contrary, this cry of "*Mea culpa!*" is the outermost gate around the temple of wisdom: No man or woman ever did, or ever will become wise, who does not pass through this gate first.

In fact, if our whole civilization is now doomed to destruction over the short term—as it may very well be—this is very simply, the direct consequence of one little fact: that the self-indulgent, over-sexed, overgrown fat children of the '60's generation, who now occupy the seats of power, have yet to find, and indeed may never find in themselves the strength of will, to force themselves to say these two little words: "*Mea culpa!*"

'A Larger American Renaissance'

Unlike the authors', my own reasons for studying Ancient Greek, and teaching it to others, involve Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., whose projects I have participated in for now more than thirty years. Hanson and Heath touch most closely on the subject of Lyndon LaRouche's lifelong effort, when they say, ". . . all attempts to reinstate Greek wisdom by reforming higher education, are ultimately doomed to failure in the absence of a larger American renaissance." Lyndon LaRouche's life's work, has been to work to bring on that new Renaissance, in America and worldwide. (And, of course, the literal meaning of the term, "renaissance," is "the rebirth of ancient [i.e., Greek] learning.")

LaRouche's effort, finds support in several of the true maxims the authors cite under the heading, "Thinking Like a Greek." As someone who does not have to answer to a campus "political correctness" committee, I am free to repeat them in my own words, as



**Who Killed Homer?
The Demise of Classical
Education and the
Recovery of Greek Wisdom**
by Victor Davis Hanson
and John Heath
New York, The Free Press, 1998
290 pages, hardcover, \$25.00

follows:

(1) Western Culture—specifically, as the Fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance rediscovered and advanced upon Classical Greek learning—is the best culture mankind has yet achieved. This is not a "racial" or "blood" question. Quite the contrary: Those who have any understanding of this culture, are duty-bound to try to make it available to every nation and people. And indeed, all people invariably want it for themselves, once they understand it.

(2) Further, the superiority of this Western Culture has immediate material consequences. To the degree that Western Culture has advanced around the globe (even despite the frequent crimes of the Western colonial powers), the world is today able to sustain a population in excess of five billion—and indeed, several-fold more, if modern technologies were fully applied, especially in Asia, Africa, and Ibero-America.

But yet, the authors prove, in effect, that we have now abandoned Western Culture, in favor of multiculturalism, moral relativism, monetarism, and the rock-sex-drug counterculture, among other foul idolatries. What, then, is the consequence, if we do not change our

ways immediately? Nothing, but the rapid collapse of the world's population to the several hundred millions which was its level at the time of the Italian Renaissance—through famine, old and new diseases, and war!

Unhappy Endings

Another of the Greek truths to be found in *Who Killed Homer* (again, in my own words), is that there is not always a “happy ending.” The boy does not always get the girl. This is not only true for the accidents of individual personal life; it is more importantly true for whole civilizations (contrary to such fatalists as G.W.F. Hegel and Karl Marx, who would have history march on inexorably forward and upward). The Earth bulges with the remains of countless extinct civilizations, cultures which “lost the moral fitness to survive,” in LaRouche’s words. Their study is the never-ending business of archeology. Similarly, much of the business of so-called “anthropology,” is the study of failed cultures which, rather than simply disappearing to the last man, instead collapsed down to a mere handful of pathetic, illiterate and naked savages. We are all now rapidly on our way, worldwide, to that latter end.

Therefore, the new Renaissance for which we fight, is not simply a desirable, good thing. It is rather, the only alternative to another Dark Age—this time not simply European, but worldwide—which, if it happens, will eclipse civilization for many decades, and bring about the collapse of world population levels to several hundred million, or fewer. It will mean death for the great majority, and unimaginable suffering and degradation for the relatively few survivors.

The trigger for this collapse, if it is permitted to occur, will be the vaporization of the world financial system, presaged by the present so-called “Asia crisis.” But the real cause is neither economic in the usual sense, nor financial, nor anything even remotely like that. It is the worldwide collapse of culture and morality, especially visible during the past thirty years, documented so passionately by these authors in the micro-

cosm of university so-called “classical studies.”

The microcosm reflects the macrocosm. The putrefaction, reminiscent of some stories of E. A. Poe, which Hanson and Heath depict in the corners of our universities, reflects, alas, the condition of civilization overall. Once this is understood, dedicated teachers to the few, such as these authors, are of necessity called to be the “shepherds” to the “sheep” of the wider world, including the sheep who are heads of state and high officials. To save them from the destruction to which they have otherwise doomed themselves, by their own folly.

Universal Classical Education

From this standpoint—which is the true context of the “larger American renaissance,” from which any discussion of academic reforms must proceed—one of the most serious errors in *Who Killed Homer*, is the contention that only *some* students should be destined for a university (i.e., Classical) education, while the rest should learn a skill or trade instead. (Admittedly, the authors regard this as a temporary expedient; but, it is a serious mistake nonetheless.)

To discuss it, first, on the less-important, narrowly economic level: Modern economy involves ever-more-rapid supercession of revolutionary, new products and processes, by still more revolutionary and newer ones. Unless we are going back to the day of the horse and buggy, as some would have us do, the “skill” each labor-force entrant *most* requires, is that of rapidly mastering new principles: Just what a good Classical education best provides.

But, there is a worse error still in the suggestion, that “[w]ith a skill and a job [i.e., absent a Classical education], each individual immediately becomes a functional member of the community, with all of the obligations and duties this entails.” This was indeed true, in a sense, throughout the greatest part of human history, when the functions, “obligations and duties” of the ninety-five percent of the human race who were essentially human cattle, were nothing but obsequious obedience to every whim of their “betters.” But Solon of Athens, Nicolaus

of Cusa, and Benjamin Franklin and the rest of our American Founding Fathers, gave us the different and better idea of the *republic*. In a republic like ours, the citizen’s duty of responsibly electing our leaders, requires that he or she have the knowledge to judge among the principled bases of alternative, proposed policies—even while not knowing all their details. Meaningful citizenship in a republic, thus requires a Classical education, one which results in the student’s reproducing, within and for his own mind, an ordered sequence of Platonic *ideas*.

In today’s circumstance of last-ditch defense of Western Culture, this question is not that of a timeless, abstract study of comparative forms of education. We require a revolution, and that very quickly. Of the American, not the Bolshevik variety: in which enough leading citizens’ depth of knowledge of, and passion for civic values, will move them to stake “their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred Honor,” in a battle for the survival of the priceless accomplishments of Western Civilization.

Just as it was over two hundred years ago, and again during the American Civil War, that is once again the question of Classical education today.

—Tony Papert

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