A LIFE OF LEARNING

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Lecture

American Council of Learned Societies
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Charles Homer Haskins (1870-1937), for whom the ACLS lecture series is named, was the first Chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies, 1920–26. He began his teaching career at the Johns Hopkins University, where he received the B.A. degree in 1887, and the Ph.D. in 1890. He later taught at the University of Wisconsin and at Harvard, where he was Henry Charles Lea Professor of Medieval History at the time of his retirement in 1931, and Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences from 1908 to 1924. He served as president of the American Historical Association, 1922, and was a founder and the second president of the Medieval Academy of America, 1926.

A great American teacher, Charles Homer Haskins also did much to establish the reputation of American scholarship abroad. His distinction was recognized in honorary degrees from Strasbourg, Padua, Manchester, Paris, Louvain, Caen, Harvard, Wisconsin, and Allegheny College, where in 1883 he had begun his higher education at the age of thirteen.

Paul Oskar Kristeller is Frederick J. E. Woodbridge Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Columbia University. He was born in Berlin, Germany. He holds degrees from the Universities of Heidelberg and Pisa, and did postdoctoral work at the Universities of Berlin and Freiburg. He joined the Philosophy Department of Columbia University in 1939, becoming Frederick J. E. Woodbridge Professor of Philosophy in 1968. He has been a member of several ACLS constituent societies including the American Philosophical Association, the Renaissance Society of America (of which he was president and delegate to ACLS), and the Medieval Academy of America (of which he was also president). He also served for a number of years as a member of the Committee on Renaissance Studies of the ACLS. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Medieval Academy of America, and the American Philosophical Society. He is also a corresponding fellow of academic organizations throughout Europe. He holds honorary degrees from Columbia; the University of Padua; the University of Rome; Middlebury College; Catholic University of America; the University of Rochester; Duke University; Washington University; State University of New York at Binghamton; and the University of Arizona.

Professor Kristeller has held many distinguished fellowships and has received awards for his contributions to the humanities. Most recently, he was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship and the first Newberry Library Award for contribution to the humanities. In 1989 he also received an award for scholarly distinction from the American Historical Association. The author of numerous articles and books, Professor Kristeller

has also delivered a variety of lectures in this country and abroad.

Among his most important works, several of which have been translated into many languages, are The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, Latin Manuscript Books before 1600, Renaissance Thought, Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance, Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters, Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning, Renaissance Thought and its Sources, Renaissance Thought and the Arts, *and* Marsilio Ficino and His Work after Five Hundred Years. *Mr. Kristeller views as his most important scholarly contribution his work on the six volumes of* Iter Italicum: a finding list of uncatalogued or incompletely catalogued humanistic manuscripts of the Renaissance in Italian and other libraries. *Mr. Kristeller also played a leading role in organizing and editing the early volumes of* Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum: Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin translations and commentaries, annotated lists and guides, *a project sponsored both by the ACLS and the Union Académique Internationale.*

Professor Kristeller's contributions to humanistic learning are among the most distinguished of any living scholar. While this lecture hardly counts as scholarship in the usual sense and certainly not as the sort of scholarship for which Paul Oskar Kristeller is so justly renowned, it reveals a side of the man that is apparent in none of his other publications. The signal traits of this lecture are its illuminating portrait of the personal underpinnings of a life devoted to learning and its author's passionate commitment to a genre of scholarship that is no longer in vogue, but is nonetheless still central to all genuinely humanistic inquiry. Originally delivered to a filled auditorium with Professor Kristeller's typical energy and forcefulness, this printed version of the lecture makes a distinguished addition to the series of Haskins Lectures that ACLS has been honored to publish since 1983.

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and guests, I should like to thank President Stanley Katz and his advisers for the kind invitation to deliver the Charles Homer Haskins lecture on the life of learning at this annual meeting of the American Council of Learned Societies. I greatly appreciate this honor, and I welcome this opportunity to pay my personal tribute to Charles Homer Haskins, a great American scholar and historian whose work I have always admired, whose contributions are still valid and worth reading many decades after his death, and whom I consider a worthy guide and model for all present and future practitioners of historical scholarship.

This honor comes to me quite unexpected, and even as a surprise, for my background is foreign and untypical (though I have lived in this country for over half a century); the subject that interests me most, the history of Western philosophy and thought, has become increasingly unfashionable, and has been called irrelevant and useless, elitist and Eurocentric, and even undemocratic (perhaps I could make it more palatable by calling it the study of interconceptual space); and my method which tries to combine the philosophical interpretation of original texts with the pertinent skills of history and philology, and of their auxiliary disciplines such as diplomatics and chronology, palaeography and bibliography, is now considered hopelessly traditional and even antiquated, as I have been told more than once by foundation officials, administrators and colleagues, reviewers and critics. This occasion prompts me to say a few words that reflect my experience and my opinions, and I apologize in case they displease some of my listeners. I have been exposed over the years to many words and thoughts that displease me, and I might claim for once my right to the freedom of speech. I do not think that I am unwilling to stand corrected when some of my statements are refuted by solid facts or arguments, and I am quite ready to admit that there are many areas and problems that lie outside my special field of interest and that deserve to be explored by other scholars. I also admit that my advanced age may make me obtuse and unresponsive to certain new subjects or methods that may turn out to be perfectly legitimate. Yet I cannot bring myself to accept or condone certain views that are in agreement with some current political or other trends, but that are flatly contradicted by firmly established facts or arguments which their proponents, knowingly or unknowingly, choose to ignore, using what I like to call the *argumentum ex ignorantia*, a powerful argument when the readers and listeners are as ignorant of the contrary evidence as are the speakers and writers.

The life of learning, as the title of our series has it, or the life devoted to learning, is a somewhat ambiguous term, if I may be allowed to borrow the method of my analytical colleagues in philosophy. It means, of course, that as scholars we always continue to learn (and unfortunately also to forget), from the beginning to the end of our life. Yet the phrase also means that we are dedicated to learning or to scholarship, words that in modern English have been used to designate all knowledge outside the natural and social sciences. All other Western languages known to me speak of the philosophical, historical, and philological disciplines as sciences, recognizing that they contain and accumulate valid knowledge based on rigorous methods (they are even predictive when they discover new texts or documents that confirm a previously proposed opinion). In English, the terms learning and scholarship do not indicate, as they should, that we deal with knowledge that is as valid and as methodical as that of the sciences, though it deals with different subjects and uses different methods. The more recent term "humanities" has the additional disadvantage that it indicates a kind of knowledge that is at best useless and dispensable, and at worst provides some kind of genteel or snobbish entertainment. Moreover, the term "humanities," and even more the term "humanism," invites a confusion with philosophical or secular humanism and with humanitarianism thus involving humanistic scholarship quite needlessly in philosophical and religious controversies, and confusing it with social and political ideals that are valid and desirable but completely irrelevant to our cause, and all this confusion serves as a temptation or excuse for diverting our meager resources towards other efforts and activities that may have great merits, even greater than we can claim for ourselves, but that are completely different from ours. We have to keep all this in mind, at least for the duration of this talk. We cannot help following ordinary English usage, but we are confronted with a case where this usage, as attested by Webster or the short Oxford dictionary, turns out to be insufficient for the discussion of a serious philosophical or scholarly problem. Another such case is the word "reason." In ordinary English, it denotes the capacity to draw valid inferences from ascertained facts, whereas a different and more comprehensive notion of reason, generally used and understood by philosophers from antiquity to fairly recent times, called *Nous* in Greek and *Vernunft* in German and identified by Kant as the faculty of principles, is admittedly untranslatable into modern English and has disappeared not only from current usage, but also from contemporary philosophical thought, to the great detriment of all

philosophical, scholarly, and scientific discourse.

When I now try to talk about my background and upbringing to serve as an explanation of my later development and work as a scholar, I should like to emphasize that I consider inheritance and education, in agreement with most serious scholars in both the Eastern and Western worlds, as necessary, but not as sufficient causes of intellectual development — otherwise all persons with the same family background and education would turn out to be the same, whereas in fact each individual person is different and in a sense unique.

I was born in Berlin in 1905 into a well-to-do Jewish middle-class family, and since my father died at the time of my birth, I was brought up by my mother, the daughter of a banker, and by my stepfather (the only father I knew), the director of a small factory. My parents had no higher education, though several of their relatives did, but they respected all cultural pursuits and made many sacrifices to further my education. My mother was interested in literature and art, visited museums and exhibitions, attended lectures and theatre performances, read a good deal, and assembled a small but good library which was at my disposal. She also knew French, English, and some Italian, and I probably inherited from her a great facility for languages that turned out to be very helpful in my later work and career.

From age six to nine, I attended a good public elementary school and learned in short time reading and writing in two scripts, Gothic and Roman, as well as arithmetic and other simple skills. From 1914 to 1923, I attended a public classical school, the Mommsen-Gymnasium in Berlin, which offered nine years of Latin (eight hours a week), eight years of French (four hours a week), six years of Greek (six hours a week), a great deal of German composition and literature, some history and geography, a good deal of mathematics (including elementary calculus), some physics, chemistry, and biology, and a year or two of English (which turned out to be my fifth language). I had to do a lot of homework, and I did not mind it, for I found the assignments interesting and challenging. I had some occasional difficulties and setbacks, but I basically liked and enjoyed my school. In all the languages which I studied I learned grammar and parsing, instead of guessing the vague content of long sentences. In mathematics I learned precise reasoning since we were supposed to understand and repeat all proofs, solutions, and constructions, not just to memorize them. I learned to compose clear papers consisting of an introduction and a conclusion and of several well distinguished parts of which the first did not presuppose

the second but vice versa, and I still write that way. In addition to some German and French classics (including Shakespeare in German), I read in school Vergil and Tacitus, Homer and Sophocles, authors who have remained my favorites throughout my later life. My teachers were for the most part well trained and knowledgeable, and they included such scholars as Walther Kranz and Ernst Hoffmann, well known among students of the classics and of ancient philosophy.

I also had a lot of extracurricular activities. I was never interested in sports, but I did a lot of swimming and hiking, and later of mountain-climbing. I had private lessons in French and English conversation, and I learned a bit of Hebrew, Dutch, and Russian, languages which I failed to keep up, whereas I later learned Italian which is now one of my best languages, and a bit of Spanish. I was a voracious reader and began to buy and collect many books, especially of history and biography, and of German and French literature. I eagerly visited the Berlin museums and especially liked the older Italian, Flemish, and Dutch masters (who were well represented in these collections), and I saw many exhibitions of modern German and French art (Berlin was ever since the seventeenth century an outpost of French culture, in spite of the political and military conflicts between the two countries, a fact that seems to be widely unknown). On a number of vacation trips made with my parents or with my school and later alone, I saw many parts of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and enjoyed the landscape as well as the architectural monuments and art collections of many cities. I also wrote a lot of poetry and continued to do so long afterwards.

The study and practice of music played a major role in my life. I began early to take piano lessons, frequently heard opera and concert performances, and continued to take advanced lessons until my university days. I played the works of all major classical composers from Bach to Chopin and Brahms and also some modern German and French music, but I disliked some of the Romantics, especially Liszt and Wagner.

My interest in philosophy developed early. In my literary readings, I came upon Ibsen's play, *The Emperor and the Galilaean*, and although this is not one of his best works, it was my first exposure to Neoplatonism, as I was to discover much later. I read Plato in school and learned from him to follow reason as far as it leads us, to look for principles rather than for specific instances, and to distinguish clearly between knowledge and opinion. At home, I read more Plato, some Aristotle, and above all, a lot of Kant. By the time I graduated from school with honors in 1923, my mind was made up to study philosophy and its

history, and my parents accepted my decision, although they were disappointed in their hope of seeing me enter the family business, and also worried about my choosing a career unknown to them and offering no prospects for a well paid position.

After graduation, I went to study at Heidelberg. The University, apart from the beauty of the city and its surroundings, had a good reputation because of the high quality of its faculty, and I was especially attracted by Ernst Hoffmann, my school teacher of Greek, who in the meantime had become a professor of ancient philosophy at Heidelberg. Needless to say, for an eighteen-year-old youth, it was attractive to get away from home for the first time. All I had to do was to take a train, to rent a furnished room, and to sign up at the registrar's office, showing my high school diploma. The tuition was modest since the university, as all others, was run by the government. I spent nine semesters at various universities, five of them at Heidelberg and the others at Berlin, Freiburg, and Marburg. At Heidelberg, my teachers in philosophy included Heinrich Rickert whose interpretation of Kant never convinced me, but who developed a theory of the historical method which has great merit and is not as well known as it deserves; Karl Jaspers who introduced me to Kierkegaard and to existentialism; and Ernst Hoffmann who lectured on Plato and Aristotle and also on Plotinus. In Freiburg, I heard Richard Kroner who introduced me to Hegel, and Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, who was not an interesting lecturer, but whose books I read with great profit. Encouraged by a fellow student, I went in 1926 to Marburg to hear Martin Heidegger. He was then working on *Sein und Zeit*, his masterpiece, and gave impressive lectures, as well as a seminar on historicism. I also came to know him personally, but I resisted the temptation to stay with him because he kept his doctoral students waiting for many years, and I returned to Heidelberg to write a thesis on Plotinus under Hoffmann.

Aside from attending lectures and seminars, I spent a lot of time on preparing seminar papers and on reading a great variety of books which interested me or which I considered as important for my studies. I read all major philosophers from the Presocratics to Husserl, including Nietzsche whom I never appreciated.

My formal minors were mathematics and medieval history. I attended some lectures and seminars on higher mathematics, though with difficulties, and I read reference books on calculus, the theory of functions and of numbers, and on differential equations. I once wrote a seminar paper on a complicated demonstration which occupied only

a few printed pages and grew in my summary to a talk of half an hour since the author had presupposed and omitted many theorems and proofs which I had to supply from other sources. This showed me that I was not able to become a professional mathematician. But I learned once and for all that we should always concentrate on problems which we may hope to solve, and that in our attempts to prove something, we should always prefer a simple and "more elegant" proof to a complicated one. I also began to understand the link between the mathematical and philosophical doctrines of such thinkers as Descartes and Leibniz.

In medieval history, I heard Karl Hampe and Friedrich Baethgen in Heidelberg, and Stengel in Marburg, and thus I acquired valuable skills in diplomatics, chronology, and the source analysis of documents. Without the knowledge of medieval rhetoric which I acquired from Hampe, I should not have been able to recognize the links between medieval and Renaissance rhetoric which I described and developed many years later.

I also studied without credit a number of other subjects which I found useful or interesting. German literature and philology, comparative linguistics, physics and psychology, church history, musicology and art history (including Far Eastern art of which I have remained an admirer ever since).

I defended my thesis on Plotinus in 1928 and published it in 1930. It contained only a fragment of what I had planned to write about Plotinus, and the published thesis is quite different from the one I presented for the defense. My hope of writing a more complete monograph on Plotinus was never fulfilled since I was later occupied with other topics. I still consider Plotinus as one of the greatest philosophers of all times, and I am convinced that his influence on later thought has been much greater than is usually recognized.

After I had passed my doctoral defense rather successfully, my hopes for an academic career were suddenly disappointed, and I chose to study classical philology in Berlin, to improve my classical training for further work on ancient philosophy, and also to prepare for a State Board examination in Greek and Latin that would enable me to teach these subjects in a Gymnasium. I took courses with Werner Jaeger and Eduard Norden, and also with Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Friedrich Solmsen, Richard Walzer, and others, and learned textual criticism and palaeography from Paul Maas and classical linguistics from Wilhelm Schulze. I also read or reread most major classical authors

(without translations, but with commentaries, where necessary), and I also learned to write (though not to speak) Latin. I learned from Jaeger to pay attention to the literary genre of a text and to the patterns and topics connected with that genre, and from both Jaeger and Norden the importance of ancient rhetoric and of its complicated relationship with philosophy. I also learned to study the history of philosophical terminology. All this proved to be very useful for my later work. During the same period, I revised my thesis on Plotinus, wrote several book reviews, a seminar thesis on Cicero's interpretation of Plato's ideas, a paper on the origin and meaning of the term *Orexis* (desire) in philosophical literature, and a state board examination thesis on one of the speeches of Pericles in Thucydides.

Having passed my state board examination with honors in 1931, I went to see Heidegger in Freiburg, asked him whether he would sponsor me for an academic career (*Habilitation*), and proposed as my subject Marsilio Ficino who interested me as the leading representative of another important period in the history of Platonism. Heidegger agreed, and I went to Freiburg to work on Ficino, while attending Heidegger's lectures and seminars. I frequently saw him about my thesis, played the piano at his home (as I had done also in Marburg), and obtained the friendly support of several historians and classical scholars on the Freiburg faculty, including Eduard Fraenkel. In 1932, I received from the German Research Foundation a fellowship of a type reserved for future university teachers. By 1933, I had finished the ground work for a book on the philosophy of Ficino, and in the spring, I went to Italy to look at manuscripts and early editions of Ficino, especially in Rome and Florence. The results were greater than expected, for I found a number of unpublished works of Ficino, especially letters and early treatises, some of them unknown to previous scholars, and I planned to publish them in an appendix to my book. While I was in Italy in March and April 1933, I suddenly learned that the newly installed Nazi government had issued a law which excluded all persons of Jewish descent from academic positions and from a number of professions. I immediately realized that this was the end of my career in Germany, and that it would be necessary for me to emigrate if I wanted to pursue my work. Instead of staying in Italy, I returned to Germany to settle my affairs, moved from Freiburg to the home of my parents in Berlin, and stayed there until early in 1934, writing nearly one half of my book on Ficino. I also corresponded with foreign scholars and institutions to prepare my emigration, and taught in a private

school directed by Vera Lachmann. When some Italian scholars, including Giovanni Gentile, expressed interest in my work, I went to Rome in February 1934, met Gentile and others, did some work as a translator, and also pursued extensive manuscript research in the Vatican and other Roman libraries. It was at this time that I became aware of the large number of potentially interesting works, not only of Ficino, but also of his friends and correspondents, predecessors, contemporaries and followers, that were not only unpublished but even unknown to exist, and I began to collect descriptions and microfilms of these writings. In the fall of 1934, I moved from Rome to Florence where I obtained a position as a teacher of Greek and Latin at a private school for German refugee children, and also a modest post as an assistant lecturer of German at a branch of the University of Florence. I also pursued extensive manuscript research in Florentine libraries, and the results were as rewarding as they had been in Rome. In the summer of 1935, I obtained, through the help of Gentile, the post of a lecturer of German at the Scuola Normale Superiore and at the University of Pisa where I spent three fruitful years. The Scuola is a community of graduate and postgraduate fellows, selected on the basis of a national competition; its students are among the best in Italy, and many of them later become college and university professors. Living among them and working with them, I made many friends and became a part of the Italian academic scene. Gentile had my Ficino texts published in two volumes as *Supplementum Ficinianum* (1937) and started to publish with me a series of unknown humanistic texts edited by students and graduates of the Scuola Normale and by other scholars. The first volume appeared in 1939, and volume 19 is now in press. I also finished my book on Ficino, translated it into Italian, and made arrangements for its publication. In addition, I published several articles and book reviews in various Italian periodicals. At the same time, I traveled throughout Italy to explore all major libraries for Renaissance texts, with the usual encouraging results. I was helped by a method learned from more experienced scholars, that is, I did not merely work from indexes, but systematically scanned all available printed catalogues and unpublished inventories, and I thus came upon authors and texts which had not even been known to exist. These trips also gave me an opportunity to see a large number of Italian cities, their monuments and art collections as well as their libraries and archives, and as a tourist interested in art history, I learned to appreciate the variety of local schools and traditions, in architecture, sculpture, and painting as well as in the decorative arts and crafts, and to understand the political and cultural history of a town or region from its

monuments, museums, and libraries.

In the spring of 1938, Hitler visited Italy, and during his stay, all German refugees were either put into jail or had to report daily to the police. This was an omen of worse things to come. In the summer of 1938, the Fascist government issued a decree that excluded all persons of Jewish descent from academic and other public positions, and those who were not Italian citizens had to leave the country within six months. I immediately lost my position in Pisa and had to make plans for a second emigration. I wrote to many colleagues and friends, especially in England and the United States, and received a number of encouraging replies, yet they did not lead to a quick solution. Ludwig Bertalot, a German private scholar living in Rome, offered me a paid position as his research assistant, and from October 1938 to January 1939 I worked for him in Rome, mainly on a volume of the catalogue of Vatican manuscripts which he was preparing, and at the same time, I continued my own work. In January of 1939, I received an invitation from Yale University where I had several American and German friends to come there as a teaching fellow and to give a graduate seminar on Plotinus. I left Italy where everybody whom I knew behaved with the greatest kindness, and arrived in New Haven in February where I was cordially received by many old and new friends, especially by Herman Weigand and Roland Bainton who obtained for me the hospitality of the Yale Divinity School. I had received a non-quota immigration visa on the basis of my invitation, and I enjoyed the opportunity to continue my work as a teacher, although my spoken English was at first quite halting and improved but gradually. I also learned that my position would not last for more than a term, and thus I had to look for another job for the fall of 1939. Fortunately, I received several lecture invitations upon my arrival, and I visited many scholars at various universities whom I had met before or to whom I was introduced. I also was able to get one of my lectures published right away. I finally was offered a position at Columbia as an associate in philosophy for one year, with a modest salary, part of which was paid by the Carl Schurz Foundation. I married in June 1940 Edith Lewinnek whom I had first met in Germany and who has been my companion and adviser ever since, while pursuing her own career as a specialist in rehabilitation medicine and as a faculty member of the New York University Medical School.

It turned out that I was to spend the rest of my life at Columbia. For nine years I remained as an associate with an annual contract, then I was made an associate professor with tenure in 1948, a professor in

1956, a Woodbridge Professor of Philosophy in 1968, and retired in 1973. The University was my home before I became a citizen (in 1945), and over the years I have had close relationships with many colleagues at Columbia and also at other institutions, not only in philosophy, but also in history and classics, in Italian, French, German, Spanish and English literature, in Oriental studies and in bibliography, in religion, musicology and art history, and also in political science and sociology. I have learned a lot from my colleagues, especially about Aristotelianism from John H. Randall and Ernest Moody, and about the history of science from Lynn Thorndike, and I greatly profited from the rich resources of our library and from the competent help of its staff. I regularly taught lecture courses on late ancient philosophy and on Renaissance philosophy, mostly for graduate students in different departments, and also seminars, often jointly with Randall and others, on some of the major philosophers from Plato to Hegel. I also taught a course on research techniques, and was involved in a large number of dissertations in many departments. Since 1945, I have taken an active part in the University Seminar on the Renaissance and in other faculty seminars at Columbia. I have lectured frequently and widely at many colleges and universities both in this country and in Europe. For my major scholarly projects, I received support from various research councils at Columbia, from the American Philosophical Society (of which I am a member since 1974), from the Bollingen Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Renaissance Society of America, the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and the Warburg Institute in London. I served as a member of the Committee on Renaissance Studies of the ACLS, and it was with its help and support that I was able to organize, with the help of several colleagues, the *Catalogue of Latin Translations and Commentaries,* a cooperative international project, of which volume VII is now in press. I also published, with the support of the Warburg Institute and of several foundations, my finding list of Renaissance manuscripts (*Iter Italicum*) of which volume V is now in press. This work is based on the notes I collected in Italy before the war and also on the results of many more recent trips through Europe and the United States. As a by-product of this work, I published in several editions a bibliography of printed catalogues and unpublished inventories of Latin manuscript books.

I have been active in the Renaissance Society of America from the time when it was founded in 1954, and also in the Medieval Academy

of America. This latter association has helped me to understand the criticism directed by many medievalists against some conventional views of the Renaissance and to redefine the Renaissance and its humanism in a way that takes this criticism into account. I have also done much reviewing, especially for the *Journal of Philosophy*, and much editorial work, especially for the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, and for *Renaissance Quarterly*.

My book on the philosophy of Ficino appeared in English in 1943, the somewhat better Italian version in 1953, and the German original only in 1972. Most of my other books are collections of lectures or articles, composed on different occasions and for different audiences. Yet I always pursued topics that interested me, and not those that others asked me to investigate. I never hesitated to intrude on neighboring fields, when pertinent, and I never minded hiding some of my best remarks in footnotes or digressions or in the middle of a paragraph, and thus most of them have been predictably overlooked. I did not learn early enough that to make an idea stick you have to put it into the title and conclusion or abstract of a paper, never mind what the rest of the article contains. Yet I did present my views on some major Renaissance thinkers in a series of lectures delivered and published at Stanford, and a similar series on Hellenistic philosophy was recently given at Pisa. My studies on Ficino emphasize his metaphysics and its original as well as its ancient, patristic, medieval, and early humanist elements. I hope I have helped to clarify the significance of Renaissance humanism, showing from its literary production and from its professional activities that it was centered in the study of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy, and not in logic, natural philosophy or metaphysics. Humanism did not destroy Aristotelian scholasticism, as often asserted, but coexisted with it through the sixteenth century and beyond. On the other hand, Renaissance humanism had close connections with medieval grammar and rhetoric. I called attention to several neglected texts of medieval rhetoric, and to the fact that medieval rhetoric was not limited to sermons and letters, as often claimed, but included a sizable body of secular oratory, especially in Italy with its city republics. I also showed that the school of Salerno, often presented as purely practical, made a notable contribution to theoretical and scholastic medicine from the twelfth century on, and also initiated that alliance of philosophy with medicine (rather than with theology) that was to remain characteristic of the Italian tradition down to the seventeenth century. I also showed that Aristotelian scholasticism as taught at the

University of Bologna had a documentable influence on the early Tuscan poets of Dante's generation, and that humanists, contrary to a widespread belief, did not oppose or try to abolish the vernacular, but actually cultivated and promoted it as part of a bilingual culture that is characteristic of both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. I also emphasized that for a proper understanding of the various philosophers and other authors, we should not only study their writings, but also their life and professional activities, the curriculum of the schools and universities where they studied and taught, the place their works occupied within the contemporary classifications of the arts and sciences, the traditions of the literary genres to which their various writings belong, and finally the meaning, sources, and origins of the technical terms used by them.

I have attempted throughout my life to pursue scholarship for its own sake, not for the pursuit of personal or political goals, and I survived two emigrations because the international academic and scholarly community had a sense of solidarity and of objective standards of work. Anybody who had something to contribute was welcome, and I found friends and supporters in two foreign countries because they liked my skills and my knowledge, not my face or gender, race or religion, national background or political opinions. My career was based on my work as a scholar and teacher which I pursued with the support of my university, of several other institutions, learned societies, and foundations, including the ACLS. The humanities, as I understand them, were then an integral part of the curriculum of all colleges and even of the better secondary schools. A graduate student could expect to teach in college even before he got his degree. The colleges gave a general cultural background to the majority of their students who went into business or the various professions, and a solid preparation, including foreign languages, to the future graduate student who thus acquired a familiarity with the general context of his field before he began the more specialized research for his dissertation. Moreover, there was at least some tolerance among the various disciplines, and each specialist was willing to respect the contributions made by other fields or even by other schools within his field. Also the general public and the news media had some interest in, and a moderate respect for, the representatives of scholarship.

This situation has profoundly changed for the worse since the 1960's. The general public and the news media show complete indifference or even contempt for scholarship, except when a sensation is

involved, as in the case of the Leonardo manuscripts discovered in Madrid in 1967, which were widely and also wrongly reported, or when a subject is related to entertainment, tourism or financial investment, as is the case with the history of music and of the theatre, with archaeology and art history, or with the study of manuscripts and rare books. The admission and graduation requirements of the secondary schools have been constantly lowered and have almost disappeared, and it is now quite common for students to graduate from high school without having learned the most elementary skills of literacy or arithmetic. More recently, the colleges, and even many of the most renowned colleges, have admitted students who are in need of instruction in remedial English and composition. A diploma from a high school or even from a college is considered as a mere entrance ticket for a better paid job, and nobody seems to understand any longer that such a diploma should be earned by acquiring a certain amount of knowledge and skills. The graduate schools have thus far managed to maintain their standards, but it remains to be seen how long they will be able to do so if the preparation of their incoming students continues to deteriorate. Within academia, the natural sciences have been able to maintain their standards, thanks to their prestige and the acknowledged usefulness of their technological applications, though some of their less useful fields, such as pure mathematics, theoretical physics or taxonomic biology, are receiving less support than they deserve. The social sciences which have made excellent contributions based on historical scholarship have to some extent been dehistoricized, tended to base their findings on the dubious evidence of statistics, questionnaires or opinion polls, and to disregard the fundamental distinction between facts and goals or values. They have made ambitious claims in defining, predicting, and solving social and political problems, and these claims, though they have been more often wrong than right, have been taken at their face value, not only by the general public, but also by many philosophers and other academics, and have contributed to the public and academic decline in the support of the humanities.

Finally, many representatives of the humanities have changed their emphasis towards contemporary history and literature, topics that should not be neglected, to be sure, but that often do not require the rigor of detailed research, as it is needed for the study of earlier periods. Faddist theories based on sensational claims rather than on solid evidence are widely acclaimed, and the advocacy of political, ideological or religious causes is brazenly proclaimed to be a substitute for evidence. A

widespread antihistorical bias has put historical studies on the defensive, and in the academic power game, faddists and ideologists are often preferred to serious younger scholars, not to speak of the steady loss of teaching positions in subjects that are no longer required or considered useful or interesting. It has been noticed in more than one area that the number of persons of any age, properly trained and competent to deal with certain specialties, amounts to less than a handful in the entire country.

We have witnessed what amounts to a cultural revolution, comparable to the one in China if not worse, and whereas the Chinese have to some extent overcome their cultural revolution, I see many signs that ours is getting worse all the time, and no indication that it will be overcome in the foreseeable future. One sign of our situation is the low level of our public and even of our academic discussions. The frequent disregard of facts or evidence, of rational discourse and arguments, and even of consistency, is appalling, and name-calling is often used as a substitute for a reasonable discussion. Every interest group demands immediate action in favor of its own goals, and easily resorts to noisy demonstrations or even to violence. What we need is a careful examination of all pertinent facts and arguments, followed by a rational decision that may be a fair compromise between the groups and interests involved. Instead of recognizing that along with many problems which we cannot solve (at least at the present) there is a solid core of knowledge to which we should hold on and which should set a limit to our arbitrary thoughts and actions, we encounter a pervasive kind of scepticism or relativism which claims that any opinion is as good or justified as any other. Every statement made before the last five years or before the latest fad is considered hopelessly antiquated, and "traditional scholarship" has become a term of opprobrium. I hold on to the view that our scholarship is cumulative, though not static, that many thoughts and opinions of the distant past may have some interest or validity for the present and future, and that there is a large body of important subjects that has not even been mentioned in the literature of the last five years.

Our relativists proclaim that words have no fixed meaning and that we are free to decide what each word in a past writer must have meant (like Humpty Dumpty who decides by himself that a word means just what he chooses it to mean). I gladly admit that words change their meanings in the course of time and that old words disappear while new ones are coined. Yet we can and must rely on a firm tradition of

lexicography in the various languages concerned, including the large Oxford English dictionary, that tells us what a given word meant at a given time, in a given context, and to a given writer. We are thus able to refute obvious blunders by the straight evidence of original texts and documents and with the tested methods of historical and philological scholarship. Interpretations based only on translations or secondary literature should be rejected outright unless they are confirmed by original texts. While sticking to problems that we can solve, we should reject the claim that all solvable problems are trivial and that all important problems are insolvable except by speculation. The world of history and philosophy is a puzzle that can be solved but slowly, by constantly adding new questions and answers and thus modifying the earlier ones. It may be argued that religious faith transcends the limits of secular knowledge, but within the range of human knowledge, the plain facts ascertained by experience and reason cannot be contradicted by an appeal to conventional or fashionable opinions that claim to be true in a higher sense.

I do not know what the future will bring, and my expectations are rather grim, not only for our education and scholarship, but also for our economic, legal, and political future. Like Cassandra, I hope I shall be wrong.

I am holding on to the methods and convictions which I have followed all my life, and nothing that has recently been proposed to replace them has convinced me as valid. I wish the best of luck to the many younger scholars who follow our methods and ideals and who will invariably correct our results and make new additions to our knowledge. They are likely to have a harder struggle than we did in getting recognized in a world that has become basically hostile to scholarship and to learning. I hope I am speaking also on their behalf since they cannot afford to say what they think. I also hope that the ACLS will use its influence, along with that of the NEH, to support humanistic scholarship and research, to help it defend its place in the colleges and universities, and also in the schools and in the public world, and perhaps to regain some of the ground which it has lost in recent years.

I have no illusions about the good old days (they had their own troubles), and I am aware of the limits imposed on philosophy, science, and scholarship in this immense world which is complex and irrational and to a large extent (contrary to what many people believe) removed from our control and manipulation. I sometimes wonder whether my life in many of its phases (as the life of many other human beings) has

been like that of the rider on Lake Constance who barely reached the shore before the ice he had crossed melted behind his back.

Yet I like to justify my fascination with the past, and especially with the history of philosophy and of learning, by stating my belief that the past remains real even after it has disappeared from the scene. It is the task of the historian to keep it alive, and to do justice also to the defeated and to the neglected, at least to the extent to which they deserve to be remembered.

Thank you.