

## **2. Alpha Omega University: Secularism and Departmentalism**

A woman dressed in a slim black coat stands at the edge of a university campus. As she surveys the empty lawn, an icy blast sweeps across her face, for a moment stinging her eyes. She watches a lone professor step cautiously along the pavement toward a tall office building, avoiding icy patches. Perhaps he is returning to finish the draft of an article, or to retrieve a book left behind at the beginning of semester break. All else is still during this Christmas season. The woman shivers, not just from the wind but also even more from the challenge that lies ahead of her.

She is Dr. Theresa H. Neumann, the new president of Alpha Omega University (AOU), a public institution in New York founded over a century ago to advance excellence in teaching, research, and service. From its founding, a liberal arts program was at the core of this university, and Alpha claimed to offer students “intrinsic values.” University brochures repeat this promise today, but academic programs are different now, more professional. Academic life has become specialized, as AOU is a preparatory program for graduate school and for professional careers. AOU’s purpose, according to the public relations officer, is to build “powers of the mind” for critical thinking and problem solving.

Now AOU's board of trustees would like to make the campus into a research university with science and engineering at its center, but some members who object to this want to study the question. Indeed, they have selected Theresa Neumann as president to help them.

Dr. Neumann is known for her courage, intellect, activism, and interest in interdisciplinary studies. The trustees know that she majored in philosophy, is proficient in fundraising, and has excellent skills in organizational development. Her enthusiasm for civic affairs is matched only by her interest in developing the moral character of students. She has the drive and imagination to do the job, but they do not know much more about her. Theresa Neumann's parents had been born in Germany and came to the United States at a young age to escape the horrors of the Nazi government. She grew up as a Catholic in the United States and her parents named her after one of saints in the Church: Saint Theresa de Avila, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish nun.<sup>i</sup> Her mother's maiden name is Heidegger, an old family name traced back to Austria. Her father had admired the philosopher Martin Heidegger, but Theresa never refers to him; his involvement with the Nazi government was too terrible for her to want any link with him, however tenuous.

The trustees do not know how Dr. Neumann has suffered. As a child, she had faced terrible illnesses and agonized under the most painful conditions. Like her namesake, Theresa de Avila, her suffering drove her into deep places. At one point, in pain, she had had a vision of an angel piercing her heart with a golden shaft. She told the priest that it was causing her immense suffering and joy simultaneously. At the time, she had gone into a passionate, almost voluptuous trance, but she never talks to anyone about it. Her faith and devotion led her to study religion. At Princeton, she had been a top student in philosophy, and her graduate work at the Harvard Divinity School was equally superb.

In the few months that she has been on campus everyone has come to know her as “Dr. Theresa.” She is different from previous AOU presidents all of whom had followed conventional philosophies. At mid-twentieth century, an AOU president adopted the tradition of Robert Hutchins -- president of the University of Chicago -- who put ideas at the forefront of a liberal arts education. Later AOU presidents built up professional schools, and still later, others emphasized corporate contracts with campus science. Now trustees are talking about a research university and hoping the new president will move in that direction.

But Dr. Theresa has a different set of interests that will require faculty leadership and cross-disciplinary studies. She proclaims that the university has lost its core values. At a meeting of the Board of Trustees, she declares:

“I believe that growth in our departments and their specialization is vital, but I find no common discourse on campus about our purpose. Our core curriculum introduces students to the subject in each separate department (chemistry, mathematics, etc.), but there is no faculty discussion on the nature of things. We need a place where faculties can explore the connection between our different schools of thought.”

The Trustees are taken back at her pronouncement and worried about what she might do during her tenure, but the depth of her concern and her gentle manner are persuasive. They suggest that she give a presentation on her concerns to the Senate. And so she does. In her Senate talk, President Theresa speaks about the calamities and wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She remembers those who were slaughtered in the gas chambers at Auschwitz; the sight of people marching line by line, recorded in the films of the condemned there. She recalls people climbing into railcars, crowding into barracks, skeleton-like bodies and mass graves. Then she asks questions that no other president has asked: “Who are we? What is our mission?” Her talk

to the Senate opens a lot of issues for faculty members about where the university might be going under her leadership.

She is sharp and personal, but also gentle in speaking to the Senate. “How do we stop such horrors from happening again? Is anything held sacred at this university? What I propose is that with your help we start a new interdisciplinary program to study such questions.”

“Dangerous,” responds one faculty member, leaving the meeting with a colleague who agrees. “Questionable,” says another. “Chilling,” a third; “Worrisome,” a fourth.

Dr. Theresa appoints a faculty committee to start conferencing, challenging the members to think about “the mission of our university.” The committee discusses how academic disciplines relate to world crises: warfare, terrorism, and problems with eco-systems – everything that could imperil the lives of millions. “I will offer a semester leave to one member of each department who writes an essay on the subject of history from the perspective of his or her own discipline,” she promises. “I would like to have a statement for Alpha Omega on how the ‘subject of history’ connects with the crises of our time and our mission. I am hoping that the problems of war and terrorism will be addressed and that every department will get involved.”

So Dr. Theresa asks that each department select a representative to write an essay on *the subject of history* in consultation with staff for what she plans to organize as a Center for Dialogue. Together, all the essays will lead to a discussion in the Senate about the university's future. A chosen person will give a "brief" to the Senate on the subject of history.

Immediately, a buzz arises in the halls about where this action may lead. The department "chairs" are concerned that new criteria for hiring may result from the study, and that there could be further implications for administrative decision-making, even for the construction of new buildings. This does not sit well with a few of them. They call a meeting of "the concerned" to see if they can block President Theresa's plan. Distrustful, bubbling with fury, one red-faced chair warns this small gathering of colleagues to "act now to stop this nonsense." Yet, non-participation could mean trouble for them. Not all of them have tenure. The study will go ahead.

Dr. Theresa explains that this project will give faculty members a sense of what could be done to improve the core curriculum. The university has diverse departmental cultures but she believes certain modern themes govern its work. She wants to preserve the various cultures and,

simultaneously, to develop them together. Alpha Omega must formulate guidelines for a future in the face of impending world crises.

The pattern of the program is announced: the Director of the Center for Dialogue will solicit departmental essays in the coming year and organize panel discussions around them. In preparation, copies of essays will be circulated among the faculty.

When these plans have been clarified, Theresa Neumann retires to her office to meditate. Silently, she thinks about what lies ahead, “As I seal my lips, my heart weeps.” Dr. Theresa is, in fact, not only a highly trained intellectual but also a mystic with no idea of what will emerge from the Center for Dialogue and departmental discussions.

She talks like a saint and even looks like a saint, but a saint she is not. She is just a human being, depressed at times, yes, but faithful, dedicated, hopeful, and full of prayer for her faculty and institution. Tomorrow morning she will push for a program to study the purpose of Alpha Omega University.

Her skeptics hear the President ask, “How is something sacred hidden in history?” This alone is enough to worry them.

The skeptics include Dean Wally Gere in the law school who is uneasy when people talk about subjects they know nothing about. Then there

is psychology professor Dr. Richard Norton who studies rats but has no interest in history. Willard Ross in political science complains, “We have more important things to do.” Roger Hammerlock in the School of Management believes that creating a university-wide dialogue is preposterous: “Another organization on this campus! My God!” Sally Smith of the English Department asserts that literary theory has already dealt with the subject of history; you cannot find a single subject that explains history. In secret, they all agree to fight the process.

As on any university campus, there are sufficient prejudices, jealousies, and hostilities to plague any group that would band together for or against the president and her plan. School of Management professor Hammerlock does not like Ron Guildcrest in the Sociology Department because he condemns business corporations; Guildcrest in turn hates Hammerlock. Sally Smith of English satirizes physics and physicists; the latter point to their colleague Alan Sokoff who has spoofed literary theory. And there are professors, such as Dr. Jim Leach in the Biology Department, who do not speak to anybody and would prefer to maintain a rigorous silence.

The President works like a fox. She asks the skeptics to serve as an ad hoc group to advise her on the very process of her project. She moves into

enemy territory to see if she can thwart any attempt to stop it.

But the skeptics will not be deterred by her efforts. In an atmosphere of hostility mingled with fear, they meet to plot ways to sabotage Dr. Theresa's plans. Their scheme is to argue against all speakers when questions are allowed from the audience.

Dr. Theresa appoints Professor Shaikh Whitman, a poet, to be Director of the new Center for Dialogue. This appointment is a hint to certain professors as to where this project could be headed: Poetry! Not good!

The President has read some of Shaikh Whitman's poetry and thinks well of it. One poem, part of which she memorized, is cast in a deep spirit, totally unlike anything written by other faculty poets. "Love, flowing like blood beneath my skin, comes/ emptying me of my self, filling me / with the Beloved, till every organ and limb/ is seized, till only my name remains: Now the rest itself is Love." <sup>ii</sup>

"He will help," she thinks, hopefully.

Dr. Neumann speaks with Whitman privately to explain more of what she has in mind. "History is a record of particular events," she says. "This field of study is where we learn about what is true but also, I think, where

we learn what is universal. Could we find what is universal in a story based on concrete events? Are universals to be found in the particulars?"

Whitman is taken back. What is she talking about?

The President says that what constitutes a *universal* is an ancient problem. Do universals exist? "Frankly, I am not even sure what a universal is. But intuitively I feel we need to look for it. We might find that a concrete universal exists in the basic, driving concept of each discipline."

Whitman says, "What do you mean?"

"We are all in a quest for truth," the President says, "Truth is considered to be universal, at least by our ideal. Our scholars say that, for truth to be universal, it must be valid in all times and places. Now I see history as a record of particular events and so this would be where we start our search for truth that is valid in all times and places."

Whitman: "I think it is too much to ask of the faculty."

Neumann: "Let me put it this way: If history is a study of concrete events, could there be anything universal in these events? Might the search begin in the basic concept guiding Alpha disciplines? We live each day between what is universal and particular. Could there be a concrete universal?"<sup>iii</sup>

Whitman says, "A concrete universal? What are you talking about?"

Dr. Neumann says, “I know ‘relativists’ on our campus who deny the existence of universal truths. They reject the idea that there could be universal principles. They do not believe moral values or concepts exist that could be universal, claiming instead, ‘All truths are relative.’”

Whitman’s response comes lightning quick: “The statement you just quoted is a contradiction. It asserts something universal and true about everything. It is exactly what relativists oppose.”

Dr. Neumann replies, “ Exactly! But I am interested in contradictions, and I think our faculty can learn from them.”

Whitman: “I can see how your question is appropriate for philosophy but not for our project. Our faculty would not think about a question as grand as that.”

The President is also quick to reply. “They don’t have to think about it.”

Whitman retorts, “*I* can’t even think about it. I would say that a *universal* is entirely different from the *particular*. They don’t go together. What is *general* is very different from what is *concrete*, to me. Why would we want faculty to think about how such differences go together?”

“It is your task as a poet to put them together!” exclaims the President, startling Whitman. “And it is our task as a university. The subject

of history is about particular people who live through concrete events. Our faculty should be interested in what is universal in this subject. It makes perfect sense for our faculty to be involved in this problem.”

Slowly, Whitman’s resistance subsides as he begins to think about what the President has said. He is a little confused and cautious, but more curious now. He will begin the project and watch what happens.

He speaks with faculty members about a method for studying “the subject of history.” First, he says that professors should give “briefings” of their views on the key concept that defines their discipline to the Senate. “Longer papers can be written to substantiate their point in a scholarly fashion, to back up these short talks,” he suggests, adding, “We hope to publish your longer, documented papers. ”

After consulting again with Dr. Theresa, Whitman continues, “My plan is this: Members in each campus department will meet to talk about the subject of history from their own point of view. For example, law school faculty will talk among themselves about a basic concept linked to history and likewise biologists enter into dialogue among themselves. For lawyers the subject might be *law* and for biologists *life*. I have no fixed idea. A representative from each department will bring their position to the Senate. Students will join the discussion.”

President Neumann is exploring a new approach, uncertain about what will happen. She feels compelled to pray: “Please guide our faculty in learning about the purpose of this community, and help students learn about the mission of Alpha Omega.” She meditates, deep in her own heart: “In this world of violence and torture, how could we be drawn to a higher Source?” As she prays, it is as if she is in another, calmer world.

The President makes it clear that faculty participation in the new Center for Dialogue is voluntary. She wonders how many professors will get involved. She asks faculty to stay on the key concept of their own department; the integrity of each department will be respected. “The dialogue should be fun,” she says hopefully.

When she next speaks to the group of dissenters, her own words surprise her. “This study will be challenging,” she tells them, spontaneously, *“Be mindful of the binaries of life -- tenderness and terrorism, wonderment and war, the holy and the holocaust.”*

The skeptics are stunned. “Binaries? What is she talking about?” Still, a few professors are more than mystified. Sally Smith recognizes the term “binaries” from literary theory; “What if the president is on a plausible track after all?” she ponders. Willard Ross has stronger doubts about resistance

because he has begun to discover more about Dr. Neumann's intellectual background.

The Senate meets in its august chambers on January 27. Dr. Theresa opens the session with a statement about war and holocausts. She is mindful of Auschwitz, of how Poles were imprisoned first, in their own country, and died in the camp. Then Soviet prisoners of war, gypsies, and prisoners of other nationalities were also incarcerated. Finally in 1942, the camp became the site of this mass murder of European Jews. She says it is deeply disturbing that German universities were involved in the Nazi plan of Jewish extermination. "Place yourself there. From all that you have read and seen of that time and place, can you begin to imagine what it was like? Isn't it necessary -- for ourselves, for the planet -- that we consider all together the categories of thought in our departments? I say that we need new thought"

Collectively, the faculty wonders what she means: "New thought?"

She turns to greet the speakers in the front row, introducing Frank Habermas of philosophy. He will be the first to speak.

There are excellent professors in Frank's department. In their private meetings, the faculty in philosophy has fought to define the subject of history. Baruch Bergson argued for "Intuition" as the key, James Locke and David Kant for "Reason." Roger Whitehead argued for an organic

perspective on history, “a living fabric,” he said. George Schopenhauer called for the recognition of “Will” hidden in history. From their varied proposals, Frank Habermas has shaped a compromise. They enjoyed participating in a marvelous debate, the first time they have ever talked together about such matters.

Shoulders hunched, Frank shuffles to the podium. He carries some unknown burden, has always had a speech impediment; his own philosophy has focused on “communications.” Absorbed momentarily in her meditative mood, Dr. Theresa wonders whether sorrow has looted his heart, whether these sessions might throw it to the winds. “He could have a profound secret,” she reasons, “that his work needs to reveal.” But for now, she praises him for giving his time to this subject.

### **Department of Philosophy: Frank Habermas**

“Our department believes that the subject of history is human experience.<sup>iv</sup> Let me begin with a little history from relatively recent times.

“Enlightenment philosophers saw the State as a critical subject of history, ‘the rational instrument of progress toward freedom.’ Religious philosophers saw God as the subject of history. But today the Enlightenment has lost its appeal and religion no longer dominates philosophy. Thank God!  
*(Almost everyone laughs).*

“We call for a philosophy that begins from the ground up, our own experience. We propose that human experience -- as the subject of history -- rests between Western and Eastern traditions of philosophy, somewhere between Principle and Passion. Principle and Passion each have a universal component, but they must be translated into concrete experiences.

“Let me explain.

“Western historians have emphasized a type of history based on Principle, rational principles. We create a record of events based on facts. Facts are verifiable by our senses with consistent reasoning. Historians make a rational interpretation but they also know that history is not all rational. So, they also look at subjective records in biographies, state documents, and in-depth reports by people present at events. All these reports contribute to that chronology of events that fits rational principles.

“Now how do we get to the Eastern tradition? G. W. F. Hegel’s outlook on history helps to make the bridge to a tradition that holds ancient stories and myth to be central to their lives. Hegel is complex, but he distinguishes three types of history: original, reflective, and philosophical...”<sup>v</sup>

*Prof. Habermas goes on at length about these three types. In the audience, Willard Ross complains to a neighbor, "I have more important things to do."*

Hegel regarded history as a story of the progressive development of consciousness and Freedom. The philosophy of history, he said, is a "self-actualizing universal." For Hegel the work we do at Alpha Omega would be called a moment of the Universal that keeps developing greater content and depth. The Idea is where features of the Absolute become known as 'a self-relating, self-developing totality.'

*Sally Smith shudders at the mention of an Absolute. She has been through this sort of talk before and, a relativist, she already thinks she has heard enough. She would like to leave.*

"Absolute and Relative are terms that represent the mutual interdependence of things in all knowledge. *Absolute* refers to being independent, everlasting, not subject to qualification. *Relative* refers to something dependent on circumstances or a point-of-view. So, knowledge at Alpha Omega is developing between the Absolute and the Relative. A relative truth can contain some grain of the whole truth; hence, there is an absolute within the relative.

*Dr. Richard Norton who studies rats has had enough. For him, this is all abstract and will lead nowhere. Valerie Ross of the English Department clears her throat, noticeably. She has parodied the work of Hegel as too idealistic. "Treacherously romantic," she breathes to a colleague sitting*

*next to her. The colleague whispers back, "But there is still some truth in Hegel's philosophy." Valerie: "He's crazy!" Colleague: "Shhh...listen."*

“The writings of contemporary historians are relevant to the link we are seeking between the East (them) and the West (us). Hayden White's work Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe, for example, links Hegel's thought for us with the Eastern tradition. White describes a schema based on the "poetics of history" that includes four structures of “emplotment,” four argumentative models, and four ideological strategies. And he adds four modes of his own on a theory of tropes. White is bringing new thought to history.

“So some scholars argue that the subject of history is dependent upon ‘the deep structure of imagination,’ as White would say. The subject is beyond the surface of an historical text; there is a latent content that is poetic and linguistic in nature. The interpretation of an historical account based on facts may be more important than its linearity and rationality.

*Professor Habermas pauses for a drink of water. Dr. Theresa is wondering whether the audience is following this lecture. It is a good lecture but she knows that not all professors are familiar with these perspectives. “What are you thinking?” she whispers to the head of the Art Department. Norma Velasquez, sitting to her right.*

“Well, I am looking at that wood panel on the podium. It's all “linear,” like history. Look at that smooth finish on top and the oak wood underneath. The wood has a luscious texture and color. Now look at the

*circular rings that tell you its history. They are not linear. Maybe history is cyclical. I am more impressed by its beauty than by its history.”*

*President Neumann is surprised at her response. She sits up as Habermas continues.*

“Mainstream historians in the West believe in a narrative with sequential and factual events. Linearity, secularity, science, reason are what we call ‘themes’ that shape the subject of history today.”

*Sally Smith clears her throat. “Yes, these are the themes that define western history,” she mumbles to her neighbor. “But why we are here?” she then asks peevishly, tossing her red scarf over her shoulder. Her neighbor answers, “Wait, I think he has something more to say.”*

“The Eastern tradition, on the other hand, has been different, I mean in the way history was taught there for millennia, before Western science spread around the world with its secular and rational outlook.

“The West has its *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but we see them as legends, not as history. Eastern philosophers, however, respect legends as the subject of history. History in this case is cyclical. In ancient times, history was not constructed by reason but by intuition, revelation, and it was based on oral story. Human experience in this way of thinking is seen as a temporal reflection of a timeless realm.”

*Roger Hammerlock in Management snickers: “A timeless realm! Ha!”*

The professor goes on to describe the work of Ananda Coomaraswamy, an indologist, art historian and eminent scholar. “Coomaraswamy says that the mythic narrative is ‘of timeless and placeless validity,’ regardless of ‘the millennia that come between the dateable words.’ The myth is not a rational invention. It evolves. It reveals a ‘poetic universality,’ a history that can be told with equal authority from different points of view. Its ‘once upon a time’ means not ‘once’ alone but ‘once and for all.’”

*Sally is actually listening now. She loves poetry.*

“In this ‘eternal beginning’ of the story, according to the Eastern tradition, there is only the Supreme Identity of ‘That One’ (Brahman, Atman), without differentiating ‘being from nonbeing,’ light from darkness, or sky from earth. The ‘All’ exists in the present and is impounded in the first principle. The first person may even be spoken of as Person, Mountain, Tree, Dragon or endless Serpent.<sup>vi</sup>

“The Mahabharata is a great epic legend of India. It is a sacred, not secular, history of people that starts from the act of creation, goes through all destruction, and eventually reaches redemption. This epic begins with a history of nature, which is not a ‘history’ from the Western perspective. It is

a poetic story of more than a hundred thousand stanzas. A storyteller, Vyasa, tells it for the benefit of a young boy.”<sup>vii</sup>

*President Theresa scans the audience. She sees Valerie’s face brightening but on the other side of the room the Dean of the Management School has started to snooze. “Detached,” she thinks to herself.*

“Brian Swimme, a mathematical cosmologist, tells the history of the universe in a way that opens universal truths. He brings the story alive to students. He questions the ways that science and religion explain history and calls for a new telling of the story. He says that we disenchant the world by our scientific explanations. He writes with fact and feeling, imagination and symbolism, as in the legends of ancient India.”<sup>viii</sup>

“Since a central theme in the Mahabharata is about what to do in a war, let us look at this type of legendary history in light of our conferences on war and peace.

“In this story, the Divine One appears in a way that is normally invisible, not only to the human eye but even to the eyes of popular gods. (The Gita says: ‘I know all beings that have been, that are, and that shall be; but no one knows Me.’) The Divine One is manifest as an act of grace only to a few who serve with pure devotion. And in the Mahabarata, this revelation of the Divine is granted to Arjuna. The revelation is a climax in

this historic poem in which Arjuna has met the tests of Krishna and as a result is offered transcendent power of sight.<sup>ix</sup>

“I would call this *poetic history* not *sacred history*. People in this tradition say ‘neither pious rites nor performances, nor reason will bring any full understanding to history.’ The reader understands history only by feeling the Great Spirit manifesting in the story. We move through selfless acts and dedication to achieve the supreme power in life.”

*Frank Habermas turns now to his graduate assistant who stands a sign up in front of the audience. In bold letters it reads:*

<p><i>Believe nothing! Belief is a confession of ignorance! Therefore do not believe what even I tell you! All I can do is teach you to enlighten yourselves. Your first duty is to abolish your ignorance, and only you yourselves can do this.</i></p> <p>The Buddha</p>
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*A big laugh creases through the audience as Habermas pauses to read the sign.*

“Well, we conclude: Western history should continue in its fact-finding, its rational and linear tradition, but at some point the field must introduce the truth and power of myth. Myth and poetry give students a truth about a subject that cannot be told in events based solely on reason and fact. The key to history in the West is found in its *empirical narrative* and the key to history in the East is found in its *spiritual narrative*.

“There is a lot for students to learn in these different traditions. The epic Mahabharata teaches that the *energy of rage is sacred*, an attribute of the gods. All energy, it goes on to say, comes from a sacred source. It teaches that terror is *the structure of human salvation*. What does all this mean? The Hindu storyteller asks: ‘What (Who) created the Himalayas?’

“Our philosophy department views the subject of history as an experience that can be taught at the inter-section of these East/West traditions. Students must experience the tension of differences.

“I could put our argument a different way. How do we link intuition with reason? How do we make written and oral traditions complement one another? How do we make the linear and the cyclical story go together? How do we advance an empirical story and a spiritual story at the same time?

“The subject of history builds from what Hegel called ‘the infinite energy in this universe.’ We propose that it becomes real through human experience.<sup>x</sup> Historians are developing new methods beyond the typical linear narrative based on facts. They are talking about new ways to tell history by *evocation, expression, hermeneutics, and poetry*.<sup>xi</sup> I think that we are on our way to a new dialogue.

“Thanks for listening.”

*There is a great round of applause, some enthusiastic, some merely polite. President Theresa is pleased. She says to herself, "The sum total of our life is a breath spent in the company of the Beloved."*

*Next, she introduces the Chair of Political Science.*

## **Department of Political Science**

*Theresa Neumann knows the Chair of Political Science very well. After losing her son in a car accident, Karla S. Mill had gone into period of despair. Theresa has observed that since her recovery a St. Bernard dog accompanies her faithfully. The dog, named Max, is very intelligent, obedient on a look from her. This oversized companion now sits in the corner of the Senate room to wait.*

*Karla Mill is not a standard political scientist, and Dr. Theresa introduces her with personal fondness. With a quick meaningful look toward Max, Karla Mill begins her department's brief response to the assignment.*

“Political scientists say that the subject of history is power. This subject is told through ‘systems of governance.’ Such systems first developed in primitive families; they then evolved into clans, tribes, and, over time, with civilization, into empires, monarchies, and state democracies.

“While the ‘state’ or ‘government’ would be subjects for political scientists, we think ‘governing systems’ is a more fundamental basis of study. Today, for example, we include among these systems: for-profit and nonprofit corporations in business, religion, education, science, the professions, the arts, etc. Families, churches, street gangs, and terrorists have ‘governing systems,’ but how do we select them as a subject for history?”

“In the light of the President’s concern about fascism and terrorism in our time, we have chosen the views of two political scientists to illustrate the relevance of this current problem. We think that how history is taught is not bad, but neither is it good. It does not lead young people to understand all those governing systems. Our standard textbooks should lead students to realize the larger whole, their humanity if you will.

“Why do I say this?

“Each nation writes its own history in its own interest. This is the way Russians, Cubans, French, and Germans write their histories. Likewise, our historians write American history in *our* interest. We talk about American heroes to illustrate the core values of our nation, but I warn you that this practice is dangerous.

“Our political scientist colleagues – those we cite below -- are not part of the mainstream. But with our focus on war and peace, their histories should cast more light on the subject of history. These historians talk about power, but it is not the same kind of power talked about in public schools.

“Here is our first illustration.

### A Radical Image

“Political scientist Howard Zinn agrees that the history of every nation is distorted in favor of itself. A text on ‘American history’ in the public

schools often begins with the voyage of Christopher Columbus and leaves out the Native American story as well as evidence of all earlier voyages to these shores. It also leaves out the *terrorism* of Columbus. American students read about Columbus the hero, the adventurer. They do not realize in what ways this ‘European discovery’ destroyed the lives of the native people already here.

The historian Samuel Eliot Morison (*Christopher Columbus, Mariner*, 1954) condenses into *a single page* the enslavement and murder of Native Americans that took place on their own land. American historians hide the facts and fail to tell students about what was truly an invasion and the worldwide significance of these events. For the native peoples, Columbus’s arrival was no less than an invasion, a terrorist act.<sup>xii</sup>

“Columbus enslaved the Indians, yet the American story portrays him as a tragic hero who ‘master-minded’ and conquered nature, taming rebellious natives in the process. The idea that ‘Columbus discovered America’ when *the Indians were already here* is of course ridiculous. Zinn's point is that historians should tell that larger truth, not just celebrate and “prettify” facts. These histories have a profound effect on students.<sup>xiii</sup>

“We forget our own massacres – like the massacre of the Taino Indians on Hispaniola by conquistadores -- when we look at many of those

we have considered our heroes, These ‘discoverers’ murdered hundreds of thousands of people. What they did was a genocide accompanied by torture, mutilation, starvation and the overworking of natives in mines; they did this indeed, to the point where the indigenous population of Hispaniola, the island that now consists of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, was wiped out, all in a very short time.

The genocide is never linked in our history with the genocides of today. We would never celebrate Hitler – and we should not – and yet all Americans celebrate Columbus. We give his name to universities, cities, city squares, huge monuments, and streets all over America.”

*James Watts of the physics department has a worried look on his face. He had never heard such things in his American history classes. He wonders whether his colleague is unpatriotic and whether she is telling truth. But he keeps silent as Karla goes on.*

“Professor Zinn quotes George Orwell on the subject of history: ‘Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.’ I have not yet seen American history written in what I would consider the right way.

“Historians keep learning about ‘unrecorded massacres’ in American history. Zinn tells about how he discovered the Bay View Massacre of 1886, which took place right after the Haymarket Massacre in May of the same

year. At Bay View, steelworkers in this small mill town were on strike, marching toward the mill when they were fired upon. The police killed them all. Their action was taken to be legitimate at the time when big corporations held enormous sway over the government.<sup>xiv</sup>

“Political scientists in our department say that ‘power is the subject of history, but a government -- whether a state or nation – cannot be the only basis for chronicling the story. Governing systems tell the larger story.

*Prof. Mary Torbert who teaches hermeneutics squirms quietly in her seat. “Power is not just about systems of dominance,” she muses to herself. “It is written into the work of great leaders, such as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven in music, and Buddha and Jesus in religion. Beethoven influences our feelings and thought, and many people say that Jesus inspires their life everyday. For political scientists, the subject of history is power, but history is not always about dominance and politics. It could also be about the sharing of authority as people govern their lives sanely together.”<sup>xv</sup>*

Karla Mill pauses for a moment, rocking back on her feet. Max lets out a WOOF! For Max, the lecture is over; he is ready to go home. Karla frowns at him, however, and shakes her head. As he lowers his massive body back down, she continues.

“Our concern about terrorism and holocausts brings me to political scientist Gene Sharp. Dr. Sharp believes that *people* — not governments — are the subject of history. Put another way, people are the *source of power*. His view of history casts a different light on the subject of history, as well as on war, terrorism, and government.

“Sharp says that historians typically dramatize war as the source of change. History too often dramatizes the violent rather than nonviolent events. Nonviolent events change governments in ways more powerful than war, he argues. Nonviolent protestors break away from oppressive governments in ways not reported by historians. Students should read about their stories, but they do not at Alpha Omega.<sup>xvi</sup>

“Sharp says that the subject of history is the power of people — not the power of governments. People also shape history, not only the kings and presidents. Through civil protests, people find their own self-direction and self-rule. Witness the 20<sup>th</sup> century political movements of M.K. Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Danilo Dolci in Sicily, Lanzo del Vasto in France, Thich Nhat Hanh and Cao Ngoc Phong in Vietnam, Dom Helder Camara in Brazil, Maireed Corrigan in Northern Ireland, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta in the United States, Vinoba Bhave in India, Kagawa in Japan, and others around the world.<sup>xvii</sup>

“Because the subject of history is so often about emperors, kings, and presidents, students cannot see the story of ordinary folks. Professor Sharp documents over a thousand cases of nonviolence that come from the underclass and the middle class.”

Professor Mill now tells about how civil disobedience changed the course of history for Guatemala. At the time that Hitler created his regime in Germany, Jorge Ubico was a dictator and Hitler was his hero.

“The story of Jorge Ubico begins in late May 1944 when forty-five lawyers petitioned for the removal of a judge who tried political opponents of the regime in court. The judge was under Ubico’s influence, and a newspaper dared to publish the petition of those lawyers who wanted him removed. Soon, people took steps toward a courageous resistance. More and more people came to oppose the government.

“On the day before a teachers’ parade was scheduled to pay tribute to the dictator Ubico, two hundred teachers risked petitioning for a wage increase. Drafters of the petition were arrested and charged with conspiracy. A few teachers who boycotted the parade were dismissed from their jobs. On June 20, students petitioned for university autonomy and the rehiring of the discharged teachers, threatening to strike. Ubico then declared a state of emergency and citizen resistance expanded.

“On June 23, the schoolteachers went on strike. The public was concerned and there was more social unrest. Ubico said boastfully that

if 300 respected citizens were to ask him to resign he would do so. On June 24, a petition carrying the signatures of 311 respected citizens, who were risking their lives in the process, was delivered to him.

“The same day students, emphasizing nonviolence, marched past the U.S. embassy in protest of American support for Ubico. That night, police beat and arrested hundreds of people at a neighborhood religious celebration. The next day the foreign minister summoned the two men who had delivered the petition to Ubico. Simultaneously, soldiers and armed police faced a demonstration before the National Palace. That afternoon women dressed in deep mourning prayed for an end to the brutalities. They formed an impressive silent procession in the city. Cavalry fired into the crowd. An unknown number were injured and one woman was killed. That was a dramatic moment.

“The people in Guatemala City responded to her ‘sacrifice’ with a silent paralysis. The whole economy was shutdown. Workers went on strike. Businesses closed. It looked as though the nation would never go back to work and would suffer a major collapse. At the request of Ubico, the diplomatic corps arranged a meeting between the opposition and the government. Ubico was told face-to-face that his rule was too oppressive. He replied: "As long as I am president, I will

never permit a free press, nor free association, because the people of Guatemala are not ready for democracy and need a strong hand."

But in the face of mounting pressures and more citizen resistance, on July 1 Ubico suddenly withdrew in favor of a triumvirate of generals. Still, that was not enough to make for a peaceful change. Political foment persisted because people felt that no basic change in the government had really been made. Labor and political organizations organized more resistance, and exiles returned to join the protest. In October came another general strike and then a student strike. People engaged in continuous protest all the while uncertain about their fate. Finally, Ubico fled the country for Mexico. Eventually, a free election was organized successfully.<sup>xviii</sup>

"Sharp argues that historians do not understand the subject of history. Mahatma Gandhi was fighting against the so-called 'forces of history' that are taught and believed in public schools. Sharp, who worked with Gandhi, argues that students should read works about the 'principled' nonviolence of leaders like Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, and the 'pragmatic' nonviolence of people who were not pacifists. People have *practiced nonviolent action for thousands of years.*<sup>xix</sup>

*Some professors are looking distracted. Professor Joan Bavaria is focused on Karla's sleek black pants suit, probably bought at a fashionable boutique like Lisa Rene, Donna Vinci, or DVC Exclusive, she decides.*

Karla Mills concludes, saying that while faculty members in her department contend that “power” is the subject of history, the concept is a complex one. “It does not only mean *dominance* and control over people. It also means the ‘capacity of people to change history.’ It could also mean ‘sharing authority,’ not domination by one group over another. We conclude that the subject of history is the way new governing systems develop in society. Thank you for listening.”

*General applause breaks out. Bravo! Karla Mill glances again at Max, who jumps up and walks over to greet her. On her way to the podium, President Theresa stops to pat the massive creature, marveling as she does at the power in his muscles. “He could tear you apart,” she says to Karla. “This dog is nonviolent because you taught him to be.” The Cambodian dictator Pol Pot flashes into her mind: “How can we teach history so that students know how to live peacefully in society, and not destroy each other?” she ponders, turning to the sociologist.*

### Department of Sociology

*President Theresa knows that professors in the sociology department are the particular bane of the management faculty and economists on campus. They are scholar activists who speak their mind. The chair of the Department, Thorstein Weber, an old man who grew up in an immigrant farming community in Wisconsin, did not learn English until his teens. He studied economics and sociology but rejected the mainstream thought in those disciplines. He did graduate work at Johns Hopkins University and later at Yale repudiating the views of his teachers at both institutions. Weber's rough manners and unkempt appearance make him unattractive to most colleagues. During his early years as an academic, he had been ejected*

*from several universities and was forced to live off his family, but President Neumann likes his crankiness. She looks forward to his talk and proudly introduces him. He bows lightly and begins:*

“The subject of history is *society*. It is equally *sociality* upon which society is based. A society is not a nation. Nor is it a government. Indeed, a history that focuses only on nations, governments and politics will fool you.

“In our field, *society* is the macro-subject and *sociality* is the micro-subject. A society is a group of human beings that can be distinguished from other groups by their mutual interests, typical relationships, shared institutions and common culture. It is more than a national regime and its administration. Social historians say the subject in history includes areas of economic history, legal history and the analysis of all aspects of society that include a class structure and social norms, customs, fads, folkways, and mores.

“Social history is about human organization, institutions, and events that occur in all orders of society. It is not just about the political economy but also equally about religion, the family, arts, sciences, professions, and more. Social historians look at labor history and the history of classes, not just management history, economic history, or corporate history. They look at gender, class, and race as part of the history of humanity.

“We can illustrate what is meant by social history by referring to President Neumann’s concern about authoritarian regimes and catastrophes that go with them. I can begin with the case of Nazi Germany, as its story would take into account all segments of society.

“There are thousands of books, articles and films on this subject, so in my short time, I intend to be brief and illustrative.

“Historians often ask: 1) How could a modern state carry out the systematic murder of a single group of people on their own soil? 2) How could the world stand by without halting such destruction? The answers to these questions go beyond the government.<sup>xx</sup>

“First, we should see how a group of people becomes visible in history. Social visibility is necessary before any attempt at genocide can take place. In this case, the identification of Jews and the question of anti-Semitism had been around for a long time before Hitler. Most of the prejudice against Jews had been religious in nature, based on the ideas of those in power. Judaism had always been the minority religion in Christian Europe and much of the Islamic world. Jews became the targets of religiously motivated violence and persecution from Christian -- and to some extent from Islamic -- rulers. So they were visible to people as a minority, and different from the majority, for a long time before Hitler.

“Some historians subscribe to ‘the Great Leader theory’ to explain the Holocaust. They assume that the impact of "Great leaders" -- by their personal charisma or by some genius -- is responsible for what happens in human events. An historian who follows the Great Leader theory would study the Second World War by focusing on personalities such as Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Stalin. All major events would be tied to their individual decisions and orders. A social historian would take powerful leaders into account when trying to determine the reasons for the Holocaust. But these historians would look equally at what happened all the way from the top to the bottom of society.<sup>xxi</sup>

“At the very top of the Nazi government we find Adolf Hitler and an elite group of German leaders. Lucy Dawidowicz argues that the annihilation of the Jews was central to Hitler’s own thoughts and plans starting from 1919. Her ideas belong to this Great Leader tradition, in this instance called the ‘intentionalist school’ of Holocaust historiography. She documents how World War II was a direct result of his personal anti-Semitism. Such work is important and vital to read but not sufficient.<sup>xxii</sup>

“We would look also at the bottom of the class structure in Germany at the time where researchers find citizens who were complacent and

compliant. This is not unusual, as we know from incidents in our own country. Christopher Browning tells how ordinary men in this case became mass murderers. They suddenly began shooting thousands of people in occupied Poland, where as reservists they served as members of the German Order Police. Browning has convincing evidence that German draftees who perpetrated much of the Holocaust were average men, as he puts it, pushed and twisted by institutional forces. He examines every contributing personal factor -- cowardice, ideological indoctrination, loyalty to the battalion, and reluctance to force the others to bear more than their share of what each viewed as an excruciating duty. Most of the killers he interviewed could not explain how they had sunk so quickly into savagery.<sup>xxiii</sup>

“How about what we would call ‘good’ citizens? Daniel Jonah Goldhagen has studied how German citizens made the Holocaust possible. Ordinary Germans included those who staffed and oversaw the concentration camps, slave labor camps, genocidal army units, police battalions, ghettos, and death marches. These were average German men and women: merchants, civil servants, academics, farmers, students, managers, and skilled and unskilled workers.<sup>xxiv</sup> Robert Gellately, in turn, studied the Nazi secret police. From Gestapo case files, he shows that the key factor in the enforcement of Nazi racial policy -- designed to isolate Jews -- was the

willingness of German citizens to provide the authorities with information about suspected criminality.<sup>xxv</sup>

“What about the basic institutions of society? Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel studied German church history. They looked at the teachings and actions of prominent church leaders and theologians and found Christian support from the rise of the Nazi party to the post-World War II period. In their work, Erickson and Heschel include different ecclesial responses -- from occasional resistance to passionate and enthusiastic leadership. But in general, Christians supported Hitler and his policies. Put bluntly, the powerful moral authority of the Christian leaders sanctioned death-dealing Nazi propaganda.<sup>xxvi</sup>

“There was some resistance among Christians -- like that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer -- but studies show a close relationship between Nazism and German Christian churches along with an ‘occasional resistance.’ Steigmann-Gall, in turn, studied how Christians collaborated within the Nazi party. His study, based on party pamphlets and writings of key members, shows that as early as 1920 the party was already declaring it represented the principles of Christianity. The Nazi elite believed that their own party doctrine and Christianity shared common themes such as ‘the opposition of

good against evil' and 'God against the devil' and the struggle for national salvation from the Jews and Marxists.<sup>xxvii</sup>

“Who, we might ask, are the evil groups today?

“What about the mass media in Germany and abroad? They played big role in advancing the Nazi program. Robert Herzstein shows the power of propaganda and the manipulation of mass media, focusing on the role of the Nazi Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels is reported to have said, ‘The rank and file are usually more primitive than we imagine. Propaganda must therefore always be essentially simple and repetitious.’ German media had a powerful effect on citizens and their decisions.<sup>xxviii</sup>

“What about the role of the U.S. media at that time? Deborah Lipstadt shows how one of every three Americans polled in 1943 dismissed as propaganda the reports of atrocities against European Jews. Major newspapers viewed with skepticism all reports given by Auschwitz escapees in 1944. The American news media ignored the Nazi persecution of European Jewry.<sup>xxix</sup>

“Richard Plant describes how people considered social deviants, such as homosexuals, were also targets of this mass destruction. The Nazis condemned homosexuals as “aberrant,” and soon after Hitler came to power in 1933, Storm Troopers raided nightclubs and other places where

homosexuals met. About 10,000 people were imprisoned as homosexuals, and many of them perished in concentration camps. In the camps, homosexual had to wear uniforms that bore a pink triangular badge as an identifying mark.<sup>xxx</sup>

*President Neumann shifts uneasily in her seat, not certain what lies ahead in this frank talk. She recalls a saying by the Sufi poet Rumi: "How long can I hide the flames, wanting to rise out of this fire, how long can one suffer the pain of hatred of another human, a friend behaving like an enemy."<sup>xxx</sup>*

“What about the people who fought against Nazi propaganda?”

Nechama Tec looked for people who acted to save Jews. Christian Poles had indeed saved the author herself from certain death. Tec studied the "righteous Christians," as they were called, people who risked their own lives to save those the authorities condemned. Tec interviewed Jewish survivors and Polish rescuers searching for a sociological pattern, the characteristics these people had in common. She explains how gender, class, religion, and other social factors played a role.<sup>xxxii</sup>

“What about business? What about the market and corporate leaders?”

Social historians look at the degree to which the structure of capitalism was a harbinger of this tragedy. The market collapsed in the Great Depression right at the time Hitler's rise to power. It was a financial crisis of major proportions. Did this economic collapse cause the Holocaust in Germany?

The answer is complex, but the crisis appears to have been a significant factor.

*The back of economics professor Gary Posner stiffens. "Sociologists are so arrogant!" he fumes. "They should become a science and stop airing their ideologies in public." In his fury, he bites his lower lip, has to daub it with a handkerchief.*

“In 1981, a Princeton University historian, David Abraham, published the book The Collapse of the Weimar Republic in which he sought to demonstrate a connection between "organized capitalism" and the rise of the Nazi party during the Great Depression.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Critics found errors in a few technical details, but nothing to fully discredit the substance of his findings or the integrity of his research. Many German historians sided with Abraham's account. On the other hand, Yale historian Henry Turner “disproved” the idea that, before 1933, German industry supported Hitler to any great extent.<sup>xxxiv</sup> But it is clear that German industrialists were in trouble during the Great Depression and did not help prevent the breakdown of the Weimar democracy when the Nazis' came to power in the early 1930s.

“It is not hard to see that when people in a nation feel like they are in a crisis for survival, they become more united. When citizens in society are threatened, they “circle the wagons” so to speak. They emphasize patriotism

and look for protection through their government. They build a “national community.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

“A major crisis can also cause big corporations to work closely with government. It is clear that business and the German government grew closer to Hitler as he rose to power. German industrialists in the Thirties and Forties were opportunists, eager for profits. They participated in heinous endeavors: securing control of Jewish-owned companies, producing war *matériel* for the *Wehrmacht*, exploiting forced laborers, and more. The executives of I.G. Farben worked people to death in Auschwitz.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

“New technologies are critical to understanding what happens in a national catastrophe. In the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., for example, one can see a Hollerith machine, a primitive calculating engine and precursor of the modern computer, one of the mechanisms by which the Nazis were able to track Jewish populations and accumulate information regarding the ‘success’ of the Genocide.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The role of industrial corporations in the research and development of Zyklon B Gas, and their complicity in the formation of forced labor sites, is also well known.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

“In his book *Death By Design: Science, Technology, and Engineering in Nazi Germany*, through a selection of primary and secondary sources, Eric

Katz examined the ways in which scientists, architects, medical professionals, businessmen, and engineers participated in the planning and operation of the concentration and extermination camps.<sup>xxxix</sup>

In sum, social historians are interested in the sequence of objective events, the causal role of institutions, and the personal experiences of people involved in the event. They want to know everything they can about significant events, both from an objective standpoint and from the subjective experience of people. They look at the actual feelings expressed in the words of Nazi leaders and common soldiers, SS doctors and European collaborators. Their words tell us how and why everyone involved participated in mass murder.<sup>xi</sup>

“Put another way, the subject of society takes into account the comprehensive networks of people who shape their destiny by consensus. Social historians study the structure of common life among all peoples and classes, workers, women, and ethnic groups.<sup>xli</sup>

“The subject of history cannot be encompassed by any philosophy enquiry, nor by government or the economy. A debate could be held on campus on definitions of the subject from varying perspectives: *political, economic, social, and cultural*.

*Sitting a row ahead and at an angle to her, economist Gary Posner leans back and catches Karla Mill's eye. Although they generally oppose*

*one another on issues of public policy, they share a common hatred for Weber. At the moment, he is insulting both their disciplines and now there is a moment of solidarity between them. They smile conspiratorially. Later they will challenge him.*

“We need to start by considering how Germany had become downgraded as a government and shamed as a nation after World War I. Any threat to survival, as we said, brings a search for a national community. Business corporations collude with the state to avoid collapse. This happened in Germany prior to World War II. But from there, we also need to explain how every aspect of human society contributed to the Nazi triumph and disaster. In sum, citizens in Germany could not distinguish between *society* and their *government*. And this was the problem. *Society* should be the subject of history.

“Now I see that it is late in the hour. I can speak more on this question in our discussion period. Thank you for your attention.”

There is applause which President Neumann cuts short, holding up her hand. “Thanks to Thorstein, Karla, and Frank. Now we want to open up a discussion about all these statements. Professor Whitman will ask for questions and act as monitor.”

Whitman steps up to the podium: “Indeed, these have all been fine statements on the subject of history. Are there questions?”

“Yes,” Sally Smith speaks up quickly. “Professor Karla Mill tells us about a nonviolent revolution in Guatemala. This was a single event. Tell us, Prof. Mill, do you see ‘nonviolent revolution’ effecting any significant change in the 21st century? Personally, I don’t think so.”

Prof. Mill: “Yes, I do see nonviolent movements taking place in this century. The Guatemala story is not just a single historical event. Professors of history avoid telling students about the instances of nonviolent action that have occurred over the course of centuries. If there were time, I could give you many illustrations of this type of civil action that are not included in our texts. Nonviolent action has been an effective mode to fight dictatorships and instrumental in overcoming oppression. Hundreds of cases show the power of nonviolent movements but we do not teach our students about them.

“If American citizens accept wars based on WMDs and stand by to watch, complacent and compliant, I believe we will destroy humankind and life on earth.”

Prof. Ross: “How could you stop dictators like Hitler?”

Prof. Mill: “In Nazi Germany, German women married to Jews protested in the streets, risking their lives to get back their husbands. And they were successful. In Norway 14, 000 teachers stopped Hitler from

placing Nazi textbooks in their schools. Resistance is a matter of collective action. No government can act without broad citizen support. I can also cite recent examples that you are familiar with. We believed at one time that we had to fight a violent war against communism, but in the Soviet Union, we saw communism collapse without a war. In Czechoslovakia, the Velvet Revolution began when 20 peaceful protestors assembled in Prague and their tiny number swelled to 200,000, and then to an estimated half-million followed by a two-hour strike involving all citizens in the country. And there are so many other events that are not even recorded as “significant” by historians. I believe historians are drawn to violence and war, just like newspaper reporters...” Interrupting her, Professor Whitman, asks for more questions.

Dean Wally Gere: “My question is for Frank Habermas. Professor, how dare you propose that a myth could have an academic status equal to fact-based history! I strongly disagree with your idea of ‘myth as history.’”

Prof. Habermas: “People always live inside a myth. Every epoch has its myth. All facts are shaped by the epochal myth in which people live.”

Dean Gere: “That’s crazy! History is different from myth.”

Prof. Habermas: “A myth is a deep attitude that people develop about themselves and the world at large. It carries timeless truths about humanity

and fabrications at the same time. It is both a good and a bad thing.

“Our popular history is secular and carries its own truth. In ancient times, sacred history was about the journey of the soul. Secular history will never tell you about the Soul. For the secular historian, the idea of a Soul is forbidden, not sufficiently definitive or empirical. But students should hear all the voices of history. Secular history for you is sacrosanct. But we believe that secular history has no metaphysical foundation, that it is part of our modern myth.”

*The words of Rumi again flash through President Theresa’s mind: “Reason says, I will beguile him with the tongue; Love says, Be silent. I will beguile him with the soul.”*

Dean Gere: “What are you talking about? Are you suggesting that *sacred* history should be taught in the history department? I think what you’re saying is crazy. I wouldn’t begin to take it seriously.”

Prof. Habermas: “Students need to understand the power of myth and the truth it expresses, as well as its fabrication. I am saying that we live in a tension between histories, one based on fact and empiricism, the other on myth and symbolism. And fact-based, secular history is not exempt from fabrication. Professor Mills gave us an example of how it creeps into our national history. A core course on myths in history for students would help balance our secular stories.”

*Professor Habermas notices the President's sudden look of concern.*

“Our core curriculum should teach students about a larger scope of truth,” he clarifies. “We should honor all voices in this academy.”

“We have time for one further brief question.” Professor Whitman glances around. ?”

Dr. Richard Norton: “Professor Weber assumes that ‘society’ should be the subject of history but I argue that every department is equal in its claim on the subject of history. *(to Weber)* Would you answer?”

Dr. Weber: “The term ‘society’ explains that everybody is independent and interdependent at the same time. I agree with Professor Habermas. Myths are part of our culture. They exist alongside what we call the “facts of history” and represent the subjective side of society. Society develops through its own agency as well as its myths throughout history.”

“I apologize. Our time is up,” Prof. Whitman interrupts once more. “We have many more departments to report on this subject. I am not certain how this discussion will influence our core curriculum. But we will go forward in the next months with statements from the members of other departments -- English, the sciences, the arts, and the professions.”

President Neumann stands up: “We are a group of teachers debating, thinking, and working together. We will look later at our core curriculum,

but in the meantime I hope we can learn from each other and discover more about what we teach as a whole at Alpha Omega.

“This session has already made me curious about some points. We are all engaged in a quest for truth. This search is our ideal, a common goal and interest, drawing us together. A primary question I posed at the beginning is this: if history is a record of concrete events, how could anything universal be found in a story of concrete events?

“After listening to our esteemed colleagues, let me ask. Could we say with our faculty members in philosophy that “experience” is universal? Could we know anything in this world except through human experience? And could we agree with our friends in political science that ‘power’ is universal? Is there anything in history that does not express some sort of power? And with our sociologists that “sociality” is universal? Does anything happen in human history without a social relationship?

“Well, for further debate on these questions, we look forward to later presentations. We will see what our colleagues in other departments say. Thank you for attending. See you next week.”

The very next day, the group of skeptics meets to discuss what transpired. Some are furious about the president’s new enterprise. Others say it is upsetting. Some say it is a bore; some even argue that it has merit.

But they all agree to keep a close watch on what happens in the following months.

Already President Neumann is thinking prayerfully about what she has initiated. “There is no department of religious studies at this state university, but shouldn’t religion be part of the subject of history? How is the sacred found in the secular? Could the subject of history be sacred? And more fundamentally, what *is* sacred?” she asks herself. “Does it manifest as deep empathy for each person? Is it a sign of the broadest regard for humankind? Could this idea of the sacred be a part of secular history?”<sup>xlii</sup>

In her meditative mood, she suddenly speaks out loud: “All of us, even the sleepers, are only shadows of some high presence. Moons, galaxies and worlds have drunk from this cup but the cupbearer is nowhere to be seen!”

Then she immediately starts preparing for the next meeting.

*This story will be interpreted in the Conclusion and continue online as other departments speak about their subject at [www2.bc.edu/~bruyn](http://www2.bc.edu/~bruyn).*

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<sup>i</sup> “...nun in Spain.” Saint Theresa de Avila came from a well-to-do noble family before she entered the Carmelite order. She broke with tradition and founded a house of reformed Carmelites living in strict observance of the Carmelite rule. In 1562, she founded the Convent of St. Joseph in Ávila, and she also founded convents of friars, having as her collaborator another great mystic, St. John of the Cross.

<sup>ii</sup> “Love, flowing like blood” is adapted from Shaikh Abil-Kheir, The Drunken Universe: An Anthology of Persian Sufi Poetry, Translated by Peter Lamborn Wilson (NY: Omega Publications, 1999)

<sup>iii</sup> “... universal and particular.” President Neumann had once read that, for the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, the “concept” is the concrete universal. It is the principle of life within all beings, which drives everyone subjectively, she concluded. Could the concrete universal be the principle of life within? She read that Hegel saw the concrete universal developing through concepts of the particular. But Hegel’s Concept was not easy to understand, and so she starts this conversation at Alpha Omega departments around *their* basic concepts. Later as this story continues online, the President will ask philosophers AOU to answer more questions about what Hegel means by his philosophy.

<sup>iv</sup> “...human experience.” Like Hegel, Frank Habermas thinks that “experience” is part of a “dialectical movement.” The dialectical movement proceeds from what Hegel calls “in itself” to “for itself,” and then “in and for itself.” Prof. Habermas thinks that for Hegel human experience is evolving through an absolute spirit, gaining a wider and deeper experience of “self.” This absolute spirit is realized slowly through development of the

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“concept.” But Frank Habermas is not all convinced about Hegel. He is intrigued by Hegelian thought, but not fully persuaded by it. For Hegel, philosophical history means the “thoughtful consideration” of the subject of history and all its meaning. To establish Hegel’s “for itself” means externalizing each phase of reality through a dialectical process. The “in and for itself,” then achieves a concrete universal, which is the mystery of Being, the dialectical movement of self.

<sup>v</sup> “...and philosophical.” Frank Habermas’s description continues, with more of Hegel’s picture of history. Original history, says Hegel, can be seen in the works of Herodotus and Thucydides, whose writings are descriptions of deeds, events, and conditions of society that “they had before their eyes, and whose spirit they shared.” Reflective history, Hegel says is of various types. One type aims to gain a view of the entire history of a people or country, or of the world -- in short, what might be called “universal history.” The problem of universal history is that it must forgo individual representations and “foreshorten its pictures by abstractions.” A second type is pragmatic history, more didactic and moral, designed to present a lesson. A third type is critical history, an investigation of the truth and credibility of historical narratives. A fourth type provides a general yet limited viewpoint on a special topic, such as the history of art, of law, of religion. It provides a transition to the philosophical history of the world, the history that most interested Hegel.

<sup>vi</sup>. “...Dragon or endless Serpent.” Alpha Omega’s philosopher is saying that the mythic narrative of the East is not unlike the mythic narrative of the Middle East: “In the beginning God created’ and at the same time ‘Through him all things were made,’ regardless of the millennia.” See Ananda K.

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Coomaraswamy, Hinduism and Buddhism (New York: Wisdom Library, n.d.), p. 6.

<sup>vii</sup>. “...for the benefit of a young boy.” The Puranas are a collection of stories. The sacred literature of India suggests that “history” is about an unfolding spiritual universe. The Four Vedas (which date from about 1000 B.C.) represent the period of early kinship with nature. The Rig Veda, the most important, is a collection of lyrical prayers and praises addressed to the powers of nature. The Brahmanas (about 800 to 600 B.C.) represent priestly Hinduism. They develop the idea that, by performing the proper rituals of sacrifice and prayer, people can force the powers they fear to help them. The Upanishads (about 600 to 300 B.C.) express a philosophy of the nature of the universe, and conclude that only the unchanging and permanent Brahman is real. The Laws of Manu (about 250 B.C.) represent legalistic Hinduism, laying down commandments and prohibitions for daily living. The Bhagavad Gita (about A.D. 1) represents devotional Hinduism. It interprets religion primarily in terms of faith and is Hinduism’s most esteemed book. The Epics and Puranas (about 200 B.C. to A.D. 250) represent popular Hinduism. They present aspects of religious life in common form.

<sup>viii</sup> “...ancient India.” Brian Swimme, The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story (NY: Orbis Books, 1996)

<sup>ix</sup>. “...transcendent power of sight.” The Bhagavad Gita, trans. Franklin Edgerton (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1944), p. 155.

<sup>8</sup>. “...infinite energy of the universe.” Hegel never anticipated what modern biologists would call natural history but for him, the subject that “tarries with the object and looks its ‘otherness’ in the face will in the end grasp its

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own pure concept and complete the circle that begins and ends with the subject. G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 488.

<sup>xi</sup> “...and poetry.” See these methods and more in Brian Fay and Philip Pomper, (eds.) History and Theory, Contemporary Readings (Blackwell Publishers, 1998)

<sup>xii</sup> “...an invasion, a terrorist act.” Zinn speaks of the extremely barbaric treatment of the Indians and their eventual mass suicides. Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980). pp. 8, 10

<sup>xiii</sup> . ... profound effect on students.” Ibid. p. 570. As the year 1992 approached, the U.S. Congress formally committed to a celebration of Columbus's first voyage by establishing a Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission. This provoked anger among environmentalists and leaders in the fight for the rights of Native Americans, who challenged the idea of celebrating the voyages without admitting to the whole story. They argued that “we should deplore what happened and repent for past crimes against America's native inhabitants” and against the fauna and flora that existed in America in 1492. Nevertheless, the problems inherent in the European myth -- the myth that underwrote expansion through the control of nature as well as the conquest of people -- were not considered in Congress's plans for the celebration. "No other single man or event has ever had such enormous consequences. For that alone, public commemoration of the approaching quincentenary seems entirely appropriate." William H. McNeil (professor of history emeritus at the

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University of Chicago), "Here's two cheers for Columbus," The Boston Globe, October 13, 1991, pp.77, 79.

<sup>xiv</sup> “. . . sway over the government.” Howard Zinn, The Future of History, (Monroe, MA.: Common Courage Press,1999), pp. 13, 126 ff.

<sup>xv</sup> . “...sharing of authority as people govern their lives together.” Robert McIver, Community (New York: Rinehart, 1923.)

<sup>xvi</sup> . “...about their stories, but they do not.” Gene Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).

<sup>xvii</sup> “. . .and others around the world “ Severyn T. Bruyn and Paula M. Rayman, Nonviolent Action and Social Change (eds.) (NY: Irvington Publishers, 1979.)

<sup>xviii</sup> . “...a free election was organized successfully.” This is a brief summary of Sharp's long story, documented and analyzed. Op. cit. Gene Sharp, pp. 91-92. In the same year, 1944, a similar nonviolent civilian defense uprising took place in El Salvador, that overthrew the dictator General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez. Other sources, bibliographies, and reports about recent research on nonviolence can be obtained from the Albert Einstein Institution, 1430 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA. 02138.

<sup>xix</sup> . . .for thousands of years.” Sharp documents this history but also tells the following story. The historian J. B. Kripalani, who became one of Gandhi's closest co-workers, said that the first time he heard Gandhi talk about nonviolence, he told Gandhi point-blank: "You may know all about the Bible or the Bhagavad Gita, but you know nothing at all about history. Never has a nation been able to free itself without violence." Gandhi remonstrated, "*You* know nothing about history. The first thing you have to learn about history is that because something has not taken place in the past,

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that does not mean it cannot take place in the future." Eknath Easwaran, Gandhi the Man (Petaluma, Calif.: Nilgiri Press, 1972), p. 49.

<sup>xx</sup> "...beyond the government." To begin to answer these questions, see Yehuda Bauer, A History of the Holocaust. (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982). This is a comprehensive historical account including material on Jewish resistance and non-Jewish rescue attempts. Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984). 3 vols. Michael R. Marrus, The Holocaust in History. (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1987).

<sup>xxi</sup> "...bottom of society." Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck (eds.) The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined, (Indiana University Press, 2002). There are 55 prominent contributors to this work. It grew out of a conference of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Research Institute: historians, theologians, literary scholars, political scientists, sociologists, and psychologists.

<sup>xxii</sup> "... but not sufficient." Lucy Dawidowicz, The War Against the Jews 1933-1945. (New York: Bantam, 1986).

<sup>xxiii</sup> "...into savagery." Christopher Browning, Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland (New York: Harper Collins, 1992.) Browning draws on the judicial interrogations of 210 men who provided testimony in the 1960s regarding their participation in the massacres and roundups of Jews in 1942 and 1943.

<sup>xxiv</sup> "... and unskilled workers." Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (NY: Vintage, 1997).

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<sup>xxv</sup> “...suspected criminality.” Robert Gellately, The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>xxvi</sup> “...Nazi propaganda.” Robert P. Ericksen, Susannah Heschel, (eds.) Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1999).

<sup>xxvii</sup> “... Jews and Marxists.” Richard Steigmann-Gall, The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Steigmann-Gall examines the leaders of the Nazi party and shows how many of them contributed to the view of an intimate relationship between Nazism and Christianity. He explores how the Nazis identified the Jews with the Devil and believed that God would liberate them from this evil.

<sup>xxviii</sup> “...and their decisions.” Robert Herzstein, The War that Hitler Won: Goebbels and the Nazi Media Campaign. (New York: Paragon House, 1978).

<sup>xxix</sup> “... of European Jewry.” Deborah Lipstadt, Beyond Belief: The American Press & the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945. (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

<sup>xxx</sup> “...an identifying mark.” Richard Plant, The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 1986). Plant examines the ideological motivations for the Nazi persecution of homosexuals and the history of the implementation of Nazi policies.

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<sup>xxx</sup> “...*a friend behaving like an enemy*. A. J. Arberry, trans. "Mystical Poems of Rumi 2" (The University of Chicago Press, 1991). Rumi's poetry is a lengthy epic of religious mysticism, including the Hathnavi, more than three thousand lyrics and odes, many spoken in a state of trance. Nader Khalili, trans. Rumi, (Harper & Row, 1979).

<sup>xxxii</sup> “...played a role.” Nechama Tec, When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> “...the Great Depression.” David Abraham, The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>xxxiv</sup> “...to any great extent.” Henry A. Turner, German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler (Oxford: University Press, 1985).

<sup>xxxv</sup> “...national community.” See Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (Owl Books, 1994).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> “...death in Auschwitz.” Peter Hayes, Industry and Ideology: IG Farben in the Nazi Era (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For these references, my thanks to S. Jonathan Wiesen, Dimensions: A Journal of Holocaust Studies, published by the Anti-Defamation League's Braun Holocaust Institute, “German Industry and the Third Reich: Fifty Years of Forgetting and Remembering.””

<sup>xxxvii</sup> “...of the Genocide.” On Hollerith and his machine, see: Geoffrey D. Austrian, Herman Hollerith: Forgotten Giant of Information Processing (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

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<sup>xxxviii</sup> “...is also well known.” See: Joseph Borkin, The Crime and Punishment of I.G. Farben (New York: Free Press, 1978) and Peter Hayes, Industry and Ideology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>xxxix</sup> “...and extermination camps.” Eric Katz, Death By Design : Science, Technology, and Engineering in Nazi Germany (Longman, 2005)

<sup>xi</sup> . “...in mass murder.” Steve Hochstadt, Sources of the Holocaust (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004). Jewish and non-Jewish victims speak of their persecution and resistance. This is a collection of original Holocaust documents and sources that brings the reader into the lives of perpetrators and victims.

<sup>xli</sup> . “...women and ethnic groups.” Gareth Stedman Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982. (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 22.

<sup>xlii</sup> “. . . part of secular history.” President Neumann has read in Hegel that the universality and ultimate context of things has to be determined concretely. Otherwise the universal in its concreteness is not fulfilled and goes without full meaning. She read that some theologians say that *Jesus* is the particular and *Christ* the universal spirit not yet understood. Buddhist philosophers say, similarly, that *Gautama* is the particular, that is, an individual figure recorded as part of a concrete history, while *Buddha* is the universal spirit. These figures might represent “One in All.” The universal in this tradition is about how a universal light combines with the impulses of life, and determines the ultimate context of the whole world of human impulses. But the President is waiting to hear other presentations by faculty ahead. We shall see where this story will go.