THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOME PRECEPTS AND PRACTICE

D. P. Leinster-Mackay*

The relatively recent publication of A. B. Cobban's *The Mediaeval Universities: their development and organisation* serves as a timely reminder of the continuity of tradition and purpose between the early institutions of the middle ages and the universities of the twentieth century. As Cobban has observed, *"Universities in the twentieth century, whatever their deviations from traditional norms and alleged innovations, are still the lineal descendants of mediaeval archetypes, and they continue to perpetuate a competitive degree system and habits of ceremonial procedure, which, however disguised, are fundamentally derivatives from the mediaeval universities."*[1]

This derivative link between mediaeval and modern universities was again highlighted recently in the Partridge Report on post secondary education in Western Australia (1976). That Report, distinguishing the international links of Australian universities with other universities from the local ties which characterised colleges of advanced education, emphasised, *inter alia*, the nature of the international community of scholars which gave them a supranational status. This claim is perhaps best understood through a historical perspective which goes beyond a passive 'presentist' acceptance of more efficient air travel as being the main factor in this international phenomenon. It may be helpful, therefore, to examine the origins of the university and to see how the idea of a university has developed from mediaevel times and in doing so to examine classic views of a university in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which have some bearing on the present relationship the universities have with other tertiary institutions.

The Origins of the University

Despite the assumption by the German existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers, in his *The Idea of a University*[2] that the university is "Greek in origin", presumably dating back, in his mind, to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum in the fourth century B.C., there is no evidence to support this. There is no organic continuity from these ancient Greek centres of higher learning to the mediaeval university of the twelfth century, with its university organization and power structure which has remained substantially the same since then.

The origins of the university are obscure but we can be certain that they were mediaeval. The term 'university' was not in general use to describe centres of higher learning (as opposed to Cathedral schools) till the fifteenth century. Derived from the Latin *'universitas'*, it originally meant any independent corporate body such as a guild: the use of the term to describe celebrated communities of scholars was, therefore, achieved by accident and has nothing to do with the universality of learning, which observation has some bearing on J. H. Newman's ideas. *'Studium generale'* was rather the term usually applied to famous communities of scholars between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. By the fourteenth century, centres at Bologna, Paris, Montpellier, Oxford, Padua, Naples and Toulouse had achieved the legal status of *'studium generale'* which term implied that (a) it was a celebrated school of learning; (b) that students came from afar to attend classes; and (c) that the seven liberal arts were taught in association with one of the superior faculties of Law, Medicine or Theology. At a very early period two privileges were associated with the *studium generale* — viz. the privilege of non-residence by beneficed clergy and the *ius ubique docendi* (licence to teach anywhere)[3]. The former privilege allowed beneficed clergy to study at the *studium generale* and continue to receive the fruits of their benefice. This privilege was not unlike modern paid study leave in reverse. The latter privilege of *ius ubique docendi* is reflected to a certain extent by the modern emphasis on the acquisition of a doctorate as a passport to university teaching and is reflected also in the modern preoccupation of equivalence for the entry to courses at a university for students from other universities.

The obscurity surrounding the beginnings of the university has led some to speculate on the possibility of its being invented by the Arabs. This is cogently argued by R. Y. Ebied and M. J. L. Young,[4] when they suggest that the Arabs enjoyed centres of higher learning in the Islamic world in the nine and tenth centuries, at least two centuries before the evolution of the *studium generale* in Western Europe, during the twelfth century. The existence of the Islamic *Ijazah*[5] (licence to teach) which preceded the *ius ubique docendi* by more than a century, and the possible derivation of the term 'baccalaureus'[6] from the Arabic *bihaqq al-riwaya* meaning "with the right to teach on the authority of another", suggests that like the term 'admiral'[7] an Islamic origin lies behind the Western European terminology and practice. However obscure are the origins of the mediaeval university, by the fifteenth century the university was a recognized institution with a concern for its autonomy *vis a vis* Papal interference, with a supranational character and with concerns, customs and ceremonies which are recognisable in twentieth century university institutions.

J. H. Newman and *The Idea of a University*

G. M. Young, the eminent social historian of Victorian England has ranked J. H. Newman's *The Idea of a University* with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in importance for intellectual historians. This may be somewhat of an exaggeration but it remains nevertheless an important milestone in the history of ideas. It is also the classic text of the nineteenth century regarding the objectives and aims of a university.

In his *Idea*, Newman defined the university as *"a place of teaching universal knowledge"*. The definition is very compact and emphasises three notions.

(a) The pre-eminence of **teaching** over other university activities such as research.

(b) The **universality** of knowledge in that all knowledge forms one whole, a notion which Karl Jaspers re-echoes in his *The Idea of a University* when he declared:

> *There is nothing which is not worth knowing about, no art which does not involve a form of knowledge. Only by unifying these various new lines of inquiry can the university do justice to them.*[8]

(c) The university is concerned with knowledge and the intellect rather than with ethics and morals.

To return to the universality of knowledge, i.e. the wholeness of it, this notion is subsumed by Newman's concept of *Liberal Education* upon which he expounds at some length.

For Newman, liberal education was to be equated with the 'enlargement of the mind' which "never views any part of the extended subject matter of knowledge without recollecting that it is but a part".[9] This, of course, is an oblique attack on **specialization** with which problem Jacques Maritain wrestled in his *Education at the Crossroads* when he wrote:

> *Paradoxically enough, university teaching coincides with a definite specialization of studies... The university should nevertheless still keep its essential character of universality, and teach universal knowledge.*[10]

Newman is quite definite on the place of teaching in his university and the place of research. His emphasis on knowledge is concerned more with its diffusion and extension than with its advancement. As he writes in his preface:

> *To discover and to teach are distinct functions.*

For Newman, the main concern was the cultivation of the mind. The untrained mind he regarded as

> *an evil which is forced upon us in every railway carriage, in every coffee shop or table d'hote, in every mixed company.*[11]

He was intent therefore on systematizing the thinking of individuals to withstand or reject the inanities of the Press which supplied, as always, ready-made opinions. This is a view shared also by the Spanish philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset.

Newman recognised that "knowledge is capable of being its own end" and as such adopts an Aristotelian position which rejected 'banausic' studies concerned with earning a living. Instead *liberal studies* — the studies of a freeman or the study of books — or both — are strongly advocated by Newman. In Discourse V of *The Idea of a University* he writes:

> *Liberal education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman...(it) is simply the cultivation of the intellect, as such, and its object is nothing more or less than intellectual excellence.*

It would seem that Newman regarded the Victorian cultivated gentleman as the educated man. He seems to be introducing the concept of the courtly academy of the Renaissance period into the university context. *Pace*, Shakespeare, Castiglione and Newman are in conjunction!

Newman enlarges on this theme of liberal education when he suggests that the end of liberal education is not mere knowledge but the building up an individual's world view. This notion is very similar to that of J. F. Herbart's concept of education which aimed at building up "a well-balanced, many sided interest" in the pupil. In Newman's words,

> *a truly great intellect...is one which takes a connected view of old and new, past and present, far and near, and which has an insight into the influence of all these on one another, without which there is no whole, and no centre.*[12]

He continues

> *the true enlargement of mind...is the power of viewing many things at once as one whole.*

Liberal education, therefore, is consonant with universal knowledge.

Apropos another aspect of his idea of a university in a celebrated passage, Newman epitomises the close staff-student relationship arising from such teaching when he writes:

> *A university is...an Alma Mater, knowing her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint or a treadmill.*[13]

One final point concerning Newman's *Idea* deserves comment — i.e. his insistence on the value of residence. In mid-nineteenth century he adumbrates this particular weakness of English 'Red Brick' universities, enunciated in 1943 by 'Bruce Truscot'[14] author of *Red Brick University*. Newman, commenting on this aspect of university life, and no doubt having in mind the benefit he gained from his Fellowship at Oriel wrote:

> *If I had to choose between a so-called university which dispensed with residence and tutorial superintendence and gave its degrees to any person who passed an examination in a wide range of subjects, and a university which had no professors or examinations at all, but merely brought a number of young men together for three or four years...I have no hesitation in giving the preference to that university which did nothing.*[15]

*Lecturer in Education, University of Western Australia.

Abraham Flexner and *Universities American English German*

Abraham Flexner's *Universities American English German* (Oxford University Press 1930) is generally regarded by educationists as a second major contribution in the history of ideas concerning the university. Taking an historicist view, Flexner suggests that universities, like all institutions, lie within the relativistic *Weltanschauung* of their time. Insisting that the university is subject to the forces of change (in the twentieth century, to democracy and science) he affirms that Oxford of the twentieth century is not the same as Oxford of the eighteenth century — and by implication the Oxford of nineteenth century Newman.

This temporal relativism is admirably, if unwittingly, demonstrated by Flexner himself when in 1930 he writes:

> *Competition becomes more and more intense — for raw materials, for colonies, for markets.*[16]

Flexner, then, establishes both by design and by accident, the relative nature of differing *Weltanschauungen* in the process of time. For him, there was a need to revise the concept of Newman's University which was *not* eternal like Augustine's City of God. In his analysis of the functions, Flexner perceived **four** major concerns viz., (a) **conservation** of knowledge and ideas; (b) the **interpretation** of knowledge and ideas; (c) the **search** for truth; (d) the **training** of students to carry on the University's functions. For Flexner, investigation had priority over instruction: advancement before the communication of knowledge. If Flexner dissented from Newman on priority between teaching and research, he was in agreement about the necessity of learning for learning's sake.

The overriding purpose of Flexner's Modern University was to encourage detached scholarship based on a concentrated and specialised study. Flexner's position is rather like that of the German sociologist, Max Weber, who once wrote:

> *A man who is not capable of, so to speak, putting on blinkers, and of working himself up into the idea that the fate of his soul depends on whether, shall we say, his conjecture about this particular passage in a manuscript is correct — then that man had better keep away from scholarship.*[17]

In his concern for research and detached scholarship rather than teaching, Flexner tended to downgrade the function of conservation of knowledge and emphasised instead the extension of knowledge and the study of problems. This almost Deweyan approach to problems was based on his recognition of the unique position of the university to study modern social life and to clear it of confusions.

He wrote at a time, it will be recalled, when there was much confusion in society concerning values and like Dewey, he sought to unravel the mysteries of modern democratic life. Flexner's position, on this point, is very similar to that of José Ortega y Gasset who saw, in his *Mission of the University*, the need for the university to step outside its cloisters and permeate life. Ortega y Gasset wrote:

> *The university must be open to the whole reality of its time. It must be in the midst of real life and saturated with it.*[18]

Only when the university was at one with Society (Life) could it act as a balance to the meretricious values encouraged by the Press.

Flexner, in his call to the universities to wrestle with modern problems rather than study esoteric knowledge, in no way compromised the academic's traditional detachment. In his doctrine of university 'irresponsibility' Flexner is specific about the non-utilitarian nature of the problems to be tackled. He wrote:

> *The modern university must neither fear the world nor make itself responsible for its conduct.*[19]

Although he stressed the need for contact, at the same time he stressed the need for detachment from the subject of study.

In his quest for 'pure' as opposed to 'applied' studies at the University, Flexner tended to veto most of the vocational studies. True he allows faculties of Law and Medicine but he is doubtful about Education (especially if it is concerned with training teachers) and vetoes business studies, journalism, domestic "science" and library "science", which he felt ought to be studied in separate vocational schools.

Whilst on the one hand Flexner seeks to exclude technical, vocational and popular education from the university he seeks to show the disadvantages inherent in isolated research institutes. In his view, research benefits by close contact with, or being within, the university. Flexner's concept of a university, it would seem, is to a very large extent influenced by the German universities of the nineteenth century with their emphasis on research. Like the German traditions there is in this "liberal model" (to use Sir Walter Moberly's term), an emphasis on flexibility in organization; of open-mindedness to all questions (the *Lehrfreiheit* of the lecturer) and on the adult status of the students in which they are regarded as responsible both for their studies and their private life (the *Lernfreiheit* of the student).

Sir William Hamilton from the columns of the *Edinburgh Review;* Mark Pattison in his *Suggestions for Academical Research;* and Matthew Arnold in his *Schools and Universities on the Continent* — all nineteenth century thinkers — 'shared' this Liberal idea of a university with Flexner, the twentieth century thinker. 'Bruce Truscot', in his *Red Brick University,* writing in the 40's, adopts a similar stance to Flexner when he refers to research which should be the chief aim of every university. A. N. Whitehead, of Cambridge and Harvard, ever an original thinker, in his essay on 'Universities and their function' in his *The aims of education and other essays,* attempted to effect a compromise between Newman and Flexner when he wrote *"The universities are schools of education, and schools of research."*[20] For Whitehead, however, *"justification for a university (was) that it preserved the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning"*.[21] Whitehead's suggested compromise has, in the process of time, been overtaken by a third concept.

Clark Kerr and the Idea of a Multiversity

In his concept of a multiversity, the American educationist Clark Kerr, writing in 1963, sees this third up-to-date model as an alternative to the "academic cloister of Cardinal Newman" and "the research organism of Abraham Flexner", both of which he felt were outmoded.

Another analyst of the situation, Sir Walter Moberly, in his *The Crisis in the University* (1949) used the epithets 'Christian-Hellenic' and 'Liberal' to describe Newman's and Flexner's models respectively, whilst a third model he describes as the 'technological and democratic' model. Moberly's nomenclature gives a clue as to the nature of this third model which both Clark Kerr in the U.S.A. and Sir Walter Moberly in Great Britain saw as successor to the University of Newman and Flexner, although antecedents of this pragmatic model go back to the Morrill Act of 1862.

If England, particularly Oxford, inspired Newman's concept of a university and Germany Flexner's, the United States of America has been the catalyst for the emergence of this third model. The rise of technology and applied science (*vide* M.I.T.) and the democratization of the universities (*vide* Berkeley, California) changed the emphases in the universities even before the second half of the twentieth century. Engineering and Chemistry, which are at the heart of the modern culture are no longer on the periphery of university studies. The new emphasis is on the practical and utilitarian, the ultimate aim being increased productivity which the recent years of ecological gloom have served only to accentuate. 'Banausic'[22] is no longer a pejorative term as it had been with both Newman and Flexner whose values of liberal education and pure research respectively proclaimed their exclusiveness. As Moberly points out, the methods of this new culture are both empirical, analytic and deliberately selective, concentrating only on what can be tested and quantified.

There was a considerable optimism which, until recently, pervaded this new culture, early epitomised by Professor J. D. Bernal in his predictions concerning the conquest of space, disease and even Death. Such an optimism had, until very recently, the force of an ideology or religion.

Contrasting Ideas of a University

There is an ontological difference between the **organic** nature of Flexner's University and the **fragmented** mechanism of the multiversity. Robert M. Hutchins, a constant critic of the *ad hoc* approach to knowledge has lampooned the modern university according to Clark Kerr as "a series of separate schools and departments held together by a central heating system".[23] Such is the price of *ad hoc* development.

Another major difference affecting ideas of a university is in the clientele who now resort to universities. In nineteenth century Oxford and Cambridge the clientele were middle class and upper middle class undergraduates, destined for politics, the law or the church, sharing the same ethos with the Oxford and Cambridge dons. In the nineteenth century German Universities, although less socially elevated, the students were likely to be in the ranks of the future leaders in the state. In the late twentieth century, on the other hand, there is an egalitarian shift and a difference in the clientele who are generally lacking in culture and who entertain largely a utilitarian aim of achieving a meal-ticket.

This lack of culture has, of course, been a source of criticism by José Ortega y Gasset, G. H. Bantock and by F. R. Leavis. In Ortega y Gasset's view the transmission of culture should be the chief mission of the university which according to Bantock would go a long way to combat the insidious pop culture which lies behind what he calls "the crisis in consciousness". This pop culture is much evidenced in the blind devotion to noise pollution and the production of cacophony even in the precincts of a university which militates effectively, if a Platonic view is taken, against the absorption of the cultural values that Bantock probably had in mind.

In his *Decline and Fall of the University Idea*, the anonymous contributor to Black Paper I, "B" (probably Max Beloff), epitomises criticism of this lack of culture when he castigates oxymoronically those "who insist on the proletarianization of the universe, the common culture of the anti-culture."

But the lack of culture is not the only source of criticism of the modern university. It has been criticized for other failings. *Pace* the Harvard Business School which has had a comparatively long existence, there has been substantial criticism of the encroachments of the business world into the groves of Academe. This criticism has been at two levels: at the faculty level where doubts have been raised about the validity of business schools in university precincts and at the university level, where big business has been seen to be gaining undue influence. The aims of these two worlds are at variance. The academic, on the one hand, is a seeker of truth; the businessman, on the other hand, is a seeker of profits. As Bantock points out " 'intellectual and **inconclusive** (my emphasis) discussions' are the very life-blood of the University."[24] By way of contrast, such academic

virtues merely vitiate commercial effort: the two are not suitable bed fellows. Daniel Defoe, in a slightly different context, had much the same idea when he wrote in his *The Compleat English Tradesman*, Vol. II (1727)

> *A Wit turned Tradesman! What an incongruous Part of Nature is brought together, consisting of direct Contraries! No Apron Strings will hold him; 'tis in vain to lock him in behind the Compter, he's gone in a Moment; instead of Journal and Ledger, he runs away to his Virgil and Horace.*[25]

The University of the last two decades has both its sponsors and its critics. Amongst the former are to be found Clark Kerr, Karl Jaspers and Lord Robbins; amongst the latter are to be found R. M. Hutchins; V. H. H. Green; Sir Walter Moberly; Max Beloff; F. R. Leavis and José Ortega y Gasset. In the case of Ortega y Gasset, it would seem that he is attacking at a very early stage (1944) symptoms that others saw perhaps not as clearly at a later stage.

In his *Mission of the University* (1944) Ortega y Gasset attacked the uncultured average person, "the new barbarian", the professional man, "more learned than ever before, but at the same time more uncultured". For him it is "imperative to set up once more in the university, the teaching of the culture, the system of **vital** ideas which the age has attained. This is the basic function of the University. This is what the university must be above all else."

Lord Bowden, on visiting Australia in 1965, addressed a meeting of the Australian Institute of Political Science in Canberra[26] in which he made pertinent comments on the function of a university in the twentieth century. In his exhortation to the academic world to embrace the utilitarian function in the service of the State, Bowden emphasised the value of the perquisites available to the academic by such service. He offered confirmation of the dictum that 'knowledge is power' thus raising the university to a similarly privileged position as that of the church in earlier times. On reflection, the parallels between the church in the middle ages and the university in the twentieth century are not without considerable similarity.[27]

(a) Both the Church and the University have been utilised by the State, Cardinal Wolsey by Henry VIII; Cardinal Richelieu by Louis XIII and Dr. Henry Kissinger by Presidents Nixon and Ford.
(b) Secular reason, in the twentieth century has replaced religious faith of previous centuries.
(c) The University dominates the school system today as did the Church dominate education in former times.
(d) Secular reason is pursued in buildings as lofty, and if not as magnificent at least as prestigious, as the Gothic cathedrals of the middle ages.
(e) Graduation ceremonies have replaced ordination services: doctors, masters and bachelors have replaced bishops, priests and deacons.
(f) Convocation, partly decked in scarlet doctoral robes, is not unlike the College of Cardinals — both indulge in colourful archaic dress and engage in equally colourful and archaic ceremony.
(g) But perhaps imagination runs wild if the university police were to be compared with the Papal Guard!

This article has had a synthetic aim of examining through a historical perspective, the idea of a university. From the time of their obscure mediaeval beginnings, universities have had a supranational character which today distinguishes them, by and large, from other tertiary institutions.[28] The characteristics of the university, underscored by both Newman and Flexner, are still today an essential though modified part of university life. The links between the university and society and between the university and the state, however, are continually being forged and strengthened. Such a close relationship makes it ever more necessary to acknowledge the traditional characteristics of a university.

In accordance with historical traditions which have evolved since the twelfth century, it should be recognised that

(a) local and national demands militate against the universities' supranational existence;
(b) if universities were on the other hand to turn their backs on society and the state, and reside in their proverbial ivory tower and be concerned only with other ivory towers, they would be sounding their death knell;
(c) utilitarian studies, distinctly banausic in character, militate against the universities' purpose of 'pure research' and 'learning for learning's sake'; and
(d) perhaps such areas of knowledge ought to be studied elsewhere.

The time has come, in view of the growth of Colleges of Advanced Education and their effectiveness in serving society in many 'applied' ways, for a compromise to be effected based on a binary principal in which both types of tertiary institution pursue their intrinsic functions and both make their peculiar contribution to the welfare of the state. In such a way it should be possible to retain university autonomy, *lehrfreiheit* and *lernfreiheit* whilst continuing to accept state subsidy, if the state can but recognise the value of this independence for both the University and for the State.

As Ortega y Gassett observed, as early as 1944, the Universities had and still have a mission; albeit in the 1970s the mission has been metamorphosed not only to foster culture but also to preserve their autonomy *pro bono publico*.

REFERENCES

1. **Cobban, A. B.**, *The Mediaeval Universities: their development and organization*, Methuen, 1975, pp. 235-236.
2. **Jaspers, K.**, *The Idea of a University*, Peter Owen, London: 1965, p. 145.
3. **Cobban**, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-28.
4. *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 2nd May, 1975.
5. The University of Cambridge Library contains an *Ijāzah* dated 1147.
6. **Ebied** and **Young** derive their circumstantial evidence on the meaning of baccalaureus and its Arabic associations from A. Guillaume's *Legacy of Islam* Oxford University Press, 1930.
7. From Arabic *amir al-bahri*.
8. **Jaspers**, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
9. **Newman, J. H.**, *The Idea of a University*, Image Books, 1959, p. 158.
10. **Maritain, J.**, *Education at the Crossroads*, Yale University Press, 1969, p. 76.
11. **Newman**, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
14. **Edgar Allison Peers**, Gilmour Professor of Spanish at the University of Liverpool used the pseudonym of 'Bruce Truscot' and caused much speculation in academic circles as to his identity.
15. **Newman**, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
16. **Flexner, A.**, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
17. Quoted from Sir Walter Moberly's *The Crisis in the University*, S. P. G. 1949, p. 38.
18. **Ortega y Gasset, J.**, *Mission of the University*, Princeton University Press, 1944, p. 97.
19. **Flexner**, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
20. **Whitehead, A. N.** *The aims of education and other essays* Ernest Benn, London: 1962, p. 138.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
22. From the Greek *Baravoia* meaning handicraft or the life and habits of a mechanic.
23. **Kerr, Clark**, *The Uses of the University*, Harper Torchbooks, 1963, p. 20.
24. **Bantock, G. H.** *Education, Culture and the Emotions*, Faber 1967, p. 190.
25. **Defoe, D.**, *The Compleat English Tradesman*, Vol. II, 1727, Rivington, London: p. 58.
26. Cf *Comparative Education*, Vol. 1, No. 2, March 1965, p. 70.
27. For a full development of this aspect of modern universities see **Barnes, H. E.** *The University as the New Church*, C. A. Watts, London: 1970.
28. In this sense the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) for example, is a University.

SOME STATISTICAL COMMENTS ON EDUCATIONAL ISSUES IN TERTIARY SELECTION

Peter D. Finch*

Introduction

Recent articles by West and Slamowicz (1976a & b), Smurthwaite (1976) and Slamowicz, Smurthwaite and West (1976) have called into question various aspects of the use of the Higher School Certificate (HSC) as a tertiary selection device in a way which some might regard as providing grounds for the mooted abolition of HSC in Victoria after 1978. A contrary view has been presented by Potter (1976).

Since the abolition of HSC would have far-reaching consequences for the public domain the issues raised by these articles are not entirely academic and for that reason we should try to examine them without the prejudice of prior conviction. In this article I look at the various arguments of West, Slamowicz and Smurthwaite to ascertain if they can be said to provide grounds for the abolition of HSC. Since I am thereby led to fault the thrust of their arguments it is important to emphasise at the outset that I am not presenting a counter-argument for the retention of HSC, I am simply examining **their** arguments and, finding them lacking, pointing out why one should regard the case against HSC as 'not yet proven'.

The arguments for changing present tertiary selection procedures focus on three issues:

(a) the failure of HSC to predict success at university efficiently, particularly around cut-off.
(b) the harmful effects of HSC on secondary education, and
(c) the failure of HSC to facilitate the greater equality of access to university.

We consider these issues in reverse order.

Equality of Access

Few would deny that there are inequalities of opportunity inasmuch as some people are deprived of entry into possible avenues of personal development by reason of socio-economic factors beyond their individual control, and most of us would like to rectify that state of affairs. This is not in dispute. But two things are arguable: firstly the extent to which one can sustain the **factual** claim that current selection procedures *per se* do not provide equality of access and secondly the question of whether, in any case, equality of access is desirable at the present time.

The second question pertains to the way in which the desired goal is to be attained and is one about which people might reasonably differ. For it could be argued, even if we did agree that present procedures favour the socially privileged, that the remedy is to eradicate economic inequality. In the meantime, however, me might advocate the retention of current procedures on the grounds that they do yield, among others, those best suited to academic studies, even though their **present** relative suitability has been determined, to some extent at least, by social privilege. To do so is, of course, to apprehend suitability for academic studies *per se* and, by distinguishing, on the one hand, between those factors which determine suitability and, on the other, those factors which

*Professor of Mathematical Statistics, Monash University