



Bradley, K. (2005). Review of *A Sanctuary of Their Own: Intellectual Refugees in the Academy*. *Workplace*, 12, 108- 110.

KAREN A. BRADLEY

**REVIEW OF *A SANCTUARY OF THEIR OWN: INTELLECTUAL
REFUGEES IN THE ACADEMY***

by Raphael Sassower

A Sanctuary of Their Own is relatively short—comprising five chapters loosely drawn together from previous work—and is grounded in European and American social philosophy. Principally, Sassower argues that the university needs to be a sanctuary for "the life of the mind," a phrase frequently repeated. A "sanctuary" for the "life of the mind" means that the university as an enterprise needs to be protected from increasingly hegemonic demands of the wider culture that ask it to behave as a corporation and be subject to "productivity reports, efficiency measures, and input-output analysis" (33). While protecting academics from the pressures of commercialized technoscience and its corporatization concerns him, the author takes particular issue with how we protect against the political takeover of knowledge, as in cases such as Auschwitz or Hiroshima. Who guards science against nationalism? he asks. More sharply, he asserts that universalism (equated with reason) is not an efficient response to nationalism in that it "can easily deteriorate into intellectual tyranny":

[U]niversalism is an absolutist view whose transcendence of all historical and national limits overlooks the significance of historical contingencies and the peculiarities, economic and others, of local communities. . . . [A]n insistence on universalism ignores the inapplicability, not to mention the dangerous dogmatism, of universalism in various contexts (which is inherent in its very refusal to recognize any specific context, of course). (55)

Thus the academy must be allowed to preserve science as a version of critical rationality within culture—that is, it must principally be a sanctuary of pluralism.

The university needs to be protected not because it is the source of privileged answers, but because it serves as a brewing place for autonomous ideas. Academics must explore the roots of all ideologies and do so critically. That is their service for society and a duty that warrants their sanctuary. Sassower's vision is of a place where critical training and intellectual safety foster true dialogue. That is, a place "where numerous alternatives are always developed, and where there is an ongoing questioning of the criteria by which we judge one set of ideas or principles to be superior to another." For Sassower, it is important "that we struggle along a continuum of ideas and principles, of criteria" (93). He argues that we must keep our accounts of history open, to recall ancient lessons learned and to revisit intellectual missteps—that we remember the travels of our intellectual ideas and practices, both the good and the bad. Thinking

complexly and solving problems in new ways takes intellectual investment in remembering, as well as an active practice of cooperation and engagement.

The book begins with talk about the life of the mind infused with passion and play—even "madness"—but ends by emphasizing the active practice of rational critique and the responsibilities of the academy. I take this to suggest not inconsistency, but rather an understanding of the contradictory tensions within academic life. These are not tensions to be engaged alone. Sassower emphasizes the importance of intellectual collaboration and the need for academics to take leadership roles in the culture around them. Working closely with other colleagues both gets us beyond the limitations of the division of labor and helps us to acknowledge the sheer size and scope of contemporary challenges. Cooperation provides more effective uses of "brain power" than does competition. In fact, collaboration is one of the key ways in which academics might serve as "role models" in a society willing to engage and learn from diverse sources (91). Sassower calls for academics to practice cooperative discussion that allows multiple approaches to remain viable. In our workplaces we must be allowed this level of free engagement without suffering under an intellectual regime that forces academic conversation to conform to a narrowly defined frame of discussion—a frame that facilitates efficiency and accountability in one sense, but cripples debate over assumptions and poisons pools of critique.

Eliminating the need to compete for funding is the most basic foundation for creating a sanctuary for the life of the mind. Odd as it sounds, Sassower notes that the university already occupies a kind of welfare status in our society—albeit one that is underfunded and not fully appreciated (89). Heeding the lessons of his book would be just one of the many steps needed in order to provide a rationale for the kind of public investment in universities Sassower imagines. The fine balance between being accountable for public involvement yet not being so dependent on such funding as to constrict the life of the mind constitutes the heart of this work. The consequences for not achieving such a balance should be clear, as Sassower's portrayal of the current corporate university model demonstrates—a portrait that will resonate with readers of this journal.

As a sociologist interested in the plight of the American university, I found this volume only somewhat stimulating. I remain unsure what Sassower's "life of the mind" entails, and recoil from the seemingly elitist underpinnings of the concept, particularly as the book is part of a critical perspective series dedicated to Paulo Freire. While Sassower does offer insights into how the academy can interact with and connect to a larger society, his conception of that academy retains a substantially hierarchical orientation. For example, in discussing our need for passion, he argues that it would make sense to suggest that the academy should be a model of how experiences should be presented and recorded, with enough details of the facts of the matter, so to speak, and enough passion for those who are involved in the experience. This would allow those training in the academy to appreciate how they should interact with and communicate to those outside the academy. The academy could then become a laboratory for experiences of what are fruitful and effective ways to inspire people, connect with each other, and develop their sense of individuality and community. (19)

While I agree in principle, I find the tone bothersome. For Sassower, the university appears to still exist exterior to society. It remains to be seen which part of society we should be a sanctuary against and which part of society we are to enable with all of our collective thinking. Sassower's work appeals at the level of abstraction but lacks the kind of examples that would give more body and substance to his points. For myself, I find arguments that recognize the potential critiques that are nurtured out of the local and particular contexts of daily lives to be much more compelling. In the end, I also doubt that governmental protection and funding for universities as he proposes would result in the consequences he desires. Even so, the argument that the academy needs to find ways to protect and enable the plural conditions of knowledge remains relevant and aptly rendered.