

# Social Advocacy and Universities<sup>1</sup>

Robert Klitgaard

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It's a pleasure to welcome you to the Lillian Maguire Social Advocacy Forum. Billie just introduced everyone but herself, so let me say a word about her, knowing that for most of you she needs no introduction. During her many years with John Maguire as the first family of Claremont, Billie launched and nurtured a variety of programs to help children. When she and John stepped down from Claremont Graduate University in 1998, the University's trustees decided to endow a forum in her name, one that would embed social advocacy in the University's life.

As the new president of CGU, I welcome this embedding. But you might ask, why did the trustees think that an endowment for this purpose was necessary? Wouldn't there automatically be enough social advocacy at a great University?

The answer is that social advocacy is not necessarily appreciated in the academic culture. To oversimplify, the advocate and the scholar are sometimes seen as different camps or orientations, perhaps along the lines of dichotomies like right brain/left brain, or faith/reason, or enthusiastic presentation of a point of view vs. the passive and patient dissecting of many points of view. Professors are not appointed or promoted on the basis of advocacy. And so, especially in graduate schools, social advocacy may not receive enough attention.

And yet, social advocacy at its best has a vital role to play in Universities and of course in our communities. When I say "at its best," I'm thinking aspirationally. What are the features of successful social advocacy that we might keep in mind as we try to meld it with the academy? If you'd like a mnemonic, let me suggest four P's.

The first P is passion. Advocates bring welcome passion to our intellectual, moral, and political lives. In a time when, as Camille Paglia puts it, "the intelligentsia seem fatigued, sapped by pointless theory, and impotent to affect events,"<sup>2</sup> universities need passion, especially passion that is not just ideology or religious fervor. Through their

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<sup>1</sup> Welcoming remarks at the 2006 Lillian Maguire Social Advocacy Forum, featuring Marilyn van Derbur speaking on sexually abused children, sponsored by Claremont Graduate University and the Children's Advocacy Center at the Claremont United Church of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Camille Paglia, "In Our Hall of Mirrors, a Queen Looms Large," *The Chronicle Review*, Sept. 22, 2006. <http://chronicle.com/temp/email2.php?id=zjThKckXcmwf3vqTfzhtFXy8ZgwxpkWN>

passion, social advocates can also teach us about persuasion. I like this maxim of La Rochefoucauld:

The passions are the only advocates who always persuade. They are like a natural art, of which the rules are unfailing; and the simplest person who has passion will be more persuasive than the most eloquent person who has none.<sup>3</sup>

The second P: successful social advocacy is positive. It is all too easy for us to be negative. Our opponents ignore this, they overlook that, they assume this other thing, oversights which, if they only listened to us, would be magically overcome. Alas, consciousness is seldom raised by attack. Let us then focus in our advocacy on the positive, on the hoped-for opposite of the problems we are addressing, on improvements, on desired alternatives.

The third P is practical. Even if we are positive, we may be Pollyannaish. Our advocacy will be all the better as we can focus on practical steps that can make a difference.

The final P is proof. Can we marshal evidence that the practical steps we recommend will in fact be worthwhile, will not lead to unintended negative consequences that outweigh the benefits?

You have all heard about the wonderful new wave of philanthropy, with Bill and Melinda Gates and Bono on the cover of *Time* and, this month, Bill Clinton on the cover of *Fortune* for their philanthropic work. The new philanthropy takes on the hardest problems and at the same time insists on evaluation and accountability. They want proof that their efforts are making a difference. As Clinton says, "It's nice to be goodhearted, but in the end that's nothing more than self-indulgence."

Proof is a good connection back to the mainstream activities of universities. It is here perhaps where scholars and social advocates can best join forces, in figuring out how to know progress if it happens, how to think about costs of many kinds, and how to advocate with our eyes wide open and our brains on overdrive.

So, tonight, as we participate in the Lillian Maguire Social Advocacy Forum, as we consider the heartbreaking problems of childhood sexual abuse, let us ponder the way ahead with the four P's in mind and heart.

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<sup>3</sup> François de La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*, London: Penguin Books, 1959 (1665) Number 8, slightly edited by me. The original: *Les passions sont les seuls orateurs qui persuadent toujours. Elles sont comme un art de la nature dont les règles sont infaillibles; et l'homme le plus simple qui a de la passion persuade mieux que le plus éloquent qui n'en a point.*