

# Awareness

AN ASBYU ACADEMICS  
PUBLICATION

## the last lecture

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## PREFACE

Termed a "veritable feast of knowledge" by the Daily Universe, "The Last Lecture" series enjoyed tremendous success during the summer of 1970 at Brigham Young University. Presented with the hypothetical question--What would your last lecture be?--Neal Maxwell, Church commissioner of education; Chauncey Riddle, dean of the Graduate School at BYU; C. Terry Warner, director of the BYU Honors Program; and Henry Eyring, world-renowned chemist, attempted to deal with what they had drawn as significant conclusions within their respective disciplines.

All lectures were carried live over KBYU radio and tapes were later rebroadcast. The overwhelming response to the series and the numerous requests for copies of the speeches prompted this publication.

Thanks go to Dave Spencer, Dorice Williams, and the entire Academics Office staff, without whose efforts publication of the "last lectures" could not have been realized.

Joel C. Peterson  
Summer Vice-President of Academics

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DR. NEAL A. MAXWELL  
Last Lecture - July 1, 1970

Neal A. Maxwell, former executive vice-president of the University of Utah, was recently named by the First Presidency as Church commissioner of education. In this post, he directs the entire Church education system. In addition, he is a regional representative of the Twelve.

Previous to assuming his duties as Church commissioner, Brother Maxwell served on the faculty of the University of Utah for near fourteen years. After joining the faculty in 1956 as assistant director of public relations, he served as assistant to the president, secretary to the Board of Regents, dean of students, vice-president for planning and public affairs, and executive vice-president. He was also an assistant professor of political science.

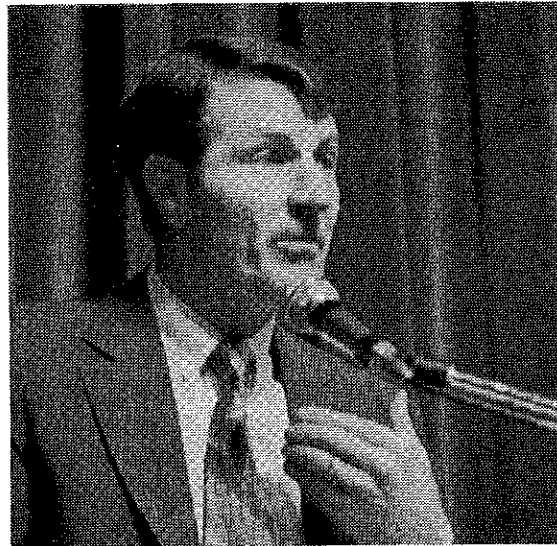
Brother Maxwell grew up in Salt Lake County and received his education at Granite High School and the University of Utah. He has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in political science, as well as an honorary doctor of laws degree from the University of Utah.

Brother Maxwell has been active in all facets of educational, civic, and religious life.

I feel doubly anxious about today's speech, first because it inaugurates a series which I think could be very exciting for you on this campus. I believe it's Brandeis University who pioneered the "last lecture" concept. Your series may have a different tone and flavor to it, but the discipline that the concept of the "last lecture" imposes on speakers is a terribly important one. The hope is that the scholars and the speakers who are involved will try to sum up what they would say to you about their field, if, in fact, this were the last lecture they were ever to give. Audiences often fear scholars and lecturers who won't risk generalizations and summations. Some risk is involved in trying to sum up one's field. I'm also very anxious to try to make a good beginning for you in this important series.

What I will attempt to tell you is where I am now in my field of political science even though I would frankly rather do this in terms of the field of religion, but that's not my assignment today. There is for me an increasing congruence between my field of political science and what I feel and believe in the realm of religion. One caveat is that time makes it necessary to exclude certain aspects of American political ideas which is an interest. A second caveat is that a speech of this kind will, of necessity, have more than the usual number of "vertical pronoun," I.

First, I am not an historical determinist, even though I recognize that



there are forces that shape human history. I am increasingly persuaded on the basis of my limited knowledge that the arithmetic of human affairs always includes leadership as a significant factor. Second, that the state, which is in a sense simply the outcome of our politics, inevitably reflects the passions and the personalities of the men who occupy the positions of power. One might make a case, for instance, that while there was a lot of anti-semitism in Germany which was waiting to be exploited before Hitler came to power, it was partly Hitler's own personal obsession and his own tortured, twisted, distorted mind that made this dimension of the German state so tragic. One can never make too much allowance, therefore, for the personality which leaders bring with them into the arena of human affairs.

Next, we as Americans are terribly ambivalent about how we feel about the common man. There is so much in our literature, our music, our drama, and our arts which venerates the common man, but we're simultaneously very insistent on the need for excellence. This is an American ambivalence that has yet to be resolved. It means that we are torn between the common-man kind of democracy which many critics fear will drive us toward mediocrity in leadership, and the rich tradition of the past in which there is much about America and Americans which makes us want to venerate meritocracy, as opposed to mediocrity. It is difficult to deal with political ideas without having this ambivalence bob to the surface.

The intellectuals in our society have not fared well. We're not a deferential society. We're not inclined to be deferential. Yet if we look to the greatest moment in American political history, in my opinion, it was, of course, the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Several of these men were action intellectuals; they were gifted men, placed in the stream of human history at that point in time when they could perform an almost unique task in human affairs in crafting and shaping the American Constitution. Yet while we venerate them, we might not be as comfortable with men like them in positions of leadership today. There is no plethora of men like them in positions of leadership today, but that I'm not certain how quick we would be to recognize them, in fact, if they were there or if they were available to us--because of this American ambivalence to which I have referred!

We've resisted rather successfully the formation of aristocracies in American political history, but we may be in the process of coming under the influence of new forms of aristocracy. The knowledge explosion, for instance, Brothers and Sisters, for me raises the possibility that we will create an aristocracy of experts which is, in a sense, a kind of counter revolution to democracy because it gives extra weight without checks and balances to those who are possessed of special knowledge in our system of decision-making. Whether we can resist that incipient aristocracy without becoming anti-intellectual remains to be seen. There is an even newer brand of aristocracy and that's the aristocracy of activism. In America, today, increasing weight is being given to activists in the process of political decision-making. Of course, in one sense those who've perspired in the political process have often claimed the prizes, but this activism is tinged with anarchy and can lean toward nihilism.

All aristocracies need to be watched, and the two new forms of aristocracy are no exception.

My reading of political literature suggests that the American intellectual himself has often been very ambivalent about what role he should play which has only reinforced the ambivalence of society at large. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance, urged by his example that some of the thinkers of America be detached. Emerson, in the midst of his own agony, one night recorded in his journal:

I waked at night and bemoaned myself because I had not thrown myself into this deplorable question of slavery, which seems to want nothing so much as a few assured voices. But then in the hours of sanity, I recover myself and say "God must govern in his own world and knows his own way out of this pit without my desertion of my post which has none to guard it but me. I have quite other slaves to free than those negroes to wit imprisoned spirits, imprisoned thoughts far back in the brain of man, far retired in the heaven of invention in which important to the republic of man have no other watchman or lover or defender but I."

That is the classic case for the detached intellectual who preserves his ability to criticize society by not becoming too involved in it. We also have another strain in American political thought, however, in which other thinkers believe they must throw themselves into the fray and risk their souls; their case is symbolized by George Bernard Shaw:

When I think of my own unfortunate character [he's writing, by the way, about a friend of his in Parliament who wouldn't compromise on an issue], smirched with compromise, rotted with opportunism, mildewed by expediency, stretched out of shape with wire-pulling, worn out by 25 years of pushing to gain an inch here, I do think my friend Joe Burgess might have put up with just a speck or two on those white robes of his for the sake of the millions of poor devils who cannot afford any character at all because they have no friend in Parliament. Oh these moral dandies, these spiritual toffs. Who is Joe anyhow that he should now risk his soul occasionally like the rest of us?

Now that's the other basic option. Your generation of students must address itself to these options by choosing which of these life styles you will pursue in bringing to bear the talents that you have. If this were my last lecture, I would also observe that we do not make adequate allowance in human affairs for the role of irony, especially in political affairs. I will predict an irony in that many of our most avid dissenters and action intellectuals today will soon experience a sharp lessening of interest in political affairs and a lessening of interest in controlling our political institutions, because they will come to realize the limitations of those institutions in solving the problems about which they are deeply concerned. Irony is seen in many political events which wipe politicians and their programs. Anthony Eden was prepared all his life to become Prime Minister, but he was wiped out not too long after becoming the Prime Minister because of the Israeli invasion of Egyptian territory. Men who come to office stoutly opposed to certain policies and principles have not been in position long, before they then begin to enunciate those very principles. If one is to deal with politics, he must make allowance for the role of irony in human affairs.

Political scientists in the future, along with other behavioral scientists, will turn more of their attention to the American home on the assumption that this is basically where individuals are shaped, formed, and molded. We bring with us the consequences of our home life into the other institutions of our society--the economic, the educational, and political institutions--and the research of the future will simply underscore the primacy of the home.

It is significant to me that this University is one of only a few who have a college concerned with family living. I personally doubt whether our political, social, and economic institutions can compensate for the failures of the home. If we poison the headwaters, try as we may and try as we must, we cannot fully depollute downstream in life, and the experience of the human family will press us back, therefore, to the home with a resultant lessening of expectation about what these other institutions can deliver.

I am also driven to conclude, although I am not completely happy with this particular conclusion, that we shall probably be governed in this country by some kind of form of democratic elitism--that is, pockets of power in which a few really decide for us all on basic issues; that's how power will operate and how decision-making will usually occur in a mass democracy. Democracy often produces certain consequences that were neither foreseen nor desired. Democracy tends to produce massive political apathy. It tends to produce mass bureaucracy. It tends to produce a number of other consequences that undercut the conditions which democracy needs to have in order to maintain itself.

One writer has observed that the initial conditions needed to have a democracy often produce consequences some of which undercut the basic conditions necessary for continuation. For instance, we have a passion for equality. This passion for equality causes us to place a heavier emphasis on the notion of equality than on unfettered liberty, since unfettered liberty gives us an unequal outcome in any kind of contest of human talent. It is a constant struggle where to place the emphasis between liberty and equality. Placing it as we often do on equality means that we create a massive bureaucracy, because bureaucracy is the almost inevitable by-product of equalitarianism; in our desire to be fair and to treat people with a sense of sameness, we must place power in hosts of officials and gatekeepers who see that everyone is treated the same. This very act of trying for equality produces the irony that you get the very unresponsive, unimaginative bureaucracy about which many of the young rightfully complain in terms of American Government.

Democratic elitism is one way of coping with massive apathy, the disparity and unevenness in human skills. Democratic elitism probably can perform adequately, as one thinker observed, if three conditions obtain: if the elites are pluralistic, so that there is variety; if the elites are competitive, and not monolithic; and if the elites are penetrable in terms of their accessibility to the new people who can become members of these elite groups.

Another thing I would say in a last lecture is that most of us are really not majoritarians at all. We are reluctant and episodic majoritarians at best. Most of us are really not comfortable with the majority's making the decision about a lot of the things that would influence our lives. If that's the case, it's best to recognize it and not to go on pretending that one is an absolute, automatic majoritarian. Time and time again as I have worked with my political

science classes, they believe themselves to be majoritarians until we engage in some special exercises in decision-making in class and it becomes very clear that they're not majoritarians at all. Most of us really will sacrifice some efficiency and some smoothness in a system of otherwise automatic majorities in order to protect minority rights and in order to protect ourselves from decisions we don't want the majority making.

This same ambivalence we have about majoritarianism occurs with regard to our view of the two-party system and checks and balances. Most Americans don't like to concentrate power anywhere. And that means we've dispersed it and distributed it widely as a way of playing off the system against itself. Voters will often vote for candidates of contradictory purposes in order to divide the system. As a result of our paranoia about power and our reluctance to locate power as a kind of a final and ultimate repository, we've created for ourselves an immense trap in American politics in that we are simply impotent at times. A classic example would be our effort to try to rejuvenate state and local government in America. We will know within five or six years whether we are going to make it or not. But we've distributed power so cleverly that we've almost outsmarted ourselves in terms of trying to solve some of the problems that we say we expect state and local governments to solve in our time. Further, because we've distributed power so carefully, we are probably going to see some Americans on the extreme right and extreme left forming or giving allegiance to more authoritarian political organizations with the manifold consequences that may have for our democracy. And this will be a function of frustration and a function of disappointment for those who want to stop something or to start something.

In our two-party system in which the ideologies overlap there are not sharp ideological cleavages. This is not as bad as it seems because the middle is where most Americans are and where problems finally get solved. The American center with the overlapping of parties and personalities makes it possible to solve political problems in our time. But this fuzziness is a source of great irritation to some.

The other personal discovery is that our American political system can operate in the presence of a lot more apathy than I ever believed possible. Perhaps one ought to quit giving, as I have done so many times, speeches decrying apathy and simply accept that as an almost built-in human condition and work within it.

There is some political literature developing which suggests that in a democracy when you get over 90 percent of the people voting, watch out; you're really in trouble because that kind of a turn out means that the system has failed and that people who come out, will come out anxious to do something dramatic. It was just that kind of voter turn out in which Adolf Hitler came into power in Germany. Apathy plays a functional role in our society in that sometimes the people who are the most apathetic are also those who would do the most damage to a democratic system if they were to become aroused. On the other hand, I am haunted by the prophetic remarks of Tocqueville when he came to America and predicted that the time would come, speaking of us as Americans, "when a taste for physical gratification among them has grown more rapidly than their education and their experience at great institutions, when the discharge of political duties appear to them to be a troublesome impediment which diverts

them from their occupations and their businesses." I am haunted by that kind of prophetic remark because there is what I call the quiet hedonism of suburbia in America in which so many simply barbecue their hamburgers and let the world go by.

I believe further that we will someday realize that work is a spiritual necessity whether or not it's an economic necessity. The gospel has told us this all along. That's often unnerving isn't it, to discover that ideas which one has been told all along are in fact true? Our political and social programs will have to take into account the fact that work is a spiritual necessity, even if the time might come when it is not economic necessity for everybody, at least as incessantly as we have known it.

Families are basic even if they are not economic units as they once were; the home is so vital that economic changes should not throw us off.

I believe further that man's need for property has some spiritual overtones.

Man's relationship with nature and the need for some solitude and beauty and oneness with life and with God have been interrupted by urbanization with harsh social and political consequences that we have not fully evaluated. Man does need to connect up with nature. This is what I see some of the responsible younger generation trying to say.

Because I believe in the four E's of Learning and that they must be delicately balanced and blended, namely, Exhortation, Explanation, Example, and Experience, I am prepared to conclude that the outgoing generation in a democratic society can't transfer its commitment to democracy to a rising generation unless that rising generation has seen the example of democracy working with reasonable effectiveness, and unless that rising generation has had some experience as individuals in developing the skills that are necessary to democracy. I don't believe exhortation and explanation are enough in the teaching process to transfer commitment from one generation to another. This is where the "baton" gets dropped often in its transfer.

I believe with Will and Ariel Durrant that, "where liberty destroys order, the hunger for order will destroy liberty." There is a twin passion in man for both order and liberty which poses an endless struggle in terms of which way the balance is to be struck, and your generation will have to deal with that just as mind has had to deal with it. The hunger for order is a very strong one in American society right now and may assert itself in a lot of ways, not all of them very wise. As one who venerates the Constitution, and I say unqualifiedly it's an inspired document, may I recommend for your reading the book, *Miracle at Philadelphia*. If you've not read it, read it and see a non-Mormon treat the founding and creation of this nation, and you'll come away with an appreciation that its title is valid.

Having said that, the American presidents whom you and I venerate most and recognize most are almost all men who broke or cracked the Constitution. Jefferson bought the Louisiana Territory without the appropriate authorization from Congress. I'm glad he did, but it was not a fully constitutional act. Teddy Roosevelt was trying to get money out of Congress to finance the digging



of the Panama Canal and when there was great delay, he said, "While Congress debates, I'll dig," which is cracking the framework of our appropriations system, constitutionally. Lincoln had a congressman put in jail and withdrew other constitutional rights in the tension and stress of Civil War times. It's a paradox that these are the men we venerate, among several others, as our top presidents. Perhaps what this tells us about ourselves is that we most like those men who do what has to be done and who are able to identify the key issue of their time and respond to it. I don't even know what Lincoln's batting average with Congress was with regard to his legislative program. You and I will always remember Lincoln for putting an end to slavery and for saving the Union. I don't know what he did about agricultural policy, and I don't even care. Perhaps, too, we can learn this about leadership in terms of why we venerate these men: we like action in behalf of obvious causes.

Each of us needs to know the implications of his beliefs. Conservatives may have to recognize the words of Whitaker Chambers who wrote that, "Conservatism is alien to the very nature of capitalism whose love of life is growth and perpetual change." It's just possible that this is one of those political ironies to which I referred. Liberals, on the other hand, will have to learn what Patrick Moinihan observed when he said, "Liberals need to acquire from life what conservatives are endowed with at birth, namely a healthy skepticism of the power of government agencies to do good," and a realization that "the more programs, the less impact." Both liberals and conservatives must be prepared to face the ironies and implications of their own beliefs.

We are in the midst of a knowledge explosion which somehow seems to separate us. We are pressed closer together and yet we're further apart. We're pressed closer together in a University in a common search for knowledge, but we're also more separated in terms of the specialties and complexities that flow out of that knowledge explosion. We are, indeed, in a time when "knowledge shall cover the earth" and when people shall be "ever learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth." And you and I witness one of the sublime ironies of human history in that, in a sense, the more we know, the less happy we have become. This is partly because we are perhaps not learning the right things and because we do not realize there is "no democracy of facts." All facts are not of equal significance to man nor to his happiness.

I would predict that the platforms or at least the action of American political parties, especially with the resurgence of youth, are less apt to be focused on traditional issues that we have known in the political action patterns of the past; the platforms or action agenda are more apt to swirl about a search for meaning and a search for community as the kind of issues in which the rising generation has a special interest, and, in my judgment, to which the gospel of Jesus Christ has a very adequate response.

We shall have to deal with the irony, too, of Tocqueville's other "prophecy" that in America "the bond of human affection would be extended, but it would also be relaxed" in that we care more about more and more people, but it's not the same kind of caring men once knew in this country in their small circle of neighbors and friends where love and caring had a special meaning. Our circle of concern has been pushed out broadly and widely by the process of awareness and education, but a corresponding thing has not happened with regard to the quality of our love and concern. We have in America today I am

told 500 communes with 10,000 young people in them. What my brief and almost superficial reading in American history suggests to me is that we have learned the following things about communalism when it's tried under those kinds of secular circumstances: (1) The submergence of the individual within the community seems to result in the stifling of individual initiative. This is not my conclusion. This is the conclusion of Josiah Warren after an abortive experiment in New Harmony in communalism in the nineteenth century. Warren's second conclusion was, (2) When you eliminate individual property rights, this results in the dissipation in the sense of responsibility individuals have for community property; (3) individual differences, in this kind of setting, often get viewed as being unfortunate and this lowers courtesy and tolerance which are the lubricants which often make a society work; and (4) As Warren stated, as the demands for conformity are increased, differences of taste and opinion are multiplied. Warren concluded that he had lost his effort because of nature's law of diversity. It would seem to be important to be aware of those things out of the nineteenth century in anticipation of the lessons being learned again in our time.

Because the scriptures give us twin responsibilities to declare peace and to be peacemakers, and yet warn us that we live in a time when peace shall be taken from the earth, you and I would do well to ponder the summational view of Bruce Catton with regard to war:

If the study of military history teaches anything worth knowing, its principal lesson is that modern war never means what the people who are fighting it thought it was going to mean. This is not merely because it involves infinite physical destruction, but because it turns loose social forces that get completely out of hand. It brings results that were neither foreseen nor desired. It means profound change, for war disrupts the ground on which people were standing when they took up arms. It erases the status quo which one side or the other, if not both, believes itself to be fighting to preserve. The very process of fighting creates the certainty that nothing is ever going to be the same again.

I accept that. And lastly, may I share with you one of the things that presses itself in upon me, a quick personal glimpse. I came back from World War II a confirmed internationalist, that is still my tilt; it is still my preference. I encountered the wise counsel of J. Reuben Clark, Jr., which irritated me privately because I did not agree with his isolationism; he looks wiser with the passage of time than he did to me in 1946, and one can say that without being a confirmed isolationist either. President Clark was saying to us: America can't run the world. My own conclusion would be that some kind of prudent involvement abroad is preferable to heedless isolationism. But probably the posture of the early American political leaders in this land who kept us less engaged and less tangled abroad may have simply been more wise than we have realized. True, we were a small, new nation and we needed time before we got involved, but their wisdom was more than that. John Quincy Adams said to a group that implored him for help in the 1820's, that while America sympathized with those abroad who were struggling against tyranny, America should not go "abroad in search of monsters to destroy." Adams wished them well in their search for freedom, but he said, we must be "a champion and vindicator only of our own." Later on, Henry Clay said, in response to pressures on him to get

the nation involved, that it was up to America to keep our lamp "burning brightly on the western shore as a light to all nations, rather than hazard it to utter extinction among the ruins of falling or fallen republics in Europe." I believe there is wisdom in this posture, and I am at a stage of pause now in what would otherwise have been a kind of unqualified internationalism; this pause is a function of experience and what I see about me in the field of political science.

In conclusion, almost all political ideology turns on one's view of the nature of man. If one is pessimistic about mankind, you construct a different government. If one is optimistic about mankind, then the way you let that kind of optimism have play in your political ideology and system is very different. And I must confess to you here that it seems to me again that the congruency of the gospel is such that it reminds me of man's tremendous and almost unlimited potential and possibilities. At the same time, it beats out a rhythm of reminders about man in terms of his limitations and his carnal nature, and this is the balance that can be struck and defended intellectually in terms of human history, in terms of the shame and the glory in the story of mankind.

Because of the "civil war" that rages within each of us in terms of which drum shall we march to and in terms of our heavenly or hedonistic instincts, I am left, frankly, at this stage in life with a paradox: I am optimistic about people whom I know, but pessimistic about the prospects of mankind. Perhaps that's simply a function of getting data and disclosure, that permits me to love people and to believe in them which tends to make me optimistic, though not naively. But if you ask me where I am in terms of the prospects of mankind, I'm not an optimist. Yet I'm delighted to function in the context of people such as you whom I know, who are proximate to me about in whom I can hope and in whom I can believe. Thank you very much for listening!