

# Science and culture

## Seminars expand convocation theme

### Culture and Science in Public Policy

One culture's progress is another culture's downfall.

That was the theme of Culture, Science and Public Policy, an anthropological look at the ethnocentrism inherent in improving the quality of life "in the public interest."

Carol Silverman, visiting professor of anthropology, began the presentation by defining progress in underdeveloped countries as the importation of selected objects, chosen by the elite of an advanced country in hope of "bringing them what we have."

But both Silverman and Geraldine Moreno-Black, assistant professor of anthropology, saw an immoral element in the definition, and therefore in the practice. The cultural context into which these objects will be introduced, they say, is frequently ignored.

Policy makers must be made aware of the impact of their programs, they said. This can be facilitated through

meeting with and gaining reactions from the recipients of their policy.

Moreno-Black used nutritional planning on national and international levels to illustrate the point. The history of U.S. nutrition policies, including the Pure Food and Drug Act, the Recommended Daily Allowance and Eating in America (the 1976 pamphlet that suggested that Americans eat more fiber and less sugars and fats) shows repeated inability to bring real change to American diets, she says.

International nutrition planning, as perpetrated by the United States and its industries, provided the second group of policies failing because of ethnocentrism. Imported corn that can't be milled, milk that most adults can't digest and milk formulas where no potable water is available have all been given to underdeveloped nations in the name of progress, they said.

By Diane Winocur



Photo by Bob Baker

Mark Setterholm, a senior, found he was one of the hundreds of people (some of whom did find seats) attending seminars after Monday's convocation.

### Evolution and Religious Truth

Religion can be explained from a materialist perspective, and that perspective can be used to have some fun, according to a seminar presentation by David Wagner, a University biology professor.

Darwin's theories lead to a materialistic outlook in which all that is real is solid, Wagner says. Everything can be explained with this outlook, he adds.

This theory, which provides a basis for scientific thought, is opposed by vitalism, which holds that a force distinct from physical and chemical forces exists in living organisms.

As science has progressed, vitalism has become a decreasingly useful theory, Wagner says.

However, this theory is still encountered in three areas of biology: in questions of consciousness, the origin of life and the border between the living and the non-living.

"Religion keeps one from committing suicide the minute you find out who you are."

Even though this concept is unreal and immaterial, it should be enjoyed, he says.

For example, Wagner says he has felt "religious experiences" similar to yoga when considering a variety of liverworts (a moss-like plant), and focusing on "an appreciation of what is vital in them."

He then senses they are holy, and where they are from is holy.

Even though he knows the experience is only a physical/chemical process, Wagner said he does not realize this during the experience.

This 'religious consciousness' permits one to no longer feel like the most important thing in the universe, but to sense the tradition of culture.

By David Steinmetz

### The Day after Trinity

Two scientists who worked on producing the first atomic bomb, University Pres. Paul Olum and biology department head Aaron Novick, presided over a discussion on that bomb and its consequences Monday as part of the University Convocation.

Olum and Novick responded to questions — mostly on the future of nuclear disarmament — to a near-capacity audience in 150 Geology.

The discussion followed "The Day After Trinity," a movie discussing the process and consequences of the building of the first atomic bomb. The film focused on the project leader, the late J. Robert Oppenheimer.

The audience listened to the filmed interviews of scientists involved with the first bomb with solemn intensity. Gallows humor marked comments such as Oppenheimer's brother mentioning that physicist Enrico Fermi was taking bets on whether, providing the bomb worked, the whole state of New Mexico would blow up at Trinity — the name given to the first test explosion.

Olum started the discussion by explaining that he did not want to lecture on his part on the project. Neither Olum nor Novick apologized for their work on the bomb.

Olum disagreed with the statement that building the bomb was a "Faustian bargain with the devil," stating that at the beginning of the work there was evidence that the Nazis were working on a bomb.

"There seemed to be no choice. Nor do I agree it was the arrogance of technical knowledge," Olum said.

Olum mentioned that Oppenheimer stopped Olum and others from meeting to discuss the implications of the project.

The two administrators took a stand against nuclear weaponry. Novick received applause for his support of the Campaign for Nuclear Freeze and ballot measures advocating halting the



Photo by Mark Pynes

University Pres. Paul Olum and Aaron Novick, head of the biology department, spoke about their participation in the building of the first atomic bomb.

production and testing of nuclear weapons.

Olum, cautiously adding that he was speaking as an individual, told the audience he supported nuclear freeze, arms reduction, unilateral nuclear freezes and legislation prohibiting a "first-strike."

Novick said that the build-up of nuclear weapons has ironically decreased the chance that the weapons would ever be used. Less than 10 percent of the population is expected to

survive a worldwide nuclear war, he estimated.

Olum and Novick met with little antagonism in their discussion. At one point, Olum asked those with opposing views to feel free to speak up. Nobody did.

Olum seemed surprised when someone asked why young people dominate the anti-nuclear movements. They have "longer futures to protect," he answered.

By Joan Nyland