

Domus or Polis? The Location of Values*

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I AM DEEPLY honored to have been selected as the Janet Doe lecturer for 1988. My gratification is enhanced by the fact that this occasion allows me to pay tribute, however small, to Janet Doe, whom I had the great privilege of meeting twice, informally, in my early days as a member of MLA. There were only five of us at a dinner party during the 1965 annual meeting in Philadelphia, but this brief association was sufficient for me to appreciate her greatness, her charm, and her unique personality. I hope that, in some measure, I may be able to do her justice today.

At least some Janet Doe lecturers are beset with doubt when the call comes, honor though undoubtedly it is. My illustrious predecessor, David Bishop, worried about the question of whether that meant that he had now joined the ranks of the dinosaurs. Being the first lecturer to come out of the ranks of the retired, this issue cannot trouble me. I take it for granted that it is a *fait accompli*. But, like others, I did worry about the message, that instrument that is expected to keep you in your seats for an hour in a state not approaching somnolence. The simplest prescription I could find to guide me to this hoped-for outcome was Eleanor Roosevelt's advice for such circumstances: "Have something to say, say it, and sit down." The third part of her recommendation would give me no difficulty, I knew. The other two required more attention. I finally decided that, like Tristram Shandy's Uncle Toby, I would ride my hobby horse. I would like to add, however, that there is at least one important difference between Uncle Toby and myself. Tristram Shandy claims that:

My Uncle Toby [would] use no other argument to prove his Hobby-Horse was a Hobby-Horse indeed, but by getting upon his back and riding him about—leaving the world, after that, to determine the point as it thought fit. In good truth, my Uncle Toby mounted him with so much

pleasure, and he carried my Uncle Toby so well—that he troubled his head very little with what the world either said or thought about it [1].

It is in the nature of the topic I have chosen that I must care, not what you say or think about my presentation, but that this association and you, its members, breathe life into this hobby horse and so transform it into a living vehicle, bringing you closer to reaching one of MLA's important goals.

I would like to examine today the gradual development, within our association, of a consciousness of its place in society as an organization of professionals holding certain values, the reflection of these values in association attitudes, and their expression in what might broadly be called political activity. I shall begin by reviewing the accumulated record from the beginning of the association, as it was articulated in the *Bulletin* and its predecessors, in board and committee decisions and actions, in pronouncements by the founders and presidents, and by the contributions of individual members.

Martha Jane Zachert, in her Janet Doe lecture ten years ago, engaged in a similar pursuit "the identification of certain beliefs that are held in high esteem by us as a group, in other words, the value-beliefs of medical librarianship . . . and what is the significance of these values for us?" [2]. With Zachert, I maintain that values are guides to action. In this sense then my quest is complementary to hers. But while she uncovered what might be considered primarily, but not exclusively, those beliefs or values which look inward—professionalism, cooperation, knowledge orientation, organization, specialized education, and service orientation—I wish to concentrate on values that are also part of our makeup and which are directed outward to the society in which we live and work. It should be noted that we may be able to infer our convictions from actions taken by the association as well as from policy statements issued at various times in our history; at other times, but less frequently, we find expressions explicitly connecting MLA with the polis of which we are a part.

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Let us first consider MLA's early formal statements as they appeared in its constitution and bylaws and documents of incorporation. Dr. Gould, one of MLA's founders, stated clearly, in 1898, that the object of the Association of Medical Librarians is "to encourage the improvement and increase of public medical libraries" [3]. The phraseology in various versions of the constitution, bylaws, or papers of incorporation, beginning in 1899, remained almost unchanged until the 1970s. It usually stated: "The objects [of the association] shall be the fostering of medical and allied scientific libraries and the exchange of medical literature among its members," with the addition, by 1934, of a second set of objects: "The organization of efforts and resources for the furtherance of the purposes of the Association" [4].

It should perhaps also be noted that the number of committees, both elective and appointed, steadily increased until it was decided, by 1975, that the list was to be omitted from the bylaws. Until 1962, as their names indicate—executive, nominating, exchange, finance, membership, convention, publication, standards, certification, curriculum, internship, recruitment, scholarship—these committees, with the possible exception of international cooperation, established in 1948, were mainly concerned with the organization and improvement of the association's internal operations.

Let me now turn to the more or less *ex-cathedra* pronouncements of MLA presidents as they justified these objectives and as, at times, they go beyond them, anticipating a larger vision which found an official home only at a later stage of our history. Since it appeared to me that in the early 1970s a radical change occurred which I shall discuss later on, I shall, for the moment concentrate on statements made prior to these events.

Throughout this earlier period, maintenance of the Exchange dominated presidential statements; so Dr. Gould, in 1898: "The work of the Association would consist practically in the work of an exchange" [5]. And two years later: "The usefulness of the Association had been amply demonstrated. The report of the Manager of the Exchange proved this" [6]. This sentiment was repeated in almost identical language by Drs. Browning [7], Ruhrah [8], Malloch [9], and others. As late as 1938, James Ballard claimed that "Whether we like it or not, the Exchange is the fundamental activity of the Association and the magnet which is steadily increasing the library membership" [10]. And in 1954, in stressing the

basic altruism of MLA, the board stated "Our purpose is to foster medical libraries" [11].

But this apparent unanimity and simplicity had already been challenged in 1948, when Ballard repeated that "The Exchange is the soul and heart of the Association. It is our Rock of Gibraltar, the life-line of our existence. Without it, the Association would become moribund" [12], while Eileen Cunningham said, unequivocally "It is no longer sufficient to have a good collection of medical books and periodicals . . . new demands, and our qualifications for handling them, pose a real challenge to the profession which they must be able to meet" [13]. And in 1957, Wilma Troxel reiterated: "At the 1947 meeting, the chairman of the Executive Committee said 'The two major functions of the Association, the Exchange and the *Bulletin*, continue to function satisfactorily.' " But she continues "While both of these functions are still of major importance, the number can no longer be limited to two" [14].

The story would be incomplete, however, without referring to that far-sighted and passionate man, Dr. Gould, who, still in 1898, voiced sentiments that did not find an echo or constitute a basis for action in MLA until a much later time. "I can imagine few things" he claimed

that are more pregnant with far-reaching influences than this little movement of ours. . . . In no branch of human endeavor is there such instant practical application to the needs of humanity as is ours. . . . I look forward to such an organization of the literary records of medicine that a puzzled worker in any part of the civilized world shall in an hour be able to gain knowledge pertaining to a subject of the experience of every other man in the world. . . . In saved lives and spared expense, our state and national governments would make money by devoting millions of dollars to establishing medical libraries in every city and village of the land [15].

How he would have enjoyed seeing today's accessibility to medical literature, supported, in great part, by the federal government through its Biomedical Communications Network.

Another, somewhat isolated instance of referring to the relationship between MLA and society occurred in 1948 when Mildred Jordan claimed that "The Association brings its force to bear upon the making of public policy in the fields which impinge upon its members and their institutions" [16]. However, in 1967 it was Scott Adams, who, in discussing the partnership between MLA and the federal government, pointed to the societal goals to which the MLA objectives are subordinate. In supporting the national health effort, the common

goal that Adams identified was "Not better libraries as libraries, not just better trained and better paid medical librarians, not mechanization for mechanization's sake, but better health for the American people and for man wherever he may live. Libraries are a means and not an end in themselves." Quoting Adlai Stevenson, Adams maintained "that the role of the federal government is to create a favorable climate and a steady stimulus for every force which can benefit mankind." He saw that MLA "had national goals to reach and strong partners to help you reach them" [17]. To anticipate, this philosophy has imbued the work of the Governmental Relations Committee which, seeing MLA as a true partner, was not content with waiting for the federal government to provide help, but assisted government in identifying new initiatives and increased support.

This new attitude was formalized by President Morse in 1969 when, in appointing the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Goals and Structure of MLA, he specified as one of the charges to "study the effectiveness of the Association's public relations with special attention to methods of informing legislative and administrative governmental agencies on matters of interest to the membership" [18]. The creation of this committee had been preceded by the 1964 MLA Statement on Federal Legislative Policy—its section on objectives was introduced by the following preamble:

The quality of health care available to the people of any country can be only as good as the quality of medical information possessed by its health practitioners. The aim of the Association is to see that every health practitioner in the country is provided with some kind of access to the record that is now accessible only to some. . . . Federal legislation and assistance are one of the means of achieving some of these objectives" [19].

These statements are not without ambiguity. "Health" and "access to health information" may both be regarded, at various times, as aims of the association. If the former holds, the latter then becomes a means. This difference, I believe, is not a trivial distinction.

In a way, these events were the culmination of MLA actions that lacked explicit theoretical justification, and of reminders by "outsiders" of the expectations held with regard to MLA's role. At the 1938 annual meeting, Charles Wilinsky, Boston deputy health commissioner, in welcoming the association, expressed appreciation for the part MLA was playing "in the conservation of life, in the protection of public health, and in addition to the best type of medical practice" [20]. Similarly,

the immediate post-World War II period had exhibited occasional flashes of recognition of a larger place for MLA in society, as when the association endorsed the UNESCO program of the extension of cultural relations to other countries [21], or by its resolution commending the actions of the Department of State and urging the continuance and extension of its cultural affairs program [22]. Shortly thereafter, in 1948, Eileen Cunningham could report the establishment of the Committee on International and National Cooperation [23], and MLA was represented at the second National Conference of the Commission for International Educational Reconstruction and at the State Department meeting to explain U.S. foreign policy [24].

Prior to and, paralleling in concept Scott Adams' Janet Doe lecture, David Clift had, in 1962, delivered a message that was not lost on his MLA audience.

The broad objectives of a library association are the furthering of library service, the profession of librarianship, and the social and cultural welfare of the country. The last named is, in the long run, the most important, the first two, in fact, are important only to the extent that they contribute to it. . . . The role of the association in legislation, particularly at the national level, is not necessarily limited to legislative matters involving library service, although restraint must be exercised in going beyond these. The library association is obligated to make its views known on legislation affecting education as a whole. . . . This exercise of leadership, while contributing to the advancement of objectives, serves also to cast the association in the role of national spokesman for the profession it represents [25].

It was at the 1970 meeting of the association, that members were presented with the first opportunity to sort things out and to ask and perhaps to determine, in open convention, what societal values are proper concerns of, and may form the basis of political action by, the association. The following motion had been cosponsored by sixty registrants:

We move that the following statement be forwarded as a letter to the Honorable Robert Finch, Secretary, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and to President Richard M. Nixon as our official resolution of this Annual Meeting of the Medical Library Association. . . . We urgently request the reordering of national priorities away from their emphasis on war and military actions towards peace and health service programs. As a first step in this direction, we demand an immediate cessation of military actions in Laos and Cambodia and the prompt withdrawal of U.S. armed forces from Vietnam [26].

The then parliamentarian declared the motion out of order as not being compatible with MLA's

charter or bylaws. The president agreed with the parliamentary and the motion to overrule the chair failed by a two to one margin.

President Morse was apparently as much concerned about the adoption of an expanded set of values as he was about the effect that raising the question itself might have on the membership, a concern that was a natural concomitant of the political climate at the end of the 1960s. He had stated the case succinctly.

At the close of the business session on Thursday, the Association may deliberate the question of whether or not a professional organization should take a stand on political issues. Possible polarization of the Association would be a concern of all members. Deliberate avoidance of excessive rhetoric or emotionalism will lessen potential danger to an Association which has demonstrated in the past that unity is not contingent upon like-mindedness [27].

As can be imagined, the issue having been raised, could not be put to bed again. After disposing of some of the side issues, such as emphasis on individual member's responsibility versus responsibility of the Association in matters relating to society, and preservation of solidarity [28], it became clear that the narrow conception of relevance could not be maintained much longer. Individual members had kept alive the interest of those who favored participation of the association, as it was put, "in the affairs of the real world" [29].

The instrument, however, that provided the impetus for further action was the newly created MLA Relevance Group which, at its first meeting, developed and then circulated a National Priorities and Peace Petition at the 1972 meeting in San Diego. It was signed by seventy-six attendees from twenty-five states, 8.5% of those attending the meeting. Its text was almost identical to the earlier resolution [30].

The turning point occurred at the 1975 annual meeting in Cleveland when the Relevance Group brought to the general business meeting a lengthier Petition on National Priorities and Health. After pointing out the low priorities of health related programs for federal funding, the petition concluded:

Therefore, be it resolved that the Medical Library Association strongly urges both the Congress and the President of the United States to reconsider priorities and reappropriate funds toward a renewed emphasis on finding solutions to the health problems of this nation [31].

The discussion on the floor was brief but did address the central issue. A member maintained

that it was not the business of the association to enter the political arena. Erich Meyerhoff responded that, on the contrary, whenever our interests are involved we have a right "to speak up as an association which has given this function to the Legislation Committee" [32]. The resolution carried by a wide margin.

This episode was perhaps only the more visible sign of different perceptions and changes of attitude that had occurred during the sixties. Don Washburn had asked in 1970, again, whether the statement "The object of the Association shall be the fostering of medical libraries and allied scientific libraries and the exchange of medical literature among its members" covered all the objectives of the association [33]. This was answered in 1984 by Nina Matheson, who said:

We in MLA must ask ourselves whether we should abandon certain assumptions and mind-sets. Where the 'Exchange of medical literature among its members' was once an energizing force, the binding force, of our association, we must ask ourselves whether eighty years later, it can be a meaningful major goal of the association" [34].

Attention turned increasingly to the polis side of the basic question. Sam Hitt, in 1974, reflected on those outside influences that have left their mark on MLA, such as the attitudes of the federal administration [35]. Gil Clausman, in 1977, in stressing the profound effect of federal legislation on MLA, could point to the good fortune of having a strong and effective Legislation Committee and predicted that headquarters and the committee would be spending considerable amounts of energy and funds in order to protect MLA's interests [36].

It was noted by Erika Love that it was MLA members who had expressed concern with political issues affecting them as individuals, as professionals, and as members of an organization and with the problem of finding criteria for political involvement [37]. The question then arose on how to decide these issues. This theme was repeated over the next few years with increasing emphasis on the polis. So Lois Ann Colaanni, in 1979: "Outside our libraries. . . issues are being raised and resolved that will affect our profession for years to come. . . It is essential that MLA know how to respond to issues" [38]. Charlie Sargent reported that political issues were recognized as of great importance by similar organizations and referred to a survey of almost 1500 national voluntary associations, including MLA, which, having been asked to rank twenty-two activities, gave government and politics the third highest priority [39]. Still, there appeared

to be uncertainty whether MLA should become an organization with definite political interests, whether members would support this view and whether long-range goals should include references to such objectives [40]. Somewhat later it would be asserted that there was increased discernment of the need to participate as a professional in the political process and to support legislation that meets the library and information needs of the community [41]. The executive director stated, in 1983, that MLA provides its members with a united and strong voice regarding legislative issues that affect health sciences librarians, and, with an eye, undoubtedly, towards the policies of the Reagan administration, that MLA must make sure that the role played by governmental agencies in making research information available is not undermined [42].

For 1979/80 the MLA board had produced a set of 225 issues of concern to MLA of which nine dealt with legislation [43]. From this list the board had identified eight major objectives, one of which reflected the importance of the political arena: "to redirect and support a larger role for the Association in areas of national policy development" [44]. One of the 225 issues, having to do with the effects of national health insurance, perhaps deserves special mention, because already in 1919, Dr. Browning, then MLA president, had felt it necessary to point out that World War I had "also stimulated socialistic efforts, such as the move to pass health insurance laws which, in turn, entail library risks and changes that cannot be foretold" [45].

On reading the record of these years, roughly the last two decades, it appears that, intermittently, either *domus* or *polis* was emphasized without achieving a true synthesis. On the one hand we have statements, quite circumspect, presenting the view of enlightened self-interest. According to these, the arena in which MLA would be an actor was pretty much defined by issues relating to libraries and information flow, perhaps simply limited to the health sciences, even if more explicit references were made to a somewhat larger view of our profession, for example, when it was claimed that the federal government needs to fund programs for librarians to teach information skills to health professionals [46]. There are, however, expressions which permit an interpretation of MLA involvement that goes beyond a confining view of responsibility, although not necessarily carried through to the level of commitment. Both Lois Ann Colaianni [47] and Nancy Lorenzi [48]

referred to the necessity of considering the larger context when attempting to shape MLA's future. But this context is left largely unexplored.

My distinguished immediate predecessor as Janet Doe lecturer raised a series of pertinent questions. Eleven years ago, Erika Love asked, perhaps rhetorically, whether MLA should leave human rights to others because that is an issue of global dimensions and whether we should be concerned with ERA because 85% of our membership is female, or become involved in hospital cost containment issues because over half of our membership are working in hospitals [49]. I do not believe that we gave a direct answer, based on principle, even though at the Anaheim meeting in 1982 the assembly had voted to reinstate the moratorium on meetings in states that failed to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment and to request that the board propose to the membership a course of action for continued support of principles inherent in ERA. The board at its midwinter meeting voted to reinstate the moratorium and recommended that support for equal rights be incorporated as a specific principle for MLA and its strategic plan [50]. The following year, however, at the Houston meeting, the moratorium was lifted, since it was considered that the issue, on the national scene, had become moot.

In trying to interpret the intentions of an organization, just as we might in the case of an individual, it may be helpful to look not only at the spoken word but at actions taken. It would appear that MLA made an entrance into the political arena, though sporadically, when in the view of the board there was sufficient provocation. The earliest record, in 1914, indicates that MLA urged its members to communicate with Congress to defeat the Army Appropriation Bill Amendment which would have transferred the Surgeon General's Library to the Library of Congress [51]. Sufficient provocation indeed. In 1936, two resolutions were passed by MLA and sent to the president and appropriate federal officials, one recommending adequate funds for the Army Medical Library, the other for funding of a building for the library [52-54], the latter the subject, by the way, of another resolution in 1946 [55]. In 1946 also, MLA supported, via letter, S. 1850, leading to the creation of the National Science Foundation [56]. In 1947 and again in 1949 (is there anything new under the sun?) MLA registered its protest against HR 2408 which had called for increased postal rates [57-58]. Between this early period and the middle 1960s, MLA, acting through its presidents, evi-

denced support for various federal issues, such as a personnel exchange [59], the Library of Congress budget [60], the Armed Forces Medical Library Building [61], the Florence Agreement [62], and, in 1957, it supported potential action on securing funds for medical libraries through federal grants [63], i.e., eight years prior to the passage of the Medical Library Assistance Act. Appropriately, it was Janet Doe whom we honor today, who, in 1956, as the MLA representative, issued a statement at a Congressional hearing on S. 3430, the transfer of authority for the National Library of Medicine to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare [64].

During Brad Rogers' presidency, in 1962, MLA authorized the appointment of a new official—the MLA Federal Liaison Representative [65]. The functions of this representative were still limited. The purpose was to be kept informed on legislative and administrative policies which have, or promise to have, profound effects on the community of medical libraries, to report to the membership from time to time and, on occasion, to represent the association at legislative hearings [66]. This action was quickly followed, in 1963, by the establishment of the Federal Relations Committee whose name was changed in 1971 to Legislation Committee and in 1983/4 to its present name—Governmental Relations Committee. The statement accompanying this creation asserted that such a formulation "is basic to the Association's being able to take an effective stand on legislation affecting the welfare of medical libraries and librarians" [67]. During 1964, MLA approved the first, and lengthy, statement of a federal legislative policy, already mentioned. Part of its justification lay in the claim that in view of the huge stake which the federal government has in the nation's health it must needs supply the necessary support for information services [68].

But by 1977, the board, on the basis of recommendations by the Legislation Committee, extended its program and thereby moved MLA towards a continuous rather than an incidental mode of action regarding the way in which it relates to society. The expansion of the committee's role included the use of a legislation information aide, regular and formal liaison with other associations, and the initiation of an educational program to lead to the more knowledgeable and active involvement of MLA members [69].

Official wording by the board relative to this committee's sphere of action still appears to be concentrating on what might be called library-

specific. The definition of the program area having to do with information issues and policy speaks of governmental actions as they affect medical libraries and librarians, exclusively, even if a more active posture has been adopted emphasizing MLA's role in making official comments on proposed legislation and supplying information to and assisting federal agencies [70]. The charge to the Governmental Relations Committee itself appears to be somewhat broader, but it is not clear whether this is accidental or intentional [71].

It would be tedious to review here in detail the many activities pursued by this committee over the years whether in the form of resolutions, statements presented at hearings, or invitations for membership participation. There are at least forty instances of this activity reflected in the *Bulletin*. Suffice it to quote from the 1967 statement of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Future Development of MLA which demonstrated a decided move towards recognizing the importance of the polis:

MLA has responsibility not only for advancing the practice of medical librarianship in individual institutions, but also for representing the goals and objectives of the profession to makers of public policy at the national level. . . . It is, therefore, critical to the future of the profession that the Medical Library Association play an active and vigorous role (A) as leader of the medical library profession to improve medical library service, (B) as consultant in providing advisory services and technical assistance to federal agencies [72].

Even though there was some official withdrawal from the sense of this commitment in the years immediately following, this statement might be regarded as the underpinnings of and justification for the creation, at a later time, of the MLA/AAHSLD Joint Task Force to Create a Legislative Agenda, and of the actions taken by this body in the middle and late eighties.

In a membership-driven organization like ours, it would be surprising if individual members had not participated, even if only tentatively, in calling for increasing awareness of the environment—and for recognition of a larger role for MLA. It was particularly, but not exclusively, through the eyes of Janet Doe lecturers that we were made to see the fields beyond the wall. Said Erich Meyerhoff, in 1977: "We are on the way to a new self-consciousness and to a better understanding of our purpose and function" even if he appeared to limit this view by saying "These are clearly in the area of communication and the transfer of knowledge to researchers, teachers, students, the sick and the healthy" [73].

David Bishop, in 1976, stressed aspects of MLA as an organization which has left behind its narrower outlook. "It is necessary to meet the future information needs of the health sciences as it is to meet society's needs in general to learn from our great humanist traditions" [74]. So also Ursula Poland who, in 1982, in discussing the international dimension of MLA's program and the complexities of political influences connected with it, cited Corning's admonition that "Health is not an isolated topic independent of political, economic and social considerations" and reminded us that "While MLA is an independent professional association, it is nonetheless closely bound to U.S. government policies" [75]. And Virginia Holtz, in 1986, pointed to an ever-present obligation, the fact that "One of the most basic needs of individuals and institutions (as groups of individuals with a common purpose) is to be able to identify their place in their universe, personal and professional" [76]. We must assume that this task of identification is not to be limited to a predetermined slice of the horizon.

It is not unlikely that the events at the New Orleans annual meeting and their aftermath moved Estelle Brodman, in her Janet Doe lecture, to consider more deeply the shape of these new developments and what they might portend. Dr. Brodman, too, recognized the importance of society as a force in medical librarianship in claiming that one of the major problems facing the profession is the willingness or ability of society to provide the means to reach the goals of the profession, and, what I take to be a complementary fact, the problem of the effectiveness of medical librarians in devising the methods to reach these goals. One is justified then in asserting that the effectiveness is enhanced or hindered to the extent that the profession is able to encourage the ability and willingness of society to support our goals. This, in part, requires political action. Dr. Brodman then proceeds to contrast the Hitler and McCarthy periods with the sixties and seventies. Referring to the former, she states:

These things were not something about which a library association took direct action, for its sphere of influence was thought to be in librarianship, not politics. How to obtain German periodicals, in spite of the blockade and the embargo, was seen to be its province, but not how to stop the war which caused the blockade [77].

Noting the change since then, Dr. Brodman is concerned that MLA does not follow the pattern of other associations by engaging in politicking rather

that politics, substituting force for reason in the pursuit of power. Fortunately, the history of MLA fails to realize these fears, expressed in 1971. Whatever occurred in the political arena may have shown a mild case of contentiousness, a not infrequent accompaniment of the exercise of reason, and as Eileen Cunningham put it: "We are a very argumentative group" [78]. Be that as it may, MLA proceeded along a slow and rational route to finding its way to polis, *Robert's Rules of Order* firmly in hand.

Rather than a rush to judgment what characterized the period following Dr. Brodman's lecture, until 1986, was the slow pace of progress, if one concentrates on statements and actions other than the charge given to and actions taken by the Legislation Committee. For example, none of the reports and recommendations of the various goals committees issued in 1972 [79], 1975 [80], and 1982 [81] included any reference to the political or legislative front, unless one wishes to include the following somewhat self-conscious and self-serving objective, one only of twenty-two, of the 1981 survey: "Improve librarians' status through educating administrators and government agencies on the importance of medical libraries and librarians" [82].

Affirmation of the correctness of the attempt to locate the Association in the polis came from Irwin Pizer in 1978 when he declared:

Professionals cannot isolate themselves from the concerns of the society they serve, and I do not believe that there is any reason for the members to feel timid about asserting themselves on issues which directly affect their functioning as responsible professionals and individuals. . . . It is gratifying to note that the board and the members are beginning to express themselves and take a stand on issues which would have been considered too controversial or not relevant to the profession, ten years ago [83].

The issue then must be seen not whether polis is the appropriate concern of the association but how widely or narrowly the line is to be drawn on issues that should be addressed. Around 1985/86, a considerable and remarkable expansion was attempted by the executive director who said at that time:

Health sciences librarians and the Medical Library Association are a part of society and as such have a responsibility to help preserve [the nation's traditional cultural values] by adopting the following goals:

- To assist in making literate the 23 million Americans who can't read.
- To help improve primary and secondary education.
- To improve library and medical education.

—To view information as a public good in a free society, not as a commodity to be bought and sold in the market place [84].

This somewhat ambitious view was not formalized as part of the mission of MLA. In actuality, the 1985 board-identified mission statement, much like the 1985 goals, paid little attention to participation in the political environment. Indeed the four goals established then for 1988 all relate to the domus [85].

It must, therefore, be regarded as one of the important achievements of the strategic planning process that the missing element was recognized that could stabilize the hitherto unexpressed substratum, and, at least for the time being, cause the termination of the meandering path between domus and polis. The conviction evidenced by the 1987 Statement of Values, "MLA serves society by improving health through the provision of information for the practice of medicine, delivery of health care, education of health professionals, the conduct of research and the public's understanding of health" [86], appears to me to have provided a resting point, if only temporary, for MLA to locate its real connection with society. The importance of this credo is the affirmation that MLA serves society, and that it serves society by improving health. The additional parameter, i.e., that it does so through the provision of information, only goes to delineate the essence of our profession. This fundamental statement and the rest of the 1987 document affirm the belief that a professional organization does not live for expediency alone, that it has a credo, and that a credo without action based upon it, is stillborn.

This is not to say that, in being concerned with health, the case for information as the ground for involvement with the community needs to be relegated to a secondary rank. "Information" has assumed a life and role that suffuses our open society where it cannot be considered, if it ever was, solely as a means to an end; it is a value to be defended because it makes us free and human.

It has been a slow, if not leisurely voyage, over the first ninety years of the association from modest self-interest, proclaiming the primacy of the Exchange, although for the sake of an external good, to the expression of larger societal values, i.e., information access, to the recognition of the necessary integration through intellectual and moral adherence and support through political action of an ever more basic societal good—the improvement of health. Without giving up our domus we have

moved into polis, and even, at times, be it noted, appearing at the agora.

It is one thing to show the evolution of political awareness within MLA and the growth in effectiveness of MLA actions in this arena, it is quite another to demonstrate that such a development is justifiable and, if so, on what basis. Does the 1987 Statement of Values provide such a grounding? The problem is not unique to MLA. Edward Miller, addressing SLA during the energizing period of 1969/70, had this to say:

I can acknowledge that an association as such might not have an ethic or even a personality. But an association should manifest some corporate conscience. I believe the real issue of involvement is the role librarians should play as intellectual leaders in their communities (local, state, and national). . . . And the association in turn has a responsibility to aid in this role whether the issues are classed as 'non-library matters' or not. . . . No involvement should embarrass any segment of our membership, nor should our silence [87].

Even Carolyn Gray's statement, in a more generalized context, implies the need for association participation rather than simply relying on individual action.

As librarians we must perfect our political and technological skills, so we may fully participate in the ongoing debates and help frame a rational information policy agenda to insure that citizens and politicians understand the importance of those issues for the maintenance of an open democratic society [88].

What Don Price said about the role of science in politics appears to me to be also true of a profession such as ours with humane values. "It is. . . to clarify public values, define our policy options and assist responsible political leaders in the guidance and control of the powerful forces which have been let loose on this troubled planet" [89].

Do such assertions carry any conviction with those who might see a professional association not in terms of its activities *pro bono publico* but in terms of the direct benefit to its dues paying members? Leaving aside the purely legal fact that MLA, as a 501c3 organization, cannot exist solely for the benefit of its membership, but must ultimately operate in the public interest [90], it might still be asked whether what we want from our association is a program whose *pro bono* activities would be justified only insofar as these entail direct benefit for the membership.

On the other hand, is it possible to maintain this reductionist attitude? Do we not want from our professional association the institutionalization and magnification of those values we hold individually,

and is the improvement of the health of the nation not one of these? On a less exalted level, one might ask, for example, whether recent MLA protests were directed at the Federal Communications Commission on the limited basis relative to the deleterious effect of the proposed rate change on individual library budgets or whether this action did not also consider support of the public and public responsibility.

As professionals, in the sphere we consider to be ours, can we and do we really remove ourselves from political involvement? Bouwsma said in his preface to *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, referring to the Berkeley disorders of the sixties when he did his work

[They] have taught me a good deal about the realities that underlie political discourse. They have required of me, as of other academic men, some direct participation in the *vita activa civile*, and this considerably deepened my understanding of the relationship between political liberty and intellectual vitality [91].

If this is an acceptable proposition, cannot MLA be seen as one of the loci for effective political activity relative to our professional values?

I believe we have agreed that ethics is not to be divorced from the practice of medicine, nor from any other profession as its practitioners, individually or collectively, express themselves or take action insofar as these affect society. If, as individual practitioners we commit ourselves to a certain course as morally right, would we refrain from expecting our professional association to support such action, because of uncertainty whether or not an association's acts can be defined as "ethical"? Is the commitment to the community which we cherish as individuals less pronounced or even absent when we consider an association as the agent? How do we, as an association, relate to, for example, Physicians for Social Responsibility? Do we share, as an association, that organization's values? If values are guides to action, as Zachert maintains, do they energize our association's future? When we attach a value to the association's existence, whether we have in mind a "central purpose" or whether we connect it with our functioning in society, can we really maintain that these values are epiphenomena needing no explicit reference, or are they not integral to our profession as an indispensable element in society, this open society which promotes social justice and of which we are a part?

I have raised a series of questions that you might suspect of being rhetorical. Perhaps they are, but I

put them before you, not because I want to spring the answers on you, but because they need to be considered as the basis of a recurring dialogue and an opportunity for affirmation, modification, or rejection by you who are concerned with the future of MLA. It is perhaps obvious that progress in that part of the history of MLA that culminated in the 1987 Statement of Values was not linear nor swift. It did not proceed like a river which gathers mass and strength as tributaries join it. Progress in this area seems to me like the process of creating a mosaic, mostly without a detailed background drawing, as individuals, over time, contributed their tesserae of different hues and shapes and inserted them at slightly different angles, enhancing the appearance of the emerging scene.

Is it domus or polis? If this were regarded as an interrogatory, the answer given by our latest document is "both". The Strategic Plan allows us, on one hand, to order our domus, to see the perfection of our essential professional interests, to improve the knowledge and status of our members; on the other hand, having acknowledged that we support a societal good—the improvement of health, it would be difficult to maintain an impenetrable wall between the provision of information and concern about other contributing or deleterious factors relative to health.

Yes, improve our association and its members, but improve also, in whatever measure we can, our society and mankind. And, do it with both vision and a heart. It is a worthwhile goal.

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