

# RETHINKING THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY

*Edited by*

David Lyle Jeffrey  
and Dominic Manganiello



*University of Ottawa Press*

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*...dubitando enim ad inquisitionem venimus;  
inquirendo veritatem percepimus.*

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*David Lyle Jeffrey and Dominic Manganiello*  
(*University of Ottawa*)

By now it is apparent even to the most remote observers of higher education in Canada that here, too, as in the modern technological countries generally, universities are in a perhaps unprecedented state of crisis. In Canada, we do not admit this lightly: the public university has been one of the most enduringly productive and stabilizing influences in a nation that, historically, has not gone out of its way to romanticize or cultivate crisis. But dramatically changing conditions in the economies, ideology, technology and sociology of knowledge, both in its production and its dissemination, have had an impact upon university education worldwide that we have not been able to avoid. The intrusiveness of market-driven curriculum and the incipience of a technolatriy Canadians were at one time inclined to view as the "Americanization of learning" (e.g., Howard Adelman and Dennis Lee, eds., *The University Game* [Toronto: Anansi, 1968]) have by now become a general system; like the Internet, its webs have been spun worldwide and know no cultural boundaries.

To say that the developments we associate with postmodernity have so far not represented an unqualified benefit to the university would be an understatement. From Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), first delivered to the Conseil des Universités du Québec in 1979, through works as divergent in focus and fashion as the Institute for Research on Public Policy's symposium *Universities in Crisis: A Medieval Institution in the Twenty-first Century* (ed. W.A.W. Neilson and Chad Gaffield [Montreal, 1986]), Peter C. Emberley and Waller R. Newell's *Bankrupt Education: The Decline of Liberal Education in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), Bill Reading's *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996) and *Petrified Campus* by Jack Granatstein, David Bercusson and Robert Bothwell (Toronto and New York: Random House, 1997), a veritable chorus of

academics—many of them Canadian—has expressed sombre concern that the very future of the University—in particular as it respects the provision of a liberal, humane education—is now in serious jeopardy. So far this concern has not perhaps been as acutely felt among the sciences and engineering faculties, but they are not likely to persist long as an exception: while such disciplines have been able to ride the wave of technological revolution more successfully in the short run, the press of economic downsizing and the effect of technical support shrinkage in these areas too has begun to raise institutional alarm. Challenges both fiscal and ethical now extend into the once sacrosanct sphere of the medical schools. Reassurances, such as David L. Johnston's 1995 Killam Lecture, "Research at Canadian Universities and the Knowledge-based Society," have been unable to assuage the resulting anxiety. Much of the predictive element in all these (and many other) studies has been bereft of generally convincing reflection on the future development of our present situation.

A further complication for universities has been the extensive discrediting of many of the great nineteenth- and early twentieth-century "founders" of scientific method and the formation of the disciplines. To take just a few examples: demonstrations that the reported experiments (and hence the derived principles) of psychologists Freud and Jung were routinely falsified or invented whole-cloth (cf. Paul C. Vitz, *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious* [New York: Guilford Press, 1988] and Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994]) have had the effect of undermining confidence in the social sciences generally; the general collapse of Marxist economies has had a similar deleterious effect in the fields of economics, history and political science. In the hard sciences, not even Darwin has stood unscathed: advances in molecular biology (cf. Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* [New York: Free Press, 1996]) have begun to call into question the venerable evolutionary model upon which much modern scientific pedagogy and research has been based. The vested interests of senior academics (and indeed of whole disciplines) act as a powerful brake on these and other challenges—yet not without unwelcome side effects. Partly as a consequence of resistance to academic iconoclasm, to use the terminology of Granatstein et. al., both organizationally and intellectually the Canadian university has come to seem to its critics as "petrified"—not only in the sense that it is clinging to an arrested state of development, but that institutionally, its ethos is characterized by fearfulness and moral paralysis.

To what extent are such assessments accurate? If there is problematic truth to be dealt with in some of the many postmodern challenges to university identity, how best to mount a practical response? And

how best to deal with imminent structural instability—for example, the parceling off of both scientific research and cultural and political reflection into industry-dominated projects and special interest think-tanks, developments that threaten to drain off too much of the “cream of the crop” from the next generation of leading university researchers?

Nowhere, perhaps, is the university crisis more conflictual than within its cadre of younger professionals. Institutional anxieties and petrification are widely mirrored by a fearful and tormented ambition in the ranks of the next generation of university researchers and teachers. All too aware that they have been produced in numbers that have created an almost ludicrously unbalanced academic buyers’ market, they compete for and cling tenuously to mostly temporary positions, striving to overcome professional paranoia and powerful resentment even as they stoop to acquire any and every scrap of herd coloration. Fashion rules. Few are willing to incur the slightest suggestion of non-compliance with trends and “norms” of the moment; conformism has never seemed more necessary for survival. For others, the extremity of our disarray is rarely better instanced than by the evasiveness and ethical vacuity that typically attends faculty discussion of the problem of overpopulated Ph.D. programs: the vested interests of senior professors (who enjoy the kudos and privileges of teaching mostly graduate students) and of administrators (who are under pressure to get undergraduates taught at the lowest possible unit cost) often coincide. What gets advertised in consequence as a purely pragmatic rationale for the *status quo* is at the same time seen by many graduate students and assistant professors as thinly masked venality.

Nor should it be imagined that the senior professoriate is necessarily content with their own lot. As measured against cherished recollections of the idealism about teaching and research that drew them to a career many saw as vocation, discrepancies abound and disgruntle. Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Carol Shields, professor (University of Manitoba) and Chancellor of the University of Winnipeg, addressed the problem of professional malaise in a speech to the quinquennial conference of the Association of the Commonwealth Universities. Notwithstanding that professors work in secure, comfortable surroundings in which they are accorded a high degree of freedom, she observed:

... we meet, every day, disaffected, alienated, embittered intellectuals who have lost faith with the enterprise...  
When have you last heard someone on a teaching staff of university say, “I am privileged to work in this extraordinary place”?

(*Ottawa Citizen*, August 18, 1998)

Shields' rhetorical question exposes issues too broad to be dealt with tidily. As she noted in the same speech, diminishment of job satisfaction in the university is complex even as it is general: "Every day we hear of professors or support staff suffering nervous breakdowns, drifting into industry or taking early retirement because, among other reasons, department strife has exhausted them." But would Prozac and partial pensions or flight to alternative employment be so common if the university's identity, community character and sense of educational mission were still compelling?

As is well known, all of these local and institutional concerns have proliferated in the context of a more general debate about the role of higher education in both political and intellectual culture. Much of the most widely publicized debate has focused on the American university. A decade ago Alan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) established a beachhead in an academic critique that quickly obtained general attention. Early reactions to the politicization of higher education in the U.S. tended to follow Bloom's lead in seeing the curricular aspects of university crisis as representing a kind of moral as well as intellectual impoverishment: Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press, 1991) is the most notorious of such critiques; nonetheless, a more balanced and liberal assessment, that of David Bromwich in *Politics by Other Means: The Limits of Institutional Radicalism* (New Haven: Yale, 1992), still argued that the underlying issues of intellectual purpose and community value were being upstaged by the more superficial (if intense) squabble about speech codes and "empowerment," and that the fuss tended to disguise an ominous complicity on the part of "professional" academics with the forces actively undermining the public university. The distance from the "marketplace" once regarded as necessary to its character and legitimate function had been sacrificed to short-term market options. Gratification of certain materialist appetites on the part of institutions and individual faculty members had led directly to something very like the "impoverishment" in Bloom's inflammatory title.

What has subsequently emerged in the ongoing conversation about the "future of the university" south of the border is a recognition that any reformation and renewal must take account of the fact of professionalization and the ethos of the marketplace. These, as much as any intellectual trends, have conspired to deprive the university of the spiritual authority so crucial to its historic development and thus, it must be added, diminished its sense of educational mission and identity. This concern is evident in such studies as Jaroslav Pelikan's review of John Henry (Cardinal) Newman's *The Idea of a University* in his *The*

*Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven: Yale, 1992), in Mark R. Schwehn's *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and George M. Marsden's *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). While recognizing that loss of spiritual identity in the contemporary university has emptied it in many cases of resources that would be useful in the present crisis, most of these studies are tentative about how the "soul" of the university should be resuscitated. Soul-searching analysis even from within the sphere of the religious universities and colleges seem better able to describe and diagnose the loss and impoverishment than to propound restorative therapies or cures. The essays collected by Theodore Hessburgh, C.S.C., in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1994) betray deep divisions concerning the maintenance of Catholic identity in the modern Catholic university, and Mark A. Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) is a poignant history of American anti-intellectualism and widespread resistance within that constituency to the achievement of first-order academic excellence.

The fact remains that the Western university was born out of a desire on the part of deeply religious Christian communities to explore the intricacies both of creation and of the human mind as an evident obligation of faith. *Fides quaerens intellectam* and *credo ut intelligam*—Anselm of Canterbury's twelfth-century summary of Augustine's sense of the interdependency of faith and reason—expresses quite accurately the impulse that was propaedeutic to the first universities. But there is another, more recent fact with which to conjure. Along the way, and especially since the nineteenth century, Western universities lost conviction concerning faith and then, more recently, concerning the reliability of the intellect as well. The full effect of this double loss, most widely apparent in the humanities, social sciences, education and law, now for the first time begins to bode ill for public support for the hard sciences.

A number of discussion groups at the University of Ottawa over the past few years have been directed to consideration of the intellectual future of the University. In one of these, presided over by the then Dean of the Graduate School, Nicole Bégin-Heick, David Jeffrey was a regular attendee and formal contributor. Another, longer-running group (dubbed the *Collegium Augustinianum*) has been meeting weekly for two hours at breakfast and involves faculty and graduate students from a variety of humane disciplines as well as representatives from the sciences and social sciences at the University. In this second group the question of spiritual identity as well as of intellectual formation has been actively pursued and critically engaged. Both Jeffrey and

Dominic Manganiello have been persistent members of and contributors to this latter group. Prompted by reading and discussion of pertinent books and articles (e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre, George Marsden, Jaroslav Pelikan, etc.), we have sought to engage still wider reflection and discussion among our colleagues.

The McMartin Family Lecture Fund provides for an annual series of lectures (Carleton University and the University of Ottawa, alternating each year), traditionally focusing on the relationship of religious and ethical reflection to the life of the intellectual disciplines. We applied successfully to employ this vehicle as our means of obtaining a complement of distinguished North Americans who have recently given sustained thought to the ongoing life of the university.

The McMartin speakers were chosen carefully so as to bring both a critical historical context and some of the best of contemporary (post-modern) reflection to bear upon our considerations. Each graciously consented to address the topic we assigned. Most of the lectures were televised (CPAC); each was followed by intensive conversation and questioning. We soon realized that demand for printed texts of the lectures was considerable and undertook to have the speakers revise for publication, following a careful brief for specific points of integration provided by ourselves, especially in consideration of the postlecture discussions.

The 1995–1996 McMartin lectures were engaged as a preliminary exercise in rethinking the present crisis in relationship to the historic identity and development of the modern university and, without evading candid assessments of the present situation, as an attempt to imagine ways of reconstructing if not precisely remembering the vital lineaments of our humane, liberal educational tradition. All McMartin lectures here printed were delivered during the autumn term of 1995 at the University of Ottawa, assisted by grants from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa and from the Centre for University Teaching, for which the organizers are deeply grateful. The series organizers have themselves also contributed two 1996 lectures: a version of David Jeffrey's paper was presented at the University of Calgary's Symposium on the Future of the Humanities in March 1996; Dominic Manganiello's was first given at the Ottawa "Univ" Conference on Communication in the University, also in March 1996.

It is our hope that the vigorous dialogue and debate represented in this volume will contribute to serious conversations elsewhere, and that these conversations will sturdily resist becoming "academic" in the pejorative sense so often attached to the adjective by our contemporaries. It is time now, we feel, for some bolder initiatives at redress, rebalancing and, as may be necessary, recovery of the nobler purposes of the university.

PART I

WHERE DID WE COME FROM?

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# THE ORIGINAL IDEA OF THE UNIVERSITY

*B. Carlos Bazan (University of Ottawa)*

In keeping with the main theme of the McMartin lectures, my aim is twofold: to identify the idea that inspired the constitution of the medieval university and, at the same time, to extract the subsequent meaning of this original idea for all those who, nowadays, ponder the future of the university as an institution. Essayed in this way, the aim is difficult to achieve, for, on the one hand, it obliges the author to engage in a kind of theoretical abstraction that can risk offending professional historians, who respect the rich variety of the particulars of the medieval universities as well as the trajectory of their progressive development. On the other hand, because of a tendency to idealize a historical reality located in another space and time, it can also be overtly tempting to make anachronistic connections to the here and now.

These caveats notwithstanding, one can still make profitable use of the human capacity to abstract ideas from their particular manifestations, provided that the rules of abstraction are respected. Abstraction responds to the old problem of the one and the many and to the antinomies that haunted the first philosophers. It is a strategy that should, of course, be exercised with humility, knowing that, in keeping with the nature of our intelligence, we bring the order of a concrete and particular existence to an order of intelligible representations that makes discourse possible. Abstraction is the result of induction, and it depends directly, in its constitution and in its exercise, on specific data furnished by experience. In order not to burden my theoretical synthesis with erudite apparatus, I will simply note that the mass of historical data supporting it is readily available so that, if the need arises, one can verify the general ideas that I will put forward. As a historian, I am aware of the *modus operandi* of my profession as a philosopher.

As for the risk of anachronism, all I can add is that it has always been possible for the human spirit to lean on its previous achievements

in order to draw valid orientations and to unify in an inclusive aim the historical experience that defines our identity. And we will be surprised to see the extent to which today we still have profound links—in the order of representation that we have of ourselves as intellectuals and as a university institution—with our medieval predecessors. I think it might be fruitful for us, upon beginning our series of reflections on the future of the university, to reflect also on our origins and on the ideals that brought our colleagues together seven centuries ago in the Middle Ages.

My exposition consists of four parts. In the first, I treat the idea of the *uniuersitas* as a corporation. In the parts that follow, I subject the historical reality to scrutiny—following an epistemological model dear to the medievals—from the point of view of the “four causes” that, by their convergence, made possible the constitution and development of medieval universities, that is to say, the efficient, final, material and formal causes of the university corporation.

## THE UNIVERSITY AS A CORPORATION

There is no doubt that universities are typically medieval institutions, fruit of the spirit of association that took hold of medieval society from the twelfth century onward, and of the power the medieval genius seemed to have had for incarnating in institutions their most cherished ideals (Rashdall, 4). The term *uniuersitas* needs to be clarified in order to avoid any ambiguity it might evoke in our contemporary mindset. In the first place, *uniuersitas* does not correspond exactly to what nowadays we call a “university.” For us, this term has an abstract meaning designating an institution or establishment of higher learning. For the medievals, the term that corresponds to this abstract meaning is *studium* (or *studium generale*). *Uniuersitas*, on the other hand, means an assembly of persons.

For example, when a letter is addressed to the *uniuersitas uestra*, it means it is addressed to the “assembly of you people.” *Uniuersitas* is thus a legal entity, a corporation bringing individuals together on the basis of a common interest. In this sense, it applies to various types of associations of individuals having common goals. In the particular case of professional teachers, it is the corporative organization that makes the *studium* function (Verger, 48).

The idea of *uniuersitas* has deep roots. Used for the first time by Cicero and later by Chalcidius (in his translation of Plato’s *Timaeus*), it translated the Greek “to pan” or “olotes,” that is to say, it meant simply “the totality.” In the ecclesiastical literature of the Middle Ages it meant “universe” (in the sense of the totality of creation), but also a

(religious) "community." Its meaning was linked to the affiliated terms *collegium*, *corpus*, *communitas*, *fraternitas*. The term was applied as much to ecclesiastical collectivities as it was to urban or rural communities. Starting in the twelfth century, the evolution of feudal society fostered a vigorous movement of an association of people having common interests who perceived in the act of association the best way of defining, in the interior of this complex and unequal network of rights that characterized feudalism, their own rights and liberties. These associations were called *uniuersitas*.

Historical and social factors contributed to the promotion of this movement. Often cited are the increase in population, the creation of an agricultural surplus, the expansion of cities, the development of trades, the increase in commercial exchange and, of course, the interests of the central authorities (king and Pope) who saw, in the act of granting rights to these associations, an effective way to affirm their primacy over the personal authority exercised by the local lords and bishops. In the particular case of intellectual corporations (a point to which I will return), the existence of instruments of intellectual work (scientific books) should be duly noted.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze these socio-economic factors. Just bringing them to your attention will serve my purpose. But since the existence of associations required an act of acknowledgment on the part of the authorities, theoretical instruments to justify the existence of a legal entity were also required. These instruments were supplied by Roman law. The fourth title of the third book of the Roman *Digest* considers *uniuersitas* estates no less than diverse groups of persons benefiting from a particular system and capable of acting through the intermediary of a representative. But Roman law was restrictive as to the type of associations that could ask for the status of a legal entity. It would become the work of canon rather than civil lawyers to elaborate on this notion based on a theoretical reflection on the long experience of life in common that the ecclesiastical communities had. The empiricism of the canonists allowed for the theoretical unpacking of the notion of *uniuersitas* so that it could be applied to a very wide range of associations of individuals. Indeed, their work has helped to clarify a fundamental element in the notion of *uniuersitas*. In effect, the gloss of the *Digest* affirmed that the *uniuersitas* was nothing more than an assembly of individuals that composed it. While being literally true, this definition failed to illuminate the existence of a special relation founded on the formal difference between the sum of individuals and the legal entity that they constituted together. Again, it would be the work of canonists to highlight this dimension. And that is why Pope Innocent IV, in the middle of the thirteenth century, could declare that the collectivity designated by the term *uniuersitas fingitur una persona* and that it

is a *nomen intellectuale*. The university is therefore a term that arises from an intellectual operation made by the jurist unifying as a legal entity the assembly of individuals composing it. This legal entity is independent of these same individuals and transcends them: they pass on, but it remains and keeps its identity intact through all the changes (Michaud-Quantin, 204–211).

This new being, independent of the individuals who compose it, is, to use the expression of Innocent IV, a *res incorporalis* that defines itself by the individuals who compose it (the material cause), by the rights that both it and its members as members are subject to (the formal cause) by the goal that it sets itself (the final cause) and by the acknowledgment of its existence, its rights and its objectives (the efficient cause). I intend to examine each of these causes that define the medieval *uniuersitas* in turn, but I want to pay almost exclusive attention to the particular *uniuersitas* of the intellectuals.

## THE MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY CORPORATION

The consideration of the individuals who compose the medieval *uniuersitas* allows us to distinguish immediately between two principal models: there are universities of masters, where students, though members, play a passive role; and there are the universities of students, where teachers are hired to offer the formation students seek. The first model is that of the University of Paris; the second, that of the University of Bologna. I am obliged to limit myself, for practical reasons, to underlining the salient features of the two models that influenced all the other medieval universities.

Whether it is a question of a university of masters or a university of students, one thing is clear: the medieval university had need of teachers. And it is precisely the history of the gradual establishment of this “trade” that should be briefly examined in order to understand the birth of the university.

Since Charlemagne, the reform in teaching proposed by Alcuin had consolidated and considerably standardized the formation offered in “schools” (palatine, cathedral, abbatial). The Church, for its part, had the vocation and the infrastructure that permitted it to assume in an almost exclusive way the educational responsibility in the West. It exercised this responsibility by demanding that those in charge of education be linked to the Church much in the manner that clerics were, while demanding for itself the exclusive power of granting a teaching licence (*licentia docendi*). This power was exercised through the mediation of the bishops, that is to say, by the local ecclesiastical authorities. The bishop had delegated this power to the *magister scholarium*, also

called *scolasticus* and finally *cancellarius* (chancellor). The latter had teaching responsibilities from the outset, and, closely linked to this function, he had the responsibility of recognizing, by an official act, the teaching competence of someone who had completed the program of studies. The chancellor thus monopolized the granting of licences and he profited from it to such an extent that the Pope felt obliged to denounce as simony the selling of grades. As long as the number of students multiplied they, in turn, took on teaching assignments, and the role of the chancellor became progressively that of a superior of "schools" opened by the new teachers, all the while retaining the exclusive power of granting the *licentia docendi*. The various schools gathered together in a city were referred to as *studium*, without this term designating any collective reality having a proper juridical status (Delhaye, 211). The schools continued this practice of reproducing themselves and in this way planted the seed of what would become *uniuersitas*, masters who demand for themselves the right to control their profession.

Two observations need to be made in this context: first, not all schools evolved into universities (e.g., Reims, Chartres, Tours); second, the old structure of the schools survived even after the foundation of the universities. But those that did not follow the associationist trend did not survive.

What was it that made certain schools evolve, at the very end of the twelfth century and in the first 20 years of the thirteenth, into universities? There is no question that the key element is the existence of a critical mass of masters (Verger, 22). And this mass is the result of the success certain schools attained in recruiting candidates for the master's degree. The success of schools in this regard is, in turn, linked to the prestige of its masters. It is known that Abelard did not found the University of Paris, but without his prestige and intellectual quality Paris would not have attracted as many students and would not have evolved later into a university. The same thing can be said of Irnerius and the legendary Peppo at Bologna. From their birth, the universities relied on a tradition of excellence, and the game has not changed since then. The other key element is the awareness masters developed of themselves as a community linked by the same interests and the same goals, that is to say, their awareness of the profession of teachers and of their place within society where they wanted to see themselves recognized. It seems well established today that two social groups—merchants and intellectuals—developed this awareness before others did (Michaud-Quantin, 169–170). In the case of merchants, the phenomenon is linked to the development of commercial trade in Western Europe and to the need of protecting the rights simultaneously of those who brought merchandise to the cities and of those who produced it

there. In the case of intellectuals the phenomenon is a complex one given the more "spiritual" nature of the factors that come into play.

The one thing needful was a conception of knowledge that responded to proper rules of discourse and to specific goals. While Christianity limited itself to preserving knowledge, the role of intellectuals had been a passive one. From the moment the critical examination of this preserved knowledge required discernment of the amount of truth it contained, then the role of intellectuals became more active. In order to conduct a critical examination of knowledge, two elements were required: an important mass of accumulated knowledge and a method of critical examination. The movement toward translating Greek and Arab works and the works of synthesis made by Peter Lombard in theology, by Gratian and Irnerius in law and by the articles produced by the learned doctors of Salerno, furnished the critical mass of knowledge. The method of *sic et non* (Abelard again) provided the instrument of work. The self-awareness of intellectuals was thus linked to the availability of a mass of knowledge and to the possession of an instrument of critical research. But the proper characteristic of the individuals who constituted the universities was that they cultivated this knowledge for its own sake. It is remarkable that the *uniuersitas* should gather together individuals who wanted to cultivate their disciplines with the simple goal of reproducing them by way of teaching and not by exercising them in a profession outside of teaching. This does not mean that the people who went to university did not see them as means of social promotion by the exercise of professions. On the contrary. We know that a great number of students frequented the university for only short periods, and that they did not at all aspire to acquire higher qualifications. After some years they retired from the university and were incorporated into society to exercise there the diverse social responsibilities for which the university had prepared them. But the ultimate goal of the corporation was the production of teachers, that is to say, of experts in the discipline capable of reproducing and developing it by way of teaching it.

The payment of taxes, from this point of view, was not perceived as a problem. According to available historical data, only 30 percent of students obtained their bachelor's degree, while barely 10 percent received their master's. But this was the final product that the corporation aimed for as an objective, the professional formation being practically a by-product, a positive and laudable one, and important from the social point of view, but not considered essential to the vocation of those who made up the corporation. Another proof is supplied by the fact that professions with a heavily intellectual component did not evolve into universities (as was the case with architects, for example), and that there were parallel professional corporations often cover-

ing the same area as the university corporation (for example, there were corporations of doctors and lawyers, whose goal was the training of their members for the exercise of their professions). The university was rather to be composed of individuals who sought knowledge for its own sake and who, on the basis of possessing this knowledge, would take their place in society. Autonomous knowledge, a method of research and *amor scientiae*, were to be the principal components of professional self-awareness of the individuals who made up the *uniuersitas*. These characteristics were to make the *magister* into a man of professional authority certified by his peers, and allow him to claim his place in the city as a distinguished person.

But this spirit could not simply give itself a body (Rüegg, 11). The movement toward association that gave rise to the universities was maintained, as I noted earlier, by social phenomena and external economics. In a society characterized by the inequality of rights, the need to assure a group of individuals of their own rights—their corporate integrity—must be effected by a whole series of parallel initiatives. One of the first manifestations of this need had been the incorporation of masters (in Paris) and of students (in Bologna). In effect, if in Paris it was the masters who needed to affirm their rights before the chancellor, in Bologna it was foreign students who experienced the same need with regard to the city that did not accord them the same rights and privileges as the rest of its citizens. For it was the fact of belonging to a city that determined the rights of the individual. The foreigner lacked such rights by definition. But Bologna had for a long time attracted students from other Italian cities (the *citramontanes*) and from foreign countries (the *ultramontanes*), all desirous of acquiring competence in civil and canon law that the reputation of Bologna promised them. These students were adults (by comparison with the young adolescent students of the faculty of arts in Paris) and rich (they were often members of the nobility, especially from Germany). They sought in the study of law a sure means of consolidating their privileges within their own cities. But in Bologna they were downgraded. To alleviate the situation they formed themselves into a corporation, they hired masters and then demanded the rights and privileges of the city. The city fathers indeed accorded them these rights and privileges, mindful of the economic advantage that a mass of rich consumers meant for the welfare of the city. This is the origin of the *uniuersitas scholarium*.

As much in the case of Paris as it was in the case of Bologna, the individuals who composed the *uniuersitas* were linked to a community from the inside of which they defined their freedoms. This membership was consecrated by a medieval institution that bound them to a corporation in a profound and personal manner: the oath. They swore to respect the university community, to pursue its interests, to contribute to

the attainment of its goals, to make an effort to excel in the activities that were proper to them. This oath was the foundation of their sense of belonging: it was not merely a sufficient condition for membership, it was the necessary condition. Its effects permeated the whole life of the individual, who was always to feel linked not to an abstract institution, but to a concrete community of colleagues. The oath also explains the primacy of the faculty of arts: the students took the oath on their entrance into this faculty, and they were linked from this point on to the rector of the faculty. This explains why the head of the faculty of arts was recognized as the head of the whole *uniuersitas*.

Since the entrance of individuals into the medieval *uniuersitas* touches on a current problem among ourselves, that of accessibility, it should be noted that the medieval university recruited its members from all social classes. While there were certain faculties that recruited among the most wealthy, such as law, the general policy of the universities was to accept their students on the basis of merit and not according to social origin. In fact, the universities became an efficient means of achieving upward social mobility. This policy was supported by the Church: the Pope intervened to prohibit the chancellor from exacting payment for the granting of a licence. He also intervened vigorously so that bishops and priests would establish prebends on behalf of poor students and so that priests who undertook studies would keep their ecclesiastical benefits while they were absent from their local churches. The Pope himself established a series of scholarships to support financially both students and teacher-students in the arts.

To understand the sense of corporate spirit and the sense of belonging to a *uniuersitas* it is necessary to analyze the formal cause of the corporation, that is, the whole of the rights and privileges that the *uniuersitas* ensured for their members.

Even if these rights and privileges were often acquired by a pre-emptive, *de facto* implementation, they were required in the end to be recognized by an authority. This is why the study of the formal cause of the universities' foundation should be made in conjunction with a study of (or at least a mention of) the efficient cause (the power that recognized these rights and privileges).

## THE RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES OF THE *UNIUIERSITAS*

In general, every corporation wants to defend the professional interests of its members by establishing an appropriate jurisdiction and a monopoly on the exercise of the profession. Inevitably, it defines itself, then, in comparison with the centres of jurisdiction that surround it and in comparison with those that compete with it. In the case of the



*uniuersitas*, this implies a struggle to define its juridical relations with the city, the political and ecclesiastical powers, as well as its professional relations with regard to other communities that aspire to achieve the same objectives (as, for example, in the case of the mendicant orders). The study of what I have called the formal cause of the universities (its rights and privileges) is thus indissolubly linked to the study of the efficient cause (the source of its rights and privileges). I will therefore focus on these two aspects simultaneously.

Yet a point of clarification needs to be made right away: in the case of "spontaneous" universities, born of the associational instinct I have already mentioned, it would be incorrect to say that these rights and privileges had as an initial source an act established by the civil or ecclesiastical authority. In fact, these rights were established as a result of battles between the corporation and the external local powers, and the subsequent interventions of larger powers (king and Pope) that came to recognize and sanction in law that which had already been in place for some time. The case of universities created by the intervention of various powers is, of course, different. And there were even cases where the actual situation was never recognized in law (Oxford never received the *licentia ubique docendi* by papal decree), and cases where even the royal decree created a *studium* but did not give rise to a *uniuersitas* (Naples).

The question of rights and privileges of the corporation is always important for, as a legal entity, the corporation presupposed, as I have said, that it would be subject to these rights as a collectivity that remained superior to and transcended its individual members. But in the Middle Ages the question was even more crucial because of the nature of juridical relations in a feudal society. Every medieval corporation tended to define for its members a domain of law. The *uniuersitas* was no exception and it tried to define this domain by a form of opposition to "foreign" powers. It tried to remove the obligation of its members to submit to these powers in order to replace it with its own power, an authority representing the collective will of its members. The sphere of rights and privileges that it procured constituted that domain which the members of the corporation called "their freedoms." And this notion essentially meant freedom from the dominion of an arbitrary external power. To be free meant to be able to discuss the limits of submission, to possess a statute indicating the rights and duties defined in a contract. In feudal society one could not attain these freedoms as an individual; one could only attain them by becoming a member of a collectivity, or a *uniuersitas*. "Academic freedoms" are those which a corporation secures for its members; and it is the corporation which is the cause of these liberties. One is free within the *uniuersitas*. "The air of the city makes one free" (Michaud-Quantin, 268–269).

The appropriate status of the corporation manifests itself in the symbolic order (the seal—which was the object of important confrontations—the rings, the biretta, the academic gown, symbols that we have kept to this day), but, above all, in the establishment of a jurisdiction with regard to its members and by comparison with external jurisdictions. By force and by the recognition that the Pope and king later accorded it, the medieval *uniuersitas* determined its own jurisdiction. I would like to highlight, briefly, the different aspects of this jurisdiction.

In the first place, the universities removed their members from the jurisdiction of the city in order to place them under the jurisdiction of the Church and of special tribunals. This tendency to liberate itself from the city manifested itself even before the consolidation of the corporation. Already, the emperor Frederick Barbarossa by his authentic Habita (1185) gave the students of Bologna the right to be evaluated by their masters or bishop; and King Philip Augustus granted the same rights to the students of Paris in 1200. But that was not yet a privilege of the corporation: it was a right that came to students on account of their being clerics. Later in the thirteenth century, the corporation, already in full flight, secured these privileges for its members as members.

Still later, the universities demanded the right to recruit or to expel their members. In the case of Paris, the action of Pope Innocent III was decisive in this regard and allowed the *uniuersitas* to confirm its jurisdiction with respect to the chancellor. By a series of effective interventions, from 1208 to 1213, Innocent III recognized the right of the masters of Paris to act as a body (recognition of an already existing fact) and to intervene actively in the recruitment of members of this corporation. In effect, the chancellor, who had the exclusive power to grant the licence, saw his power gradually diminish to the point that it became purely symbolic (as is the case today). In 1212–1213, Innocent III accorded the masters of Paris the right to examine candidates for the licence and obliged the chancellor to accept all the candidates recommended to the *uniuersitas*. In 1231, after grave conflicts provoked the secession of the *uniuersitas*, Pope Gregory IX obliged the chancellor to obtain the approval of masters (these do not, therefore, give a simple *consilium*; their consensus is required). The ambiguities of this way of consolidating the rights of the *uniuersitas* with respect to the chancellor have often been underlined by historians: to become independent from the local ecclesiastical authority, the corporation had to become dependent on the Pope (it had, nevertheless, played another card, that of appealing to the chancellor of Sainte-Geneviève). The universities gradually became the protégés and dependants of the Pope. And so that the university might exercise its right to recruit in a rigorous manner, the popes intervened in the establishment of programs of study.

Thus, after the rights acquired in 1213, the university had to review its plans of study in accordance with the directives of the legate, Robert de Courçon, in 1215; and the *Parens scientiarum* of Gregory IX, which is considered the Magna Carta of the University of Paris, imposed on this university very precise directives concerning the plan of studies and the methods of examination.

But the right to recruit that it had just obtained had limits for the university. In effect, if the papal directives did not contain limits for the faculty of arts, they indicated that the number of chairs in theology must not exceed 12 (a directive followed with little rigour since there were 15 by the middle of the century). But the point deserves to be examined because it can illuminate certain subjects of our own contemporary debates. In effect, the corporation continued to give diplomas to a great number of teachers, and they received the *licentia ubique docendi*. With the same stroke they became full-fledged members of the corporation of masters. They were even obliged to teach during the first two years following their *inceptio*. They were at that time called "regent masters." But the limited number of chairs (the policy of *numerus clausus*) forced the university to accelerate the turnover of positions. A master did not remain a regent his entire life (only some exceptions that confirm this rule can be noted). There was no tenure (in spite of the clear medieval origin of the term). After some years (a minimum of two), the teacher became a "non-regent master." But he continued to be a member of the corporation, and he was entrusted with extraordinary courses, or participated in their discussions. In modern terms, the "alumni" continued to be part of the corporation, and they participated in teaching activities as invited professors. Membership was not broken by the fact of no longer holding a chair. Meanwhile, many sought avenues other than the ones the *licentia ubique docentia* offered them and opened schools in other *studia generale*.

Finally, the *uniuersitas* demanded the right to give statutes and its norms of internal working procedure. This right had various interconnecting aspects: a legislative aspect, strictly speaking, but also an executive aspect (the right to give itself authorities and to have representatives) as well as a judicial aspect (the decision of tribunals to which academics submitted their cases). The *uniuersitas* gave itself statutes well before having official approval. And when the pontifical legate Robert de Courçon approved them in 1215, he took over, it seems, the essence of the ancient norms while adjusting them to the new realities. In 1231, Gregory IX confirmed the statutes of the universities. They contained norms on the program of studies, on procedural norms at the time of official ceremonies, on the corporative duties of members of the *uniuersitas* and other internal norms having equal value to the statutes that touched on the remuneration of professors:

even if knowledge was a gift of God that one would not know how to sell, teaching was regarded as work that deserved remuneration. It is reported, moreover, that "market differentials," alas, already existed in the Middle Ages, and that in this struggle lawyers were the winners, "arts students" the losers. Other statutes governed the taxes that could be levied on members (particularly the question of tuition fees, or *collectae*), the exams and conditions for obtaining a licence, dress, religious ceremonies and funerals, the responsibility of teachers toward their students and professional ethics (the authority of the master should be exercised with humility since there is only one master; one was to avoid devoting oneself to vain curiosities in teaching—the so-called "vanity courses"! ). Still other statutes legislated the duties of students (no pupil without a teacher), the oath of membership, rent, teaching assignments and the obligation to carry on disputations. The statutes thus defined the common good of the corporation, of its members, who, subjected to the same laws and enjoying through this contract well specified rights and privileges, constituted the *uniuersitas*, the group of persons responsible for the general *studium* of Paris.

Two aspects strictly linked in the statutes are particularly important: the establishment of authorities responsible for the administrative management of the corporation and the legislative mechanisms to modify the statutes. The first aspect concerns the right of all corporations to install officers to ensure the application of the statutes and to represent the corporation before external authorities. The University of Paris was organized according to four faculties (arts, theology, canon law and medicine). The last three, which can be considered as faculties of graduate studies, had a dean at their head. The faculty of arts (the one with the greatest number of students by far since it was the "entrance" faculty) and masters were divided into four nations that grouped the professors and their students according to their geographical origin. Each one was directed by a procurator (proctor) and the four assisted the rector, head of the faculty and in effect chief executive officer of the whole *uniuersitas* starting in 1280 (not without meeting some resistance from the faculty of theology). Rectors, procurators, deans: all were masters elected by their peers, and all were therefore full-fledged members of the *uniuersitas*. The only external power was the chancellor as chancellor, since if he was a professor he was also a member of the corporation as a master. The rector carried out a double function: he convoked and presided over the university assembly and established an agenda (without taking part in debates). At first he represented the faculty of arts and later the whole university. He had judicial powers: with the four procurators he constituted the court of highest authority in questions of discipline (of masters or students, and of civil conflicts with the middle class). After this tribunal of the highest authority, the members of the

university could make appeal to special tribunals created by the bishop or papal legate. He controlled part of the funds of the faculty of arts. He remained in his position for three months and had to give an account (accountability—*syndicatio*) of the administration to the end of his mandate. Other officers completed the team of administrators: the proctor, who represented the university before the Pope; the procurator and the accountant, who represented in court both the individuals and the corporation; the vergers, entrusted with the communication of decisions and the circulation of important information; the registrar, in charge of matriculation; the *massarii* (treasurers). All these officers were members of the *uniuersitas*, not outside administrators. That is why the real representative, having full legislative powers in the corporation, was the general assembly (*congregatio generalis, plena congregatio, generale concilium*). Each faculty in turn had their own assemblies (*congregatio, conuentus*). The members of those assemblies were the master regents (but from the fourteenth century even the non-regents formed part of the assembly). The constitution of these assemblies and their central power resulted from the application of the old juridical principle *quod omnes tangit* ("that which concerns all should be decided by all"). The assembly represented the legal entity of the *uniuersitas*. Since the university was a federation of faculties, each one deliberated separately and brought its vote to the general assembly. The rector did not have the right to vote. The virtual veto that each faculty had was replaced by majority rule, though not without resistance (a dissenting faculty refused, for example, to bring the key to the coffer where the seal of the university was kept, impeding in this way the validation of the decision. The solution? The coffer was broken.)

This instance notwithstanding, what should be remembered about this early structure of government is the profound collegial sense it helped to obtain in the medieval university. Masters, students, alumni and administrators constituted the same community, and were alike responsible for its government in view of common interests and objectives. This collegiality is the essence of the medieval university as it derived from the Paris model. Perhaps needless to say, it no longer exists, or, if it does, it lives on in a system that is fraught with ambiguity. In the medieval university even the parallel professions enjoyed the sense of belonging and were protected and supervised by the corporation: librarians, stationers, brokers, craftsmen in parchment, etc. The *uniuersitas* was a community of persons dedicated to the same goal: knowledge and scientific excellence. It was the institutional framework responsible for the good functioning of the *studium* and of the protection of the rights of its members.

To defend these rights and to show its responsibility with regard to the interests of the corporation, the *uniuersitas* had a formidable means:

the right to strike (that the bishops and the cities tried to limit, but which the popes always protected). This power was increased, curiously, by the poverty of the universities: they had no possessions, no land of their own, but they constituted a very important group of consumers for the cities' economy. When the occasion justified it (for example, when the police of the city or the king did not respect the rights or the life of the members of the corporation), a strike was declared, which meant in practice that they left the city. Thus, in 1229, after the police killed students following a brawl with the middle class, the corporation left Paris and did not come back until two years later, and then only after the Pope intervened to confirm their statutes. The solidarity of the *uniuersitas* included all its members, and so masters went on strike to defend their students.

Historians have highlighted the profound impact this collegial practice had on the mentality of the Middle Ages. In effect, the universities constituted "living and active models of a representative system which applied in a concrete fashion the principle *quod omnes tangit...* of which the parliamentary system represents another practical example" (Michaud-Quantin, 324). The collegial principle compels the member of the *uniuersitas* to exercise his freedoms within a community that vouches for it. Its freedom acquires weight because it is part of a communal decision taken by the *uniuersitas* and put into practice by a representative system. And this freedom is safeguarded even if, by the institutional play of the representative mechanisms of the community, the adopted decision expresses, in fact and at a given moment, a conception opposed to that of a specific individual. If the rules of the game of collegial decision making have been followed, there is no further right to lodge a complaint. In this respect, there is a profound difference between the medieval university and the hybrid model (collegial-adversarial) of many contemporary universities.

### THE FINAL CAUSE OF THE *UNIUIERSITAS*

The medieval *uniuersitas*, as Alexander IV had well defined it in 1255, designated a community of persons (masters, students, alumni) all of whose members wanted to live a communal existence in which they affirmed the reality of their collective and single personality and pursued a common goal (Michaud-Quantin, 57).

The collection of rights and principles I have analyzed in the preceding section did not constitute the goal of the *uniuersitas*, but the means the community perceived to be necessary to pursue the goal. In order to have a corporation it was necessary that the corporation be a university. The purpose of the *uniuersitas* was to ensure the functioning of the *studium generale*.

A *studium generale* was a collection of disciplines that were cultivated for their own sake, which meant, in effect, the preservation, development, communication and dissemination of the knowledge that they contained. To say that the *uniuersitas* had the responsibility of the *studium* means that its members had the will and the conscience to live a life devoted to the flourishing of these areas of knowledge, which they perceived to be worthy of being cultivated for themselves as goods for the proper functioning of society and of institutions.

The *uniuersitas* was a professional corporation, but it should be well understood what kind of profession is meant. At the beginning of this chapter it was recalled that there were corporations of doctors and lawyers that were not *uniuersitas* and that did not have the responsibility of a *studium* but of the professional training of its members in view of the exercise of their profession. Their aim was not to cultivate medicine or law as disciplines in themselves but to prepare people for the exercise of their profession (as the exercise of the profession was too tied to economic interests, the corporations of professions were more closed than the universities were in matters of accessibility).

The *uniuersitas*, by contrast, had for its aim the cultivation of disciplines like the sciences, which implies research (preservation and development of the discipline) and teaching (communication and dissemination of the discipline). The profession for which these professional corporations prepare one was therefore the profession of teaching, or, to use a contemporary term that is a bit ambiguous, of being an intellectual. Communal existence that brought together the members of the *uniuersitas* was grounded in the theoretical life, the ancient idea of *bios theoretikos*, which had nothing passive or lazy about it, but which brought with it above all in the Middle Ages a particular vocation open to the acceptance of poverty and capable of resisting the temptation to embark on activities of a more lucrative type than that of acquiring knowledge (kings and popes—and even students—had to remind certain masters about this, especially in the faculty of law). As I have already said, this did not exclude people from frequenting university and then leaving it after a certain time to assume their professional work.

But it was not for this that the *uniuersitas* was founded. Its goal was not the practice of medicine and law, or the direct cure of souls, but rather the study of medical science, the discipline of law and theology as a science. And in doing research, in teaching, these intellectuals ensured the preservation, the development and the dissemination of their scientific activity. In cultivating these areas of knowledge for themselves, they accorded them a universal value (the university is not an institution where all the sciences are cultivated, but where the ones that are cultivated are cultivated for their own sake).

Further, if knowledge is universal, those who aspire to possess it do not recognize national boundaries. The original medieval university was international by vocation and in fact. This international character manifested itself by the diploma it granted to those who passed the tests: it is the *licentia ubique docendi*. The medieval university did not grant a diploma for the direct exercise of the profession; it granted a diploma that attests to the fact that the one who holds it can engage in university teaching in his discipline throughout the world; that is to say, that one has the acquired competence to do science and to initiate others into pursuing the same objective.

It was very important for the medieval universities to have the right to accord the *licentia ubique docendi*, and they defended it vigorously. Far from their understanding was the purely local vocation that was proper to trade corporations. Echoes can still be heard today: a doctor in law of our University can teach right away in any university of the world, but he cannot exercise this right as legal practice before having passed the bar exam in each province where he would like to work. And a doctor in history can teach anywhere, but cannot teach history in primary or secondary school without passing the exams of the school boards, which nevertheless will typically accord this privilege to someone who has but a few credits in history.

That which defines the *uniuersitas* in terms of its final cause is therefore an intellectual life constituted essentially of research and teaching. And the "university man" is one who has embraced, collegially, this common life. It is true that it is a theoretical type of life, but it is a practical one at the same time, for it includes teaching as a fundamental activity. It is on account of the surplus of this kind of life that the universities are also able to nourish the concrete exercise of professions. And it is as institutions that today would be called "scientific and educational" that the universities were irreplaceable in medieval society, or, perhaps, in any society.

This way of life communicates itself in certain activities through which the scientific goal of the *uniuersitas* is achieved and takes shape. All these activities shared a common aspect: they had to confirm the master in the exercise of his twofold responsibility as researcher and teacher, and they had to prepare the "apprentice" students for the exercise of the two components of their own profession as intellectuals and teachers. In order for these activities to develop and acquire their typically medieval forms, a long process of enrichment of the cultural life had already to have been established.

As already noted, it was necessary from early on that Western culture generate for itself a method of creative intellectual work. This distinctive method was in large part due to the contribution of Abelard,



whose method of *sic et non* permitted not only the enrichment of logic (cultivated in the schools as part of the trivium), but also the development of speculative theology. Speculative theology, that is to say scientific theology, had a similar impact on other disciplines which were in the process of being raised professionally from the simply affirmative stage (the repetition of texts) through a veritable questioning of the tradition to a research into matters of truth based on reason as well as on authority. The development of these methods of research has been fundamental to the survival of universities since the beginning of their existence.

What was needed next was an enrichment of the available body of knowledge. Two formidable enterprises contributed in a decisive manner to satisfy this condition. In the first place, a movement toward translating works from Greek and Arabic was initiated in many places in Christendom. (This took place particularly in Toledo, a notable site of cross-cultural encounters—a point that permits me to add that university life has nothing to gain by closing itself within a single cultural profile, and has everything to gain if it exposes itself to other cultures.) This movement toward translation put the Latins in contact with a scientific world constituted next to and independent of the Bible and yet which contained, to be sure, truths about human existence, about the structure of the universe and about the nature of discourse. In the second place, important syntheses of the tradition were carried out by Peter Lombard (in theology), by Gratian and Irnerius (in law) and by the masters of Salerno (in medicine). These syntheses already utilized the essentials of Abelardian method, granting value to the anomalies of an enormous intellectual tradition, and inviting the reader in this way to offer a critical judgment.

Finally, it required a clear understanding of the structure of knowledge capable of inspiring structures of teaching. The initial intuition came from far away: the reform of Alcuin, in the time of Charlemagne, had made the study of *artes liberales* the necessary preparation for all the other types of graduate studies, particularly of theology or of the *Sacra pagina*. The need for a *basic formation* of a methodological and scientific nature as a prerequisite for further studies was thus affirmed. Thus, when the move toward translation shattered the heretofore narrow framework of the liberal arts, and the needs of the disciplines like medicine pointed to the insufficiency of a purely formal education, the "arts students" promptly introduced new texts into the curriculum of studies, not without generating some strong reaction on the part of the Church. But the *universitas* succeeded in affirming its principled position. It was necessary for the faculty of arts to be capable of enriching itself with the most recent "scientific discoveries" in order to fulfill its formative function in an efficacious manner. It is on account of this factor that the texts of Aristotle and those of Arab commentators found

their place in the curriculum. Prohibited in 1210–1215, accepted conditionally (*quosque ab omni suspitione errorum fuerint*) in 1231, they ended up making it into the curriculum in 1255 with papal approval. The *uniuersitas* thus gradually formed its members from a common base solidly established by a “core curriculum,” the nucleus of the basic formation furnished by the faculty of arts.

The tension which this faculty experienced in the Middle Ages is no different from that which our faculty experiences today: are we a faculty of service or do we have our own autonomous scientific project? The crisis of “Latin Averroism” arose out of this problem, when the “arts students” wanted to make philosophy an aim in itself. But Albert and Thomas already possessed a clear understanding of the scientific autonomy of the arts: “*nihil ad me de Dei miraculis cum naturalitier de naturalibus disseramus.*”

With these three prerequisites, the *uniuersitas* could begin to flourish as a community of intellectuals. The evolution of their awareness as intellectuals manifested itself in the evolution of methods of teaching and research.

The first form that the activity of the university men took was the *lectio* (lesson, lecture). This was appropriate for a culture centred on texts, a culture with a hermeneutical disposition. It developed on three levels: *lettera*, the simple explanation of terms; *sensus*, the analysis of meanings taking into account the context and underscoring this through a lucid reformulation; *sententia*, the disengagement of the underlying thought from the mechanics of the exegesis toward an accurate understanding of the text (Chenu, 70). Such texts were the *auctoritates* of medieval culture. Problems began once the masters realized that these “authorities” did not always necessarily agree on a given topic. The argument from authority, then, proved to be insufficient and the master needed to examine the question in a critical manner with the aid of dialectical methods worked out by the logicians. As Abelard himself said: “*dubitando enim ad inquisitionem venimus; inquirendo veritatem percipimus*” (Bazan, 27).

The second method to be developed, that of the *questio*, was always strictly linked to the text and formed part of the *lectio*. The *questio* is the first effective surplus of the practice of exegesis, and it allows the intellectual to adopt a new role: he actively participates in the research for truth, without limiting himself simply to transmitting it. If the text or texts are the first element of the *questio*, the second, equally important, is the ability of the master to incorporate himself into a tradition by his own activity of researching the truth (not of the text, but of the subject matter itself!). As Thomas Aquinas would later put it before the divergence of “authorities”: “*Quidquid autem horum sit, non est nobis*

*multum curandum; quia studium philosophiae non est ad hoc quod sciatur quid homines senserint sed qualiter se habeat veritas rerum*" (*De Caeolo*). By introducing the *questio*, the disciplines cultivated in the different faculties asserted themselves as veritable areas of rational knowledge. And not only the master changes roles; the student also, from the passive auditor that he has been, now becomes an active participant in the work of critical examination of the truth (research) that takes place in the *lectio* (teaching).

This method of establishing the question was so successful that it ended by replacing the purely literal *lectio*. But another step needed to be taken. Here appears the medieval *disputatio*, the veritable masterpiece of the *uniuersitas*, for this method synthesized all the functions that characterized the university corporation. In having acquired a method for raising questions about a text, the university men had, in effect, emancipated their method of textual exegesis. Masters and students alike began "to put the question" to problems and propositions, even if their truth was established, because what now most interests them is to practise the active acquisition of truth, the only way to grasp the fundamental sense and to realize its true value. Of the original *questio* only the form will remain; now masters and students examine a theme by mobilizing all the textual tradition as well as the arguments from reason they can develop on their own. Clearly, this method is only possible if there are teachers who are conscious of their duty to advance knowledge, of the value of their speculative spirit and of the need to teach students the steps toward acquiring new truths or toward the critical confirmation of received truths.

The *disputatio* came to be a method practised in all the faculties—in the arts, in theology, in law and in medicine. But it was to be the theologians who, by using the work of Thomas Aquinas, would lead it to its formal perfection. The medieval disputation became a success because it brought together the activities of research and teaching. It was a method of teaching from which the student could learn to discover the truth for himself. Teaching and research were now seen as but the two faces of the common intellectual activity essential to the *uniuersitas*. And this method of teaching and research came to be so efficacious that even when the authors wrote their treatises, they did so using the method of disputation. Nothing was more foreign to the medieval university than an opposition between teaching and research.

This brings me to present some details about the concrete life of the corporation. The masters knew they had to teach, and the new methods permitted them to see no contradiction between this profession of teaching and their vocation as intellectuals. The corporation obliged them to accord a great importance to teaching. They protected

the number of "reading" days (during which lessons could be given). The calculations of Verger lead one to think that there were between 130 and 150 "readable" days, and the masters would have to give two hours of lessons each of these days. That gives a teaching load of between 260 and 300 hours per academic year. In addition, the masters were supposed to dispute once or twice a week, and a session of disputation could not be held for less than three hours. Since the academic year consisted of 32 weeks, this allowed between 96 and 192 supplementary hours for teaching-research. The masters, after their courses or disputes, withdrew to write up the result of their course (*lectiones et disputationes*) as well as to write works independent of their teaching. The great advantage for them was that the teaching-research method allowed them to bring out publications derived from their teaching.

Be that as it may, the norm, according to my calculations, is that the medieval master would dedicate some 356 hours to teaching (Verger arrives at 492). By way of comparison, a professor in the faculty of arts in our university teaches for 195 hours each year. In Paris there were exceptional cases, such as that of Thomas, who added to his regular teaching load an enormous amount of time devoted to disputations, to the point that historians have difficulty in explaining how he managed to do so many things, since, in addition to teaching, he published prolifically. But perhaps his example is not a good one to follow: he died when he was only 49 years old!

The other aspect that is interesting to underline is the role that students played in the medieval university. It is well known that when a student finished in arts he became a master of arts before becoming a student in a graduate faculty (one could not stay too long in this intermediary stage: *non est senescendum in artibus*). And some began their graduate studies immediately, all the while teaching in arts in order to finance their studies. But this is not the point I would like to underline. What seems to me more important is that students had gradually begun to participate in the master's own tasks: they were active in disputations, be it as *respondens* or as *opponens*; in the graduate faculties they had to take on teaching assignments from the moment they became bachelors (sententiary or biblical). The student was not passive. In the course of his formation, he was prepared for assignments both in teaching and in research. And that was consistent: for at the end of his career he was granted the licence to teach. This complete apprenticeship in the profession was not separate from the apprenticeship in the discipline and in the development of competence in research. It was by participating in activities where teaching and research coincided that he prepared himself to fulfill all the aspects of his discipline and of his profession.

The idea of a faculty of education, separate from the faculties of various disciplines, did not make sense in the medieval *uniuersitas*. From the moment he received his bachelor of arts diploma, the student was incorporated into the activities of teaching and research, and it was by exercising the acts proper to his profession that he became master (researcher-teacher). This aspect has seemed to me most worthy of note because it reveals perhaps a deficiency in our universities, where the student is typically passive for most of the time, and then, once he becomes active, works on his own. And perhaps the cause is that the professors themselves divide the spheres of teaching and research. In the medieval university, it is because the student participated in *all* the activities of the profession that the corporation accorded him the *licentia docendi, disputandi et predicandi*.

There was yet another important dimension of their scholarly activities. The disputations served not only to develop the ability to engage in dialectic or to explore difficult themes; they were also the occasion for the students to show and to affirm their competence before the masters and the people of the city who could be thus interested in giving them financial support. It was by means of their accomplishment in the work of the university that their scholarships were won. As for the masters, they were also supposed to present themselves before the learned community once or twice a year. They were the *questiones de quodlibet*, where the master presented himself before the corporation and the general public and joined in the discussion on any subject of his discipline (*de quodlibet*). This was the equivalent of our learned societies' meeting—or of this McMartin lecture—but it had a much greater social impact.

## CONCLUSION

The medieval *uniuersitas* was born as a result of the corporate effort of people who had as a goal the preservation, development and dissemination of scientific knowledge cultivated for its own sake, and who saw in collegiality the best means of attaining this goal. As a community, it was not exclusive; it welcomed candidates from every sort of background, it provided its own representatives and directors, and asserted itself before external powers in demanding necessary privileges and rights for the exercise of a common vocation. Collegiality, universality, a commitment to learning, harmony between teaching and research, these were the strengths of the original idea of the university. Nothing could be more foreign to this original idea of the university than the current division between professors and administrators, nothing so contrary to its original spirit as to want to be a purely local institution, nothing more minimizing of its interests than to be simply a

school of professional training, nothing more contradictory to its goals than to oppose teaching and research.

Rectors, deans, masters, students and support staff—all were inspired by the same spirit of service to knowledge. To achieve this object they had to define, within their feudal society, a sphere of rights and privileges, simple means that guaranteed their independence and their autonomy as a corporation. Above all, they won the right to formulate their own rules and statutes, to choose their own authorities and representatives, to establish through the plan of studies the required conditions for the exercise of the profession and to control by their own criteria of excellence access to the profession despite the attempt of external powers who wanted to control knowledge. The medieval university wanted above and before all to be the guardian of the criteria of excellence that allowed one to be accepted into the corporation. And these criteria of excellence were taken to have been clearly attested to by participation in the exercises of research and teaching controlled by the corporation. The corporation did not define itself by distinguishing itself from those responsible for university administration (for they, too, are its members), but by an opposition to powers external to the corporation, that is to say, with those who do not share the same objectives.

The weaknesses of the medieval *uniuersitas* are practically the opposite side of the coin of its strengths. Le Goff has remarked, with reason, that corporate organization is paralyzed even by those forces which have helped it to consolidate; the very elements that manifest its progress prepare for an eventual decline (Le Goff, 89). Thus, wanting to free itself from local ecclesiastical authorities, the *uniuersitas* ended by becoming dependent on a higher ecclesiastical power; wanting to assert itself before the city authorities, it ended by becoming dependent on the king. And when the Pope and king entered into conflict, the university corporation found itself caught in the crossfire; wanting to affirm its rights in the feudal structure, it did not know how to distinguish between rights and privileges in such a way that when the evolution of society developed a sense of the equality of rights, the *uniuersitas* could be perceived as anything other than an ivory tower, a centre of privileges from which the ordinary citizen did not benefit. Thus inadvertently, the universities gave rise to the just complaint or jealousy of the civil population. Inspired in its early days by a strong commitment to internationalism, it did not know how to confront nationalism and regionalism (Paris Frenchified itself and ceased to be the intellectual centre of Christendom). In wanting to give students an active role in teaching, the university eventually forgot that teaching ought to rest principally with the masters (in the fifteenth century, professors of certain faculties might teach but once or twice a year, a phenomenon that seems to occur even today).

The more the *uniuersitas* abused its privileges, the more the intervention of external powers seemed justified. Thus, when the university community of Paris demanded the privilege of having special tribunals, Parliament returned them entirely to the common jurisdiction. When the University of Bologna did not want to respond to the requests of the city, *reformatores studii* were imposed upon it. The kings of France did the same thing by the end of the fourteenth century and above all in the fifteenth century. The popes ended by playing a purely formal role and the universities gradually passed under the control of the political power.

But there is nothing strange about this. The universities are historical realities and not supratemporal essences. What should be retained for our consideration of the contemporary university are the elements that constituted the strengths of the medieval university (its collegiality, scientific vocation, the harmony between teaching and research), even as we are mindful of its weaknesses so as not to repeat them. Of these weaknesses, most important are the abuse of its privileges, the forgetting of the complete vocation of the university as a community devoted to research and teaching, the regionalizing of that which is by nature a universal institution and the distance that too many privileges create between the university man and his fellow citizens.

The ideal of the university that the medievals first intuited and then achieved is an ideal worthy of being lived. It is an ideal of life and common activity among colleagues, masters and students, who search for truth for its own sake and who share it among themselves—for truth is a common good. Here was a community of learning where administrative service was accomplished not by isolating oneself from colleagues, but was undertaken as a service in the name of one's colleagues.

When at the beginning of his career the exceptional medieval master who we know as Thomas Aquinas discussed the question of knowing whether teaching belonged to the active or contemplative life, he answered the question by underlining the fact that teaching has two aspects or objects: that which is taught and the person who is taught. Because of the first, Aquinas highlights the contemplative life, whose object is the contemplation of scientific truths; because of the second, he highlights the active life, which is the good of one's neighbor. Teaching thus unites the two types of life: by its end it belongs to the active life, but the principle and root of this activity is research: *Contemplatio alitis tradere* ("research functioning as service").

It was the medieval ideal of research, teaching and collegial service that I embraced in my youth. It is the ideal that continues to inspire my life today and that I try to achieve in my daily university work (even if

at times the limits of mortality prevent me from living it with the desired equilibrium). And it is in the pursuit of this ideal that I will finish my days, when the moment will come to join another *uniuersitas*, be it the material universe out of which I came by chance, necessity or providence, or be it that which joins the creature with his Maker—if such a society is accessible to the human being, as Aristotle once wondered.

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## NEWMAN, THEOLOGY AND THE CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY

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It is now nearly a century and a half since John Henry Newman delivered his famous lectures on *The Idea of a University*.<sup>1</sup> So it is worth asking how his "idea" is doing. Let us suppose that Newman were somehow able to return to survey the state of modern universities. Let us say, for instance, that he had an opportunity to tour the universities of North America, which today may lay claim to providing the prototypical idea for the university being exported around the world. What would he think?

The most striking first impression would be the way in which higher education had become a mass enterprise. Modern universities, he would soon realize, were not shaped by any unifying "idea." They were products of the market.

A resourceful guide, say a minister of education, might point out to Newman, however, that even where mass education is most rampant, a considerable elite among university and college students still seeks a substantial liberal arts education. This humane elite is probably larger, relative to the whole population, than those of the fortunate few white males who attended the tiny universities and colleges of Newman's time. For all the laments about the state of higher education today, proportionately more people today, it might be argued, are receiving a first-rate humane education than ever in history.

Newman, however, would be far from satisfied with this line of reassurance. Rather, he would have to point out to his guide that his idea of a university was not simply about the maintenance of the humane educational ideals of the Western heritage. His educational ideal must be viewed as a unified whole. In fact, the survival of something like this or that of his secondary ideals would in his view be worse than useless in a system that so systematically excluded one of the most essential components of his educational design.

What would alarm Newman most (although it would surprise him least) about current higher education is the missing place of theology. In most major universities today theological study is rarely even an option in undergraduate curricula. Catholic universities are the exception, but are in that respect usually regarded as behind the times. In fact, most academics today take it for granted that to invoke a normative theological concern would be to contaminate one's scholarship. Even some of Newman's most ardent admirers part with him on this crucial point. A striking example is Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (Yale University Press, 1991). Pelikan, himself a distinguished historian of theology, presents his book as a dialogue with Newman. Yet when Pelikan describes his supposedly Newmanian ideal for the contemporary university, he leaves theology in a minor position, entirely on the periphery.

For Newman, by contrast, theology is pivotal to the idea of a university. After his introductory discourse, theology is his first topic. "A University," he argues, "...by its very name professes to teach universal knowledge: Theology is surely a branch of knowledge: how then is it possible for a university to profess to encompass all branches of knowledge and yet to exclude from the subjects of its teaching one which, to say the least, is as important and as large as any of them?"<sup>2</sup>

Newman is not arguing that theology should merely be included among the sciences studied in the university, but something much more basic. Theology's presence provides a necessary context for the proper conduct of the other disciplines. Essential to Newman's outlook is that all knowledge is connected. Truths about any part of the universe are qualified by their relationship to truths about other parts of the universe. This interrelatedness of all truth is essential to his ideal of an educated person. "That only is true enlargement of the mind," he writes, "which is the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence."<sup>3</sup> If a university is to foster such integrated learning, then each of the arts and the sciences needs to reckon with the insights of all others if it is going to be pursued correctly. Since relationships to God are the most important of human relationships, no university can be said to be fulfilling its task of pursuing universal knowledge if knowledge about God is not part of the context for all other knowledge.

Newman correctly identified one of the major afflictions that has indeed plagued academic thought since his time. Each discipline tends to aggrandize its way of looking at reality and to ignore the other ways. Economists see economics as basic for understanding human ex-

perience. Psychologists see psychological factors as basic. Sociologists may reduce everything to social forces and class. Biologists may see it as all in the genes. Literary students see human problems as reducible to linguistic constructions. And so forth. Communication among disciplines becomes almost impossible. Today specialists even in closely related subdisciplines sometimes cannot understand each other. Or, even if they can communicate, they cannot begin to keep up with each others' fields. Thus, although we have accumulated incredibly more information and expertise of many topics in the past century and a half, we have far less sense than our ancestors did of the relationships of one part of our experience to the rest.

Even apart from the question of the place of theology, this fragmentation of knowledge undermines the possibility of any coherent ideal for a university. "The idea of a multiversity" seems like a contradiction in terms. Universities today have no central point of reference. They have no overarching philosophy. Rather they are clearing houses for a multiplicity of special interests in the production of information and opinion. Students become educated in parcels of this or that specialized knowledge, but they are poorly equipped to evaluate the interrelationships of these parcels or to weigh their relative importance.

Newman, seeing the beginnings of modern academic specialization and the tendency of each discipline to absolutize itself, argued that for a university to survive as a coherent entity the discipline of philosophy would have to play a central role as the "science of sciences." Philosophers, who should look at human knowledge as a whole, could balance the claims of the various specialized disciplines, including, of course, theology. In today's multiversity, philosophy is just one small marginal and specialized discipline. Theology is absent from the mainstream intellectual enterprises altogether.

Newman saw this trend developing already at the Anglican universities of Oxford and Cambridge. These universities were still formally religious, but religion was becoming irrelevant to the principal intellectual enterprise. That trend would, as Newman foresaw, accelerate as the modern universities emerged. Speaking for his opponents, Newman declared:

The proper procedure, then, is not to oppose Theology, but to rival it... [and] aim at the introduction of other studies, which, while they have the accidental charm of novelty, possess a surpassing interest, richness, and practical value of their own... Take it for granted, and protest, for the future, that Religion has nothing to do with the studies to which I am alluding, nor those studies with Religion.<sup>4</sup>

Newman's emphasis on theology as essential to a true university was, as he makes clear, not to turn a university into a theological seminary. Rather it was based on the larger ideal that universal knowledge must involve the interrelations of what humans know. So theology must be included as a most important dimension of human inquiry. If other sciences hope to understand the most significant truths about human experience, they cannot do so without taking the truths of theology into account. Without consideration of these truths, they are engaged in a futile attempt to understand essential questions about the universe without considering one of the most essential dimensions of the universe as a whole. They are attempting to understand the creation without any knowledge of the creator.

### NEWMAN'S IDEAL AND HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY

Today Newman's ideal that theology must play a crucial role if we are to have true universities seems to many people like something from the Dark Ages. Not only is theology not a point of reference for other disciplines, it is not even a discipline at most universities. Moreover, if a young sociologist or psychologist, let us say, announced that he was going to be guided by a theological insight in setting a research agenda, his chances of a successful academic career would probably be greatly diminished. Even though the project of relating one's faith to the rest of one's thought has a distinguished intellectual heritage, most academics today regard it as unprofessional and entirely out of place. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, in an article on this topic, summarized one prominent historian as responding that "the notion that scholars' personal beliefs are compatible with their academic interests is 'loony' and reflects 'a self-indulgent professoriate.'"<sup>5</sup> According to this view, religious beliefs are purely "personal" and hence it would be "self-indulgent" to introduce them into one's professional thought.

Given such prejudices in the academy, most religious academics, especially younger ones, soon learn to keep quiet about their faith. In North America the anomaly this creates is particularly striking. Most of the population professes rather traditional Christian beliefs about some very fundamental dimensions of reality and many such believers study in universities. According to the survey conducted by the Angus Reid Group and historian George Rawlyk, approximately two-thirds of Canadians profess to believe in something like traditional Christian doctrines.<sup>6</sup> Such a figure, of course, must be taken with a large grain of salt. But even if we cut them in half, it is still striking that within the universities of such a culture almost nobody makes an explicit effort to relate Christian faith to other dimensions of human experience. There are not, for instance, schools of Christian thought recognized in the

mainstream of most disciplines in which scholars might wrestle with the relationships of their faith to their learning. There is nothing, for instance, comparable to feminist studies in which women explore the implications of gender for other fields of study. Or contrast the role of Christians in academia to that of Marxists. Marxists seem threatened with extinction in the rest of the population, but have prominent representatives in many academic fields.

One common reaction to the near absence of theological reference in modern mainstream university education is nonetheless to insist that this is just the way it should be. Particularly if Newman is being invoked, it is easy to understand such negative reactions. Newman's ideal in its pure form would be out of place in the multiversities of today. Newman was speaking as the rector of a small Catholic institution in which everyone could be expected to subscribe to the same theological tradition. In the diverse universities of today, such expectations would seem wildly inappropriate.

Yet the broader points that Newman raises should not be so easily dismissed, even in the setting of today's universities. Questions remain even for such institutions. If contemporary universities are to be truly diverse and inclusive, should they not include room for scholars who are explicitly relating the theological implications of their faith to the rest of their learning? All the major traditions of faith, after all, include some intellectually rigorous traditions informed by the insights of that faith. Should those intellectual traditions be out of bounds, except as objects of study, in contemporary universities?

The suggestion that today's universities be open to such efforts to integrate various religious traditions with learning needs to be qualified by a number of ground rules. Many people in every religious tradition use their faith as a substitute for learning. They profess to rely simply on religious authority for all their answers. They are accordingly dogmatic and see the academic arena as principally another place to proselytize. However appropriate such attitudes may be when speaking within the religious traditions themselves, they are not appropriate to the diverse modern academy. Most of modern education is funded by governments and committed to serving a broad constituency of people of all traditional faiths or of none. In order for such people to get along and to have any fruitful intellectual interchange, they must agree to play by some common rules. These are the rules of modern scholarly discourse that make it possible for people to weigh and evaluate each others' evidence and arguments. They are analogous to the rules of the court of law that allow more or less disinterested third parties to adjudicate disputes as objectively as possible. For an academic community to function effectively, it must allow some room for

relatively dispassionate analysis in which all parties are open to some correction of their views. Pre-empting all discussion by simple appeals to religious authority, to evidence that is not accessible to others or by one-sided preaching or proselytizing, undercuts the possibility for fruitful exchanges in diverse academic settings.

In the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as modern higher education was being defined, the logic of these considerations helped lead toward the construction of a much stronger rule regarding the place of religion in the academy. Many academics came to believe that the best rule should be that any religion that appealed to authority higher than the human mind should be banished from the best education, as much as possible.<sup>7</sup>

This sentiment was not generated by intellectual considerations alone. It was also a strong reaction against the dominant role that Christianity had long held in higher education. As late as the time of Newman's university lectures in the mid-nineteenth century, it was still standard practice for universities and colleges to be governed by one Christian denomination or tradition, which controlled the selection of administrators and faculties. In the Anglican universities of Oxford and Cambridge, there were still religious tests for admission of students. University reformers of the next generation understandably wished to end this clerical control. In that setting, some progressive thinkers developed strong antagonisms to traditional Christianity. Actual or *de facto* establishment of Protestant Christian teaching at state-sponsored universities understandably seemed unfair to people of other faiths. As twentieth-century universities made increasing efforts to serve more diverse communities, the virtual exclusion of religious concerns in scholarship seemed all the more a good way of preserving equity and of helping to keep the peace.

All these considerations converged toward promoting what has become a very strong rule regarding the place of religion in mainstream intellectual life—any religious expression is widely thought to be unscientific, unprofessional and inappropriate.<sup>8</sup>

## RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES IN TODAY'S UNIVERSITIES?

The question remains, however, whether this strong rule, as understandable as its origins are, is a good one. Is it not perhaps an overcorrection for what were real problems? Is there not a way to reopen a university intellectual life to explicit religious concerns, while continuing to guard against religious excesses? Is there not, in other words, a middle way? Is there not room within a genuinely pluralistic academy



for the perspectives of various religious faiths along with other responsible perspectives that are accepted in the academy?

Religiously based commitments are not unique in any of these influences. Feminist scholars recently have effectively emphasized the degree to which social location is likely to shape scholarly agendas and evaluations of materials. A feminist scholar is more likely than is a non-feminist male to be concerned with women's activities, to be inclined toward theories that emphasize gender construction and roles, and to see the subordination of women as a primary moral concern. Marxist scholars likewise have typical sets of agendas, interpretive emphases and moral judgments. So do neoconservatives and old-style liberals, and so forth. Whatever social or ideological locations are most determinative of one's identity are likely to be refracted throughout one's scholarship as well.

This observation about the inevitable influences of social and ideological location does not amount to a licence for partisan scholarship that ignores standards of evidence and argument essential to a discipline. As some representatives of each of the positions mentioned above have demonstrated, one can be bound by strong social or ideological commitments and still follow the highest scholarly standards. In the more technical parts of one's scholarship, or in fields that are largely technical or scientific, one's prior commitments are likely to have little appreciable impact, although they still may be helping to set one's agenda. As scholarship moves into interpretation, especially in matters that involve human relationships, epistemology and metaphysics, prior commitments come more into play. The best scholars, however, will still defend their viewpoints with evidence and arguments that are accessible to people of other outlooks. They will also treat their opponents and counterevidence fairly and with respect. Scholars who base their interpretations largely on appeals to the prejudices of their own social or ideological groups may have an impact on those groups, but will likely fail to communicate with, let alone persuade, scholars of the wide variety of persuasions who make up the modern academy.

People often ask, however, what difference religious perspectives might make in more responsible scholarship. An example from the major theological traditions can illustrate this point. A very fruitful academic inquiry would be the question of what are the scholarly implications of the belief of Christianity, Judaism and Islam that God is "the Creator of the heavens and the earth?" Such an affirmation does not settle the question of how God may have created, whether by immediate fiat or by means of natural evolutionary processes. Even with the question of how God created left wholly open, the belief that the

universe is ultimately the product of an intelligence should put an importantly different spin on many issues. Particularly when natural science is pushed to its limits and moves into metaphysical speculation about the structures of reality (such as, what had to happen before the big bang or whether the universe must be a self-contained entity), this theological affirmation might have a legitimate bearing on one's theorizing. Belief in the divine should not limit inquiry into the natural order, but it may provide a caution against regarding the best current natural explanation as ultimately the best explanation.

It is outside of natural science, however, that the belief in a creator may have the strongest impact. If religious scholars reflect the implications of their belief in a creator, it can have an important bearing on what sorts of theories they accept or reject. They might, for instance, be disinclined to view the development of human moral ideals purely functionally, as nothing more than constructions necessary to meet the needs in the evolution of particular cultures. Rather, while recognizing the functional dimensions of moral constructions, they might also be inclined to view humans, as creations of God, as embodying, however imperfectly, some moral sense that deals with a right and wrong created into the scheme of things. Morality, then, would be in part a social construction, but more as well. The study of human history, or of anthropology, might thus be seen as part of the often flawed human quest to find the good. Such a viewpoint would differ in tone from that of so much current scholarship that assumes that "the good" is defined simply by what works best for one's social group in a particular cultural setting.

Or in approaching the epistemological questions raised by post-modernism, the scholar who was committed to a belief that God created our minds and the reality that we encounter might be less inclined than are her peers to see human knowing as purely relative to one's community or as simply controlled by the constructions of those who hold cultural power. We cannot immediately determine exactly what differences it would make to take into account a belief in divine creation in one's reflections on such questions, but it should be clear that the theological issue would provide an intriguing agenda for scholarly reflection.

Religious people come in many varieties and might take widely differing positions regarding the implications of their beliefs for the rest of their scholarship. So saying that their theological beliefs will bear on their scholarship is not at all to say that they will be introducing pat answers drawn simply from authority. They will be bringing with them, as do other scholars, some important assumptions into their scholarships. In most fields these assumptions should lead to

challenging some of the reigning unproven assumptions of most of contemporary scholarship. They thus introduce new agendas for inquiry and the sorts of critical perspectives that can lead to creativity.

Some of the most fruitful areas for inquiry for religious scholars can arise if they self-consciously use their religious perspectives as a basis for questioning some of the most taken-for-granted assumptions of our own time. For instance, scholars whose views of human nature are shaped by traditional religious accounts might launch very effective critiques of the contemporary cult of the self that is so pervasive, not only in popular culture, but in academic culture as well.<sup>9</sup> Since religious people often differ among themselves on such questions, such cultural critiques may lead to critiques of their own religious traditions as well. During the cold war, for instance, Christian scholars sometimes spoke out strongly against their own churches' easy identifications of Christianity with American patriotism.

Today many of the intellectual forces associated with the attacks on established Christianity and with the rise of materialistic world views associated with natural scientific definitions of intellectual life have spent their force. Visions that the twentieth century would be a time of progress and unity based on the spread of a universal science have proven illusory. Many people today wonder how, without the contributions of religious traditions, our cultures can get beyond the moral impasse of moral relativism that we see both in our highest academic life and in our mass media. Perhaps the time has come, then, to recognize that it is perfectly legitimate for some scholars to take up once again Newman's academic agenda that includes theological as well as other perspectives. Not everything that Newman proposed seems viable as we approach the twenty-first century and Newman himself might not be happy with the rather modest proposals presented here to save something of his essential agenda. Newman was working in an era when established churches were taken for granted and he had a high regard for the theological authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Nonetheless, the essence of his theologically oriented agenda should challenge people of the twenty-first century to reconsider seriously some of their assumptions about education and theology.

## NOTES

1. This essay is adapted from a longer essay published by Yale University Press in its 1996 edition of *The Idea of the University*, Frank M. Turner, ed., and is published here with the permission of Yale University Press.
2. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University: Defined and Illustrated in Nine Discourses Delivered to the Catholics of Dublin in Occasional Lectures and*

*Essays Addressed to the Members of the Catholic University*, edited with an introduction and notes by Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 14–15.

3. *Ibid.*, 103.
4. *Ibid.*, 298.
5. Carolyn J. Mooney, "Devout Professors on the Offensive," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 4, 1994, A 18, quoting Bruce Kuklick.
6. "God Is Alive," *Maclean's*, April 12, 1993, 32–50.
7. The exception often was theological study itself, which was usually isolated from the rest of the universities, as in divinity schools.
8. I have explored this history in *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford, 1994).
9. For example, see Paul Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994).

PART II  
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

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## THE POLITICIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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“Education is a subject on which we all feel that we have something to say,” wrote T.S. Eliot, and here one is reminded of the American writer Flannery O’Connor’s pithy riposte to a query from an earnest young student following a lecture she had given on the state of American fiction. The student fretted that education, the dead hand of the past, must surely stifle many a budding genius. Did not Miss O’Connor find this to be the case? O’Connor’s typically sardonic response was that, to the contrary, education didn’t “stifle enough of them.” She would surely join hands with T.S. Eliot in holding that everyone has something to say, but not everything said is worthy of sustained attention. How to sort the wheat from the chaff, especially on a subject on which all feel they have something to say?

This quickly takes us to the heart of how we define education, its meaning and purposes—a necessary first step in assessing whether inappropriate politicization of the university is underway. Here I believe we must steer a course between those who opt for a strong stipulative definition of education that brooks no dissent and, by contrast, those who wobble all over the place, careening wildly in their understanding depending upon the passing political and pedagogical enthusiasms of a given moment. I refer, of course, to those who give themselves over to trendiness. The latter temptation is particularly great for educators and the definition of education in a democratic society under the presumption that what is new is surely better. Not necessarily. Understanding education in and for a democratic society is an especially controversial task. For democracy is not simply a set of procedures, a constitution, if you will, but an ethos, a way of responding, including standards of conduct in public and private life.

Not being simple, democracy does not afford us a straightforward definition of what education in, and for, democracy might be. If we

move too quickly to the notion of education for relevance, we may stress a watery adaptation above authentic excellence. If we concentrate exclusively on the few, assuming that the many are less vital in the overall scheme of things, the culture necessary to sustain democracy over the long haul will either wither on the vine or not bear fruit in the first place. We are on the horns of more than one dilemma. Ours is a vibrant, living political world and culture. We cannot freeze a tradition, pinion it under glass and hold it intact for future use. As well, one culture's definition of education in and for democracy will not and cannot be identical to that of another. We arrive at democracy and our understanding of education in many complex ways, framed within a horizon of limited, not limitless, possibility dictated in part by our historic time and place. We must, nevertheless, try to grasp meaning and to clarify purpose, for to abandon the attempt altogether would be to live in an amorphous and pointless world in which nobody cared very much about anything. Because a democratic culture is one in which responsibility and freedom go hand in hand, human beings, limited though they may be, can and must sort out the important from the less important, the vital from the trivial, the worthy from the unworthy, the excellent from the mediocre. Democracy is a culture of, and for, the stout-hearted, persons who, in their efforts to define and to realize the good life, can live with complexity and uncertainty.

From Jefferson's bold throwing down of the gauntlet to the British Empire not knowing whether the upshot would be "hanging together or being hanged separately" to Lincoln's "nation thus conceived and thus dedicated," to Martin Luther King's dream of an essentially pacific democratic people who judge their fellow citizens by the content of their character not the color of their skins, democratic culture in the United States has been a *wager*, not a frozen accomplishment. Education in a democracy might not guarantee the robust spiritedness that democratic culture, if it is to be a living thing, requires, but it, too, must be cast in the form of anticipation and stirring expectancy. We know this much, surely: that any and all attempts to define education locate us in a complex relationship to a tradition. How we acknowledge and view the past forms a frame of reference for our understanding of the perils and possibilities of the present. We are entangled with tradition. And tradition, no more than education, is of a piece. Indeed, human life itself, in any complex culture, is an ongoing contestation over the meaning of tradition, including that tradition transmitted through education, and the ways in which we would affirm or challenge that which is given to us in our own particular time and place.

One might put it this way: a democratic culture is neither an *à la carte* menu nor a fixed dinner. No one among us could participate in all the multiple possibilities contemporary life spreads before each human



subject. Nor is it workable in late modernity to be so totally immersed in one mode that no alternative to this conception, this belief, this way of doing things ever presents itself. Education is about being in and of one's society, yes, but it also means being able to stand back, take a hard look and criticize or reaffirm, as the case may be, the way of life of which one is a part.

There is a peril in all this. If criticism runs wild, if critique is absolute and becomes an end in itself, it may invite the giddy belief that one can reject the entire cultural menu; that one can eschew all previous definitions. But this is no genuine alternative either. Indeed, to take the example of recent heated debates over "the canon," one discerns immediately that the anticanonical camp requires the *idea* of a canon as the basis for its own revolt and its presentation of an alternative. The canon functions as a kind of master thought that governs their anticanonical revolt. This is the sort of thing we simply cannot get out of, even if we try. It is, then, best for us to recognize the ways in which we are entangled in a culture and a way of life, including previous evaluations of literary and philosophical works.

Perhaps one way to characterize our situation, as we lumber to the end of this troubled century, is to highlight its deep and abiding irony. By this I mean to refer to the dilemma of those in the present, who, standing restlessly on the shoulders of giants, teeter and grumble and would leap off and run forward on their own but do not, for they recognize that to make that leap is not to be "free" so much as terribly diminished. The authoritative traditions to which we are heir bind us, yes, but they help us to see further and to move more surefootedly than we could on our own. The mesmerized worshipper of authority denies himself the critical freedom that is rightly his, a freedom those he idealizes seized and put their own individual stamp on; on the other hand, the agitated negator of all that has gone before preaches freedom, but, in fact, she denies herself real freedom in its deepest meaning, for each and every move she makes is governed by the tradition she condemns and can see only as pervasive and menacing.

A genuinely critical education helps us to bring these and other matters to the surface, to engage in a debate with interlocutors long dead or protagonists who never lived save on the page, and, through that engagement, to elaborate rich conceptions through which to apprehend our world and the way that world represents itself. That, at least, is one way to understand a living language and culture and the education ongoingly defined and imperfectly realized within it.

"Perhaps," writes political philosopher Michael Oakeshott,

we may think of the components of a culture as voices, each the expression of a distinct and conditional understanding of the world and a distinct

idiom of human self-understanding, and of the culture itself as these voices joined, as such voices could only be joined, in a conversation—an endless unrehearsed intellectual adventure in which, in imagination, we enter into a variety of modes of understanding the world and ourselves and are not disconcerted by the differences or dismayed by the inconclusiveness of it all. And perhaps we may recognize liberal learning as, above all else, an education in imagination, an initiation into the art of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices; to distinguish their different modes of utterance, to acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to this conversational relationship and thus to make our *début dans la vie humaine*.<sup>1</sup>

At present in our culture, education is increasingly defined with reference to diversity or, as it is usually put, multiculturalism. We should worry about the presumptions that undergird much of this effort and the practices it yields. For all too often we are asked to become “sensitive” not so much to a wondrous variety of idioms and voices as to group exclusivities and grievances. In other words, our definition of education may have become, or is in peril of becoming, inappropriately politicized. In a world of overheated political demands, education is required to serve all sorts of political and ideological masters and loses its integrity in the process. Let me spell things out just a bit. Education is never outside a world of which politics—how human beings govern and order a way of life in common—is a necessary feature. Education is *always* cast as the means whereby some or all citizens of a particular society get their bearings and learn to live with and among one another. Education *always* reflects a society’s view of what is excellent, worthy and necessary. These values are ongoingly refracted and reshaped as definitions, meanings and purposes alter through contestation. In this sense, education is political. But this is very different from being directly and blatantly politicized.

Consider the following examples. A class takes up the Declaration of Independence and the great pronouncement that “all men are created equal.” But women, and many men, were disenfranchised. Slaves were not counted as fully “men.” How could this be? What meaning of equality did the American founders embrace? How did they square this meaning with what we perceive to be manifest inequalities? What was debated, and what was not? What political and moral exigencies of that historic moment compelled what sorts of compromises? Might things have gone differently? I take this to be an instance of reflective political education to and for American democracy. But let me offer a second example. A teacher declares that nothing good ever came from the hand of “dead, white, European males.” Their words and deeds are nefarious. They were nothing but racists and patriarchs, blatant oppressors, who hid behind fine-sounding words. All they created is

tainted and hypocritical. Here matters simply end. There is no room for debate—only for tabloid exposé. Indeed, debate is discouraged or not permitted. To express a different point of view is to betray one's false consciousness or patriarchal privilege. This I take to be an instance of unreflective dogmatic politicization. It evades the dilemmas of democratic society and the transmission of tradition rather than offering us points of critical reflection on those dilemmas. This sort of education fails in its very particular and important task of preparing us for a world of ambiguity and variety. It equips us only for resentment, in Kierkegaard's prescient sense of the word.

Let us take up another theme. Education is neither the family nor the state; rather, "School and university are places apart where a declared learner is emancipated from the limitations of his local circumstances and from the wants he may happen to have acquired and is moved by intimations of what he has never yet dreamed. He finds himself invited to pursue satisfactions he has never yet imagined or wished for. They are, then, sheltered places where excellences may be heard, because the din of local partialities is no more than a distant rumble" (Oakeshott, 24). This, no doubt, is an idealized version of education as a high autonomous realm of culture. We understand that education can never be, nor should it be, wholly inoculated from outside forces, defined apart from all else. We believe this because we understand, however tacit this understanding may be, that education in and for a democratic culture is a porous affair, open to the world of which it is a part, yet not *so* open that it becomes the mere plaything of passing enthusiasms.

Ideological definitions that give rise to overpoliticization of the university have been around for a long time. In *The Idea of the University*, John Henry Cardinal Newman criticized the political economists of his time for single-mindedly determining that what life is all about is the attainment of wealth; that "morals and happiness are made to depend on gain and accumulation... the pursuit of gain then is the basis of virtue, religion, happiness; though it is, all the while, as a Christian knows, the 'root of all evils,' and the 'poor, on the contrary, are blessed for theirs is the Kingdom of God.'"<sup>2</sup> What I take Newman to be up to is arguing against any reductionist account of human meaning, purpose and motivation. But is this not precisely what our politicizers traffic in: we hear over and over again that what human beings are about is power, that life is about who has it and who does not; and that we can determine quite readily the answer to this question; that life is, then, about masters and slaves, and between masters and slaves there can only be war. One might call this the *power-über alles* view of human life.

But there are many problems with this: the understanding of human beings or sets or anthropological presuppositions involved; the

understanding of power; the understanding of what sorts of relations can and in fact do obtain between persons differently stationed or positioned; and the many levels and activities and associations and institutions of a complex, late-modern society.

If you begin from impoverished assumptions, your view of education is itself bound to be impoverished—it cannot help but be—and you thereby lose education as, in Newman’s words, an “action upon our mental nature... the formation of character” (Newman, 131). For those “whose minds are possessed with some one object, take exaggerated views of its importance, are feverish in the pursuit of it, make it the measure of all things” (Newman, 156) lose a capacity for judgment. One enters the ranks of the intolerant, and intolerant in a particular direction—in the name of “going beyond tolerance,” tolerance being too tepid a word, one not signifying full and uncritical acceptance of every claim made on us in the name of multiculturalism or difference. The upshot, of course, is that we become deeply, ineradicably intolerant. We do not have to take what anyone says very seriously at all, if it is the case that we inhabit such different universes that we cannot really converse. If each of us has constructed our own world of meaning, we are given permission to refuse to engage.

Now what is at stake in all of this is our understanding of truth itself. For truth is part of what is up for grabs these days as we educate for pluralism defined as moral relativism.<sup>3</sup> Students are not so much enjoined to debate what is true or not, as the case may be; to sort out what is true from that which is false; as to disdain the notion of truth altogether. Hannah Arendt saw this coming. In an essay now 30 years old, she surveyed the attack on truth, the “blurring of the dividing line between factual truth and opinion.”<sup>4</sup> She detected an assault on authority in every arena, including the family and the school. Factual statements (her example is “Germany invaded Belgium in August, 1914”) are the last redoubt of political possibility, the need to have a record, to begin from some common understanding. But we find many who would dissolve even these sorts of truths. All is froth and foam on the disappearing sea wave. All is up for grabs—even, as we have learned to our dismay in recent years, the Holocaust. For every historical debate, there are radical revisionists. Debate about interpretation of events is, of course, one thing. Denial that such events occurred is something else. Sadly, Arendt argues, since “the liar” is free to fashion his “facts” to fit the profit and pleasure, or even the mere expectations of his audience, the chances are that he will be more persuasive than the truth teller. Indeed, he will usually have plausibility on his side; his exposition will sound more logical, as it were, since the element of unexpectedness—one of the characteristics of all events—has mercifully disappeared. Facts are stubborn. They bind us. Today, at least in the

United States, there are many among us who would be free, so damn the facts. Deny the possibility that some arguments are more compelling than others; that a stronger case may be made for the authority of *this* way of understanding by comparison to *that*.

Arendt feared that whole societies might place themselves in a position in which they needed no minions operating under orders from Big Brother in order to make embarrassing facts and politically incorrect understandings disappear down an Orwellian memory-hole. Our own minds and lives would be such a memory-hole, a funnel down which facts and our arguments go out and out of which rushes opinion, but opinion of a particular sort, opinion that claims first-person privilege; that isn't amenable to correction, reproof or authentic dialogue. "It's just your opinion, I have mine." This is a world in which authority has disappeared; a world that is itself dead, never a source of meaning or of purpose; a world entirely up for grabs, entirely "constructed" in the current lingo. Because, in Arendt's words, "our apprehension of reality is dependent upon our sharing the world with our fellow men," to the extent that there is no world to share—not even a culture of argument—we will have severed ourselves in that measure from the claims made upon us by other minds, other persons, and we will have witnessed the complete collapse of education and authentic pluralism and all the rest. We are not there yet, but we are getting too close for comfort. The danger in going too far down our present path is that our understanding of education is imperilled because we have done too little to protect education from heavy-handed intrusion on the parts of those who would have it serve this political master or that ideological purpose. At the same time, we seem intent on stripping education of what, in fact, it ought to be about: an invitation to particular "adventures in human self-understanding," in Oakeshott's terms.

The implication for a definition of education is simply this: a democratic country is uniquely dependent on responsibility and self-limiting freedom. Because democracy is the political form that permits and requires human freedom as responsibility, any definition or system that sanctions evasion of responsibility imperils democracy. Whether in the name of change or to forestall all change, an ideological system of education is the worst possible way for human beings to order their collective affairs. For once a world of personal responsibility with its characteristic virtues and marks of decency (justice, honor, friendship, fidelity) is ruptured or emptied, what rushes in to take its place is politics as a "technology of power," in Václav Havel's phrase. Responsibility, according to Havel, flows from the aims of life "in its essence," including our plurality for independent self-constitution by contrast to the stultifying dogmas of ideological left- and right-wing thinkers who abandon reality and assault life with their rigid, abstract chimeras. A

living culture is one in which words acquire new associations in lieu of some of their old ones, but there is a limit to the process of redefinition. Words may, over time, be denuded of meaning rather than enhanced by definitional contestation without end. Part of my own culture's desperate floundering at the present moment stems from the fact that we appear to have lost any solidity to our understanding of the most basic things. Words have become rootless and homeless.

This has come about for some good reasons—recognition of the slipperiness of definitions—and, more and more, for some very bad reasons: cynicism bordering on vulgar antinomianism about the need for at least provisional (and no doubt imperfect) sharing of certain key words (*freedom, democracy, truth, fairness, law*), if we are to constitute ourselves a *we* in any robust sense; disdain bordering on a remorseless contempt for any and all attempts to articulate the norms we *must* share in order that democratic debate and dialogue continue to be reaffirmed as the way we citizens of a democratic culture do business with one another.

Education is cut adrift, subject to ideologically inflamed demands and enthusiasms. We have grown uncertain, muddled, about the worth of our own traditions and what we can and ought, therefore, transmit to our children. This uncertainty stems not from robust skepticism but from a desperate failure of nerve. This wants explaining. I rely upon Hannah Arendt's discussion of "The Crisis of Education," an essay in which she ties diminution in authentic education to abdication by adults of responsibility for the world. She writes:

Insofar as the child is not yet acquainted with the world, he must be gradually introduced to it; insofar as he is new, care must be taken that this new thing comes to fruition in relation to the world as it is. In any case, however, the educators here stand in relation to the young as representatives of a world for which they assume responsibility... This responsibility is not arbitrarily imposed upon educators; it is implicit in the fact that the young are introduced by adults into a continuously changing world... and in education this responsibility for the world takes the form of authority. (Arendt, 189)

Let me return to Havel to further deepen our understanding. A fusion of freedom and responsibility yields a distinct but definite *political* conclusion: democracy is the political form that permits and requires human freedom, not as an act of self-overcoming, nor pure reason, but in service to others in one's own time and place. To live "within the truth" is to give voice to a self that has embraced responsibility for the here and now: "That means that responsibility is ours, that we must accept it and grasp it *here, now*, in this place in time and space where the

Lord has set us down, and that we cannot lie our way out of it by moving somewhere else, whether it be to an Indian ashram or to a parallel polis," writes Havel.<sup>5</sup>

Havel believes we are living in the midst of a general crisis of human consciousness. That crisis manifests itself in the spheres of human freedom, responsibility and identity itself. Acceptance of the risks of free action—an affirmation education in and for democracy makes possible though does not guarantee—makes one a person and forms the basis of one's identity. Any mode of thought or program of education that reduces human responsibility narrows the horizon of human possibility. To assume "full responsibility" is not to lapse into dour moralism, nor to universalize a giddy and boundless compassion, but to take up the specific concrete burdens of one's own culture. Education that undermines even the possibility that at least some among us may be called upon to bear witness is an exercise in speciousness.

Our malaise over education stems in part from a culturally sanctioned abdication by adults of their responsible authority as parents and educators. What on earth is going on when fourth-graders in my own country are being taught the intricacies of condom use but cannot read or cipher with any sophistication? What definition of education here reigns? Who has abdicated responsibility for what? Or, alternatively, what agencies, groups and enthusiasts seek to make education the vanguard or home base of their own essentially extra educational or polemical efforts.

These are questions we must face head on, and, in answering, let the chips fall where they may, with this caveat: the crisis in education has not come about because a few self-interested groups have successfully hijacked the system. Indeed, it seems far more plausible that education in America is in its present straits because of a general collapse of authoritative meanings and institutions, an abdication by responsible persons (parents, teachers, intellectuals and politicians) of their *necessary* vocations. Being free means being able to shirk one's responsibilities, but being responsible means one does not thus abdicate. The massive abdication of authority by those most responsible for its democratic exercise is a complex story, one ripe for the telling. For now I would simply note that we are in danger of forfeiting our cultural heritage—indeed, our cultural home—because we have convinced ourselves that it represents only the detritus of power and chicanery, rather than the way imperfect human beings, only a few of whom were villains, have offered us the fruits of their strengths and weaknesses, their moments of honor and their hours of despair. If education fails to incorporate within its living definition strong stories and conceptions, it cannot launch us into a wider world with the strength of character and

firmness and flexibility of purpose democratic thinkers have presumed as both the cause and consequence of democracy itself.

“Home is where one starts from. As we grow older, the World becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated of dead and living”—these words from T.S. Eliot’s poem “East Coker” haunt us as we approach the next millennium. Education, he suggests, should help us to appreciate and cherish that complexity, to love this strange world in which we are nonetheless required to be at home. If it fails in this task, our humanity itself is imperilled.

## NOTES

1. Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 38–39.
2. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of the University*, ed. Daniel M. O’Connell, S.J. (New York: America Press, 1941), 108–109.
3. This, of course, is *not* the only possible definition of pluralism; indeed it negates *authentic* pluralism of the sort that requires engagement and is open to the possibility of what used to be called “cultural exchange.”
4. Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking), 161; rpt. (New York: Penguin, 1983), 239.
5. Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless” in *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965-1990*, ed. Paul Wilson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 195.



## CAN HUMANE LITERACY SURVIVE WITHOUT A GRAND NARRATIVE?

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The use of letters is the principal circumstance that distinguishes a civilized people from a herd of savages incapable of knowledge or reflection. —Gibbon

Think what punishment shall come upon us on account of this world, when we have not ourselves loved [the gift of literacy] in the least degree, or enabled others to do so. —King Alfred

I want to begin by recounting a story from the earliest days of literacy in the English-speaking world. It was the end of the sixth century. The flower of Roman antiquity had wilted and then been blasted into fragments by corruption from within and barbarian invasions from without. But Christian missionaries were still being sent out, bearing their book into dark and brooding lands such as that of the islanded Angles, Jutes and dreaded Saxons. The effect of eventual Christianization on the savage Germanic warriors who ruled what is now England was, despite resistance, remarkable in its amelioration of their savagery and its gradual replacement by a love of learning and desire for God. This was evident not only among monks like the Venerable Bede, that signal historian of early Britain from whose pages comes the account I wish here to relate, but among warrior kings turned from bloodshed to the pursuit of books and public wisdom, such as King Alfred, justly called Alfred the Great.

The account Bede gives of the conversion of King Edwin of Diera (roughly present-day York and Northumberland) tells how the king, whose wife had already become a Christian, sought the advice of “friends, princes and counselors” concerning the question of his own possible openness to the new faith. Among the speakers, Coifi, chief among the pagan priests, offered the pragmatic observation that there seemed to be “no truth and no usefulness in the old religion,” so that if the new faith proved “stronger medicine,” they should take to it. But

the next speaker, an unnamed counsellor, was concerned rather about wisdom in a deeper sense. In his speech he casts his counsel in the form of metaphor:

Such it seems to me, dear Sovereign, that the life of men present here in earth (for the comparison of our uncertain time, and days to live) is as if a sparrow beaten with wind and weather should chance to fly in at one window of the parlour, and flitting there a little about, straightway fly out at another, while your grace is at dinner in the presence of your dukes, lords, captains, and high guard. The parlour itself being then pleasant, and warm with a soft fire burning amidst thereof, but all places, and ways abroad troubled with tempest, raging storms, winter winds, hail, and snow. Now your grace considereth, that this sparrow while it was within the house felt no smart of tempestuous wind or rain. But after the short space of this fair weather and warm air the poor bird escapeth your sight, and returneth from winter to winter again. So the life of man appeareth here in earth, and is to be seen for a season: but what may, or shall follow the same, or what hath gone before it, that surely know we not. Therefore if this new learning can inform us of any better surety, methinks it is worthy to be followed.<sup>1</sup>

This second counsel proved decisive. In its proposed matriculation from pagan pragmatism toward the wisdom of the Book it is exemplary of that attraction to a more explanatory human story, a grand narrative by means of which English-speaking tribes began to be transformed from a severe proto-Darwinian servitude to fate and the strongest man toward order, choice and the consensual rule of common law. This transformation, however simply it appeared to come at first, in fact developed slowly over a long period of time. But in our time, 1300 years later, it may much more quickly be coming undone.

My short answer to the question in my title "Can Humane Literacy Survive without a Grand Narrative?," let me admit it straightaway, is "probably not." I am not unaware that in our cultural context a wide-ranging effort has been mounted to promote contrary views—at the very least to celebrate the decentralized cultivation of what American philosopher Richard Rorty calls "incommensurable discourses." My doubtfulness might seem in this light lamentably unfashionable, if not in outright poor taste. After all, ours is the age of the triumphant polymorphous, the multicultural mosaic, the omniversity—an age, in short, where even the idea of a commonly possessed community story has been made to seem an overbearing as well as anachronistic imposition. Indeed, the term "grand narrative," signifying for many such outdated concepts as "foundational myth," "metaphoricity" and "canon," has been generated and deployed as a term of opprobrium.

What then do I mean by calling this current convention into question? Well, what I mean to suggest is that if we still wish to preserve humane culture we should move our focus, for a time, away from theory and other substitutes for empirical evidence to consider a hugely pertinent and yet regularly neglected factor in the demise of the influence of *any* grand narrative upon our general culture. As a percentage of the total, fewer and fewer of our citizens are in any meaningful sense—that is, any *humane* sense—literate. In the academic trenches, as the mountains of first-year essays beside our desks grow to gargantuan proportions and we have begun timidly to look our fate, so to speak, in the laser-printed eye, we are all of us aware that the level of even basic literacy possessed by many of our students is often insufficient for them either to think their way through the texts they read or to write their way through commensurable levels of interaction in an essay. We who teach did not need the now numerous literacy polls to tell us that one university graduate in eight cannot read a straightforward newspaper editorial and say in two or three sentences what it is about, despite 16 or 17 years of formal schooling. Who is not aware of the downward pressure upon the language as well as the content of seminar and lecture, the attenuation of reading lists, the levelling of performance and the compensatory inflation of grades? All these, and more, are palpable evidences that the reach of humane literacy into the minds and hearts of our contemporaries doth oft indeed exceed their grasp. Employers berate the university for the lack of basic literacy in our graduates, international testing has long since ceased to favor the products of our schools and even lackadaisical government bureaucrats have begun to complain vociferously. Defenders of the status quo, who like to protest that today's students are brighter and more articulate than ever before, and that all the talk about literacy levels is hyperinflated by sinister agents of a neoconservative agenda, have, frankly, ceased to be convincing, even to themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Not everything in this unfortunate state of affairs, let us hasten to agree, is the fault of the schools. Humanists are among those only too happy to be able to point convincingly to other pressures against literacy: is it our fault that only about two percent of North Americans any longer regularly read books? The American novelist Walker Percy, who at least as much as the newspaper chains and beleaguered professors of humanities had a considerable vested interest in the literacy problem, imagined that the

diagnosis of this state of affairs by men of letters might run something like this: literacy in America has declined for a variety of reasons—bad schools, decay of the family, most of all, the six or seven hours of daily TV. This decline of literacy is accompanied by a rise in philistinism in Amer-

ica: a preference for the skillfully marketed and packaged product for the consumption of the mass man—the Top Ten on TV, NFL telecasts with the quite well-done Miller Lite and Mean Joe Green commercials—plus a few big commercial novels, whether the Harold Robbins novel in which sex figures second only to money, the Barbara Cartland novel in which sex becomes something called romance, or the Judy Blume novel in which teenagers are introduced to sex like Tarzan and Jane.<sup>3</sup>

Touché: his summary will almost do, as far as it goes. (Alas, he died before they could get him “on-line.” Or perhaps he might have said “in line.”)

My own purpose is not to go much further over this somewhat muddy ground. Relativizing so-called “child-centred” primary and secondary education, shot through as it is with a fuzzy and self-justifying 1960s southern California metaphysics, has taken its toll among many we would not wish to think of as philistines. I am more concerned with philistinism of an analogous and, for us, still more immediate sort. One register of this philistinism has been almost obsessively discussed, but too little constructively engaged. I refer to that dissociation between common sense and educational purposes so successfully effected on our campuses by the overt rhetorical conflict over what has come to be called “political correctness.” Most will agree with me, I think, that a slightly less charged term covers more fully the ethos of constraint or repression of its own intellectual tradition in the contemporary university. The term “postmodernism” was first given currency in American academic argot by a literary critic, Leslie Fiedler.<sup>4</sup> In the view of another and currently more fashionable culture theorist, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, we are to understand that postmodernism refers above all to a shift away from traditional theories of knowledge and the knower, particularly such theories of knowledge as imply a philosophy of history—or world view—as a means of legitimating that knowledge. Lyotard’s simplest definition of postmodernism is “incredulity toward metanarratives.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to apparent “post-Christian” (or post-Jewish) presuppositions, this incredulity entails a loss of confidence in any modern theory of “progress,” most particularly, any narrative explanation of our educational efforts that portray them as leading to some type of emancipation for those who labor to learn. In the encapsulation of Anthony Giddens, a British sociologist:

The condition of postmodernity is distinguished by an evaporating of the “grand narrative”—the overarching “story line” by means of which we are placed in history as beings having a definite past and “predictable future.”<sup>6</sup>

In his sense, it is surely the case that, as Lyotard, Giddens and Charles Taylor among others have argued, the assiduous intellectual

cultivation of postmodernism is effectively a phase of acceleration for what we have long called "modernism," that is, an accumulation of modernism's full momentum, a time in which "the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalized and universalized than before."<sup>7</sup> One of these consequences is the fuller politicization of educational culture: from John Dewey's notion that the purpose of public education was socialization, its goal the "final pooled intelligence" of the mass mind, many educators have come at last to construe the task of the university as the political institution of a prevalent sociology of knowledge in the bureaucratic class. It now appears that some bureaucrats feel this "institution" requires political coercion rather than the exchange of free debate to succeed. For Lyotard, for example, the post-modern cyberspace era will ultimately require of the university's learners a stern and severe context of constraint. He advised his 1979 audience of Quebec university administrators that their system decisions "do not have to respect individuals' aspirations": the aspirations have to aspire to the decisions, or at least to their effects. Administration procedures should make individuals "want what the system needs in order to perform well." He assured them, further: "It cannot be denied that there is persuasive force in the idea that context control and domination are inherently better than their absence" and, ominously, that indeed the coming system "can count severity among its advantages."<sup>8</sup> At the level of theoretical discussion in the humanities, this technologically supported liquidation of nostalgia for a shared explanatory context, for vestigial impulses toward the "grand narrative," has the effect of increasing, not reducing, pressures to conformity. Persistent grand narratives may prove an unwelcome source of constraint for movements toward still greater constraint.

In our universities themselves one sees this development in authoritarian pronouncements like that of Barbara Johnson, Professor of English at Harvard, who says that "professors should have less freedom of expression than writers and artists, because professors are supposed to be creating a better community."<sup>9</sup> More disturbingly, it has taken the form of bureaucratic edicts, such as the former (NDP) Ontario government's "Framework Regarding Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination in Ontario Universities" (1993), with its "zero tolerance" speech code. This "Framework" was successfully resisted by professional associations and the professoriate. Yet within three years university administrators themselves were asking for still harsher constraints on professors' freedom of speech. These include sanctions against professors publishing in any other forum than the professional organs of one's narrow discipline.<sup>10</sup> We are discovering that the modernist impulse, which begins in the promise of greater personal liberty, when pressed to its full consequences can suddenly seem to revoke

that original promise. In social terms at least, this is one apparent meaning of "postmodernism."

At another level of educational experience, however, as instanced notably by enthusiastic promotion of the Internet, there is a world of information now available at a whim, suggesting to the contrary a kind of armchair emancipation. Cyberspace can be made to seem the most promising environment for an entertainment-driven, variety-hungry postmodern academic. In the secret confines of our office or study carrel, we enter into a consolatory, therapeutic experience of apparent mastery over all the information in the universe without significant limits to either appetite or expression. In striking contrast to the bureaucratic and administrative systems with which we struggle, the World Wide Web is spun, it would seem, by virtually invisible spiders. While our actual social and educational environments are being more and more compressed by severe speech codes and by a narrowing of other political and judicial freedoms, we are entertainingly diverted as perhaps never before by the silky cocoon world of cyberspace, in which we are given an antidotal, perhaps onanistic, and almost certainly opiate illusion.

This illusion conforms rather well to notions fostered by various expressions of "value-free" education. In a fashion evocative of what Dostoevsky once said would happen in civic morality upon proclamation of the death of God, so too in our palaces of wisdom upon declaration of the death of reason: "Everything is now permitted." Of itself, increased information produces little in the way of wisdom, and often less in the way of clarity. In some spheres of the printed word, textual interpretation or even historical recollection, for example, there is now deemed to be no such thing as a "wrong answer." Normative grammar and lexical meaning are, after all, merely the imposition of patriarchy. Pursuit of the "grammatically correct" has in some jurisdictions almost become "politically incorrect," and that with the blessing of some among my own colleagues. Likewise with logic: for Richard Rorty, to cite an infamous example, what we call "common sense" is "nothing more than a disposition to use the language of our ancestors, to worship the corpses of their metaphors,"<sup>11</sup> and so by definition retrograde.

For Rorty, the exponential spread of talk at cross-purposes is not in any sense problematic. Quite the contrary, it is a growth industry to whose uneasy conscience he and his confrères seek to provide their own brand of occupational therapy. The therapy of choice is self-involved "conversation," a directionless but diverting dance of dialogue among interlocutors whose starting points—and probably ending points—are assumed to be "incommensurable." In an era of pluralistic and multicultural societies and in which, moreover, there has

been a resurgence of tribalism despite (perhaps to some degree because of) the global economy, we can see why therapies for institutionalized incommensurability, even if they should prove to be merely palliative to the inmates of senescent institutions, are attractive. But what, university students may well ask, is the *educational* value of such an odd, even self-contradictory notion of "conversation"? (Why, when they could be surfing the Net, buzzing the Web or boobing the tube, should they persist with our incommensurable Babel-Tower lingo? Surely a picture, any picture, is worth a thousand empty words.)

Yet the therapeutic and palliative aspect of "conversation" in the university as Rorty sees it makes "self-edification" rather than arrival at truth or even common understanding the goal of participants in conversation, and requires of its apprentices only that we abandon forever "believing that we know ourselves by knowing a set of objective facts" and "thinking that we possess a deep, hidden, metaphysically significant nature which makes us irreducibly different from inkwells or atoms."<sup>12</sup> A problem with such a notion of "self-edification" is that it is non-generative: all too quickly it becomes a prescription for self-defeat as well as for an effective constraint of other selves. What *anybody* thinks or says, in effect, is not at last really very important. The limitation of Rorty's notion of "conversation" for large community enterprises—nation building, let us say, or forging some sort of national standards in education—will be fairly apparent.

It may be useful to remind ourselves of the specific *bête noire*, or perhaps we should say "corpse of ideas," against which Rorty's notion of conversation has been set to work. This, too, may be done succinctly, by recollection of a classic defence of the humanities—"the Great Conversation," he called it—made by Robert M. Hutchins while he was still chancellor of the University of Chicago. In this lecture, Hutchins argued what to many of our contemporaries must now seem an offensive thesis, namely that "the Civilization of the Dialogue is the only civilization worth having." For Hutchins too, conversation was crucial, but clearly his was a very different notion of conversation:

An educational institution should be a community. A community must have a common aim, and the common aim of the educational community is the truth. It is not necessary that the members of the educational community agree with one another. It is necessary that they communicate with one another, for the basis of community is communication. In order to communicate with one another, the members of the community must understand one another, and this means that they must have a common language and common stock of ideas. Any system of education that is based on the training of individual differences is fraudulent in this sense. The primary object of education should be to bring out our common humanity.

For though men are different, they are also the same, and their common humanity, rather than their individual differences, requires development today as at no earlier era in history.<sup>13</sup>

Hutchins' "Great Conversation" evidently has not only a synchronic dimension but a diachronic one as well: it is a conversation in this present time against and across time; in short, it is a paradigm example of "grand narrative" educational thinking.

It is precisely this granting of a measure of authority to the past (that is, to teaching from the past), ceding a possible pertinence of voices from history or tradition to our present understanding, that is most to be rejected according to postmodern strategists. Why has this become an agenda item of such evident urgency? Humanists, presumably, can guess at some possible answers. To begin with, it is evident that the "loss of grand narrative" offers an attractive means of justifying exemption from one critical sphere of accountability. Rationalizations—often overstated—for the virtues of this "loss" or jettisoning of a common story are often therefore "theoretical" masks for simpler and more candid declarations, such as Sartre's "I create myself" or William Blake's famous response to tradition: "I must create my own system or be enslaved by that of another man."

Refusing one's obligation to the past can take a variety of forms of hubristic ingratitude. If I may recollect a classic text from English literature of the Renaissance: one of the humorous preludes to the damnation of Marlowe's professor Doctor Faustus occurs at the theatrical diversion put on for his benefit by Lucifer and Mephistopheles, a dance of the Seven Deadly Sins—to Faustus the laughably outworn form of an archaic ethical analysis. The first dancer is Pride, whose brazen self-declaration to the besotted Faustus is: "I disdain to own any parents." This, of course, quite precisely mirrors the professor's own hubris. Yet if we jump forward to nineteenth-century America, we must acknowledge an evident sea change concerning hubris. What Marlowe regards as a self-deluding vice sufficient to lead his Wittenberg professor to perdition, Professor Ralph Waldo Emerson, following Blake, makes a virtue of "Self-Reliance" in his famous essay of that name: "History is an impertinence and an injury," he declares *inter alia*, "if it be anything more than a cheerful apologue or parable of my being and becoming."<sup>14</sup> A more acute self-consciousness about this stance is found in the famous quip by Oscar Wilde: "The one duty we have to history is to rewrite it."<sup>15</sup> It may be the ironic Wilde who has really grasped the nettle that pricks most deftly. History, like myth, tends when rejected to require replacement by something more unequivocally and unambiguously self-justifying—or "therapeutic." So the expedient proposal is to rewrite it so as to accommodate these frankly self-centring purposes.



Let me consider briefly just one academic example: the sustained connection in North American Marxist versions of postmodern theory between the otherwise patently contradictory pursuits of a radically subjective hermeneutics and a radically determinist socialist politics becomes more comprehensible in the light of the rejection by the autonomous ego of parenting, mentoring and tradition.<sup>16</sup> Like many another six-figure salaried bogus leftist, Rorty exemplifies the odd contradiction, echoing self-deifying voices from Faustus and Blake to Sartre when he urges that instead of attempting to understand ourselves as part of an intellectual and social tradition we should follow Nietzsche's example and insistently define the world from the ego out. Such a world, he concedes, with a pragmatic sigh, is likely to prove a lonely place. If we need palliation, he says, we should "seek consolation, at the moment of death, not in having transcended the animal condition, but in being that peculiar sort of dying animal who, by describing himself in his own terms, had created himself." Loneliness is not such a bad thing if you are an *übermensch*. Rorty makes it hard not to think here of the song made famous by America's most notorious hoodlum singer, Frank Sinatra: "I did it my way"—the theme song of hell, Peter Kreeft has called it.<sup>17</sup> But it is surely an odd concert in which gangsters, directors of multinational corporations and academic Marxists can all be found singing the same tune.

More pitiable banalities of confused self-idolatry live on in the North American academy. At Duke University, for example, the self-advertised "cutting edge" of postmodern literary criticism, several of the most prominent Marxist, poststructuralist and feminist academics have abandoned both literature and criticism for the writing of autobiography. These "leading national figures" in English literary theory—Frank Lentricchia, Alice Kaplan, Marianna Torgovnick, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Jane Tompkins (wife of ex-chairman of the English department, Stanley Fish) among them—by this latest intensification of their disdain for explanatory discourse and turn to direct literary self-creation, merely carry the logic of their romantic theorizing and, as Tompkins calls it, their "trajectory of personal development" to its inevitably embarrassing conclusion. Fish himself, meanwhile, has edged himself out of the (non)community he largely created, apparently under ungrateful social pressure to do so, to take full-time shelter in Duke's Faculty of Law.<sup>18</sup> Undergraduate enrollment in English has meanwhile dropped precipitously, the ample complement of reputedly highest-paid English professors in North America notwithstanding. Their graduate students find it just as difficult as graduate students in humanities and social sciences everywhere else to get an academic job. The prediction of Jean-François Lyotard in 1979 that with the advent of cyber-learning the professoriate itself would dwindle to merely frac-

tional existence may yet prove to have been accurate. His further prediction, that the elite among researchers would gravitate to think-tanks, in many cases leaving the universities behind, has proved him prescient. But his assurance that a stern coerciveness in the reconfigured university would not in the end damage pedagogy has been less persuasive.<sup>19</sup> The elevation of a coterie elite attending to theoretical preoccupations in increasingly opaque language and the eventual replacement of most other professors by monitors and modems—his imagination of the future of the university—hardly makes it seem like a propagator of general literacy.

Let me risk the indelicacy of this point a bit further. All culturally accountable persons, one hopes, will want to think about the motives that may lie behind the Nietzschean articulations that tend to recur in much postmodern discourse. Why should any wielder of potentially tyrannous power want to insist on being *auto-nomos*, a law unto the self, “self-created”? What are the uses of such a myth? And how should such a one escape evidence that might give the lie to this myth of self? Protect his alibi? One of the oldest strategies of all (cf. Genesis 4) is to exclude contrary or implicating witnesses, even if by the simple expedient of not taking them seriously enough to argue their point. And that, it seems, is what some “rewriters” of history evidently wish to do, as much as did those who were burners of books.

In general, we who labor in the university should ponder such developments with concern. If Paul Ricoeur is right that the paradigm shift in modernist historiography involves reluctant abandonment of the enlightenment theory of progress to an age of ambiguity, and that the crisis of ambiguity in turn is bound to resolve itself either by finding alternative grounds for hope or falling into despair, then perhaps what we are living with now is confused irresolution of both impulses.<sup>20</sup> It seems beyond question the case that, as Anthony Giddens has suggested, “loss of a belief in ‘progress’... is one of the factors that underlies the dissolution of ‘narratives’ of history.”<sup>21</sup> Sustaining narrative rationales for cultural literacy have tended to dissolve with them. Perhaps we ought to take the measure of our colleague’s anxieties quite seriously. Shamed by the painful failure of the old Enlightenment and Darwinian assurances about the triumph of rational progress, yet unable to admit that this bankruptcy is open to succinct and yet psychologically plausible analysis from within the Christian tradition upon whose rejection the Enlightenment project was constructed, is it possible that some of our contemporaries are drawn to “posthumanist,” “postliberal,” “postmodernist” strategies out of a felt need for what the media handlers of politicians like to call “damage control”? Could it be that much postmodern theory is less forward-looking than after-the-fact apologia for a failed utopian vision? Whether in their liberal humanist

or Marxist guise, modern theories of progress and emancipation have never seemed more hopelessly at variance with the pertinent evidence.

If this predicament—or some version of it—has been an actual motivation for certain kinds of ego-driven yet consensus-demanding postmodern theories, how might one purposefully, yet compassionately and self-critically, query the antirealist theoretical smoke screen that the underlying embarrassments have thrown up? How might more of us together enter into a discourse of sober, grounded and patient rational inquiry concerning the increasingly evident divorce of moral accountability from educational and professional life—a kind of intellectual examination of conscience?

This task, it should be admitted, will not prove easy. As we know, for the postmodernist, language is no longer to be used according to its conventional expectations of reference. For Rorty, for example, the notion of truth external to the self to which language attempts correspondence is purely chimerical, the faded vestige of a world view in which people could believe, as Roger Lundin trenchantly puts it, “in something so demeaning as a Creator-God.”<sup>22</sup> In practice, say Rorty and postmodernists generally, it is as Kant suggested, only more so: “everything can be changed by talking in new terms”—by our language *we* constitute our world, as well as our “self.” Our saying makes it so. Where conventional associations make this awkward for us, we simply redefine key terms: a key recognition of radical modernism is the discovery that “anything could be made to look bad, important or unimportant, useful or useless, by being redescribed.”<sup>23</sup> How convenient—and how resistant to learning, to others, to reality.

It is an irony of more than passing interest that in America, Madison Avenue and the political spin-doctors have been well ahead of the philosophers in developing this theory as cultural practice. (It was the culture of Madison Avenue, we may remember, that popularized the materialist myth of the “self-made man.”) Philosopher Rorty identifies postmodernism with the egocentric “romanticism” of figures like Blake and Rousseau, as well he might. But the mediation of this romanticism turns out to have been by a quite specific and much less esoteric postromantic discourse. When Rorty says that the essential postmodern theme is that “what is most important for human life is not what propositions we believe but what vocabulary we use,” he quickly observes that philosophers like Nietzsche and William James have been instrumental in developing this thesis by teaching us to give up “the notion of truth as a correspondence to reality.” Henceforth, instead of saying that the function of language is to “bring hidden secrets to light, they said that new ways of speaking could *help us get what we want*.”<sup>24</sup> But the rhetorical force of this last, essentially consumerist

phrase is clarifying, a kind of giveaway. Here, an admirer of intelligence may justifiably feel, is "adult" language more or less rationalizing the screeching egocentrism of a spoiled child—perhaps the new "everyman" for North American culture (cf. Bart Simpson or Calvin of "Calvin and Hobbes"). For those who read books to small children, statements like Rorty's offer an inescapable reminiscence of Humpty Dumpty:

"There's glory for you!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."<sup>25</sup>

In such a self-referential linguistic environment, to cite Nietzsche, truths can be dismissed with a flourish as "illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are" ("On Truth and Lies").

When we permit linguistic meaning to be reduced to an affect of power, or mastery, there remains little possibility of truthful exchange. Accordingly, Lyotard claims that the academic question is no longer "Is it true?" but rather, "What use is it?" or, more precisely, "How much is it worth?" (Madison Avenue again. In the marketplace of ideas, option price can be the real bottom line, as anyone who has followed the career of certain luminous contemporary professors will appreciate.) And so Relativism reigns, often as the consort of Opportunism. It may thus be for a complex of not very high-minded reasons that, as Jaroslav Pelikan puts it succinctly, in some quarters of the academy, relativism, "especially relativism about first principles" has been itself elevated "to the status of a first principle (about which it is not permitted to be a relativist)."<sup>26</sup> Contemporary demands for "pluralism" are often just another form of this new first principle, and just as often a bedmate of Opportunism.

Contemporary humanist discourse, it is hardly necessary to say, is overrun with varieties of relativism and antirealism. Rorty's version—that truth is what my peers will let me get away with saying—is just one of them. Philosopher Alvin Plantinga highlights the troubling social and political implications of this view by noting that on Rorty's

view “what is true for me, naturally enough, might be false for you; my peers might let *me* get away with saying something that *your* peers won’t let *you* away with saying.” More poignantly, “even if we had the same peers, they might not let you and me get away with saying the same things.” As Plantinga puts it, *au courant* or not, this view has peculiar consequences:

For example, most of us think the Chinese authorities did something monstrous in murdering those hundreds of young people in Tianamen Square; they then compounded their wickedness by denying that they had done it. On Rorty’s view, however, this is perhaps an uncharitable misunderstanding. What the authorities were doing, in denying that they had murdered those students, was something wholly praiseworthy: they were trying to bring it about that the alleged massacre never happened. For they were trying to see to it that their peers would let them away with saying that the massacre never happened; if they were successful, then (on the Rortian view) it would have been *true* that it never happened, in which case, of course, it would never have happened. So in denying that they did this horrifying thing, they were trying to make it *true* that it had never happened; and who can fault them for that? The same goes for those contemporary neo-Nazis who claim that there was no holocaust; from a Rortian perspective, they are only trying to see to it that such an appalling event never happened; why should we hold *that* against them? Instead of blaming them, we should cheer them on.

This way of thinking has real possibilities for dealing with poverty and disease: if only we let each other get away with saying that there isn’t any poverty and disease—no cancer or AIDS let us say—then it would be *true* that there isn’t any; and if it were true that there isn’t, then of course there wouldn’t *be* any. That seems vastly cheaper and less cumbersome than the conventional methods of fighting poverty and disease. At a more personal level, if you have done something wrong, it is not too late; lie about it, thus bringing it about that your peers will let you get away with saying that you didn’t do it; and, as an added bonus, that you didn’t even lie about it. One hopes Rorty is just joshing the rest of us. (But he isn’t.)<sup>27</sup>

Thinking about these issues raises discomfiting moral dilemmas for the academic who believes herself to be responsible to pursue more than just the acceptance of her professional peers.<sup>28</sup> A pertinent task for contemporary scholarship in the humanities—one, it must be admitted, not yet constructively enough accomplished—may thus be identification and analysis of the *motivation* for wishing relativism *a priori* to reign, for the banishing of truth questions. Perhaps we need to find ways to ask Lyotard’s question—“What use is it?”—from a more self-transcending, civic-minded perspective.

We may find that we do not necessarily have to have read George Orwell or Aldous Huxley yesterday to come up with some disturbing possible answers. Yet surely we must probe further. What do contemporary humanists, even from the perspective of the normal commerce of their daily life in community, have to say about the counterfactual, antirealist temper of postmodern language in its flight from epistemology to “hermeneutics” (Rorty)? As *ethos*, is postmodernism merely taking evasive action here, or is it possibly striking out in anger at exposure of a misplaced idolatry? Behind the extremism, then, are there particular grounds for a more constructive, even compassionate understanding? Can we hear in the postmodernist’s belligerent anti-realism and self-referential logic a *cri de cœur* explicable in much more straightforward terms? Perhaps. But in the meantime, one has also to wonder whether too much postmodernist antirealism has not had the effect of subverting our shared civic purpose, specifically our traditional and necessary commitment to the fostering in our citizens of a high-quality humane literacy.<sup>29</sup>

Literacy is notoriously easier to lose than to acquire. And when it is lost something far larger than the mechanical ability to decode signs goes with it. As the prologues he wrote to those works of classical humane wisdom (Orosius, Boethius, Augustine, Gregory) he translated for his people make clear, King Alfred the Great understood that humane literacy was the key to a world in which it had suddenly become possible to focus hopefully on the future, rather than simply live under the tyranny of the present. As Bede’s narrative about the speech of the counsellors at the time of King Edwin’s conversion likewise illustrates, it was the very notion of “grand narrative” that created a sense of future hope and thus of the value of learning and humane literacy among the pagan Germanic peoples. It was revolutionary for them, and culturally securing, to enter into conversation with a grand narrative. Before Alfred, who could have imagined a model of Germanic kingship of which it might truthfully be said that the pen became mightier than the sword?<sup>30</sup> Who even now would want to live in a world in which the pen had been emptied of its power to countervail the clash of steel?

What is it that Germanic pagans, native Africans in the age of missions, attic Greeks or Augustan Romans saw as attractive and culturally sustaining about their own participation in a grand narrative—be it biblical, Homeric or Vergilian? Presumably what each grand narrative offered was the notion that there is meaning in history and, as the anonymous Anglo-Saxon counsellor captured in his metaphor of the sparrow flight through the mead-hall and out into the night, that an understanding of continuity with the past might help to undergird community future. These reflections in their turn engender the notion

that there is, after all, something to be learned. They also imply that since language is an inheritance as well as a present instrument, literacy is that which most generously affords us a place in the continuing conversation—in Hutchins' rational exchange rather than Rorty's incommensurable bidding and forbidding. From the Judaeo-Christian point of view in particular, a grand narrative is what gives substance to the idea of human beings as persons with a purpose. In this respect, it is perhaps needless to add, it further subtends Western convictions about the fundamental character of human rights.<sup>31</sup>

In its broadest Erasmian definition, the "Civilization of the Dialogue," in its advocacy of humane literacy, encourages and permits access to other conversations. Precisely this is so because it commits its citizens to read—to interpret the other—and to write rationally and truthfully enough that the other may "read" accountably in turn. That is, the postmodernists notwithstanding, there is no self-edification at last without a complementary commitment to edification of the other: it is no accident that the English medieval poet Chaucer aptly commends his Clerk, "Gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche." The survival of humane literacy depends on literate humans personally communicating the literature by which they themselves have learned to become more humane.

Neil Postman observes that

from Erasmus in the sixteenth century to Elizabeth Eisenstein in the twentieth, almost every scholar who has grappled with the question of what reading does to one's habits of mind has concluded that the process encourages rationality; that the sequential, propositional character of the written word fosters what Walter Ong calls the "analytic management of knowledge." To engage the written word means to follow a line of thought, which requires considerable powers of classifying, inference-making and reasoning. It means to uncover lies, confusions, and overgeneralizations, to detect abuses of logic and common sense. It also means to weigh ideas, to compare and contrast assertions, to connect one generalization to another.<sup>32</sup>

These are features, we might think, which could lead to commensurable conversations, even in the university.

In our day, for reasons both far wider and deeper than religious pluralism or multiculturalism, our culture may be in flight from rationality—even from intelligibility—and returning again to various manifestations of pagan insecurity. All of our institutions stagger under the withdrawal of their foundation of belief. But *can* the Western university—from its foundations and through its history a legacy of one

grand narrative—survive without a sustaining belief and articulate practice of communicable rationality and humane literacy which has been the gift of that narrative? That is, can we survive in a world in which centring words themselves have lost their referents, been emptied out, and in which educated persons have lost both the ability and the will to reach toward a common truth? Can there continue a humane literacy without a shared “grand narrative”? At last to be brief: *Dubio*, as they used to say in the first universities—I doubt it, very much.

## NOTES

1. Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, is quoted here in the 1565 translation of Thomas Stapleton (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1935), vol. 2, p. 13.
2. They can, however, exhibit creative strategies for masking the evidence (see *University Affairs*, January 1977). When the former (NDP) Minister of Education for the Province of Ontario came to the conclusion that the Ontario education system needed a major overhaul (and established the Royal Commission for Learning, whose findings were published in February 1995), he began by ordering a universal Grade 9 English test. The Queen’s Park bureaucracy quietly produced a travesty of meaningful testing. Students were allowed to: “(1) write comments about a poem chosen by the student from a list of several alternatives, and, (2) write a short narrative or supported opinion on a subject of the student’s choosing, and, (3) submit a piece of prose selected by the student as his/her best from *previously written* material on any subject, and (4) read short pieces of prose and answer a series of multiple choice or short answer questions.” Teachers could comment on early drafts of students’ efforts so that edited versions would be the final submission. Dictionaries could be used and help from fellow students and parents was also encouraged. Even with all this assistance, any student thought by the teacher to be unable to complete the test could be exempted from it, without any need to report on the number of such exempted students. The reading passages used in the test had difficulty levels (Edward Fry, “Effective School Practices,” 1994) equivalent only to Grade 7 material. Even so, only 41 percent of Ontario students achieved “C” or higher in the reading tests, and 51 percent in writing. See Ted Johnson, “When Is a Test Not a Test,” in *Learning at Home*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1994), 1–4. The Education Minister announced that there would be province-wide standardized tests at Grade 3, 6, 9 and 11 levels, administered by a new bureaucracy of 70 persons overseen by a seven-member volunteer panel of “high profile” lay persons reporting directly to the legislature, an initiative opposed by the teachers’ union. Cf. Graeme Hunter, “Can You Read? Philosophical Reflections on Labour, Leisure and Literacy,” *Eidos*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1991), 47–61.



3. Walker Percy, *Signposts in a Strange Land* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), 170.
4. It may also be the most misleading. Fiedler's preoccupation with the subversion of traditional canons and the instituting of texts of heretofore marginalized culture (e.g., African-American, native Indian, homosexual) nevertheless signals a prominent political attribute of postmodernist agendas. See his "In the Beginning Was the Word: Logos or Mythos?" in *No! in Thunder: Essays on Myth and Literature* (Boston: Beacon, 1960), 295-308; and *What Was Literature? Class Culture and Mass Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).
5. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and M. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv. Cf. his penetrating observation in the appended essay, "What Is Postmodernism?" that "Modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality, together with the invention of other realities" (77).
6. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 2. Noting that the decline of Marxist political regimes has accelerated the tendency in postmodern theorizing to disregard—or wish to disregard—any overarching world view whatsoever, Giddens amplifies his definition by reference to the actual disarray in postmodern discourses:
 

What does postmodernity ordinarily refer to? Apart from the general sense of living through a period of marked disparity from the past, the term usually means one or more of the following: that we have discovered that nothing can be known with any certainty, since all pre-existing "foundations" of epistemology have been shown to be unreliable; that "history" is devoid of teleology and consequently no version of "progress" can plausibly be defended; and that a new social and political agenda has come into being with the increasing prominence of ecological concerns and perhaps of new social movements generally.

Cf. Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
7. Giddens, 3; Lyotard, 79.
8. Lyotard, 62.
9. Quoted by Robert Detlefsen, "White Like Me," *New Republic*, April 10, 1989. That this constraint on professional free speech is directed against freedom of conscience and of religion has been pointed out before. Recently George Marsden, formerly Professor of History at Duke and now at Notre Dame, has gone so far as to suggest that truth in advertising laws might require American colleges and universities to add a specific disclaimer to their typical antidiscrimination assurances in university calendars and handbooks, saying after the sentences encouraging "diversity of perspectives," "except of course, religious perspectives; we do, of course, discriminate on the basis of religion" ("Religious Professors Are the Last

- Taboo," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 22, 1993; see also "Scholar Calls Colleges Biased against Religion," by Peter Steinfels, *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 1993).
10. E.g., the University of Ottawa took this position in bargaining with its Association of University Professors in May 1996.
  11. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21.
  12. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 373.
  13. Quoted from Edward P.J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 377.
  14. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" in *Collected Essays* (New York: Hurst and Co., 1892), 7–48. For Emerson, perhaps, the paradigm American romantic incarnation of Kant's transcendent ego, "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own mind." Accordingly, "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and Bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it."
  15. *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. G.F. Maine (London, 1954), 962.
  16. This impulse is clearly discernible in Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech and It's a Good Thing Too* (1994); first essayed as an article with the same title in Paul Berman, ed., *Debating Political Correctness* (New York: Laurel, 1992), 233.
  17. See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 27 (cf. n. 2). Roger Lundin, in a helpful and penetrating recent study, comments on this and other of Rorty's central formulations (*The Culture of Interpretation: A Christian Encounter with Postmodern Critical Theory* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 224–225). Kreeft's remark is found in his *Back to Virtue* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 100. "My Way," written by Ottawa native Paul Anka, recently earned for its composer the order of the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres, perhaps in part because it was in fact Anka's adaptation of a French song, "Comme d'Habitude," by Claude François. If repetition is any index to its general significance (since it was written in 1968 it has been sung in 600 versions, with more than 300 million records sold), then this song would seem to be a kind of anthem for our time.
  18. For a recent review, see Adam Begley, "The I's Have It: Duke's 'Moi' Critics Expose Themselves," *Lingua Franca*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1994), 54–59.
  19. Lyotard, 48–51.
  20. Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).
  21. Giddens, 10.
  22. Lundin, especially chapters 4, 8 (cf. n. 13).

23. Rorty, *Contingency*, 5, 7.
24. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 142, 150.
25. From chapter 6 ("Humpty Dumpty") of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, ed. Martin Gardner, *The Annotated Alice* (New York: Bramhall, 1960), 268–269.
26. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Re-examination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 29.
27. Alvin Plantinga, "On Christian Scholarship," in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University*, ed. Theodore M. Hesburgh (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 267–296.
28. According to David Bromwich, *Politics by Other Means: The Limits of Institutional Radicalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), "The new academic professionalism shows that [universities] at this level are just one more casualty of an ethic of market rationalization that controls our society as never before." Yet properly, he observes, "Professional development really has no more claim upon us than real-estate development... The truth is that with much refinement and convenience, professionalization has brought much damage everywhere. *Everywhere*: in the medical and legal professions, too; in every discipline the creation of which requires the creation of a new laity. What it most has destroyed... is our common sense of public life" (111).
29. Such questions have begun to be raised recently in a number of quarters, even if tentatively. A useful example from within the discipline is afforded by Morris Dickstein, "Damaged Literacy: The Decay of Reading," *Profession* 93 (New York: Modern Language Association, 1993), 34–40.
30. I have taken up the relationship of Anglo-Saxon evangelization to the birth and growth of literacy and literature in chapter 4 of my *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
31. Failure to understand the connection occasions much confusion in contemporary Western politics, as was illustrated by Clinton's recent capitulation to China in the negotiations over trade and "most-favored nation status" (and Jean Chrétien's parallel gestures). Within the community of Chinese intellectuals on the other hand, there is considerable interest in the Western "grand narrative" because of their perception that Christian ethics, which apart from its religious foundation they profess to admire, is grounded in it.
32. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 51.

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PART III

**WHERE ARE WE GOING?**

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## THE FUTURE OF TEACHING

*Mark R. Schwehn (Valparaiso University)*

In 1960, the distinguished American colonial historian Bernard Bailyn published a small essay that deeply influenced the manner in which an entire generation of social and intellectual historians came to think about education. Entitled *Education in the Forming of American Society*, the essay argued for a view of education that now seems to be very much a commonplace, namely that education should not be reduced to “schooling” but that it should instead be regarded as “the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations.”<sup>1</sup> Having argued with characteristic subtlety for this latter view, Bailyn proceeded to show how schools in the English colonies arose in response to the reconfiguration of other institutions—indentured servanthood, apprenticeship, the family and the Church—that had for a long time been the primary agents of cultural transmission.

It is very unlikely that we would have needed Bailyn to tell us all of this today. The personal experiences of any college teacher will quickly demonstrate the extent to which his or her work is in part defined by the operation of institutions of cultural transmission other than the college or university. We all notice that an increasing number of our students shows the effects of abuse, neglect and divorce. We all worry over the schools that educate younger children. And few of us have not complained at one time or another about the decline of cultural literacy among our students and the rise in a certain kind of visual sophistication. *Paradise Lost*!!!!? Is that a rock group or a video game? Finally, do we not find ourselves asked increasingly to “minister to the whole student” or to “educate the whole person” when these injunctions are often code words for increasing university expenditures for support services like psychological counselling and drug abuse centres? All of these experiences lead us to sense in the fabric of our daily lives the extent to which the allocation of university resources, the substance of our curriculum, our choice of study materials,

our level of expectation, our vocabulary, even our pedagogical style are shaped by a multitude of social institutions outside of the academy that are themselves for better or for worse involved in education.

But although we would all instantly agree, on the basis of experience if nothing else, that education should not be and cannot be reduced to schooling, we would probably nevertheless think, at least in our unguarded moments, that teaching refers to something like "classroom activity." In other words, though many of us are disposed to a more broadly cultural understanding of education, we are also disposed toward a more narrowly professional understanding of teaching. And indeed this latter disposition was precisely what led to the historiographical situation that Bernard Bailyn sought to improve a generation ago in his pathbreaking book. The history of education had, according to Bailyn, fallen into the hands of professional teachers of education sometime around the turn of the twentieth century. And once that happened, the whole purpose of histories of education became, in Bailyn's words, "to dignify a new self-conscious profession by arguing that modern education was a cosmic force leading mankind to a full realization of itself."<sup>2</sup> This self-serving agenda in turn led these historians of education to "direct their attention almost exclusively to the part of the educational process carried on in formal institutions of instruction." By so limiting their subject, they "lost the capacity to see it in its full context and hence to assess the variety and magnitude of the burdens it had borne and to judge its historical importance."<sup>3</sup>

I think we might at this point be in danger of losing our capacity to see the full context of teaching and to judge its historical importance. I therefore want to suggest that unless we remind ourselves that teaching is a vocation that extends far beyond disciplinary guilds and self-contained classrooms, we risk misunderstanding both its nature and its purposes. If we think of teaching simply as classroom activity or even more broadly but still restrictively as a collegial activity, we will be inclined to make one of two fundamental errors. We will either reduce it to a set of methods and techniques, turning it finally into a technology, or we will mystify it by turning it into an occult practice that defies rational appraisal or description.

I want to suggest instead that good thinking about good teaching begins with the recognition that teaching is a basic human practice whose excellence depends upon the exercise of certain intellectual and moral virtues. Teaching is closer to an art than it is to a *techne*, and, though it certainly involves mysterious transactions, it is nevertheless a public activity that is improvable through practice and criticism. Finally, I will invite you to consider what I regard as the principal threat to good teaching and the principal opportunity for it. The principal



threat to good college and university teaching arises, I will argue, from certain tendencies within the modern research university itself. The principal opportunity arises from the desperate need, in Canada, the United States and throughout the world, for a renewal of civil society. Good teaching and liberal learning are now, I think, more than ever before, indispensable to the continuity of democracy itself.

At some level we all recognize that teaching is a basic human art more than it is a professional practice like medicine or law. This summer, I asked a group of adults two questions that I would ask you now if we had time for you to ponder them carefully. The first question was, "Who were the three most important teachers in your life?" The second question was, "What, if anything, did these three people have in common?" Few people included more than one professionally trained teacher in their list of three; they listed instead parents, spouses, friends, neighbors, pastors, siblings and other relatives. So much for professionalism. But more important, almost no one in answer to the second question about what the three teachers had in common listed techniques or teaching styles. On the contrary. The three teachers selected were invariably very different from one another in terms of what they taught and how they taught it and even in terms of how well they knew or appeared to know what they taught. But they invariably had in common certain attitudes toward their craft or subject and toward their pupils as well. They moreover had certain qualities of character in common—integrity, truthfulness, compassion, dedication, empathy, attentiveness and love were frequently mentioned. In brief, people know good teaching when they see it, and when they try to describe it they rarely if ever do so in terms of some favored technique even though a great deal of literature about teaching until quite recently emphasized technique over almost everything else.

These observations suggest that if we want to develop a rich account of good teaching, we must begin by looking to what the lives of teachers of liberal and professional studies have in common with the lives of grandparents teaching their grandchildren how to sew or how to fish and with barge pilots or fly fishermen teaching apprentices how to read a river. Before we think about teaching chemistry or history or philosophy or economics we need to think about generic human excellences that make teaching of any kind possible.

In my book *Exiles from Eden*, I tried to specify and then to elaborate upon a few of those qualities of character that are indispensable to both teaching and learning.<sup>4</sup> An arrogant teacher, for example, no matter how well she understands organic chemistry, is apt to be unresponsive to her students and impatient with their errors and hesitations. Humility, therefore, is both a human excellence and a pedagogical virtue. It

would be an interesting and worthy project to articulate in a more systematic fashion those virtues whose exercise is most important for good teaching and to rank them accordingly. They would surely include, in addition to humility, faith, justice, courage, prudence, temperance, honesty and, perhaps above all, charity. Indeed, my favorite brief account of the vocation of teaching has become the unofficial motto of the honors college where I teach. It comes from the eleventh century and St. Bernard of Clairvaux as follows: "Some seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge: that is curiosity; others seek knowledge that they may themselves be known: that is vanity; but there are still others who seek knowledge in order to serve and edify others, and that is charity."

Many of you will agree with what I have said thus far, but you may need some persuasion in order to be convinced of the next point I wish to make about pedagogical virtues. These are not simply moral virtues that, when accompanied by the exercise of certain intellectual virtues, yield good teaching. Rather, moral and spiritual virtues like justice and charity have cognitive significance. My own discipline is history, and I remember very well how moved I was when I read J.H. Hexter's *The Historical Primer*. Hexter was and remains one of the most terrifying polemicists of the historical profession. He once parodied H.R. Trevor-Roper's interpretation of the English Civil War as a conflict between the little piggies who went to court and had roast beef (the court gentry) and the little piggies who stayed at home and had none (the country gentry). But Hexter's polemical zeal was driven in large part by his deep aversion to sloppy reasoning and carelessness with evidence. He puts this whole matter more positively himself at the end of *The Historical Primer* when he lists charity as the supreme historical virtue.<sup>5</sup> By charity he means a taking care of the thoughts, the deeds and the lives of others. Being care-ful.

My own practice as a historian has repeatedly vindicated Hexter's view, and has shown me time and again the cognitive value of charity. I have in mind here criticism I have received or that I have repeatedly levelled at myself regarding my thinking about, say, William James, a figure long dead. "You have really not done James full justice in your discussion of his religious views." Or again, "you really need to be more charitable to James in your analysis of his courtship and marriage." Notice that the vocabulary of moral and spiritual virtue—here justice and charity—easily insinuates itself into appraisals of thought as well as action. If I have grown to treat my colleagues and my students with justice and charity, am I more or less apt to treat historical subjects such as William James in the same manner? I am surely more apt to do so. And would such treatment increase or decrease the quality of my historical *thinking*? Again, I think that the exercise of charity toward my historical subjects is bound to make me a better historian—

more cautious in appraisal, more sympathetic with human failings, less prone to stereotype and caricature. And insofar as this is so, the manner of teaching others to think historically ought to cultivate, at least through force of example, the virtue of charity.

Some of you may by now be convinced that if we are to think well about our teaching, we must begin with some thorough discussion of our own characters through a consideration of those human virtues that promote the excellence of all teaching. But many of us here, I trust, are after all university professors, and we teach liberal and professional studies. Does it not seem true that much of what makes for good teaching is context-specific, depending upon our academic disciplines, the level of knowledge of our students, the size of our classes, and so forth? Can we really say that a description of the good teacher of advanced analytical chemistry would be the same description as the description of a good teacher of Freshman English or Introductory French?

The answer here seems to be "Yes, but of course not." Yes, we would expect all good teachers, including the analytical chemist and the French Professor, to be just and charitable. But no, we should not of course expect all of them to teach in the same manner. This is the trouble with much of the literature on teaching technique, which makes it seem as though certain methods are uniformly or universally applicable. Conversation about teaching techniques is fine; I engage in it all the time, and I have learned almost everything I value about teaching from watching my teachers and my colleagues and listening to them talk about how they teach. But finally no one can give me a technique that will tell me whether, when and how to apply a given technique in a given class. That is why good teaching is an art rather than a techne or a science. It depends upon a great deal of self-knowledge, upon no small amount of experience, and, here we come to the virtues again, upon the exercise of prudential wisdom.

Even so, you may have noticed that I was myself compelled, in the course of my account of the pedagogical virtues, to draw upon my own discipline of history. And I do think that it is important, especially in these days and times, to bear in mind that university teaching at each and every moment, involves a discipline and points toward some subject or another. Though the liberal arts as a whole are not defined by a subject matter, this truth can easily obscure at least one other truth if it is pushed too far, namely the truth that in each and every class in liberal and professional studies there is very definitely a subject, a collective focus of attention and comprehension. Sometimes this is a text, at other times an experiment, a natural phenomenon, a social action, any number of things.

It is especially important for teachers to bear this latter truth in mind these days, since we are being urged by some of our colleagues to correct for what they believe to have been an era of “teacher-centred” learning by inaugurating an era of “student-centred” learning. The proper rejoinder to the counsel that we should let the students dictate the shape and the substance of classroom activity is not I think simply to reassert the importance of the subject, as I have done thus far. Rather, we should describe the complex web of interactions among teachers, students and subjects in terms of a series of questions like those raised by Joseph McDonald as follows:

Real teaching... happens inside a wild triangle of relations—among teacher, students, subject—and the points of this triangle shift continuously. What shall I teach amid all that I might teach? How can I grasp it myself so that my grasping may enable theirs? What are they thinking and feeling—toward me, toward each other, toward the thing I am trying to teach? How near should I come, how far off should I stay? How much clutch, how much gas.<sup>6</sup>

Or, perhaps better still, as Margret Buchmann has written in her fine book *The Careful Vision: How Practical Is Contemplation in Teaching?*:

Teaching demands recognizing that students and teaching subjects can neither be known altogether, nor once and for all. The more teachers think about their subjects, the less they are sure of their ground, becoming clearer about the limits of their understanding and coming to share in the “learned uncertainty” of scholars. The more they contemplate their students, the more they will become aware of the fact that their knowledge of them is imperfect and constructed, a fallible vision also because people change, and are supposed to change, in school.<sup>7</sup>

In brief, we must maintain two seemingly incompatible things at once if we are to be credible teachers of the liberal arts, broadly understood: first, that these arts have no defining subject matter; second, that liberal learning is nonetheless to a degree subject-centred, that in another sense these arts, in any given instance of their exercise, always have a subject. Perhaps one of our principal pedagogical challenges these days is to maintain these two positions at once in the face of certain intellectual fashions that would invite us to deconstruct our subjects altogether or to dissolve them without remainder into the imagination of the teacher or the responses of the students or both.

If good teaching must be responsive to the context of the relevant academic discipline and the peculiar difficulties of the subject, it must also be responsive to the technologies through which it operates. We

are, after all, living in the midst of the so-called Information Age. Closer to home here, the University of Ottawa takes justifiable pride in its pace-setting ventures in co-operative and distance learning. We would be quite remiss if, in a talk on the "Future of Teaching" we did not reckon with the new technologies that make widely accessible forms of communication possible that seemed a few years ago inconceivable. Yet here it is quite hazardous to make any predictions. We are already learning that these new technologies have not delivered on two of the promises their early prophets and defenders made to us. First, these technologies are expensive; they are not, as some promised, saving us money. Second, these technologies are stress-inducing; they are not, as others reassured us, creating a more relaxed atmosphere for teaching and learning. And this may indeed be the major threat posed to good teaching by the new technologies, for good teaching depends upon the space and time to contemplate and reflect. Frantic speed is inimical to sound pedagogy.

But beyond these two caveats, it would be, I think, a mistake at this point to imagine that the Internet, for example, is by itself, either inimical to good teaching or friendly to it. Rather, we should treat the Internet, as we should treat all technological innovations that have pedagogical applications, as another part of the context that helps to shape the character and possibilities of teaching and learning, not as either a *bête noire* or a panacea. So, for example, we should not make the mistake that some critics of the Internet make, when they claim that it depersonalizes teaching and learning. These people conflate person-to-person communication with face-to-face communication, and they then tend to make something of a mystical fetish of the latter form of conversation at the expense of the former kind. An hour's experience will undermine months of theorizing in this regard. Many of my students find themselves empowered to speak on the Internet. They are shy in public; they feel more comfortable if they can revise on screen before they make what is on their screen public. Or, like E.M. Forster, they do not really know what they think until they see what they have written. So writing their remarks actually clarifies their ideas for them to the point that they find the confidence to express them publicly. In brief, in several respects, the possibilities of distance learning are liberating for both teachers and students. The diversity and range of dialogue partners increases geometrically, new levels of candor and intellectual refinement are encouraged, and many people are included in the conversation who would otherwise be self-excluded for reasons not at all related to the quality of their ideas.

The Internet is hardly a *bête noire*, but it is not a panacea either, and, if it is relied upon exclusively as a teaching vehicle, it can lead to serious losses. It may, for example, encourage the view that thought is

a disembodied enterprise, free from anchorage in personality, social location, history and an entire complex of material considerations. A person is accountable for something he or she says in class in a way that he or she is not accountable on the Internet. In the former case, the student must live with the remark she made, live in the company of others to whom she made the remark and who in turn can be expected to know its larger significance by virtue of knowing *her*. In the worst case scenario, the Internet could be related to classroom discussion as the television, call-in talk show is related to dining table conversation. In the former contexts—the Internet and the talk show—persons are not responsible for what they say in the same robust sense in which they are responsible in the latter contexts. And this is potentially dangerous to both liberal education and to professional study.

These comments are not meant to “solve the problem” of the new technological context for teaching in our time; rather, they are meant to exemplify what I believe must be our communal response to the problem. We must take matters up on a case-by-case basis, and we must be wary reasoners here, unmoved by apocalyptic rhetoric on either side of the issue. We should remind ourselves that teaching, like camping, is a complex activity that embraces a wide range of simpler activities that in turn constitute it. Yes, both hiking and packing are parts of camping, but camping cannot be reduced to either hiking or packing. Yes, both imparting information and listening attentively are part of teaching, but teaching cannot be reduced to either of these activities. The principal error in most debates about, for example, the impact of the Internet upon teaching, is that people on the one side refuse to acknowledge that imparting information is, after all, a part of teaching, while people on the other side speak as though teaching is just imparting information. For the former group, the Internet is an abomination; for the latter, a technological triumph. But it is neither one, as I have said. It does make good teachers responsible for and to a new set of resources and skills that their students often know better than they do, but it does not alter the fundamental character of teaching itself. So the real question is seldom what we imagine it to be. It is almost never an abstract question like, “Is teaching just imparting information?” It is instead, always a question involving practical reasoning, such as, “Given these students, this subject, these purposes and those constraints, do I need now to provide more information or to formulate more productive problems and questions?” And, “if I do now need to provide more information, what is the best way of doing that, given the resources at my disposal?” Good teaching always needs more resourcefulness more than it needs more resources.

I said at the beginning of this talk that we must at all costs avoid both reducing teaching to a set of techniques and shrouding it behind a

thicket of mystical verbiage. I hope you will agree that I have avoided the first mistake. You are certainly entitled to wonder, however, whether I have altogether avoided the second. Have I not suggested that the more teachers think about their teaching the less sure they are of their ground? And have I not spoken of teaching as an art, calling for the constant application of practical wisdom? And have I not admitted that good teaching requires a good bit of self-knowledge, and that it is to an important degree dependent upon both the context of the relevant academic discipline and upon the context of available technologies? Do these several observations taken together risk mystification? Or, to raise a more practical question, does this account of teaching render teaching an activity that is impossible to evaluate fairly?

Let me be blunt: my account of teaching here probably does suggest that most faculty evaluation programs currently in place will be woefully inadequate. But it would be a grave mistake to draw from this admission the conclusion that we should not evaluate teaching. On the contrary, faculty must subject themselves to regular evaluation of their teaching as a matter of justice and professional integrity. They should not subject themselves, however, to perfunctory evaluations that result in shoddy appraisals and an erosion of collegiality. Or, to put it positively, we need radically to review our evaluation procedures to bring them into alignment with our sense of the complex nature of the art of teaching.

Mary C. Boys suggests that we think of faculty assessment rather than faculty evaluation. The Latin root of the word "assessment," she points out, is the word *assidere*, meaning "to sit beside."<sup>8</sup> She therefore argues that assessment should be viewed as a collegial process that approximates a mentoring relationship between the faculty member being assessed and the faculty members doing the assessing. In addition to student evaluations, all such assessments should minimally include the faculty member's own assessment through a portfolio or portrait and the sponsorship of a series of conversations on teaching. In my judgment, Boys' article sets out in great detail a process of appraisal that is commensurate with the complex art of teaching itself. Indeed, if we were half as careful about the manner in which we assess teaching as we are about the manner in which we assess scholarship, teaching would seem much less mysterious and scholarship would seem more so. Instead, having proclaimed that it is impossible to competently evaluate teaching, we tend to rush through teaching assessments and then pronounce them unfair, inadequate and counterproductive. This is, on almost every campus, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The entire complex of the historical and social conditions that collectively describe the current context for our teaching sets before us

once more and with renewed urgency the question the citizens of Athens faced during the trial of Socrates. Is teaching finally an act of piety, as Socrates thought, or an act of impiety as his Athenian judges concluded? And does an education finally undermine citizenship by corrupting the young, as the Athenians believed, or does it make us and our students better human beings and citizens, as Socrates taught?

If George Marsden is correct, and I believe he is correct, we have witnessed over the course of the last century an unprecedented marginalization of religion in academic life in the United States. In *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), he argues that though religious activities of one kind or another abound on our campuses, large and small, public and private, religious motivations, questions, attitudes and virtues are conspicuous by their absence from the central activities of the academy—teaching, learning and scholarship. The pursuit of wisdom, whatever it may be today, is certainly not regarded on most college and university campuses in the U.S. as an act of piety. On the contrary, in order to engage credibly in public, academic conversation about the truth of matters, one must on most campuses keep one's religious convictions private. "Religion," in the words of the philosopher Richard Rorty, "is a conversation stopper."<sup>9</sup>

Whether by coincidence or through some subtle reciprocal processes, the consignment of religion to the margins of academia has accompanied a gradual process of dissolution both of citizenship and of civil society. As yet another McMartin lecturer, Jean Bethke Elshtain, has argued in her book *Democracy on Trial*, the nurseries of democracy, the very institutions that define the larger ecology of our own colleges and universities, have been steadily unravelling—the family, the neighborhood, the voluntary civic organization and the Church. It is as though Athens, not Socrates, had taken the hemlock.

In *Exiles from Eden* I raised the question of whether virtues such as humility, charity and self-denial, which are indispensable to teaching and learning, could be sustained indefinitely in the absence of those religious communities whose practices, rituals, stories, convictions and communal forms originally gave rise to those virtues and helped to sustain them over time.<sup>10</sup> I wondered then, and I still wonder, whether we may all be living off of borrowed moral capital, taken without replenishment from religious traditions that have been occluded, at least within many universities, on the grounds that religion leads invariably to intolerance and anti-intellectualism. If the vocation of a teacher must include, as I have argued it must, the cultivation, both within the soul of the teacher and within the souls of her students, of those virtues that make learning of any kind possible, then how long can good teaching flourish without some understanding of inquiry as an act of piety?



These observations and questions provide the framework for my concluding remarks about the future of teaching. My thesis is simple. Whatever subject we may teach, we are, within the university, bound by the corporate vocation of the university itself to be about the business of education, of leading students out of the prison houses of prejudice and ignorance, of freeing them from the unexamined tyrannies that hold sway over their minds and freeing them for love of the world through lifelong and active engagement with fundamental human questions and with the project of human flourishing. Education must always aim at the higher, at the achievement of self-transcendence and the pursuit of the truth of matters. In whatever idiom and with whatever images we might wish to vivify this noble endeavor, teaching is finally a sacred task and a religious vocation.

These claims will seem tautological to many of you. But if so, they are tautologies well worth remembering. And besides, as Samuel Johnson has said, "we are more often reminded than we are instructed." In our time, however, these truths have a rather fragile standing within at least some precincts of the academy. Too many of our colleagues are convinced that the quest for truth is nothing more and nothing less than a thickly disguised quest for power and dominion. Too many others contend that our alleged truths reduce without remainder to elaborate articulations of the perspectives that arise from our own class, race or gender. And an increasing number of intellectuals, both inside and outside of the academy, suggest that we finally fashion ourselves and our worlds at will.

There are parallels to these developments in the civic realm. To the contemporary suggestions that only women can understand women, or that only Africans can understand Africans, or that only gay men should teach courses about gay men, we have the civic counterpart of "identity politics," quests for power that are based upon the dubious assumption that we are first and last women or Asians or poor people and never really citizens. To the teaching that the quest for truth is only a quest for power we have the civic counterpart in the operational denial, in many of our instruments of mass communication, of distinctions between political argument, gossip and propaganda. And to the belief that we can fashion our own worlds at will, we have the civic counterparts of the denial of nature, the refusal to recognize limits and the careless manipulation of the environment. In short, an abdication of the aspiration to higher things within the academy is part of the same process that has led to the abdication of the notion of a common good within the civil society. The academic abandonment of the quest to enlarge our vision coincides with the civic abandonment of the ideal of citizenship.

These are not idle speculations. Robert D. Putnam has observed that in the United States membership in organizations such as parent-teacher

associations, the League of Women Voters, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, all Fraternal Organizations and the Red Cross, has fallen catastrophically over the last 30 years—by over 40 percent in most cases. In the meantime, membership in self-help organizations has soared. So too has membership within large and impersonal national associations that are organized around a single issue. Unlike the smaller, face-to-face organizations that further a variety of civic and social purposes, the self-help groups provide support for persons with particular problems who terminate their membership as soon as their problem has been solved. The single-cause organizations are made up of millions of members who remain anonymous to one another and who share as a common activity only the payment of regular membership dues.<sup>11</sup>

The alarming trend here is quite clear. The smaller civic societies and social clubs nurtured habits of compromise, mutual responsibility and accountability, and they were constantly renewed by the discovery of common purposes. The associations that are replacing them reinforce differences, solidify and intensify abstract disagreements or provide a kind of group therapy for the lonely and disenfranchised. What Alexis de Tocqueville, the great French student of English and American institutions, once identified as the nurseries of democracy have been replaced by a proliferation of interest groups and therapeutic collectives. And the results of this reconfiguration of loyalty and group endeavor are equally clear. The percentage of U.S. citizens who vote continues to decline, neighborliness has all but disappeared, social trust is at a premium and the distrust of politics and politicians rises every year.

But what does this have to do with teaching and the future of teaching? University teachers must either do their parts to reverse these disturbing trends or they must be complicit with them. So long as knowing is regarded as an individual state of mind rather than an interpersonal activity, so long as individual research projects, sometimes undertaken at the expense of good teaching, are the only path to academic preference, so long as the university is regarded by its members as more and more a resource centre and less and less a community of scholars, so long as teaching is itself understood exclusively in terms of the transmission of knowledge and skills at the expense of the cultivation of character and virtue, so long as the imperatives of hyper-specialization lead teachers to retreat further and further into the realms of cyberspace, so long as, finally, education becomes mere training at the expense of the sacred task of inquiry, university teachers will aid and abet the unravelling of the fabric of democracy.

Considerations such as these shape the distinctive character of our tasks today. For centuries universities have lived in tension with a variety of prevailing regimes. Their service to society has been understood

as in some sense connected both to the distinctively academic virtues of critical reasoning and to the prophetic task of speaking truth to power. Socrates has therefore always been, in some sense or another, on trial. But now democracy is itself on trial, and the terrible weapons of critical thinking in the absence of the moral and spiritual virtues that have kept that thinking at its best lovingly and responsibly engaged with a larger civic culture have here and there threatened to inflict upon democracy itself wounds from which it may not recover easily. Many of us therefore find ourselves in the following paradoxical situation: we are most critical of the prevailing culture when we are most irenic, most counter-cultural when we are friendly to democracy, most authentically advanced in our thinking when we are most old-fashioned in our loyalty to ideals like self-transcendence and universality.

So the future of teaching is at this moment in history bound up in peculiar ways to the future of democratic government. Socrates would find this a strange world. And since I have so often invoked him, I might as well close by quoting him. In Plato's only dialogue on the subject of education, *Meno*, Socrates at one point interrupts the flow of the dialectic to make a profession of faith. "I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs that we will be better human beings, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it."<sup>12</sup> We are better and braver human beings if we believe in the possibility of inquiry. To this we add two corollaries. First, unless we are brave and virtuous, we cannot inquire. Second, unless we construe our tasks as teachers to include the cultivation of virtues like courage and charity, we will fail ourselves, our students, our universities and, in this day and age, our democracy as well.

## NOTES

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# THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH

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## INTRODUCTION

Active participants in university value the ideals of autonomy, independent research and the advancement of knowledge. Universities are portrayed by many as adhocracies in which professors pursue their own research individually. Over the years, however, broader social roles and expectations of performance have been emphasized for universities. As a result of perceived demands concerning the contribution that universities can make to economic and social development, funders of universities have sought expansion, leading them to expand their mission from education and research to becoming an agent of progress generally.

In the face of the rising costs of university education, growing pressures for wider access and the need to use science for economic progress, governments have developed university systems that are publicly financed while tuition fees and private contributions finance a relatively small share of total costs. Returns on private and public investments in education and research, especially at the university level, are deemed to be very high and have served as a rationale for allocating substantial levels of public funding to postsecondary education and quasi state takeovers.

Harnessing the research capabilities of universities to enhance competitiveness abroad and rejuvenate the economy has also become a central political issue. Competition on a global scale makes the vitality of university education and research a key element of industrial strategies. Universities face the dual challenge of maintaining a firm commitment to humanistic values and traditions while responding to new demands for greater involvement in technological and economic development. Universities, whether professors like it or not, will face in-

creasingly complex and demanding challenges: difficult choices will have to be made.

## **ROLES AND MISSIONS OF UNIVERSITIES: HETEROGENEITY VERSUS HOMOGENEITY**

Universities started in the Middle Ages as centres of liberal and professional learning. In Europe, many such institutions were set up by princes with charters from Rome and support staff from religious orders. The teaching role of universities has however undergone transformations and now includes research and social action. Let us first try to understand these three missions of universities.

### **THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION**

A central role of the university is the transmission of knowledge and the training of minds.<sup>1</sup> The heritage of humanity has been handed down to successive generations through university education in the liberal arts, philosophy and the social sciences. Professional training was provided in such areas as law, medicine and the natural sciences. Over the years, new disciplines were added in the fields of health sciences, teaching, engineering, management and so on.

The educative function of the university has been characterized by increasing specialization and differentiation of the programs offered, in response to the evolution of scientific knowledge, the professional specialization of the workplace and the market demands of rising student enrolments. While the educational function is performed mainly at the undergraduate level, the graduate level—where enrolments are much lower—is also an integral part of the basic mission of a university system.

In their teaching role, universities have become increasingly market-oriented but still remain inefficient training centres. Compared to pilot training centres, universities are backward, inefficient and old-fashioned. The idea of educating minds in the knowledge needed for a fulfilling life has been abandoned in favor of either mass technical or ideology-based social science training. The pursuit of philosophical knowledge, deliberation in search of truth and development of critical abilities are gone except in a few elite institutions.

### **THE RESEARCH MISSION**

A second role of the university is to engage in basic research activities that promote the systematic advancement of knowledge. This model of the university as the locus of pure research was adopted

during the nineteenth century by the leading institutions of higher learning in the western world.<sup>2</sup> The penetration of this view has substantially modified educational institutions into research-oriented universities.

This vision of the university was so widely accepted that today virtually every professor, even at the undergraduate level, is expected to carry on some research activities, if only to keep abreast of developments in his field. This is even more true at the graduate level, where the research and educational missions are closely integrated. Departments organized around disciplines, scientific publications and research for training graduate students are fundamental elements of this approach.

Though basic research activities are also performed in industrial and governmental laboratories, the relative superiority of the university setting for the pursuit of scientific knowledge is recognized. Indeed, in most advanced countries, a major proportion of basic research is carried out in universities. To improve their ability to carry out research, universities have often superimposed advanced research programs and mission-oriented centres on top of department structures. The increase of knowledge about the laws of nature and a better understanding of the physical world have led to many inventions and innovations.

By fulfilling their research functions, universities contribute indirectly, and sometimes directly, to economic progress. Advances in biology, physics, chemistry and information theory have led to the emergence of new industrial sectors. For example, the recent development of biotechnology as a commercial activity is the result of publicly funded basic research conducted mainly in universities over the past three decades.

### THE DEVELOPMENT MISSION

A third growing role of the university—one that is compatible with, and complementary to, the first two functions—is that of an active agent of economic and social progress. Through the diffusion of knowledge to other institutions, universities play a significant role in transforming governments and firms involved in the production of goods and services.<sup>3</sup>

In many countries, technical universities oriented toward industrial applications and management have been established to perform the diffusion role. Canada, however, has few technical universities of this kind. As a result, the need to diffuse basic research and technology is placing added demands on traditional universities.

The role of universities as catalysts in the diffusion of state-of-the-art knowledge and technology, as well as the effectiveness with which they play that role, are issues forming the core of public debates concerning the financing of postsecondary education. Diffusion can take place through consulting activities, systematic exchanges and the conduct of applications-oriented research.

Performance of the diffusion mission depends, to a large extent, on how well universities perform the first two roles. In other words, if the education and research functions are well developed, then they will provide a solid base from which universities can disseminate scientific and technical knowledge to the rest of society. The extent to which they are successful in fulfilling this role also depends on the structure and dynamics of the industries with which they interface.

The view that universities should act as agents of progress is not a universal one. Maintaining the education and research functions is seen by some as the absolute priority of any university system. According to this argument, universities already contribute to economic development by indirect means, such as the training of students and researchers, and by basic research leading to the advancement of knowledge. The transfer of scientific and technological knowledge, it is argued, would best be left to mechanisms that fall outside the core functions of the university.

By contrast, the proponents of the university as an agent of change through the diffusion of best-practice knowledge and technology point out that universities not only should maintain good relations with industry but that they should also make cultural changes of their own in order to become effective partners of industry and government in their joint social and economic mission. Numerous examples of close relationships between universities with the agricultural sector, in the medical field and with the pharmaceutical industry show that many universities have been actively involved in diffusion activities with both considerable success and legitimacy.

## RESEARCH IN CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

Analysts have demonstrated that strong links exist between education, the advancement of knowledge and economic growth. Education and research expenditures contributed substantially to national productivity gains in industrialized countries. Social and natural sciences are major contributors to economic progress through inventions, innovations and creative adaptations that enhance the productivity and the competitiveness of industries.

The major funders of R&D activities in Canada are the corporate sector and the federal government, while the major performers are



**Table 1**  
**Total Domestic Expenditure on R&D by Funders and Performers, 1986**

	FUNDERS		PERFORMERS	
	\$(millions)	Percentage	\$(millions)	Percentage
Federal Government	1,928	30.2	1,196	18.7
Provinces	387	6.1	160	3.2
Business Enterprises	3,052	47.8	4,114	64.5
Universities	237	3.2	862	13.6
Private Non-profit Organizations	36	0.6	—	—
Foreign	1,004	12.1	—	—
TOTAL	8,310	100	8,310	100

Source: Statistics Canada, 1995

business firms, universities and government laboratories. Universities perform about 23 percent of national R&D activities (in dollar terms). Total R&D expenditures in Canada as a proportion of GDP are approximately 1.3 percent. Canada's ratio has historically been low relative to that of other countries.

Universities play a significant role in national R&D systems. As performers of R&D, universities are second to the business sector and just ahead of most government laboratories. This is an important statistic given the relative decline of most government laboratories (with the exception of those in natural science engineering). University R&D activities are funded mostly by governments, either directly through granting agencies or indirectly through fiscal transfers. The private sector financed approximately 13 percent of university R&D, with business firms contributing slightly over three percent.

#### THE RESEARCH CAPABILITY OF CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

The research capability of a university is determined by its staff. The number of professors is determined by the teaching needs of these institutions, which in turn are affected by the levels of student enrolment. Following a period of rapid growth in faculty recruitment in the 1960s and 1970s resulting from rising student enrolments, the hiring of academic staff with doctorates has substantially dropped if not stopped in recent years. As a consequence, *the research faculty of universities is aging rapidly*. The foreseeable negative impact of this

factor on the future quality of both research and education is not to be underestimated.

The recruitment of a substantial number of young faculty members is needed to enhance the quality, adaptability and development of the research activities of the universities. The ability to recruit recent Ph.D. graduates plays a critical role in helping universities adapt to recent developments and enter new fields of research.

#### MAINTENANCE OF THE RESEARCH BASE OF UNIVERSITIES

The ethos of the academic profession is that each faculty member should be engaged in both education and research activities. In reality, the number of applications for research grants by faculty members varies between disciplines and not all professors apply. Overall, only one-fourth of professors in Canada apply to granting councils, while in the medical field almost all faculty members apply for research grants.

Research grants funded by the NSERC, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC) under the peer review system are small; the average NSERC grant is about \$28,000—an amount that is inadequate for the establishment of a research capability enabling the recipient to remain reasonably up-to-date. Research funds made available by granting agencies are thus aimed primarily at maintaining the science base of universities; they contribute little toward the establishment of significant new research capabilities.

The *peer review process* ensures that the funds are allocated competitively, on the basis of *individual merits*. Such arrangements have resulted in a reasonable distribution with some concentration in major universities. Individual grants range from a few thousand dollars to more than \$150,000, depending on the productivity and quality of the research performed by the individual applicant.

#### THE UNDERFUNDING OF VENTURESOME RESEARCH

Few universities in Canada reach a level of research intensity found in leading universities in the United States. To achieve excellence in research, it is necessary not only to invest large sums of money in emerging scientific fields but also to establish research groups whose size and funding levels compare with those in competing universities abroad.

Because of inadequate funding levels, professors and groups at the forefront of their disciplines in Canadian universities find it difficult to undertake venturesome and leading-edge research projects. Success is likely to be achieved late, only after leading research universities have

**Table 2**  
**Top 10 University Recipients of NSERC Funding, 1995**

University	Scholarships Granted
Toronto	\$42,294,000
British Columbia	\$38,206,000
McGill	\$27,906,000
Montreal*	\$27,338,000
McMaster	\$27,030,000
Waterloo	\$22,293,000
Quebec	\$18,195,000
Guelph	\$18,181,000
Western	\$13,070,000
Calgary	\$13,010,000
<b>Total Funding to All Canadian Universities</b>	<b>\$247,523,000</b>

Source: NSERC, 1995

\*Does not include École Polytechnique or Hautes Études Commerciales.

established themselves as pre-eminent in new scientific trajectories. Very few large groups of scientists thrive in Canadian universities.

Venturesome research in Canadian universities is underfunded. The granting agencies need resources to promote venturesome research efforts on a scale that will enable Canadian research groups to compete favorably with those in leading research universities in the world.

## THE FINANCING OF RESEARCH IN UNIVERSITIES

The financing of the direct costs of research in universities is largely a federal government undertaking, although some provincial governments are also involved. A number of issues are pertinent here: What level and what rate of growth of funding should be allocated on a national basis for research by the federal government? How should indirect costs be handled? How should the funds be allocated between basic and targeted research? To what extent should universities and government laboratories be involved in research? Let us address these issues briefly.

### *The level and growth of funding*

*What priority should governments in Canada give to research, both to research generally and to research that is done in universities? Expenditures on government-funded research must grow more rapidly than GNP if knowledge is to become a strategic lever in Canada's development.*

Since university research usually has a long-term horizon, the public sector, rather than the private sector, will inevitably be the prime source of funding.

*The rationale for government investment in R&D is essentially that the output of such activities is a "public good" and that the expected social rate of return is high enough to justify them even though they might not be profitable from a strictly private point of view.* Economists have devised various methods for measuring the "social returns" on R&D investment. They have found not only that such returns are very high but that they are significantly higher than the "private returns" to the investing firms. According to Edwin Mansfield et al., the medians are 56 percent per year for the social returns and 25 percent per year for the private returns.<sup>4</sup>

The funding of basic research is often motivated by the desire to explore scientific issues systematically in the search of new knowledge with the certainty that social benefits arise from basic research. From the point of view of society, therefore, it is proper for government to finance these high-risk activities because they result in the production of "public goods" that are good in and of themselves and contribute to economic growth.

The bulk of direct federal funding for university research is channelled through the three federal granting councils. Each council is an arm's-length agency governed by an act of Parliament. *The capacity of universities to train qualified individuals and to produce and disseminate new knowledge is fundamental to the future of the country.* Thus, the granting councils need the means to take action on several fronts: i) greater support should be available for *individuals or groups at the forefront of their disciplines*; ii) *adequate funding for equipment and facilities* is a prerequisite for a stimulating research and research-training environment; iii) funds should be available for *targeted research in areas of national interest*.

#### *The funding of indirect costs*

The federal government and some provincial governments fund the bulk of the direct costs associated with research projects in universities. Private businesses and non-profit organizations account for three percent and eight percent respectively of total university R&D funding.

Indirect costs—which include the salaries, equipment and services paid for by universities in the course of fulfilling their educational and research functions—are assumed to be paid through general grants from the provinces to universities. Universities find it increasingly difficult to carry the overhead costs of research performed under grants.

The lack of an overhead provision has the effect of providing an implicit subsidy to universities that conduct little research while penalizing those that have extensive research programs.

*Basic vs. targeted research*

What purpose does research serve? Is it the development of new knowledge or is it the practical application of scientific discoveries? Does basic science precede and nourish technology, or is it the other way around? More specifically, is an emphasis on fundamental science a prerequisite for the development of a technologically sophisticated and successful economy? *These questions highlight the need to address the issue of the appropriate balance between basic research and technology development that must be struck in funding policy.*

The answer varies by country. The U.S. government appears to have concluded that basic science is the best route to technological superiority. In the United Kingdom and West Germany, however, targeted policies are preferred. Until recently, Japan seemed to follow the same route, but recent policy statements suggest that the Japanese government is now giving priority to national capacity in basic science.

Compared with large economies such as the United States and Japan, it seems likely that basic research activities in Canada aimed at the development of new scientific fields might entail lower social rates of return than would investments in education, training and the diffusion of best-practice technology. Given the international flow of communications and ideas, it is difficult for a relatively small country, such as Canada, to retain "first-mover" advantages or even to maintain a leadership position once scientific breakthroughs have been achieved. A cost/benefit analysis of the social returns on investments in basic research and emerging scientific technologies might thus suggest that a deliberate "followership" attitude in most disciplines would be appropriate.

However, a closer look at the scientific process leads to a less severe conclusion. Basic research is an essential component of any program aimed at developing generic technologies. Investment in basic R&D is often a prerequisite for the importation and application of foreign technology. Furthermore, the international scientific community thrives on the exchange of information and membership in that community depends on the contribution that one makes to it.

Reviewing the evidence, it is hard to escape the conclusion that general strength in education and research is a prerequisite for vitality in knowledge-based industries. A further critical element is the existence of a system of scientific and engineering education that trains a

significant proportion of graduates in industrial careers. These goals can only be achieved if numerous universities operate at the leading edge of research in a variety of disciplines.

*A shift in the locus of research: from public laboratories to universities*

Some argue that government laboratories are required because they serve a wide array of public needs, because social rates of return exceed private rates of return and because the risks and expenses involved are too high for industry. These arguments are often beside the point because they pertain to the proper role of government in the funding of research, not necessarily to the locus of the research activities. These arguments confuse the objectives with the instruments.

As a basic policy position, governments should increasingly rely on universities or joint industry-government-university partnerships to provide the broad base of national competence in scientific research. *The science capability of universities has grown* substantially in recent years, and university activities in basic research are best suited to the shifting dynamics of scientific progress. Research projects can be re-oriented quickly, and high-level graduate students can be involved. *The increased level of research activities would have a beneficial impact* on the quality of research performed in universities. In turn, quality research leads to quality teaching and attracts the best students. *Universities are increasingly called upon to co-operate with industry in the conduct of applied research.* Public laboratories do not have to submit to the discipline of the *peer review* or to other control mechanisms that are accepted facts of life in universities.

## THE RESEARCH PERFORMANCE OF CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

The results of surveys of various groups suggest that the quality of research in Canadian universities is good. The number of research papers published worldwide is a good indicator of the relative performance of Canadian universities. Canadian scientists authored or co-authored about four percent of the world's scientific papers. However, the stagnation of research publications over the past 15 years is indicative of problems in Canada's universities.

Despite the underfunding that characterizes the present situation, *a broad base of university research has been developed over the years. In many respects, Canadian universities fare favorably in comparisons with those in other advanced industrialized countries.* Measuring the output of university research is a formidable task. Nonetheless, a monitoring system can be developed by using indicators such as publications, citations, scientific events and patents. Scientometrics is a good case in point.

## UNIVERSITIES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE: DIFFUSION OF KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY

Diffusion activities make available to industry and government some of the best scientific and technical practices of the day. High hopes are attached to the success of technology transfer from universities. While universities can indeed play a role in the transmission of scientific and technical knowledge to other sectors of society, it would be unwise to overestimate the potential of applied research undertaken on their own.

As a rule, universities are not very good at playing entrepreneurial roles. Nonetheless, their participation in joint university-industry projects can certainly be beneficial. Joint efforts, even though they will always represent only a small fraction of R&D funding in universities, can still help them keep in touch with market expectations and pertinent research fields. In the final analysis, however, the comparative advantage of universities lies in the training of scientists and engineers and in long-term basic research.

### DIFFUSION TO HELP REDUCE LAG IN THE ADOPTION OF TECHNOLOGY

The diffusion of technology in Canada is lagging in three respects. First, in some Canadian industries, new technology is often adopted later than in the corresponding industries of other nations. Second, within Canada itself, there are interregional time lags in the diffusion of innovations. Third, because of inadequate training, managers and workers often resist new technologies or adopt them without being able to exploit them to the fullest.

What are the causes of this lag? Among the possible explanations is the fact that the introduction of innovations is often leading to low profitability because of the small size of the domestic market. Yet, NAFTA has changed this! Other factors, such as the level of R&D activities, foreign ownership and industry structure, may also explain the adoption and diffusion lag. Investment in R&D activities, which reflects the degree to which firms are committed to the pursuit of technological opportunities, tends to be low in many industries in Canada. Finally, managerial attitudes and a lack of appreciation for the potential of technology have been proposed as factors explaining the low rates of innovation diffusion in this country.

Universities play distinct roles in reducing this lag. An increasing share of R&D activities in Canada is financed and performed by the private sector. Not surprisingly, this growing interest has been accompanied by an increase in university-industry collaborations. The corpo-

rate sector's contribution to university research in the form of grants and contracts totalled about 3.5 percent of total R&D funding in Canadian universities. The corresponding figure for the United States is four percent. The volume of research contracted to universities by the private sector has risen substantially over the past several years.

### UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

Universities have an impact on technology diffusion, and thereby contribute to national and regional competitiveness through various mechanisms such as *consulting and clinical activities, contract research, joint ventures with business firms and participation in consortia aimed at solving generic industrial problems.*

Consulting activities of a clinical nature are not only an effective means for transferring technological knowledge to large and small businesses, but they also help faculty members. *The association of universities with emerging industries fosters entrepreneurial attitudes among students and encourages consulting activities within the faculty.* At present, however, very little information is available on the actual extent of consulting activities in Canadian universities.

*Contract research and grant activities by industrial firms represent about 3.2 percent of total university R&D funding, while non-profit organizations account for approximately 9.5 percent.* The contribution of the latter to the funding of actual research is about half that amount, however, as funds are often earmarked for such purposes as buildings, indirect costs and overhead. Non-profit organizations allocated most of their university R&D funds to projects in the health field.

Several universities in Canada have established *interface institutes* that offer research, development and education services. Some are confined to a single university and several corporations, while others involve an entire industry and one or several universities. The Pulp and Paper Research Institute of Canada (PAPRICAN), for instance, is a consortium linking universities and various Canadian pulp and paper firms. Joint ventures between universities and industrial firms are even more numerous. Most such arrangements are oriented toward research and technology transfer.

### DIFFICULTIES IN DEVELOPING INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION

The level of interaction between universities and industry in Canada is increasing but is still low. Does the absence of linkages explain this relative lack of ties between industry and the universities or is cultural mismatch the main cause? Conflicts are of two kinds:



- General conflicts of values and goals, which arise when some of the major functions of the university (the advancement of fundamental science or the objectivity of scientific enquiry, for example) are felt to be jeopardized as a result of industrial involvement.
- Institutional or organizational conflicts, which involve the norms and standards of the academic system. When these standards are ignored or challenged, the purpose of universities is undermined.

Value differences and conflicts are more apparent than real. The bottom line is that both the university researchers and the industrial corporations involved benefit from these joint efforts. Our brief survey of joint university-industry efforts indicated that substantial results have been achieved. However, a number of stumbling blocks could prevent the further development of such collaboration.

By encouraging the development of consortia, institutes and joint ventures, joint funding helps universities to be in closer contact with market dynamics. Universities are not good at setting priorities for applications-oriented research. Given the limited amount of funds available, the resources committed to university research for applied work should not be allocated in an unfocused manner. One of the benefits of a matching-funding policy is that it will result in the reorientation of a small but significant portion of academic research in a direction that is more closely attuned to Canada's needs and comparative advantages, while avoiding the pitfalls usually associated with centralized decision making in that area.

#### DIFFICULTIES IN APPROPRIATING BENEFIT INNOVATION

It is often assumed that the bulk of high-technology companies are started by university professors or around universities; that assumption does not bear careful scrutiny. Surveys of start-ups in high-technology clusters in the United States, Canada and Britain suggest that a very small proportion of these are linked directly to university professors. Most high-technology firms are started, in fact, by graduates who discover opportunities while working for "incubator" organizations such as high-growth companies, corporate development laboratories or contract research institutes. The major contribution of universities in this respect is that they trained engineers and scientists who later became entrepreneurs.

In the early years of science-based industries, university professors are indeed actively associated with the birth of science-based companies. Such start-up companies usually focus on areas that are in the early stages of active development and that are changing rapidly as a result of discoveries in basic and applied research. Current examples

are found in biotechnology and biomedical instrumentation. Similar developments occurred in the area of microelectronics in the 1950s and in computer-assisted design and manufacturing in the 1960s. Basic and clinical research activities are offering opportunities that are visible to university professors and researchers at the leading edge of their disciplines.

Adopting a liberal attitude toward the creation of a climate of entrepreneurship, the market value of research universities is promoted by many scholars. Encouraging the development of links between the faculty and corporate and government clients makes the transfer of state-of-the-art techniques easier. Vesting the ownership of intellectual property with the university professor who conducts the work builds incentive to exploit this know-how commercially. In return, should ventures be profitable, the university would expect contributions or donations from the professors. Recognizing the fact that it is legitimate for university professors to hold equity and management positions encourages the transfer of technology resulting from university research.

By contrast, many Canadian universities take an institutional approach, insist on university ownership of patent rights and attempt to structure faculty involvement in start-up businesses. Formal mechanisms, such as industry liaison offices and patenting offices, have been established in a number of cases. A major problem with the exploitation of patents or technologies resulting from university research is that venture funds are needed to transform ideas or patents into products.

Many universities have attempted to resolve this problem by controlling and fostering the development of patents through such means as i) licensing the technology to corporations able to fund the required development work; ii) gathering funds from government and commercial sources to finance the required design and engineering work; and iii) developing joint agreements with commercial or venture-capital firms to bring about the exploitation of the patents and the engineering concepts.

A liberal policy toward the commercial exploitation of university-based R&D including the vesting of patent rights with university researchers is more appropriate to the Canadian situation than more formally structured approaches. It may create envy but it is at least more likely to be effective.

## **THE NEED FOR HETEROGENEITY**

Each university needs not give equal weight to each of the three roles to which we have alluded. It would be unrealistic to expect every

institution to reflect the needed diversity. Similarly, not every discipline or applied field should combine the three functions and faculty members need not be equally involved in all three roles.

Some institutions focus primarily on the educational role and foster research activities in support of high-quality undergraduate programs and graduate professional training. A limited number of universities stress the importance of basic research activities beyond the requirements of the educational function and aim at contributing to a significant advancement of knowledge. A few others combine the education and research functions in the pursuit of knowledge and diffuse best-practice technologies to business and public organizations.

A few institutions attempt to combine all three roles and develop close links with government and industry. Funding and support for both basic and applications-oriented research are secured through grants from public agencies and through private contracting arrangements. They do so by supplementing their academic departments with problem-oriented, applied-research centres, and by developing multiple-career paths that combine teaching with basic research activities.

#### FACTORS LIMITING DIVERSITY

The Canadian university system is perceived by many as forming a group of homogeneous institutions. A number of factors have tended to restrict diversity in the university system. First, there are no private universities of any stature in Canada. The aversion toward private institutions has led to most religious colleges and universities being converted into quasi-public institutions. Second, easy entry standards and strong government control over the financing impedes the development of mission-oriented institutions. Third, few universities specialize in undergraduate and liberal arts programs, but most institutions offer specialized programs at the graduate level; approximately half of them provide some form of doctoral program.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE CONTEXT ON THE GROWTH OF UNIVERSITIES

The Canadian context has been detrimental to private, denominational and liberal arts universities. Large private fortunes were not generous, religious orders did not have faith in their own initiatives and there was a large lobby in favor of state intervention. The greater the government funding, the more universities respond to market needs by developing training programs that are more vocational in orientation and less focused on what a well-educated person should know. Canadian universities have been turned into part of the economic machine. Of course, some are better than others, but public

funding drives many aspects of the educative, research or diffusion mission.

Collège Ste-Croix and Collège Notre-Dame were both founded by French-Canadian priests in the early 1800s. One has become a low-class junior college and the other a world-class university. Collège Ste-Marie and Sophia University were both founded by Jesuits; one has disappeared, the other is among the most prestigious universities in Japan.

### THE NEED TO DIFFERENTIATE INSTITUTIONS WITH SPECIFIC MISSIONS

In spite of pressures toward homogeneity, the bulk of university research activities in Canada, whether autonomous or mission-oriented, is conducted in only a few institutions. For example, the top 15 recipients of federal R&D grants account for close to 80 percent of all research grants provided by the federal government to universities.

An even greater concentration has emerged in the United States. Data compiled by the National Science Foundation suggest that a three-tier pattern is found among postsecondary institutions in the United States. The first tier is composed of two- or four-year colleges that are primarily teaching institutions and perform little or no externally funded research. The second tier is made up of roughly 300 colleges and universities where research activities conform to the traditional picture of basic research performed mostly by faculty members and by small groups of researchers. Research in these institutions is intimately linked to graduate education. The third tier comprises 200 research-oriented institutions that solicit both individual research grants and larger mission-oriented grants. These institutions account for more than four-fifths of all academic research and funding in the United States.

### CONCLUSION

The demands made on the Canadian university system by students, industry and government are high and likely to increase. Much is expected from universities with respect to the diffusion of knowledge, research and education. The strategy of relying more on universities for collaborative research with industry needs to be associated with measures to increase the number of qualified researchers in universities. In brief, the relationships between the three roles of universities must be considered explicitly and dealt with in a balanced manner. Much will be gained by letting natural forces contribute to the emergence of a more heterogeneous university network.

## NOTES

1. Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University* (1852), a much-reprinted work, is universally recognized as being a seminal contribution to the modern conception of the educational role of universities, especially with respect to the training of the mind.
2. The idea of the research-oriented university focusing primarily on graduate studies was first developed in Germany, but it spread rapidly to the rest of Europe and to North America and Japan. See Karl Jaspers et al., *Die Idee der Universität* (Berlin: Springer, 1961).
3. The notion of universities as agents of progress began in the social sciences, but it has also spread to the natural sciences over the past half-century. See Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1929), and Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).
4. Edwin Mansfield et al., *Technology Transfer, Productivity, and Economic Policy* (New York: Norton, 1983), 189. See the relevant chapter titled "Federal Support of R&D Activities in the Private Sector," 173–207.

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# THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY: FROM POSTMODERN TO TRANSMODERN

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## THE MODERN UNIVERSITY

We begin by surveying the situation of the university today, especially the university world in the United States with which I am most familiar. (Of course, there are strong similarities between universities in the U.S. and those in Canada and Western Europe.) Let us call this the “modern university” as it is the university with which we are all so familiar.

Obviously, this modern university is quite different from the medieval university, or the university of the eighteenth century. For example, today’s university is primarily supported by the federal and local state, as well as tax revenues, and is an integral part of the general economy. Even in the United States, where a significant minority of major universities are called “private,” the same situation holds. Private universities receive very substantial support in the form of research grants, student-aid and so forth from federal and state governments, not to mention tax-free donations that comes from individuals, foundations and businesses. My own university—NYU, a private university—spends much effort making certain that it gets its share of government money and that it meets government requirements. In short, the modern university is part of a seamless bureaucratic web centred for us Americans in our state capitals, but especially in Washington, D.C.

In contrast, the premodern university, for example, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was dramatically smaller, even relative to its society. And it was largely disconnected from many of the major political and economic forces of the times. It tended to specialize in the preparation of clergy and in the education of a small social and academic elite. In the nineteenth century what we now know as “the

university" came into being in a big way. In the U.S., the mid-nineteenth century establishment of land-grant universities in different states was a major expression of modernism; and countless other state institutions of higher learning have since been set up—particularly in the twentieth century.

By the term "modern" we mean what most have meant—*roughly* the past 250 years—and the ideas produced during this period. For our purposes, the modern begins around the middle of the eighteenth century, with the French Enlightenment. Key events in this period have been the French and American Revolutions, the rise of modern science and technology, the industrial economy and the move from a rural to an urban population, e.g., the modern city. The rise of the modern state-supported university, beginning in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century, drew on modern ideas, and on the continuing development of modernism in general. This period has been one of mass intellectual movements such as democracy, Communism and Fascism. Key ideas have been liberty, egalitarianism, rationalism, science and objective knowledge, and especially progress.

### THE POSTMODERN UNIVERSITY AND THE WITHERING OF THE MODERN STATE

But as we all know, the modern period is beginning to end, and something known as "postmodern" is widely understood to be under way. If by modern is meant the period starting around 250 years ago, although somewhat later in the universities, by postmodern we will mean the major intellectual changes in roughly the last 30 to 50 years. The interesting thing about postmodernism is that it is a natural extension of modern ideas, but this extension has typically been fuelled by hostility to the more basic ideas from which it springs. Postmodernism, therefore, is the dissolving of modern certainties using modern logic itself. For this reason *postmodernism is really a form of late modernism, or what I call "morbid" modernism.*

Nietzsche was the first thinker to lay the groundwork for postmodernism, and today's postmodern theorists include in philosophy such figures as Richard Rorty, who has claimed more or less that "truth is what your colleagues will let you get away with saying." In literary studies, we have deconstructionists such as Derrida, Stanley Fish and many others. Postmodernism is rejecting such familiar concepts as the enthusiasm for reason (which originated in the Enlightenment), the belief in the objectivity of science and the belief that there is some discoverable and more or less fixed meaning to be found in any written text. The result is our familiar contemporary intellectual attitude of relativ-



ism with respect to both truth and morality. In the arts, it is the bor- ingly familiar attitude of the avant-garde now in its postmodern form of ironic distance and nihilism. All of this, of course, fits in with con- temporary political opinions, with their emphasis on plurality, cultural relativity and consumer economy, with its message of anything goes, if you like it—and can afford it.

The primary factor affecting the university as we move into the postmodern period will, I believe, be what can be called “the withering of the modern state.” We have already noted that the modern univer- sity is financially dependent upon the state and thoroughly integrated into the network of institutions that surround it. Thus, any long-term systematic contraction of today’s welfare state means a similar contrac- tion for the modern university. Very briefly, I want to make a case that the welfare state, probably the major political expression of modernity, is now entering a long period of dissolution and general lack of support.

The major liabilities of the modern state have been spelled out by others, but let us review them. First and foremost is the enormous amount of debt and other financial obligations that the state has taken upon itself. It is now clear that further growth of government budgets, at least in any significant sense, is no longer possible. It is hard to see how the amount of debt, even that which is officially recognized much less the large unofficial debt, can ever be paid off. Throughout the Western economies, it is generally acknowledged that maintaining the status quo of welfare benefits is probably the very best that can be hoped for, while most predict a substantial long-term reduction in the financial support of modern government.

Even if the total amount of money in the federal budget remains roughly constant over the next few decades, it is most unlikely that the proportion going to higher education will remain as large as it has been. In North America and in Europe, demographic pressures based upon an aging population clearly point to increased funds de- voted to the needs of the elderly. For example, in the U.S., in the struggle between health costs and education, education is already tending to lose. In Europe, the pressures against education will be even stronger as their very low birth rates shift political power to the elderly.

The state seems already to have begun the kind of downsizing that started some 20 years ago in the world of corporate business. Reasons for believing this—aside from such obvious things as recent budget cuts—are the following: throughout the developed world, general en- thusiasm for the modern state is waning. In the United States, large numbers of Americans see the state with its tax powers, bureaucratic

requirements, police agencies and the like, as a serious enemy. Such citizens are found on both the political left and the political right, and are especially common in the heartland and rural areas of America. In other nations, there seems to be less of this generalized fear of the central state and more of a specific secessionist psychology. That is, there is a growing allegiance to racial, ethnic and cultural identity and hostility to the homogenizing modern state that rejects such distinctions. For example, Quebec in Canada is a familiar example of this mentality, and strong and growing secessionist sentiments are found in many other countries.

Part of this antipathy to the modern state is a long-overdue reaction to the enormous growth of the state during the long period from World War II through the Cold War. And part of this antipathy to the state arises because there are no longer any other nations which seem to be seriously threatening. Therefore the usefulness of the state as a protection against an outside enemy is less convincing. In other words, when outside enemies decrease, inside enemies increase.

Regardless, throughout the world, state socialist structures are being privatized, reduced in size and occasionally closed down. In many respects the modern university is a socialist structure—a kind of educational monopoly only vaguely responsive to the needs of those that fund it. The downsizing and privatizing of the universities, although taking longer to develop, can be seen as part of this larger worldwide trend.

Meanwhile, there has been the growth of transnational organizations such as the European Community, GATT and NAFTA. These new international organizations and especially the economic activity that supports them are already beginning to undermine national sovereignty and, in the process, make the modern state less important. The general world view promoted by international business and by the many international contacts of the governing class is making nationalism increasingly a thing of the past. Differences *within* nations are becoming greater than differences *between* nations. An example is the widespread growth of particularist psychology. In the United States in a recent high school graduation in northern California separate graduation ceremonies were held for white students, Latino students and black students. It was the minority students who insisted on this procedure. In response to a comment by a white student that "We are all Americans," one Latino student said: "You may be an American, but I'm not." For many minority students, the term American means white or Anglo-American. Certainly, throughout the modern states of Europe and North America large-scale immigration has also undermined national identity.

## OTHER LIABILITIES OF THE POSTMODERN UNIVERSITY

Besides the decline of the modern state, there are many other reasons why American higher education is in trouble. The most obvious is the enormous cost of college education. One year at a private university in the United States now commonly costs \$30,000. This includes tuition, room and board, books and modest living expenses. (I speak from direct experience. We have six children: one graduated from college three years ago and another one last year, one is in college now and three are looking forward to it.) Even so, private universities claim that this figure does not come close to paying the actual costs, and the shortfall is made up by infusions from endowments and various forms of government funding. State universities cost less to the student but the burden falls on the taxpayer—and the total costs of state or public education are even higher than in the private sector due to the intrinsic inefficiencies of government-based systems. In the U.S., the total costs of education at the local, state and federal levels make education our single largest user of tax money—more than any other service by far.

Perhaps all this cost would be justified if the quality of the education itself were generally understood to be high and getting better. Instead, the opposite is the case: the quality of a college education, at least in the United States, is considered to be mediocre and getting worse. Certain universities have had almost half their courses aimed at what are called “remedial” education. As the budget cuts of the past few years have taken effect, students are complaining justifiably that classes are getting larger and more and more of the teachers are graduate students, often foreign students with serious language difficulties in English. After graduation, students are commonly disillusioned to discover how little a college degree is worth on the job market and how long it takes to pay off their large college loans.

Meanwhile—at least in the United States—secondary education, having declined for decades, is finally in a real crisis. Another way of putting this is to say that the “farm system”—namely the U.S. public high school system—is in such a sad condition that actual improvement in college education is unlikely in the foreseeable future. The decline in basic reading, writing and math skills has been familiar to American faculty for years. I was recently told by a professor at the Collège de France that the same phenomenon is now true in France, whose high-quality secondary education has long been legendary.

It has been said, and with a distressing amount of truth, that the American colleges and universities are the most expensive baby-sitting institutions in history. We simply do not know what else to do with our young people, except to send them to college. There certainly does not seem to be any obvious place for them in the economy.

At another level, we see in the United States the emergence of large numbers of children who are home-schooled—a reasonable estimate is at present one million children. Typically, these children and their families are supported by computer communications and contemporary technology, such as video-based instruction. When interactive television and interactive computer-based learning are more regularly in place, the stage will be set for an end run around much of the existing university system. For example, the chairman of a major department of mathematics recently told me in a private conversation, “Why should we pay professors to teach the same course in Calculus I year after year? A well-done video introduction to calculus, combined with tutorial support, would make it easy to abolish many faculty lines.” Every fall, there are thousands of rather mediocre Introductory Psychology courses offered throughout the country. Most of these classes have hundreds of students in them, and there is almost no interaction with the professor. Far more efficient would be an excellent and well-edited video presentation given by one of the half-dozen best psychology lecturers in the country—combined, of course, with tutorials. Indeed, one of the things becoming clear is that it would no longer be necessary for the student to be physically on the campus. This instruction can take place anywhere a computer can go.

In the United States, more and more parents worry about the campus environment, in terms of the pressures there that encourage everything from binge drinking to drug use to sexual promiscuity of all kinds. At certain universities, the now unsupervised dormitories have been described as the most corrupt environment to come into existence ever—or at least since ancient Rome. These dorms are one part saloon, one part drug-den, one part brothel and one part vomitorium. Campus life, as a result, has lost most of its former charm—especially for those who pay for it. In fact, universities could emerge to take advantage of the new worldwide communication network—universities that have no physical “campus” at all. Such new universities would be defined not by their expensive ivy-covered walls, but by their efficient use of cyberspace. (One seems to be getting started, called the Western Governors University. See Cushman 1996.)

There are, of course, other signs that the university is having a crisis of morale. The professors themselves continue to disengage from teaching and from allegiance to their own university. They see themselves as part of a national or international community of scholars and, much like today’s professional athletes, they are available to the highest bidder and often eager to move. (Perhaps university administrators, like the owners of sports teams, should get together and agree on a “salary cap” for academic stars.) Institutional loyalty among students is also declining as evidenced by the increasing number of students

who do not finish their B.A. or who transfer to one or more schools before completing their degree. Even for the better students, their undergraduate college is seen as a kind of "prep school" for later professional or other graduate education. In these graduate programs, students commonly identify with their profession or their career—not the university.

Another disturbing indicator of the university *malaise* is the absence of major university leaders. Today's university presidents are primarily fundraisers, lobbyists and public relations people trying to shore up the institution and put out as many brush fires of bad publicity as they can. Indeed, it is difficult to recruit presidents for universities, and the pressures on presidents can be exemplified by the recent leave of absence taken by the relatively new president of Harvard University—a leave precipitated by the stress of his job.

Meanwhile, the well-documented politicization of the universities has added a further serious liability. The political-correctness, feminist and pro-gay movements have undermined the objectivity of many scholars and have alienated large numbers of faculty and much of the taxpaying public. Why send your child to a brainwashing college program disguised as education?

Stepping back and taking something of a historical perspective, we can interpret today's universities as modern institutions moving into a postmodern period in which traditional supports are withering. We should add that these universities are a form of academic industrialism, created by the same nineteenth-century forces that produced the factory, the modern city, the modern bureaucratic state and many other highly concentrated economic and political entities. In certain respects, modern universities are the last surviving example of the nineteenth-century factory. They are huge assemblages of centralized "red brick" buildings. Besides the cost of faculty and staff, the major budget category is building-maintenance. These academic factories have certain buildings set aside for the workers to live in (student dormitories), other buildings for the factory activity (libraries, classrooms, laboratories) and still others for the managers (administrative offices, faculty offices and housing). These dense, expensive and increasingly inefficient systems are also, as noted, on a collision course with the new decentralizing technology, and it is likely that when this technology is fully in place, the university crisis will become dramatic. Downsizing has been difficult enough for major corporations, but should it hit the universities suddenly, the screams of pain will be deafening—and no doubt articulate. Let us hope the economy can avoid any dramatic crises thus allowing for gradual downsizing to take place.

In simple language, the prestige, self-confidence and morale of American universities have been in decline for about three decades, probably starting during the student riots in the late 1960s. Throughout this period, however, the massive growth of the same universities in terms of programs and buildings has made them increasingly vulnerable to any serious withdrawal of support. Today's university community has all the signs of a complex, extremely expensive, redundant and over-developed system waiting for big-time trouble.

### **"THINK TANKS": THE RISE OF ALTERNATIVE CENTRES OF INTELLECTUAL LIFE**

Unfortunately for universities in the U.S., many outstanding intellectuals will be deaf to their problems because so many powerful minds have already left the academic world. This point deserves some development. In the United States, intellectual life in important ways has already moved out of the universities and into "think tanks" or independent institutes that are sometimes nominally in a university but function more or less autonomously. The rapid development of think tanks and similar institutions in the past 30 years has not been recognized as the social and academic revolution that it is.

A very short representative list of U.S. think tanks includes: the Heritage Foundation, the Hudson Institute, the Manhattan Institute, the Rockford Institute, the Acton Institute, the Discovery Foundation, the Cato Institute, the Brookings Institute, the Ethics and Public Policy Center, the Hoover Institute, the Institute on Religion and Public Life and on and on.

The bureaucratization of the university is well known to all those in it: the endless meetings, new forms to fill out, complicated social issues to address—or avoid. All these have greatly reduced the amount of time that can be profitably spent on what really matters to most academics: research, and teaching when the students are motivated and well-prepared. Think tanks finesse all these problems; they have no athletic teams to worry about; no Chemistry I to be staffed; they have no remedial writing courses to create controversy over political correctness—indeed they don't have students, except for a few interns; they don't even have much government funding and the problems that generates. Essentially, think tanks provide ideal environments for the life of the mind, without anxieties about academic programs. The closest equivalent to the modern think tank would be the intellectually oriented courts and "salons" of the eighteenth century, typically funded and organized by a wealthy aristocrat.

What is surprising is how little money it really takes to fund a think tank—in comparison with a university budget. Of course, in the

sciences, establishing think tanks is more difficult because of research costs and laboratories, but even so, independent institutes for doing high-level research have been spun off from the normal academic structures on most major university campuses. Perhaps Professor Irving Kristol, formerly at my university, is a good example of the rising appeal of private institutes. Given a choice between his professorship and an appointment at the American Enterprise Institute, he chose the latter—and no doubt wisely.

In other words, now that the U.S. university no longer provides a reliable place for such major functions as keeping intellectual life alive in a relatively independent form, other institutions have come along to replace it. And one result is the development of a growing intellectual community that no longer has any vested interest in the universities.

### LOOKING TO THE “TRANSMODERN PERIOD”

The preceding negative and pessimistic evaluation of the university in its present condition needs to be qualified. Yes, it is true that the postmodern university is in decline. Nevertheless, I see this decline as slow due to the proposed withering of the welfare state, the university’s gradually increasing inefficiency and costs, the gradual increase in critical attitudes about the university in the culture at large and the creeping intellectual and moral confusion that are rife in many disciplines, especially in the humanities. I use the term “withering” to imply the slowness of this change and to imply that there should be time to adapt and respond positively to it. In any case, I believe the postmodern period will be one of the ending of the modern university and of transition to something new.

This ambiguous new period I call “transmodern.” By that I mean something that *transforms* modernism, something that *transcends* it and moves beyond it. In doing this, it certainly does not reject all things modern, and thus it is far from a reactionary vision of the future. Also, I am open to the use of some other term to describe this proposed new period—and new *esprit*—that is still incubating, but “transmodern” has been reasonably satisfactory.

The spirit of this transmodern mentality and the culture that I believe is yet to come can be described with various terms. Among them are the following: a spirit of hopefulness; a desire for wisdom; a concern with religious and transcendent and spiritual themes; a rediscovery of the importance of truth, beauty, goodness and harmony; a concern with simplicity and the quest for a mature and balanced understanding of experience. It will not be so much a spirit of new theories or ideologies, but of an integration of existing valid intellectual

approaches, including those from the pre-modern tradition, a kind of synthetic mentality, rather than an analytic one.

What signs are there of this new transmodern mentality? Here I will list examples that I believe illustrate something new and positive on the horizon. There may be other and better examples that you know of, but these are a few that have struck me. Beginning with music, we find the remarkable response to major new composers with spiritual themes—composers who have revived earlier often premodern traditions after being thoroughly enmeshed in modern and postmodern techniques. Here we have the Catholic and Polish Henryk Gorecki. There is the Eastern Orthodox Arvo Part from Estonia. There are two Englishmen: John Tavener, who is Eastern Orthodox, and James MacMillan, a Catholic. Two young composers from Slovakia who are not yet very well known are Daniel Matej and Peter Zagar, both serious Christians—the first Protestant, the second Catholic. In a different vein, we have the American composer John Adams with his minimal and now more complex works that communicate a meditative and spiritual quality of a somewhat Eastern religious kind. The recent composer Terry Riley, a minimalist, also has a definite Eastern religious component.

Finally, in the music world we observe the great popularity of Gregorian chant—including one Spanish Benedictine album that has sold well over a million copies, and made the CD bestseller list.

In architecture, we now have a revival of neoclassicism, especially the school of Notre Dame under Dean Thomas Gordon Smith. Other important neoclassical names are Leon Krier and the Belgian architect Maurice Culot. Such a return may at first be called “reactionary,” but any style that remains in continuity with the past must of course return to it for inspiration—for models of beauty and order. We can also assume that the intervening modern period will nonetheless lead to a new or distinctive expression of classical ideals—thus continuing the tradition in an innovative way. A similar revival is well under way in the world of painting, where thousands of artists are now returning to figurative, historical, mythological, Arcadian and other types of painting found in the great tradition preceding modern and postmodern painting. Let’s call it “transmodern art.” Important examples include the Norwegian Odd Nerdrum, the Swede Torgny Lindgren, the Scot Ian Hamilton Finlay, the Englishman Roger Wagner, the Americans David Ligare, Bruno Civitico and Audrey Flack. Sculptors include Frederick Hart and Richard McDermott Miller. Other artists in this movement are John Stuart Ingle, Martha Mayer Erlebacher, James Aponovich. (Institutional support comes from the New York Academy of Art with its conscious revival of figurative and Arcadian painting,



and from such journals as *American Arts Quarterly* and *Image*. A modest supporter is also the influential *New Criterion*.)

The same revival is occurring in poetry and elsewhere in literature. Examples include the poets Fred Feirstein, Dick Allen, Jack Butler, Paul Lake, Lewis Steele and others involved in the recovery of formalism and narrative. With respect to poetry as well as much else in the arts, the university community, dominated by modern and postmodern ideology, is quite out of touch with new developments.

Closer to home, in the academic world, there are signs not merely of rejection of the postmodern nihilistic dead-end but of a positive recovery of the core of the previous intellectual tradition. This would include the serious critique of Derrida by Alexander Argyros (1991) in *A Blessed Rage for Order*—and also his positive vision of a new co-operation between art and science. Equally striking is Fredrick Turner's (1995) significant *The Culture of Hope: A New Birth of the Classical Spirit*. Turner speaks of the possibility of recovering a new form of the "Great Chain of Being." He also sounds the subtheme of co-operation between art and science, especially emphasizing recent scientific theories.

In the general American culture, we see a major sign of the new mentality in William J. Bennett's (1993) *The Book of Virtues*—over two million hardcover sales! Speaking of virtue, we note a major renewal of interest in the concept within philosophy with important contributions by Iris Murdoch, P.T. Geach, Philipa Foot, Chaim Perelman and Stanley Hauerwas. Also central to what comes after postmodernism are the contributions of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, especially his *After Virtue* (1984) and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1989).

There is also Canada's Charles Taylor, whose *Sources of the Self* (1989) and *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1992) are having major impact. The recent book by James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (1995), brings together social science and, of all things, the Aristotelian tradition. The rebirth of natural law theory is yet another sign of the new transmodern mentality; some of the key contributors are John Finnis, Robert George and Russell Hittinger.

In addition, there is the revival in French intellectual circles of what was once called the great "liberal" tradition, and what now might be called "neoconservative." Here we have such young writers as Philippe Beneton, Alain Besançon, Pierre Manent and others. Although these political philosophers cover many topics, they are focused on traditional disciplines and have been nurtured by such nineteenth-century thinkers as Benjamin Constant and Tocqueville. By contrast, Derrida, Foucault and assorted French postmodernists have been passé in France for quite some years.

In the previous listing of artists, writers and intellectuals I have, no doubt, left out many people of whom I am unaware.

Finally, the transmodern note sounded here can be found in the writings of Pope John Paul II. Examples are his bestseller *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1994) and his vision of a new civilization of love. The philosophy underlying his approach is a mixture of traditional Thomism and modern Phenomenology. And there are other prominent theologians that fit the transmodern concept. Examples are Hans Urs von Balthasar and Thomas Torrance.

In short, it is already time not only for conferences on "The Death of Postmodernism" but for others on the birth of this new ideal of hope, of wisdom, of virtue and the good, of beauty and harmony, on the resurrection of classicism and other premodern concepts in the different arts and in the intellectual life itself. Don't be too surprised if all this comes up like the dawn—very quietly, yet dramatically. It will not be a revolution, it will be a quieter, more thorough transformation. The real question is: Will the universities take the lead in recognizing this major new intellectual mentality? Or will other structures such as the think tanks, Internet communities or even religious institutions lead the way and benefit from this coming transmodern period?

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## WILL TECHNOLOGY SAVE US?

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A telling exchange between a professor and his pupil in Ionesco's "The Lesson" captures well the spirit of modern education:

PUPIL: I have a great thirst for knowledge. My parents also want me to get an education. They want me to specialize. They consider a little general culture, even if it is solid, is no longer enough, in these times.

PROFESSOR: Your parents, miss, are perfectly right. You must go on with your studies. Forgive me for saying so, but it is very necessary. Our contemporary life has become most complex. (Ionesco, 48–49)

Indeed it has. The link between knowledge and education, once considered indissoluble, has now been severed. The university operates as "a factory of knowledge," in T.H. Huxley's disturbing phrase (Huxley, 328), churning out isolated masses of information without reference to an underlying principle of integration.<sup>1</sup> Here all knowing is "perspectival," as Nietzsche maintained; there is no meaning, only countless specialized meanings. Broader, more integrative knowledge is deemed irrelevant or useless if it does not lead to a job. Yet this potent combination of utilitarianism and specialism works at the service of a relativism, according to Allan Bloom, that supposedly facilitates "broadmindedness."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, such "broadmindedness" without focus or content has not always led to the development of much critical intelligence. There was once a Harvard professor who used to tell his students, "By all means have an open mind... but not so open that your brains fall out." Intellectual integrity evaporates when the mind remains open to everything except truth. If there is no truth, then there is nothing to teach, nothing to learn and nothing to communicate. Information merely passes from the mouth of the teacher to the ears of the student "without," Stanley Jaki adds ironically, "having passed through the minds of either of them" (183).

The contemporary flight from truth stems from many causes. One that is sometimes overlooked is the loss, among many university students, of the sense of wonder. For Aristotle, wonder was a highly positive and valuable emotion, the catalyst that awakens our desire to know:

Philosophy (the love of wisdom) arose then, as it arises still, from wonder. At first men wondered about the more obvious problems that demanded explanation; gradually their enquiries spread farther afield, and they asked questions upon such larger topics as changes in the sun and moon and stars, and the origin of the world. Now a man labouring under astonishment and perplexity is conscious of his own ignorance (it is for this reason that the lover of myth is in some sense a philosopher, for myth is composed of marvels); and if men philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, they were evidently in search of knowledge for its own sake and not for any practical results they might derive from it. (*Metaphysics*, 55)

Instead of simply taking things for granted and just living, like animals and plants, the human being wonders why, and this raising of questions marks the beginning of *philo-sophia*. Wonder is not only the effect of ignorance but also the cause of our wanting to know, understand and love the truth about things for their own sake. For Aristotle, rightly ordered wonder is instrumental: the perfection of knowledge that is *scientia* leads to the pursuit of wisdom or *sapientia*, the knowledge of ultimate causes.

Today we know considerably more than our ancestors did about science and technology, but we are not necessarily wiser than they were. Information that is not digested and evaluated does not form the mind or, more importantly, the person. It is not, in Aristotle's sense (*paideia*), education. Although our culture prides itself on being technological, in fact, it has increasingly tended to privilege *techne*, or technique, while discarding *logos*, the Greek word that denotes, among other things (to which I will come back), meaning. We have lost, as a result, the primary force in our lives, what Viktor Frankl calls "the will to meaning." Any theory of education implies a theory of the person rooted in the questions, "What is man? and What is man for?" as T.S. Eliot reminds us ("The Aims of Education," 75). But these are also the kinds of questions children ask: Is there a God? Is there freedom? Is there punishment for evil deeds? Is there certain knowledge? Yet, unlike the case among the ancient Greeks or the European founders of the modern university, these are questions no longer asked by faculties of arts and sciences. "Now the grownups are busy at work," Allan Bloom explains with deadly irony, "and the children are left in a day-care centre called the humanities, in which discussions have no echo in the adult world" (372). The student who arrives before the portals of the

factory of knowledge and says, "I am a whole human being. Help me to form myself in my wholeness and let me develop my real potential," (Bloom, 339) receives no answer. Such a student, jaded by the silence of the multiversity to his questions, might well repeat the haunting questions posed by T.S. Eliot in "The Rock" (*Selected Poems*, 107):

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

The pursuit of *scientia* in isolation from *sapientia* can be traced back to the thought of a major figure of the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon, who coined the motto of the age, *nam et ipsa scientia potestas est*—"knowledge is power." The inductive method of discovering truth was founded upon empirical observation, inference resulting in hypotheses and the verification of hypotheses through repeated experiments. Inquiry existed not for learning "metaphysical" truth or for moral action, but for technological know-how. Set on destroying idolatrously held false knowledge, the Renaissance scientist resembles the Dickensian character Thomas Gradgrind, "a man of facts and calculations... with a rule and pair of scales... ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to" (*Hard Times*, 12).

Bacon actually set himself a Promethean task in the preface to *De Interpretatione Naturae*:

If a man should succeed, not in striking out some particular invention, but in kindling a light in nature—a light... that should presently disclose and bring into sight all that is most hidden and secret in the world—that man (I thought) would be benefactor indeed of the human race. (*Selected Writings*, 150–151)

The new science, as idealistically envisaged here, was not an intellectual enterprise designed to increase man's knowledge of nature but to give him imperial mastery over it. Unlike Aristotle and his followers, Bacon urged the "true sons of knowledge" to "conquer and subdue [nature], to shake her to her foundations" and "to discover the secrets still locked in Nature's bosom" (Farrington, 77). These were precisely the scientific triumphs that Percy Bysshe Shelley would celebrate two centuries later in his dramatic poem *Prometheus Unbound*:

The Lightning is his [man's] slave, Heaven's utmost deep  
Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep  
They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on!  
The Tempest is his steed,—he strides the air;  
And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,  
"Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me, I have none." (*Selected Poetry and Prose*, 381)

The Promethean fire that generated all the arts, useful and imaginative, as well as the sciences, in this revised Romantic version of the myth, removes "the taint of sin," as Donald Cowan puts it (26, 158), from the knowledge found by Marlowe's Faustus, and serves as an optimistic emblem for the hoped-for future of education in our time.<sup>3</sup> But is such optimism any longer warranted?

The technological triumphs following the unbinding of Prometheus may have been purchased at too high a price. So C.S. Lewis argued:

There is something which unites magic and applied science while separating both from the "wisdom" of earlier ages. For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique. (46)

Upon examining Western civilization and its discontents, even Freud concluded that our new, godlike powers have not made us any happier. Why? "We control nature," Peter Kreeft explains, "but we cannot control our control" (*Back to Virtue*, 23). This is a lesson the scientists in Jurassic Park learn the hard way (witness the number of chapters ironically titled "control") when they are finally compelled to ponder the ethical implications of their genetic engineering:

Scientific power is like inherited wealth: attained without discipline. You read what others have done, and you take the next step... There is no mastery: old scientists are ignored. There is no humility before nature. (306)

The grave danger posed by this "cosmic impiety"<sup>4</sup> prompted Christopher Dawson to conclude that ours is not the age of Faust, but "the age of Frankenstein, the hero who created a mechanical monster and then found it had got out of control and threatened his own existence" (*Crisis*, 151). The word "monster" derives from the Latin word *monere*—to warn (Grant, "Knowing and Making," 66). Mary Shelley's cautionary tale points to the monster we have created. Many of our contemporaries have come to think that it is all too easy for the scientist to place his technological know-how at the service of a Nietzschean, amoral will to power (Dawson, 155) even while claiming to do so, like Frankenstein, for "the benefit of mankind" (Mary Shelley, 52, 203). Yet Bacon's true aspirations are fulfilled here, and it is no accident that the full title of Mary Shelley's tale is *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. "[La] science sans conscience," Rabelais reminded his readers, "n'est que [la] ruine de l'âme" ("Science without conscience is but the ruin of the soul") (Rabelais, 137).

But if "conscience" has in this way been divorced from learning (cf. Leclercq, 316–319), it has been replaced by "consciousness." If Bacon had provided science with a new method, Descartes gave it a new philosophy when he, too, expressed disapproval of Aristotelian wonder. In his *Discourse on Method*, he registered the hope "that those who have understood all that has been said in this treatise will, in future, see nothing whose cause they cannot easily understand, nor anything that gives them any reason to marvel" (361).<sup>5</sup> For Aristotle, the philosopher—the lover of wisdom—was also in some sense a lover of myth, since myth is composed of marvels. For Descartes, on the other hand, the clarity of scientific explanations would dispel all mystery (one of the original meanings of "mythos") surrounding natural phenomena and demythologize them. His famous *cogito* principle made reason the sole guarantor of truth. This subjectivism has had far-reaching consequences for modern education. Newman knew well its danger, which in *The Idea of a University* he described with profound lucidity: "Knowledge... exerts a subtle influence in throwing us back on ourselves, and making us our own centre, and our minds the measure of all things" (238). In his Gifford Lectures, John MacMurray subsequently underlined the problem with making "I think" the starting point of philosophy. This intellectual premise

institutes a formal dualism of theory and practice; and... this dualism makes it formally impossible to... conceive the possibility of persons in relation, whether the relation be theoretical, as knowledge, or practical, as cooperation. For thought is essentially private. (73)

The domination of the *I* of the investigator over the *It* of the investigated ignores the existence of the *Thou*, to use Martin Buber's terms (cf. Lewis, 47). When the mind is locked up in its ivory tower, when what "I think" becomes the only certain reality, then in due course no communication or community is possible.

From these philosophical antecedents we can better comprehend how technology has become our metaphysic. As a result of equating truth with what is measurable and quantifiable, with technique, the computer is now our oracle, as Jacques Ellul argues in *Technology and Society*, and the statistician our *deus ex machina*. By fulfilling the Promethean prophecy, technology is supposedly what makes the human race specifically human (Cowan, 152). But *techne* alone excludes the *logos*, the word, the meaning or even the idea of meaning.

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift satirized the extravagant claims made for technological advancement in the form of the "Academy of Projectors of Lagado," one of whose projects was to replace words with things so that they could be closer to "empirical reality." In

accordance with the new scientific imperative, everyone walks around carrying a pack of objects on his back for use as devices of communication because words had been banned for being misleading. The common people rebel against this project in order that they might be "allowed the liberty to speak with their tongues," but they are considered the "enemies of science" (198). Perhaps the word has been not much less "humiliated" in this century as well. Chesterton noted, for example, how once we invented telephones and loudspeakers, we found out we really had nothing to say—so we invented noisier loudspeakers and telephones (Aeschliman, 44).<sup>6</sup> And Ellul has shown how the "image"—the product of a mechanical technique—is today seen as the means *par excellence* of communicating reality and truth (31). The trouble with the image, he writes, is that it fails to convey anything about the order of truth:

It never grasps anything but an appearance or outward behaviour. It is unable to convey a spiritual experience, a requirement of justice, a testimony to the deepest feelings of a person, or to bear witness to the truth. In all these areas the image will rely on a form. (29)

Despite this caveat, the image reigns supreme in our technological society and tends, even in university teaching, to oppose the human word. Interfacing with computers seems to obviate the need for thinking and speaking together.

But will mastering the new technology make us any wiser? Neil Postman remarks that the computer can furnish an answer to questions such as "How can I get more information faster, and in a more usable form?," but not to larger questions:

The computer and its information cannot answer any of the fundamental questions we need to address to make our lives more meaningful and humane. The computer cannot provide an organizing moral framework. It cannot tell us what questions are worth asking. It cannot provide a means of understanding why we are here or why we fight each other or why decency eludes us so often, especially when we need it the most. The computer is, in a sense, a magnificent toy that distracts us from facing what we most need to confront—spiritual emptiness, knowledge of ourselves, usable conceptions of the past and future. (9–10)

The technician argues that Virtual Reality will relieve spiritual poverty, but Max Frisch disputes this claim with the following definition: "Technology is the knack of so arranging the world that we do not experience it" (quoted in May, 57). Despite instantaneous global communication, then, the big questions that make us so unhappy still persist.



George Grant has shown that the co-penetration of knowing and making in the neologism "technology" is, in the end, illusory. For example, the word "justice"—which was traditionally understood as "rendering to each his due"—now means "the calculation of self-interest," a definition that fits conveniently into a technological world view (*English-Speaking Justice*, 20).<sup>7</sup> The mastery of nature has given way to the mastery of words and concepts, to what might be called the triumph of the Humpty Dumpty principle: "When I use a word... it means just what I choose it to mean" (Carroll, 163).

The aftermath has been a cultural Babel, a proliferation of highly technical languages far removed from the common tongue and from common sense. Small wonder that T.S. Eliot critiqued "the vague jargon of our time, when we have a vocabulary for everything and exact ideas about nothing" (*Selected Essays*, 347). What university educators need to remember is that we do not speak, then, only to convey information, or to master words. Language is a call, an exchange, as Ellul reminds us:

Dialogue involves the astonishing discovery of the other person who is like me, and the person like me is different. We need both similarity and difference at the same time. I speak the same language you do; we use the same code. But what I have to say is different from what you have to say. Without this difference there would be neither language nor dialogue. (16)

The word, moreover, entails mystery. This mystery has to do with the other person whom I cannot understand. His word provides me with an echo of his person, but no more than that. His silence, his unspoken thought, beckons me to respond to him, face to face (cf. Pieper, 35–36). This is why *mythos* and *logos* go together (Ellul, 25–26). So man is a lover of wisdom and a lover of myth, as Aristotle claimed, a lover of stories that aspire to truth. And are such stories not the basis of a liberal education that conduces to communal vision and shareable aspirations?

Will technique or the person be the focus in the university of the future? Jean-François Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) thinks technique will triumph, and that in the future university "system decisions" will not need to respect "individuals' aspirations" (62). In 1984 Richard Cyert (cited in Roszak, 61), president of Carnegie-Mellon, confidently predicted that the one distinguishing feature of tomorrow's "great university" will be "a great computer system." Electronic teachers would replace the traditional classroom setting by providing bountiful exchanges of information and would constitute the very substance of thought. Theodore Roszak responded to this dramatic statement with a counter-image: that of teachers and students "in one

another's face-to-face company, perhaps pondering a book, a work of art, even a crude scrawl on the blackboard." From this "primitive" scene he proceeded to define education:

It is the unmediated encounter of two minds, one needing to learn, the other wanting to teach. The biological spontaneity of that encounter is a given fact of life; ideally, it should be kept close to the flesh and blood, as uncluttered and supple as possible. Too much apparatus, like too much bureaucracy, only inhibits the natural flow. Free human dialogue, wandering wherever the agility of the mind allows, lies at the heart of education. (62-63)

Technology, therefore, must always facilitate rather than hinder human interaction and the development of the person.

If teachers do not have the time, the incentive, or the wit to provide that, if students are too demoralized, bored, or distracted to muster the attention their teachers need of them, then that is the educational problem which has to be solved and should be solved from inside the experience of the teachers and the students. Defaulting to the computer is not a solution; it is surrender. (62-63)

For Roszak, education is marvellously simple so long as we keep alive its original *raison d'être*.

This is what Newman proposed to do a century and a half ago, and his idea of the university is worth recovering. The starting point of the perennial philosophy is the reality of things, or "being," that exists independently of the human mind. So Newman affirms that "all branches of knowledge are connected together, because the subject-matter of knowledge is intimately united in itself, as being the acts and the work of the Creator"(118). The attainment of truth is the common aim of the arts and sciences. Newman could still recall the maxim of St. Augustine, who in turn borrowed it from St. Ambrose: "all truth is God's truth." On this venerable view, there can be no real clash between the various branches of knowledge as long as the apprehension and contemplation of truth is the proper end of those who study them because "Nature and Grace, Reason and Revelation, come from the same Divine Author, whose words cannot contradict each other" (240). All truth forms part of the *logos* or divine design, the very largest pattern of meaning and order in the universe.

A broad or open mind is one that "takes a connected view of old and new, past and present, far and near, and which has an insight into the influence of these on another, without which there is no whole, and no centre. It possesses the knowledge, not only of things, but also of

their mutual and true relations; knowledge, not merely considered as acquirement, but as philosophy" (153–154). Newman here contrasts these "men of illumination" with "men of information," those who exhibit a narrowness of mind because they adhere to no clear or settled principles: "they speak of every one and every thing, only as so many phenomena, which are complete in themselves, and lead to nothing, not discussing them, or teaching any truth, or instructing the hearer, but simply talking" (154). Such men entertain a vast multitude of ideas without relating them to a centre. They are finally unable to communicate anything, Newman implies, because they fail to realize that knowledge before being a power is a good.

Newman could not have imagined the extent to which the "men of information" would one day fill the lecture halls of the university and redefine the goals of education. His critique still applies, nonetheless, to those who, bent on informing themselves to death, bow reverently with glazed eyes before their electronic screens, firmly believing that their cult-like devotion to compiling facts will somehow save them. Theodore Roszak, in the spirit of Newman, has warned against such mindless allegiance and acquiescence: "People who have no clear idea what they mean by information, or why they should want so much of it, are nonetheless prepared to believe that we live in an Information Age, which makes every computer around us what the relics of the True Cross were in the Age of Faith: emblems of salvation" (x). Instead of viewing education, like Newman did, as an exciting adventure in the growth of personal understanding, the devotees of information tend to idolize whatever gadgetry the technical marketplace deems useful. In so doing, they substitute means for ends by extolling the merits of computer literacy at the expense of the personal possession of a larger humane literacy. For Newman, wisdom and technological ingenuity were not one and the same. He followed Aristotle in distinguishing between "useful" and "liberal" knowledge. "Of possessions," the ancient philosopher says, "those rather are useful, which bear fruit; those *liberal*, which tend to enjoyment. By fruitful, I mean, which yield revenue; by enjoyable, where *nothing accrues of consequence beyond the using*" (*Rhetoric* i, 5; cited in *Idea*, 127).

From this distinction Newman derives his idea of the university as a place of "education" rather than of "instruction":

We are instructed, for instance, in manual exercises, in the fine and useful arts, in trades, in ways of business; for these are methods, which have little or no effect upon the mind itself... But education is a higher word; it implies an action upon our mental nature, and the formation of a character; it is something individual and permanent, and is commonly spoken of in connection with religion and virtue. (131)

Because a liberal education implies a habit of mind and the formation of a character, it is, according to Newman, "useful" in the full, not utilitarian, sense of the word:

Let us take "useful" to mean, not what is simply good, but what tends to good, or is the instrument of good. Good is not only good, but reproductive of good; this is one of its attributes; nothing is excellent, beautiful, perfect, desirable, for its own sake, but it overflows, and spreads the likeness of itself all around it. Good is prolific... A great good will impart great good. If then the intellect is so excellent a portion of us, and its cultivation so excellent, it is not only beautiful, perfect, admirable, and noble in itself, but in a true and high sense it must be useful to the possessor and to all around him; not useful in any low, mechanical, mercantile sense, but as diffusing good, or as a blessing, or a gift, or a power, or a treasure, first to the owner, then through him to the world. I say then, if a liberal education be good, it must necessarily be useful too. (184–185)

Just as a man has to be healthy before he can perform certain bodily labours, so too the general culture of mind is the best aid to professional and scientific study:

the man who has learned to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyze, who has refined his taste, and formed his judgment, and sharpened his mental vision, will not indeed at once be a lawyer... or a statesman, or a physician... or a man of business... or an engineer... but he will be placed in the state of intellect in which he can take up any of these callings with grace, versatility and success. (186)

Otherwise a man will end up being "usurped" by his profession (here Newman quotes one of his contemporaries, Mr. Davison): "He is to be clothed in its garb from head to foot. His virtues, his science, and his ideas are all to be put into a gown or uniform, and the whole man to be shaped, pressed, and stiffened, in the exact mould of his technical character" (190). The training or discipline of the intellect, then, which is the best for the formation of the individual himself, also best enables him to discharge his duties to society (196).

To hold a meaningful conversation about who we are and where we come from requires a conviction, moreover, that one's cultural heritage, "the mind of Europe," T.S. Eliot calls it, is more important than one's own "private mind" (*Selected Essays*, 16).<sup>8</sup> Robert M. Hutchins, the former chancellor of the University of Chicago cited elsewhere in this volume, made his classic defense of the humanities by appealing to "the Great Conversation" our commonly possessed intellectual heritage makes possible: "An educational institution should be a commu-

nity. A community must have a common aim, and the common aim of the educational community is the truth" (99–100). For Hutchins, no less than for Newman, "the Civilization of Dialogue is the only civilization worth having" (100). For this reason, Newman refers to the university as an Alma Mater who knows "her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill" (162) or (one might add) a factory of knowledge. When the mind considers itself its own place, and thoroughly "independent and supreme," Newman concludes, "it requires no external authority; it makes a religion for itself" (202). This is why the unaided intellect needs *revealed* truth (since it is not only "a portion but a condition of general knowledge" [Newman, 84]) along with "the firm guiding hand" of "Alma Mater Ecclesia," to use J.R.R. Tolkien's more recent phrase (*Letters*, 109). St. Thomas Aquinas, in an eloquent paragraph from the prologue to the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, explains why the pursuit of wisdom is the most perfect, the most sublime, the most profitable, and the most delightful of all human pursuits:

It is the most perfect, since a man already shares in true happiness in proportion to the extent that he devotes himself to the pursuit of wisdom; hence we read in Ecclesiasticus (14.22) "Blessed is the man that shall continue in wisdom." It is the most sublime, because it is in this pursuit above all others that a man approaches a likeness to God, who "made all things in wisdom" [Ps 103: 24]; and since likeness is the cause of love, the pursuit of wisdom above all others unites man to God by friendship. Hence it is said in the Book of Wisdom (7.14) that "Wisdom is an infinite treasure to men: they that use it become the friends of God." It is the most profitable, because by wisdom itself man is brought to the kingdom of immortality, since it is written in the same book (6.21) that "the desire of wisdom leads to the everlasting kingdom." And it is the most delightful, because (8.16) "the conversation of Wisdom has no bitterness, and her company no tediousness, but joy and gladness." (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 2, p. 8: 3)

The pursuit of wisdom fosters a community of persons in relation who make a gift of self to each other, and through their self-giving communicate joy. This is because the "I" learns how to say "Thou" to the wholly other, speaking face to face, like friends.

If technology will not save us, it is to some degree because it will not permit us to be and become ourselves. For those who wish such being and becoming, then perhaps the pursuit of wisdom will still prove to be an attractive ideal. The integral comprehension of wisdom may not be attainable without love for, according to a maxim as old as St. Gregory the Great, *amor ipse notitia est* (*Hom.* 27 PL 76: 1207), "love itself is knowledge of him in whom it is directed, because in proportion as we love, to that extent we know."<sup>9</sup> Might it not be, after all, that the

university will remain true to its origins only by being a place where we still love to learn in order to learn to love?<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

1. Huxley's ideal permeates the contemporary university milieu. Wm A. Wulf, for example, argues that universities are in the "information business" and share at least some of the attributes of "vertically integrated industries": "They 'manufacture' information (scholarship) and occasionally 'reprocess' it into knowledge or even wisdom, they warehouse it (libraries), they distribute it (articles and books), and they retail it (classroom teaching)" (47).
2. In their *Bankrupt Education* (1994), Peter C. Emberley and Waller R. Newell chart current attempts to uproot the tradition of liberal education in Canada.
3. Drawing on this Baconian view of knowledge, Max Weber defined the goal of modern academic life as "master[ing] all things by calculation." See Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden*, 9.
4. This phrase was used by Bertrand Russell to describe what he considered to be the greatest danger of our time: "The concept of 'truth' as something dependent upon facts largely outside human control has been one of the ways in which philosophy hitherto has inculcated the necessary element of humility. When this check upon pride is removed, a further step is taken on the road towards a certain kind of madness—the intoxication of power... to which modern men, whether philosophers or not, are prone" (782).
5. For a full discussion of the mechanist attack on wonder, see chapter 7 of Mary Midgley's *Science as Salvation*.
6. Chesterton observed that the obsession with technique, "like so many modern notions... is an idolatry of the intermediate, to the oblivion of the ultimate" (7).
7. Grant explains that Kant's dictum "the mind makes the object" were the words of blessing spoken at the wedding of knowing and production (or the arts and sciences) represented by the word "technology" (*English-Speaking Justice*, 1). The instrumentality of modern technologies, according to Grant, can never be morally neutral. For example, the statement, "the computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used" raises up in opposition to that neutrality "an account of human freedom which is just as novel as our new instruments." The modern notion of freedom conceives of human beings as "autonomous"—the makers of their own laws and values. Those self-created values have, linguistically, taken the place of "the traditional good, which was not created, but recognized." Computers and "values," then, both spring from the same world view ("The computer

does not impose on us the ways it should be used," 121, 125). Technological values have also been embraced by the university. Debates about the curriculum, for example, are typically grounded in the fundamental assumption of how and which sciences best facilitate the goal of "mastery" to the detriment of the humanities' traditional aspiration for excellence through contemplation (see Grant, "The University Curriculum").

8. Christopher Dawson pointed out that since the eighteenth century, European culture has been living on "the spiritual capital it has inherited from Christian civilization" (*Religion and the Modern State*, 64). T.S. Eliot added that it is against a background of Christian culture that all our thought has its significance. Even if an individual is a non-believer, "what he says, and makes, and does, will spring out of his heritage... Only a Christian culture could have produced a Voltaire or a Nietzsche. If Christianity goes, the whole of our culture goes" (*Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, 122). More recently, Mark Schwehn registers his worry that most of our present-day academies as well as academicians "might be living off a kind of borrowed fund of moral capital." Although they may be able to draw on these spiritual resources in the short term, academicians may not be able "either to replenish the fund or to transmit it intact to the next generation" (*Exiles from Eden*, 53).
9. Schwehn examines some contemporary accounts of knowing as a kind of loving. See *Exiles from Eden*, 24–32, 60.
10. What is the task of institutions of higher learning? Josef Pieper answers succinctly: "To live out a paradigmatic model: namely, the free interpersonal communication anchored in the truth of reality—the reality of the world around us, the reality of ourselves, and the reality of God" (39).

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