
The Humanities, Inc.

Reason, Persuasion, and the Business Mind

Many philosophers today proclaim that the philosophy of the future—by which they usually mean just their own views at present—must be radically different from the philosophies of the past. Like many other scholars in the humanities, these philosophers have become impatient with much philosophy itself. They now make their livings, ironically, by professing over and over that we should stop doing philosophy, by offering us therapies for philosophy and the urge to philosophize, and by articulating alternatives to most or all existing philosophy. For example, Richard Rorty, one of the best known and most influential of these writers, urges us to complete a “rejection of metaphilosophical scientism.” He explains: “That is, we should let the debate between those who see contemporary democratic societies as hopeless and those who see them as our only hope, be conducted in terms of the actual problems now being faced by those societies. . . . it would be well for us to debate political topics explicitly, rather than using Aesopian philosophical language.”¹

What follows from this advice? What are its implications? For his part, Rorty foresees a “post-Philosophical” future. From this perspective, he thinks, we may recognize at last that theoretical reflection is not likely to help us and that twentieth century theory (whether Marxism, analytical philosophy, or postmodernism) has not clarified actual problems or developed conceptual instruments superior to those made available to us by American pragmatists such as James and Dewey at the beginning of this century. This enables us, Rorty continues, to grasp that we are just where our grandfathers and grandmothers suspected we were: in the midst of a struggle for power between

1. Richard Rorty, “Philosophy as Science, as Metaphor, and as Politics,” *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 25.

those who possess it and those who are suffering from it, terrorized by it, want it, and, I might add, for the most part do not have the luxury of theorizing about it. We would see, Rorty concludes, that the familiar vocabulary of social democratic politics probably does not require today any further sophistication, at least by philosophers.

This conclusion is both mistaken and dangerous. As he frequently does, Rorty here has drawn the wrong conclusions from his own analysis. Rorty's sound advice to debate political topics explicitly does not imply that concerned philosophical theorists should cease and desist, becoming, in his own terms, content post-philosophical "ironists" or "postmodern bourgeois liberals." Instead, Rorty's advice implies—indeed contains—a new set of marching orders that should transform theory in philosophy and across the humanities. The theory and the vocabulary of social democratic politics—here Rorty is simply mistaken, I think—*does* require further sophistication and a more fully self-critical, self-reflexive, self-aware character.

This transformation is necessary and timely because today the vocabulary of social democratic politics really is being stripped of its critical power—and stripped of its power in a manner not apparent to our grandfathers and grandmothers. Philosophers today face no more important problem.

I want to develop this claim—that the vocabulary of democratic politics is being stripped of its critical power—by means of three initial observations. I find all three observations terribly disturbing. The first comes from Rorty, again. Calling himself a pragmatist and berating philosophers who still cling to foundational, absolutist, realist, or scientistic notions of truth, Rorty succinctly states that "for us [pragmatists] 'rational' merely means 'persuasive,' 'irrational' can only mean 'invoking force.'"² To hold a rational view, as pragmatists realize, according to Rorty, is simply to hold a view that is persuasive.

The second observation comes from the well-known post-structuralist French philosopher Michel Foucault. Responding to an interviewer who suggested that his genealogical studies of systems of discourses and webs of power undermined rationality—and even the possibility of rationality—in human history, Foucault replied that no particular, given form of rationality constitutes reason and, thus, that no transformation from one form of rationality to another constitutes a collapse of reason or the end of reason. Because different "forms of rationality are created endlessly," Foucault concluded

2. Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation: A Response to Jean-Francois Lyotard," *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 220.

that “there is no sense at all to the proposition that reason is a long narrative which is now finished, and that another narrative is under way.”³

The third and final observation comes from the American pragmatist John Dewey. In *Individualism: Old and New*, Dewey criticized outdated but still commonplace notions of individualism in America. Seeking to develop an alternative and attempting to identify roadblocks to the realization of this alternative,⁴ Dewey set forth a scathing, radical critique of American thought and life. Because of its significance for present purposes, I quote at length a passage from this work:

The significant thing is that the loyalties which once held individuals, which gave them support, direction, and unity of outlook on life, have well-nigh disappeared. . . . Some persons hold that a genuine mental counterpart of the outward social scheme is actually forming. Our prevailing mentality, our “ideology,” is said to be that of the “business mind” which has become so deplorably pervasive. Are not the prevailing standards of value those derived from pecuniary success and economic prosperity? Were the answer unqualifiedly in the affirmative, we should have to admit that our outer civilization is attaining an inner culture which corresponds to it, however much we might disesteem the quality of that culture. The objection that such a condition is impossible, since man cannot live by bread, by material prosperity alone, is tempting, but may be said to beg the question. The conclusive answer is that the business mind is not itself unified. It is divided within itself and must remain so as long as the results of industry as the determining force in life are corporate and collective while its animating motives and compensations are so unmitigatedly private. A unified mind, even of the business type, can come into being only when conscious intent and consummation are in harmony with consequences actually effected. This statement expresses conditions so psychologically assured that it may be termed a law of mental integrity.⁵

Let me outline an initial response to these three observations. First, in reply to Rorty, it simply is *not* the case that rationality “just means persuasion”—even for pragmatists. To think otherwise is to empty pragmatism of its concern with intelligence and inquiry. Rorty does just this, trading pragmatic inquiry into experience for a pseudo-pragmatic redescription of language. In doing this, Rorty is simply continuing a linguistic turn that he took

3. Michel Foucault, “Critical Theory/Intellectual History,” *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1988 [1983]), p. 35.

4. See the discussion of economics, communication, and education in chapter 13.

5. John Dewey, *Individualism: Old and New*, *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 5 (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984 [1930]), pp. 66, 67, 69. Hereafter abbreviated “*I:O&N; LW 5.*” in this chapter.

years before his self-identification as a pragmatist. It is, moreover, a linguistic turn from which he has yet to return. No matter how liberal or bourgeois or pluralistic one's intent, to identify rationality with persuasion is to reduce criticism and philosophy to marketing and advertising. It is to exchange love of wisdom for the business mind. Neither genuine individuality nor genuine democracy is possible in this context.

Second, as Foucault noted, new forms of rationality surely do arise and old forms surely do disappear. Today, at least outside the academy, rationality increasingly is understood as, practiced as, and identified with, persuasion. To the extent that this is so, the "business mind" apparently is becoming, or has become, largely unified. In theory, careful, detailed genealogy may trace and fragment this unity and its subjects. In this work, pragmatists may locate the "cash-value" of a great deal of Foucault's work. In practice, such genealogy will have a critical value only to the extent to which it is not marginalized, contained, or absorbed by the "business mind." In this event, any post-structuralist politics of discourse becomes little more than a distracting and trivial discourse of politics.

Third, despite his questionable appeal to a so-called law of mental integrity, Dewey did not insist that the business mind could not in principle become unified. Instead, he simply thought there was evidence that it was not unified—as a matter of fact. Since Dewey's time, I think this evidence has shifted. On Dewey's terms, this means that conscious intent is now largely in harmony with consequence effected. It means, moreover, that collective forces in our culture have been harmonized with private motives and results. Both seem to be the case. In fact, the business mind seems to have become unified to such a high degree that it does seem over and over again to contain criticism directed at it. As the critical theorists Horkheimer and Adorno observed in analyzing the "culture industry," marketing has triumphed over thinking, evidenced by the fact that even though we see through the claims of advertising, still we feel compelled to buy its products.⁶ Today, to be is to be in business; to be is to have—and, ideally, to have more and more.

What If They Gave a War and Nobody Came

The expansion of the business mind and the constriction of criticism may be seen more sharply by focusing more narrowly on higher education and connections between higher education and democracy. There is good

6. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1982 [1944]), p. 167.

reason for this. Depressingly, the business mind today has expanded into, and reaches throughout, education—including higher education, the humanities, and philosophy. The consequences of this for democracy are large and terrible, as Dewey insightfully noted:

If our public-school system merely turns out efficient industrial fodder and citizenship fodder in a state controlled by pecuniary industry, as other schools in other nations have turned out efficient cannon fodder, it is not helping to solve the problem of building up a distinctive American culture; it is only aggravating the problem. That which prevents the schools from doing their educational work freely is precisely the pressure—for the most part indirect, to be sure—of domination by the money-motif of our economic regime. . . . Such an education is at best extremely one-sided; it operates to create the specialized “business mind,” and this, in turn, is manifested in leisure as well as in business itself. The one-sidedness is accentuated because of the tragic irrelevancy of prior schooling to the controlling realities of social life. There is little preparation to induce either hardy resistance, discriminating criticism, or the vision and desire to direct economic forces in new channels. (*I:O&N; LW 5:102–3*)

Where there is little vision or desire, moreover, there is little will or capacity to change. Instead, in higher education today, the humanities have become a battleground. Like most battlegrounds, this one is littered with uniformed casualties and innocent bystanders, spent shells and disappointing duds, sophisticated weapons and expensive delivery systems, oaths of allegiance and chains of command, and the public hopes and private ambitions of academic glory seekers.

These brave philosophers, historians, literary theorists, artists, and other humanist foot soldiers are fighting divisive skirmishes on several fronts. These battles—today’s so-called culture wars—are now familiar.⁷ They include:

7. There is a vast literature on this cluster of issues. The following are some of the best or most influential book-length contributions. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Paul Lauter, *Canons and Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); D. Gless and B. H. Smith, *The Politics of Liberal Education* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992); Martin Anderson, *Imposters in the Temple* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); Michael H. Mitias, *Moral Education and the Liberal Arts* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992); Paul Bové, *In the Wake of Theory* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press and University Presses of New England, 1992); S. Greenblatt and G. Gunn, *Redrawing the Boundaries* (New York: Modern Languages Association of America, 1992); George H. Douglas, *Education without Impact* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1992); Barry Schwartz, *Educating for Civic Responsibility in a Multicultural World* (Swarthmore, Penn.: Swarthmore College, 1993); Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); E. Messer-Davidow, D. Shumway, and D. Sylvan, *Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity*

disputes that pit advocates of a new multicultural curriculum against defenders of a traditional Western canon; related bitter battles over “political correctness,” institutional orthodoxy (both liberal and conservative), and intellectual openness; ongoing infighting about teaching, teaching loads, incentives and rewards for teaching excellence, and the relation of teaching to research; charges and countercharges about the educational significance and practical value of humanities research, and the energies and resources devoted to it; and deep disagreements about intellectual agendas and educational missions—from scholars who pursue business as usual to those who announce “the end of philosophy,” “the end of art,” “the end of history,” “the end of literature,” even the “end of theory,” and, in short, the end of the humanities as now understood and practiced.

Intellectual controversies are reflections of conflicts within vital social organizations and movements for change, and so it is a sign of openness and health that education is marked by theoretical disagreements and practical differences. Our present intellectual controversies, and the values and assumptions that underlie them, surely merit careful attention and informed action. They merit all available, relevant insights drawn from literature, history, philosophy, the arts—in short, the best that the humanities can provide.

However, today’s culture wars rarely evidence anything close to the best that the humanities have to offer. Instead, humanists today engage in very little open discussion, shared inquiry, sweeping imagination, constructive criticism, or joint action and policy-making. Instead, debates among professional humanists are marked by remarkably low levels of trust, respect, and fair play, and by disastrously high levels of suspicion, polarization, and distorted communication. Indeed, humanists now often seem more interested in making converts than in making inquiries. And, whatever the place of “difference” in humanistic theory, humanists rarely value it in practice.

What Good Are the Humanities?

If these bitter disputes had no implications beyond the ivory tower, they would not matter much. In fact, however, they have far-reaching off-campus consequences, at least in combination with the steady flow of well-publicized

(Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993); Peter T. Marsh, *Contesting the Boundaries of Liberal and Professional Education* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988); Abraham Edel, *Interpreting Education* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989); John Arthur and Amy Shapiro, eds., *Campus Wars: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995); M. N. S. Sellers, ed., *An Ethical Education: Community and Morality in the Multicultural University* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994).

scandals that now seem commonplace—the linguist who faked research data, the humanities dean who plagiarized, the football player who graduated but cannot read, the philosophy department head who appointed his wife to the faculty and sexually harassed his female students, the sophomores who could not locate the United States on a world map or determine the century in which World War I took place, the historian who destroyed documents sought by other scholars, the professor spotted in France sipping wine throughout sabbatical, the endowed professor of religious studies who always flew first-class, the big-name literary theorists lured to new positions by six-figure salaries and tiny teaching loads, and on and on.

In this context, the nasty, shrill disputes among humanists have eroded significantly public confidence in higher education in general and education in the humanities in particular. At best, humanists seem unable to put into practice what they put into theory. At worst, humanistic theory seems silly and indefensible.

As a result, humanities scholars have a lot to prove to taxpayers, administrators, foundations, prospective donors, students, and even their colleagues. This point is absolutely critical because education in the humanities is sold in America in a what economists call a market with asymmetric information—a “trust market.” Taxpayers, legislators, administrators, and students support education in the humanities not because they are experts in the humanities or know in advance what the humanities will do for them, but because they trust the humanities deliver value even though they are not exactly sure how. As is the case in any trust market (such as medicine or law), when trust in education in the humanities is low—as it is now—support for this sort of education will be correspondingly low—as it is now.

It doesn't have to be this way. Humanists need to go public and spread their message; in an advertising culture, humanists must deliver their critical message. Although they have not done so, there is no reason to think they cannot do better. As John Dewey noted:

I do not hold, I think, an exaggerated opinion of the influence that is wielded by so-called “intellectuals”—philosophers, professional and otherwise, critics, writers and professional persons in general having interests beyond their immediate callings. But their present position is not a measure of their possibilities. For they are now intellectually dispersed and divided. . . . This internal dissolution is necessarily accompanied by a weak social efficacy. The chaos is due, more than to anything else, to mental withdrawal, to the failure to face the realities of industrialized society. Whether the ultimate influence of the distinctively intellectual or reflective groups is to be great or small, an initial move is theirs. (*J.O&N; LW 5:107*)

Overly absorbed by intramural squabbles and struggles to the death (or at least tenure and promotion), professional humanists have obscured the

commitments historically central to the practice and aims of the humanities. These commitments, essential for the public trust and public support of the humanities, are sustained by the following three-part realization: *Education in the humanities is essential for the realization of basic professional, personal, and social values.*

First, as study after study documents, the humanities provide remarkably practical preparation for a successful career or profession. In an increasingly competitive, dynamic, international marketplace in which yesterday's training is obsolete tomorrow, there is a premium on the skills that the humanities develop—communication, reasoning, analysis, and imagination. From the standpoint of a career, investment in the humanities pays an exceptionally high rate of return.

This is especially important because the majority of college and university students today report that they don't care much about developing a meaningful philosophy of life. Instead, they say they are in school for financial success and social status. They want a "good job" and they feel an unexamined life definitely may be worth living—worth it all the way to the bank. They feel the humanities are not very practical or useful for this. Of course, there is something pathetic about having to respond to this concern. After all, this is an age of white-collar criminals and rogue politicians, a time of covert military operations and overt personal consumption, an era of cancerous cultural illiteracy. We have big business, big science, big technology, and big weapons, but also lots and lots of very small people. As a result, it is tempting simply to register the moral bankruptcy of much of this concern—and its striking inability to distinguish education from training, and a profession from a series of jobs. But today humanists cannot afford the luxury of this sort of response.

Instead, they must stress that the humanities in fact do provide practical preparation for a successful career. Consider the information that emerges from recent studies: Undergraduate humanities majors outscore most all of their fellow students on graduate and professional school admissions tests; students with degrees in the humanities secure employment and financial compensation at rates similar to or higher than students with degrees in other fields; and, employment opportunities for humanists (and liberal arts students more generally) appear to be improving further. Employers do realize, then, that today's workplace requires workers who can critically and imaginatively respond to rapid change and new realities.⁸

Second, and much more importantly, the humanities provide crucial preparation for life—human development, in addition to human employment.

8. See the discussion of family income and education levels in chapter 14.

What the humanities do, in other words, is humanize. While the humanities disciplines include sophisticated skills of analysis, interpretation, and communication, and vast amounts of information and knowledge (some of which is written into notebooks each term by students seeking the “right answers” to a future exam), this is not their core. Instead, the core of the humanities is the power to illuminate and enlarge our understanding of who we are, increase our choices of who we meaningfully might become, and expand our abilities to attain the goals we choose. Our most fundamental individual decisions, repeated day after day (though seldom consciously), concern what sort of life to lead and what sort of person to become.⁹ The humanities—the study of languages and literatures, philosophies, histories, and religions, for example—offer a wealth of wisdom for this choosing. This wisdom and these skills are readily available; unfortunately, in humanities education today, at least, supply-side theory is not working. In sharp contrast to the situation in the sciences, technology, and the professions, the products of the humanities—self-understanding, illuminating interpretation, imaginative perception of alternatives, clarity and wisdom about values, rationality in choice, and the unwillingness to be deceived or manipulated—are little sought for by the majority of people. As a result, few lives today are self-chosen, and few decisions are free expressions of personal life. In this context, the humanities offer significant possibilities for much needed change.

Third, the humanities provide wisdom and skills vital not only for the improvement of individual life, but also for the enrichment of culture, the realization of societal ideals, and the creation of community. Democracy is intrinsically and inextricably connected to education in the humanities because self-government requires citizens who can act with self-awareness and understanding of others, face the future with imagination and vision, and participate effectively in the cultural practices and institutions that affect their lives. Effective citizenship and public discourse are simply impossible without large doses of humanistic education. The humanities can provide interpretive skills needed to utilize successfully immense amounts of information and data, imaginative capacities needed to deal effectively with ambiguity, multiplicity, and diversity, and reasoning abilities needed to identify and resist dogma, slogans, rhetoric, prejudice, propaganda, and otherwise hidden and obvious agendas marketed incessantly. In the United States, a legitimate or justified government long has been understood, at least in theory, as a government that embodies the will of its people—as self-government. Self-government, however, requires selves—individuals who understand themselves and their situation, creatively choose from among alternatives, and

9. See the discussion of this issue in the context of personal death in chapter 15.

realize such choice in active participation in community life.¹⁰ Humanistic education is the development of these abilities—it is self-development. Self-government requires this self-development. To the extent that effective humanistic education is lacking, then, individuals fail to become fully human selves, governments and other institutions fail to operate in a fully democratic manner, and societies fail to be genuine communities. To the extent that education in the humanities is absorbed or contained by science, technology, and business, these possibilities for individuality and community vanish. And although public support for the humanities may not absolutely guarantee anything, it does clearly demonstrate the will to act on the moral and intellectual requirements of a country conceived in liberty.

The Education Business

This points to the biggest challenge now facing the humanities, although humanities faculty seem not to realize it. So far, at least, they just don't get it. Perhaps they don't want to get it. As John Dewey observed:

It is indeed foolish to assume that an industrial civilization will somehow automatically, from its own inner impetus, produce a new culture. But it is a lazy abdication of responsibility which assumes that a genuine culture can be achieved except first by an active and alert intellectual recognition of the realities of an industrial age, and then by planning to use them in behalf of a significantly human life. To charge that those who urge intellectual acknowledgment or acceptance as the first necessary step stop at this point, and thus end with an optimistic rationalization of the present as if it were final, is a misconstruction that indicates a desire to shirk responsibility for undertaking the task of reconstruction and direction. Or else it waits upon a miracle to beget the culture which is desired by all serious minds. (*I:O&N; LW 5:110*)

While philosophers and other professional humanists busy themselves with bitter intramural battles, the real, decisive cultural war is being fought—and lost—on another front. Just as the family farm largely has been replaced by Agri-business, the liberal arts (and especially the humanities) largely have been replaced by *Edu-business*. In earlier times, education in the humanities was controlled by religion or family or the State. Today it is controlled, directly or indirectly, by business.

To understand *Edu-business*, it is crucial to grasp three points. First, private business is taking over more and more the public role of traditional higher education. Education, that is, has become increasingly business-based.

10. See the discussions of self, individuality, and community in chapters 12 and 13.

Corporations in America now spend vast sums to train and educate their employees—more than \$40 billion annually and perhaps as much as all of America's four-year colleges and universities combined. They educate huge numbers of students—at least 8 million annually and, again, perhaps as many as all American four-year colleges and universities. These students participate in seminars, institutes, and in-house educational programs. In addition to instruction at the workplace, they receive education at corporate campuses—facilities, often resembling traditional college campuses, designed specifically for employee education. These corporate colleges increasingly grant their own degrees, and these degree programs increasingly are being recognized by the same associations that accredit traditional colleges and universities. An early, influential example of this corporate college is the National Technological University. NTU beams instruction by satellite to corporate classrooms around the country. This noncampus corporate university has served and been supported by IBM, Digital Equipment, Hewlett-Packard, RCA, Control Data, NCR, and many other major companies. In short, as *Corporate Classrooms*, a 1985 study funded by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, observes, traditional schools, colleges, and universities no longer have a monopoly on education: "New corporate institutions are operating on the same academic turf, and new technologies have the power to bypass the classroom and the campus. . . . The danger is that, in a bid for survival, higher education will imitate its rivals, that careerism will dominate the campus as colleges pursue the marketplace goals of corporate education."¹¹

11. Nell P. Eurich, *Corporate Classrooms*, with a foreword by Ernest L. Boyer (Princeton, N.J.: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1985), p. xiv. Here too there is a large literature of books, including the following: Sande Cohen, *Academia and the Luster of Capital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Mark R. Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); William H. Berquist, *The Four Cultures of the Academy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992); Thomas Bender, *Intellect and Public Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters* (New York: Polity Press, 1987); Alexander W. Astin, *Academic Gamesmanship* (New York: Praeger Press, 1976); Robert Birnbaum, *How Colleges Work: The Cybernetics of Academic Organization and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988); F. Rourke and G. Brooks, *The Managerial Revolution in Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976); Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Interdisciplinarity and Higher Education* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979); Arthur Levine, *Higher Learning in America, 1980–2000* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); W. Neilson and C. Gaffield, *Universities in Crisis: A Mediaeval Institution in the Twenty-First Century* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1986); Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

Second, higher education in turn is taking on more and more the structure and mission of private business. Education has internalized the structures of business and the culture of the corporation. It has become a business. Students have become education consumers. A discipline's majors have become its repeat customers. Admissions offices are measured by the market share they capture. For their part, faculty have become intellectual entrepreneurs—taking their services to the highest bidders, producing and amassing cultural capital that can be quantified on resumés that resemble bank statements or financial asset summaries. When we call teaching a profession, today we usually mean that it is a job, not a calling. In administration, universities have become corporations—governed by people and processes that suggest more a board room than a classroom, more a board of directors than a genuine community of scholars. The humanities—like leisure studies, hotel management, commercial graphics design, and, of course, business administration—have become just another one of the many enterprises of these educational corporations we call universities. As such, they have become the humanities, incorporated—complete with middle management deans, associate deans, and department heads, fund-raisers, grant-writing assistants, public relations specialists, and marketing experts. All of these people watch the bottom line and count profits. They count faculty publications, course enrollments, departmental credit hours, and alumni donations. And all of these people, in committee permutations, develop strategic plans so that in the future there will be bigger numbers to count. And humanists participate in, legitimize, and strengthen all of it.

Third, higher education and business increasingly are entering into shared business relationships.¹² In the language of business, these are mergers; per-

12. For an extensive and useful account (with extensive case studies) of the rise of university-business relationships, see: Norman E. Bowie, *University-Business Partnerships: An Assessment* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994); and, Thomas W. Langfitt, Sheldon Hackney, Alfred Fishman, and Albert Glowasky, *Partners in the Research Enterprise: University-Corporate Relations in Science and Technology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). A briefer account is provided by Harvey Brooks, "Current Criticisms of Research Universities," *The Research University in a Time of Discontent*, ed. Jonathan R. Cole, Elinor G. Barber, and Stephen R. Graubard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 247–50. Bowie, Langfitt and colleagues, and Brooks do not pay any attention to the impact of university-business associations on the humanities. Further, these university-business partnerships in the sciences, humanities, and other fields frequently arise against a background of increasing government and government-business influence that results from greatly increased government funding for universities and colleges during the past fifty years. See, for example: John W. Sommer, ed., *The Academy in Crisis: The Political Economy of Higher Education* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1995); Roger E. Meiners and Ryan C. Amacher, eds., *Federal Support of Higher Education: The Growing Challenge to Intellectual Freedom* (New York: Paragon House, 1989); Roger L. Geiger, *To Advance Knowledge: The Growth of American*

haps, in a different language, they are Faustian bargains. These associations increasingly align the interests of higher education with those of business, and increasingly assimilate the mission of educational institutions to the mission of businesses. These activities may be displayed along a spectrum from the more incidental interactions to those that fundamentally alter the structure and operations of educational institutions.

Along that spectrum, let me simply highlight five types of education/business mergers. In the first place, for example, individual business leaders, corporations, any many foundations fund activities that further—or are thought to further—business interests. Often this support takes the form of funding for business schools and economics or business-related scientific, mathematical, engineering, and technological programs. The results include new buildings, new professorships, and new instructional and research funds. In turn, this leads to further growth in these programs and further growth in their share of resources, students, and alumni at educational institutions. There are not, for example, General Motors Professors of Religious Studies, Microsoft Professors of Comparative Literature, Wal-Mart Professors of Philosophy, or Nabisco Professors of Critical Theory. Though usually unnoticed, this has immense on-campus and off-campus consequences for the humanities. As a recent U.S. Department of Education study documented, in the last twenty years business has virtually taken over the college curriculum.¹³ Making the same point more strongly and critically, Lawrence Soley describes the seduction of higher education by the military, government, and business: “The story about universities in the 1980s and 1990s is that they will turn a trick for anybody with money to invest; and the only ones with money are corporations, millionaires, and foundations. These investments in universities have

Research Universities, 1900–1940 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Kenneth J. Arrow and Richard W. Cottle, *Education in a Research University* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Richard J. Baker, *The Politics of Research* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1966); Steven Ballard, Thomas E. James, Jr., Timothy I. Adams, Michael D. Devine, Lani L. Malya, and Mark Meo, *Innovation through Technical and Scientific Information: Government and Industry Cooperation* (New York: Quorum Books, 1989); Jonathan R. Cole, “Balancing Acts: Dilemmas of Choice Facing Research Universities” and Stephen R. Graubard, “The Research University: Notes toward a New History,” *The Research University in a Time of Discontent*, pp. 1–36, 361–90. In this context, Nicholas H. Stenreck argues persuasively that a consequence of government-university associations has been the loss of academic community and loss of faculty concern with the morality of their own institutions. “Ethics and Aims of Universities in Historical Perspective,” *An Ethical Education: Community and Morality in the Multicultural University*, ed. M. N. S. Sellers, pp. 9–20.

13. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 1, 1995, p. A27. Business largely has taken over not simply the curriculum but also the administration of the curriculum through various simple-minded budgeting processes that directly link program support and faculty salaries to student enrollment and external funding.

dramatically led universities to attend to the interests of their well-heeled patrons, rather than those of students.”¹⁴

In the second place, business increasingly sponsors university activities in return for advertising considerations. Like the woman in the George Bernard Shaw play—or, for those who are part of a postprint culture, like the wife in the 1993 Demi Moore/Robert Redford film, *Indecent Proposal*—it is clear the university is for sale. The only question is the exact price. At Penn State University, for example, the classic blue and white football uniforms do not sport player’s names. The team, rather than the individual player, is promoted. However, the uniforms do sport a Nike Corporation patch. The team and the company are promoted—adding evidence to Nike’s advertising slogan that “It must be the shoes.” At Clayton State College, Delta Airlines employs about 150 students to serve its customers from a space that it has leased in the college’s student center. This is so common—corporate advertising in the gym, in the labs, in the computer center, in the classroom—that it is hardly noticed any longer. Perhaps professors, like professional athletes, soon will dress in clothes covered with the patches of corporate sponsors. Worrying about this commercialization of the university, Derek Bok wondered if some things in a university should not be for sale: “But what things? And why, if they bring in money to be used for worthy academic purposes? . . . [I]t will take strong leadership to keep the profit motive from gradually eroding the values on which the welfare and reputation of universities ultimately depend.”¹⁵

In the third place, business increasingly provides preferred customer status to colleges and universities in return for market advantage or monopoly. In return for big bucks, Penn State is a Pepsi campus. You can’t find Coca Cola in any vending machine or dining facility on campus. The University of Oregon is a Taco Time—not a Taco Bell—campus. Indeed, almost every campus has—or hopes to have—such private vendor or “outsourcing” arrangements with banks, fast food restaurants, book stores, and computer makers. And, as a director of a State Council of Higher Education recently predicted, “I think it’s only a matter of time before somebody outsources areas of instruction.”¹⁶

In the fourth place, more ominously, colleges and universities increasingly enter into business partnerships that reroute educational resources and

14. Lawrence C. Soley, *Leasing the Ivory Tower: The Corporate Takeover of Academia* (Boston: South End Press, 1995), p. 5. Like Bowie’s study, Soley’s more passionate, polemical analysis ignores the humanities.

15. Derek Bok, “Universities: Their Temptations and Tensions,” *Journal of College and University Law*, 1991; included in Bowie, *University-Business Partnerships*, pp. 119, 121.

16. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 7, 1995, pp. A31–32.

redefine educational missions. These activities blur traditional distinctions between the public and the private, the role of government and the role of business, and the aims of business and the aims of education. As such, it is increasingly misleading to view the university as an autonomous institution and its employees as disinterested seekers of truth. Instead, it is increasingly necessary to view the university within the context of a larger system of the production and distribution of knowledge, material resources, and power—as part of a complex, interwoven system of colleges and universities, research institutes and think tanks, the media, government agencies, and corporations.¹⁷ On campus, the most obvious, familiar manifestation of this is the university research park. Multimillion-dollar university-funded venture-capital partnerships and investment funds are more recent, less visible examples of this same development. David W. Mueller, managing partner of the AM Fund, a venture fund backed by Texas A&M University, summarizes the spirit of these enterprises that are not guided ultimately by concern with instruction or research: “We do deals because we think we’re going to make money.”¹⁸ These joint university/business operations raise complex questions—questions about confidentiality, conflict of interest, profit-making ventures, the ownership of patents, faculty release time for private consulting, use of course time to address private business concerns, and the allocation of resources within the university. Faced with these sorts of problems, the University of Arizona recently terminated all direct commercialization of faculty research. By contrast, research ventures at the University of Utah, for example, result in several spin-off companies each year.¹⁹ Here the university is not simply engaged in public service; instead, the university is engaged in self-service through projects that identify the interests of particular businesses with its own interests. Increasingly, the business of education is business. Increasingly, its professors act as entrepreneurs.

Finally, in the fifth place, other developments are under way, and lots of dollars are at stake. Many universities, libraries, and publishers are exploring the possibilities of using computer technologies to create distance education programs and virtual universities (as opposed to “campus-bound” institutions)—

17. For a discussion of the fundamental role of class within this system, see Stanley Aronowitz and William DiFazio, “A Taxonomy of Teacher Work,” *The Jobless Future: Sci-Tech and the Dogma of Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 226–63. Calling the existence of a community of scholars a fiction, they conclude: “While in earlier periods it was necessary to ‘penetrate the veil’ of ideology of knowledge for knowledge’s sake to reveal the underlying economic and political function of universities with respect to the larger social system, the overwhelming power of business as a moral pursuit increasingly makes this deconstructive work superfluous” (p. 263).

18. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 17, 1996, pp. A37–38.

19. *Ibid.*, July 21, 1995, pp. A33–34.

siteless, bookless educational institutions that provide virtual education to students and their terminal lives. New York University, for example, has begun to offer a graduate program entirely through an interactive electronic network. A group of young scholars, in part dismayed by the tough academic job market, now are planning to establish Virtual Online University, an institution entirely on the Internet. A recent study, "Using Information Technology to Enhance Academic Productivity," commissioned by Educom, a consortium of hundreds of colleges and companies committed to increasing the use of technology in higher education, concludes that in an increasingly knowledge-based economy, traditional colleges and universities must exploit new technologies or "other nontraditional providers of education will be quick to do so." Although the study notes that this new technology is most useful for transmitting "codified knowledge" and is not appropriate for teaching "meaning and value" or "culture and philosophy," it is clear that its recommendations uncritically presuppose meanings and values that are antithetical to the humanities and humane cultures.²⁰ At the same time, with public funds and private funding from publishing companies that produce educational media, governors of eighteen Western states and territories have agreed to explore the creation of a "virtual university" that would deliver courses and award degrees across the region through state "franchises." Moreover, some of these governors have suggested that this "alternative university" should award academic credit for knowledge gained on the job or from commercial tutorials on the Internet. Complaining that the certification of what is learned still is in the hands of the university, Colorado Governor Roy Romer observed: "People are learning all over, in places that are not part of accredited universities. . . . We're coming into the age where that is going to be blown apart."²¹ Perhaps this will lead to the private or public franchising of education—McEducation—that will leave only a handful of universities (like airlines or fast food chains) whose products are delivered globally by a small workforce of producers (and a larger service economy) that can perform business office functions and deliver information. While this information, I stress again, does not constitute and cannot contain the core of the humanities, it is not difficult to imagine tomorrow's virtual students being asked if they want a little humanities with their education—being asked, in effect, "Do you want fries with that?"

Though quibbling humanists generally have not recognized it or done much about it, the rise of Edu-business—the usurpation of education by

20. William F. Massy and Robert Zemsky, "Using Information Technology to Enhance Academic Productivity," Educom National Learning Infrastructure Initiative, 1996

21. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 22, 1995, pp. A19, A21. See also a follow-up report, June 11, 1996, pp. A30–31.

business and the transformation of education into business—has rendered the humanities marginal, impotent, and culturally unimportant. Looking ahead, it also presents the humanities with several limited options.

The first option—really more a default mode—is to pursue business as usual. This is a recipe for cultural irrelevance—what Dewey called a “shrinking classicism.” It cedes the humanities to the professional humanists: They write books and journal articles for one another; they teach the many students trapped by minimal, incoherent, vestigial humanities distribution requirements; and, they teach the few “leisure class” students who have the time and money and language²² to pursue some intellectual finishing. On this option, as their funding and numbers shrink within the college and university, and vanish altogether in “the real world” outside, humanists can console themselves that they are the keepers of genuine culture and that the barbarians sadly are already inside the gates. Moreover, the great advantage of business as usual is that it requires little effort.

Of course, humanists could forsake business as usual in order to pursue a second option. Within Edu-business, the humanities could become a booming service industry. The international banking student could gain a career edge by knowing Japanese or Spanish. The future manager may need to know some of the religious history and values of the local workers and consumers in order to achieve maximum productivity. The prospective corporate attorney may benefit from a course in logic. English composition courses could provide key skills to tomorrow’s entrepreneurs who need to be not only computer-literate but also just plain literate as they navigate the information highways of the future. All this would require significant restructuring and, surely, downsizing. It could involve hostile takeovers, re-training, more “temporary” workers, and certainly some layoffs. This option—measuring the humanities and the liberal arts against the yardstick of “workplace correctness”²³—may shock or sicken humanities purists, but it is increasingly evident in the rhetoric, if not the beliefs, of humanists on almost every campus.

There is a third option that aligns the humanities more with the consumer than the producer, more with Walt Disney than General Motors: the humanities as entertainment. A long time ago, Greek philosophers claimed that philosophy begins in wonder. Today, the *National Inquirer* instructs us that “inquiring minds want to know.” Celebrity humanist scholars who now write learned essays about Madonna and feminist theory, Michael Jackson

22. See Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron, Monique de Saint Martin, Christian Baudelot, and Guy Vincent, *Academic Discourse: Linguistic Misunderstanding and Professorial Power [Rapport Pedagogique et Communication]* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994 [1965]).

23. Patricia Kean, “The New Assault on the Liberal Arts,” *Lingua Franca*, May/June 1993, pp. 1, 22–28.

and the politics of desire, Cindy Crawford and late capitalist productions of style, Axl Rose and the politics of diminished expectations, and “NYPD Blues” and postmodern communication are the vanguard of this movement. The movement, however, is much larger, and includes all humanists, whether politically correct or incorrect, who have given up concern with the reconstruction of practice for the fun of deconstruction of theory.

Should the humanities take the first option, remaining the harmless zoo-animals of the ivory tower? Should they pursue the second option that provides them a robust role as special skills coach for Team USA or Transnational Business? Or, should they take a third path that promises all the good times of life as a cultural court jester or epiphenomenal comic?

None of the above options is an acceptable one for education in the humanities—an education that trades in self-understanding, imagination, and self-criticism. Is a better option possible? No, not at present. Let me be very clear here. *No* better option now is available to humanists *as* humanists—in their present professional roles or current activities *as* humanists. Better options are available to many persons—including professional humanists—who are willing and able to engage the public—citizens, legislators, journalists, foundation heads, the business community, politicians, and others who do *not* determine teaching schedules, fix course prerequisites, approve research leaves, grant tenure, or award merit pay.

To note this fact is not to be pessimistic. Rather it is to be realistic. The humanities occupy an increasingly marginal position within colleges and universities, and colleges and universities play only a small educational role in society. Any philosophy that fails to address this issue fails to be genuinely pragmatic, fails to be self-reflective, and fails to do anything genuinely dangerous. The theory and the vocabulary of social democratic politics requires something both more and different. This fact must constitute a central agenda item for any genuinely instrumental and genealogical pragmatism. In the meantime, the problems that are the results of this failure—Rorty’s “actual problems now being faced”—constitute an ongoing crisis in education and a crisis in society, even if to date it has meant business as usual for *postcritical* humanists, their theories, their institutions, and their investors.²⁴

24. An earlier version of portions of this essay appeared in “The Humanities, Inc.: Taking Care of Business,” *Re-Inventing the Humanities: International Perspectives*, ed. David Myers (Kew, Victoria: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 1995), pp. 3–10. These revised passages appear here with the kind permission of the editor and the publisher.