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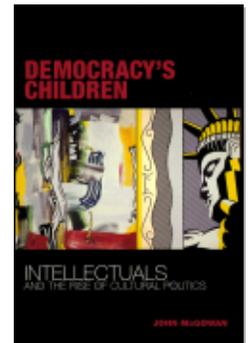
Democracy's Children

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CHAPTER 4

Humanists, Cultural Authority, and the University

Two quasi-public debates stirred the thoughts that comprise this chapter. The first concerned faculty salaries at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where I teach. In a state where the median household income in 1998 was \$36,985 and 13.8 percent of the population was under the poverty level of \$17,029 for a family of four, UNC tried to make the case that faculty salaries—which averaged \$51,000 for assistant professors and \$86,000 for full professors—were not “competitive.” (These figures exclude the medical school and, thus, are not artificially high. There is no available breakdown for salaries in the humanities, but my sense is that they deviate at most \$10,000 from the cited numbers. Starting salaries for assistant professors in the English department are currently in the mid to high 40s.) These salaries place UNC 34th out of 84 Research I and AAU Institutions in faculty compensation.¹ The university asked the state legislature for an appropriations increase that would match an increase of 25 percent in tuition over three years, with the money specifically earmarked for increased faculty salaries and increased aid for students of demonstrated need. In-state tuition in 1998–99 was \$2262, already a 56 percent increase from 1993–94’s \$1454. Out of state tuition was \$11,428. 82 percent of our students are from North Carolina.

1. Figures are for 1998–99. Sources: “In US, Poverty at Lowest Since ‘79,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, Sept. 27, 2000: 1A, 15A. UNC figures are from the Office of Institutional Research and are available on its web site: www.aid.unc.edu/ir. Subsequent figures are from the same source unless otherwise noted.

The internal faculty debate over this issue divided into three camps, each of which published a position paper in the state's newspapers. The first group made the market argument that UNC's preeminence as a research university required that it pay competitive salaries—and then added that UNC's research, reputation, graduates, and entrepreneurial spin-offs contributed mightily to the state's booming economy. The second group supported the students' opposition to a tuition increase, advocating adherence to the state constitution's provision that "the General Assembly shall provide the benefits of The University of North Carolina and other public institutions of higher education, as far as practicable, be extended to the people of the State free of expense." Legislative appropriations had shrunk from 42.5 percent in 1986 to 31.3 percent in 1996 of the university's total annual revenues. The state was withdrawing its support of a public university and shifting the burden to students, a strategy necessitated during a time of economic prosperity by large tax cuts during the 1990s. This group advocated a more holistic appraisal of the university's problems—including scandalously low wages for support staff and a crumbling infrastructure—in relation to the "depublicization" of the university.

The third group lamented the obsession with "peer institutions" and *US News and World Report* rankings, arguing that the particular ethos of UNC had eroded with the arrival of increasingly bureaucratic and impersonal modes of "accountability" and increasing pressure on faculty to achieve "national prominence" in one's field as opposed to contributing to the local intellectual community of colleagues and students. Play that game in evaluating faculty and, of course, they will develop no loyalty to the institution and will bolt for the first job that pays more. Repair of local working conditions in defiance of the university's "rationalization" (in Max Weber's sense) would do far more for faculty retention than salary increases. We needed to resist the one-size-fits-all model of what a university should be and how it should be ranked.

Although far more sympathetic with the second and third groups, I found myself in sharp disagreement with them all. For a start, no one liked it when I insisted that UNC is welfare for the upper middle classes. The tuition is outrageously low, especially when 56 percent of incoming students in 1999 reported a family income of over \$75,000, just about twice the state's overall median.² Tuition will never cover the whole cost of a

2. Figures are from the 1999 Freshman Survey taken at UNC, Chapel Hill, administered by CIRP (Cooperative Institutional Research Program). This survey offers the following

college education; subsidies from various other sources will always be necessary. A progressive financial aid system can insure access for all students—and is more likely to be tolerated than a genuinely progressive state-wide income tax. Cuts in tuition aid over the past twenty years contribute to the fact that “in 1979 kids from the top socioeconomic quarter of American families were four times more likely to get a college degree than those from the bottom quarter; now they are ten times more likely.”³ Higher education, in other words, has played a major role in American society’s steady movement toward plutocracy. The upper middle class should at least have to pay a substantial tuition toward the maintenance of the institution that secures its social and economic standing.

Even more telling is the disproportionate share of North Carolina’s education budget that goes to its flagship campus. Chapel Hill has 15,400 undergraduates, about 12 percent of the total enrolled in the 16 campus UNC system. Add graduate students and Chapel Hill enrolls 16 percent of all students studying at a UNC system campus. But UNC, Chapel Hill, receives 25 percent of the system’s annual budget.⁴ The contrast with public K-12 education in North Carolina is even more stark. The state ranks 38th in annual per student expenditure, at \$5,315 in 1995–96 when the national average was \$6,392. Only Georgia and South Carolina had lower average SAT scores for its high school graduates in 1997–98.⁵ The governor’s big initiative over the past five years was to raise starting teacher salaries in K-12 to \$25,000 by the year 2000, a goal that was accomplished.

UNC, Chapel Hill, in other words, is a rich school in a poor state. Or, more accurately, it is a privileged school in a moderately prosperous state that has a long history of neglecting the education of the many while supporting the education of the few. (That history, of course, is connected first and foremost to segregation and, then, to desegregation. After 1960, public schools were underfunded because many whites fled to “private academies.”) To call for increased state allocations to Chapel Hill in view of

figures nationally for highly selective public universities: 48 percent with family incomes of \$75,000 or more, and for all public universities: 38 percent with family incomes \$75,000 or higher. My thanks to Lynn Williford for tracking down this information for me.

3. Rorty (1998, 86). Rorty cites Karen Arenson, “Cuts in Tuition Assistance Put College beyond Reach of Poorest Students,” *New York Times*, Jan. 27, 1997, B1. Of course, other factors contribute to the class profile of our students, including access to better (public or private) schools before college with the resultant more competitive SAT scores when applying to college.

4. These numbers come from the website of the UNC system’s General Administration, www.ga.unc.edu and from UNC, Chapel Hill’s web page, www.unc.edu

5. Figures are from the *Digest of Educational Statistics 1999*.

more pressing needs elsewhere in public education looked to me like a formula for perpetuating and even widening the gap between haves and have-nots. To whine publicly about faculty salaries when public school teachers and our own support staff were abominably paid was worse than insensitive. Thus I found myself the sole advocate for a raise in tuition that would free state revenues to be allocated elsewhere.

It would be easy to say that I was taking a position contrary to my colleagues' and my own economic interest, so they inevitably rejected it. I think the situation was far more complex. The money was an important factor. I hope to write in the future about the constant and nerve-wracking anxieties about money that plague most American families earning less than \$125,000 a year.⁶ I will only relate here that UNC issued its faculty Diners Club cards last year for use during university-related travel. Four months later, we received a directive that their personal use was forbidden. It seems a significant portion of the faculty had maxed out the card's credit line within weeks of receiving it.

Beneath the money worries, however, lurked a more general and truly bitter sense of being ill-used. A conviction that one is overworked and under-appreciated is perhaps endemic to any hierarchical organization, but is exacerbated by the peculiarly individualistic structure of academic achievements. The academic career is almost entirely self-fashioned. You're on your own, baby. The projects are self-generated and, by and large, the work is all done by one person, who is also responsible for securing the time and funding that permit the work to get done. That work, often called "my own work," is also separate from the teaching which takes much of the professor's time—and which is barely noticed unless done extremely well or extremely poorly. (The model is different in the sciences, where there is less teaching and more research collaboration.) Yet this academic free agent is peculiarly dependent on the recognition of others, their appreciation and reward of the individual's efforts. Most academics were praised throughout their school years—and suffer greatly from a dearth of praise, a being-taken-for-granted, as adults.

But I want to insist that this personal grievance connected to local neglect is not the whole story either. The more general grievance is that academic work is undervalued by society. When salary matters are discussed, aca-

6. Schor (1998, 7) cites a survey in which 27 percent of respondents earning over \$100,000 a year, 39 percent earning from \$75,000 to \$100,000, and 50 percent earning from \$25,000 to \$35,000 report, "I cannot afford to buy everything I need." A more objective measure is that 63 percent of households earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 are in credit card debt (19).

demics don't talk about how much more than school teachers they make, but about how much less than other professionals—doctors, lawyers, MBAs. "I am as smart, I have invested as much time and money in my education, as these others, but I am making a sacrifice to do the work of education." The market discounts the academic's abilities, the academic's work. Students and their families won't pay the full cost of education and, increasingly, the state won't either. The difference has to be made up by private benefactors, by corporations contracting for specific services, and by the willingness of talented people to take lower salaries in return for various amenities such as significant autonomy. This bargain rankles.

For whatever reasons—maybe I am just a sweet-tempered guy—I don't feel these grievances. I am impatient with, annoyed and even outraged by, the pissing and moaning of many academics. (Admittedly, this salary issue brought out the worst in everyone.) Perhaps it's because I spent twelve years teaching in less wealthy schools before arriving at UNC instead of coming straight to Chapel Hill from grad school at Yale or Harvard. I often want to send my colleagues for a three year stint at Fayetteville State University or East Durham High School when I hear them complaining. More globally, I have always been amazed at how privileged academics are. (When I said just that to colleagues, while I was earning \$37,000 at my job prior to UNC, a furious argument ensued.) What strikes me is not that the market undervalues our work, but that it values it at all—and consistently at a price above the median paid to all workers. Why should our work be more valuable, better compensated, than the work of most Americans? I just don't have the sense of entitlement, of self-assured conviction that what I do is important and necessary, that would sustain the complaint of being under-appreciated. That some people like what I do, and that I am paid enough to keep doing it within an institution that enables me to do the work, seems miraculous. Maybe this is a class thing. The university afforded me an escape from the quotidian world of drudgery that was my family's fate prior to my generation. What I do feels so little like work as I understood that burden when growing up that I am amazed I get paid to do it.

But this is still not the whole story. I want to ratchet the analysis up another step—and introduce the second debate that motivated this chapter. The complaint that the market undervalues academic work can take a very different tack. Humanities professors, by and large, are paid less than non-humanities professors because of "market forces." These same market forces stand to blame for the decline of the humanities both within the

university and within the general society. This decline has been slow, but steady, over the past 150 years at least. Objective measures would be fewer humanities majors, a shrinking portion of required and offered courses coming from humanities disciplines, and a loosening link between a “liberal arts education” and social status.⁷

Right now I am neither interested in analyzing this decline nor in predicting the humanities’ future. My focus here is on the way that the values associated with the humanities, or most likely to be central to those working in the humanities, have been on the defensive for a long time. Adherents of the humanities have felt constrained to be public advocates, to convince a mostly indifferent and sometimes hostile society of the humanities’ value in every sense of the term “value.” In the bluntest terms, the humanities condemn “commercial culture” for neglecting and/or scorning the knowledge, insights, and ways of being-in-the-world that the humanities offer. Either humanists must show that a liberal education has market value or they must argue for the value of other goods which do not provide an obvious financial return on money invested. In most cases, humanists have taken both tacks.⁸

I have been part of an on-going colloquium at the National Humanities Center on “Liberalism and its Contexts.”⁹ We have mostly focused on

7. In fact, the statistics tell a complicated story. If we start from 1950, the percentage of English majors among all undergraduate degrees granted looks remarkably stable, moving from 3.99 percent in 1950 to 4.21 percent in 1996–97. But that hides a large spike from 1960 (5.13 percent) to the high of 1967–68 (7.59 percent), followed by precipitous decline through the 1970s to the low of 3.50 percent in 1979–80. The 1980s brought a small run-up to 4.83 percent in 1990–91, and then a steady decline to the current 4.21 percent. The figures for history majors are fairly similar, but show a more decided long-term decline, moving from 3.13 percent in 1950 to a peak of 5.58 percent in 1967–68, a low of 1.66 percent in 1985–86, and a current 2.15 percent (1996–97). Interestingly, bachelor’s degrees in business have declined through the 1990s, although they still represent 19 percent of all undergraduate degrees in 1996–97, down from 23.66 percent in 1989–90. The big growth areas in the 1990s have been agriculture, biological and life sciences, and health professions. (Source: Franklin, 2000).

8. See Hutcheon, 2000, for a succinct rendition of almost all the arguments humanists in the university employ to defend their work. Her final sentence covers nearly all the bases, claiming both economic and non-economic benefits: “Skills are part of the picture, but only part; those broader educational goals are desirable and important both for the general economic and social well-being of the nation and for the personal and professional life of the informed and thoughtful citizen—and voter” (4).

9. This Sawyer seminar is funded by the Mellon Foundation. My thoughts here were formulated particularly in response to Gary Wihl’s paper presented to the seminar, “Individualism and Liberalism in the Poetry of Walt Whitman.” Wihl critiques the “abstract” individualism of procedural or simply rights-focused liberalism in order to advocate the more “robust” individualism that can be found in other liberal writers, noticeably Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman.

nineteenth-century arguments for and with liberalism, although we have ranged more widely than that. Once again, I find myself at odds with most of my colleagues. (I may be sweet-tempered, but I also seem to be perversely contrarian.) At issue is what might be characterized as a diffident, pluralist liberalism (which I advocate) and a culturalist liberalism. Most of the colloquium's members accept that commercial culture offers a reprehensible way of life, and openly advocate a more "robust" liberalism that will offer an alternative to the market. Commercial culture only offers selves who are rational maximizers of interest, passive consumers, or mechanical drudges; the "cash nexus," however understood, only generates lives of quiet or not-so-quiet desperation. If liberalism is diffident, if it is understood as merely a neutral by-stander that provides the political infrastructure for commercial culture's existence, then liberalism must be rejected. The total triumph of the market cannot be accepted.

Luckily, according to their story, there is another liberalism, a more activist liberalism. This liberalism comes in two forms, both of which rest on the foundation of rights that negatively define the state's limits, rights that are the centerpiece of diffident liberalism. State action liberalism interferes in the market to counter extreme economic inequalities, to protect the public health and the environment, to forbid the growth of monopolies, and to alleviate the misery of the sick, aged, and otherwise unemployed. In this liberalism, citizenship entails not only negative liberties, but also positive welfare claims to which the state must respond. State action liberalism addresses the economic failings of the market. It accepts that individual flourishing is the *raison d'être*, the legitimation, of liberal polities, and thus provides state remediation when and where the market fails to provide the resources necessary to flourish. Since I will only return to this branch of liberalism in passing, let me say right now that I am all for it.

Culturalist liberalism is hardly antagonistic to state action liberalism. In fact, the two are usually understood as complementary; it is my desire to disentangle the two, endorsing the one but not the other, that leads me to disagree with my National Humanities Center colleagues. Fundamentally, the culturalist liberals believe that individual flourishing requires not just financial resources and physical security, but also certain skills, knowledge, competencies, and values. In a word—our contemporary word—flourishing requires an "identity," a way-of-being-in-the-world and of being-with-others that gives individuality substance and individual existence meaning. The participants in the seminar have amply

demonstrated this culturalist tradition within liberalism. (Rosenblum [1987] is a central text for this argument.) That is, various thinkers who are committed to individual liberty are also concerned with the process of *Bildung*, of identity formation within culture, in order to create individuals fully capable of enjoying the freedoms liberal polities will afford them. (As I will discuss in the next two chapters, what I am calling culturalism can also take anti-liberal and a-liberal forms. Here I am confining myself to its liberal manifestations.) Mill, Arnold, and Emerson represent this liberal tradition, which merges Romantic paradigms of self-actualization with Enlightenment commitments to universal rights. Here is a vision of individual and society that counters, even subsumes, a vision that sees the world as all market. A richer culture, one that attends to the "full humanity" of persons, is offered in place of the attenuated, partial, and thin culture of the market. Individuals are called to participate in, form their identities in relation to, this richer culture.

I have my doubts. As a pluralist, I am not in favor of letting the market determine all human relations or all human desires. But I want to encourage suspicion about the culturalist alternative, which looks equally anti-pluralist to me. The culturalist alternative to the market is so attractive to humanists because they are continually aggrieved at the market's undervaluation of what they do. Here, in one fell swoop, the humanist lays claim to the cultural authority s/he thinks rightfully his or hers. The arena of identity formation is shifted from commercial culture to the school, where the humanist presides. And the cultural authority that the humanist might not acquire in a full and fair competition of diverse models of selfhood is now underwritten by the state. The humanists' importance is assured, and they are even given their own institution (or, at least, part of that institution) through which to enforce it. I am extremely wary of the humanists' turn to state power to shore up their visions of the qualities that the more general culture ignores or derides. In addition, it raises my hackles when professors assume that education is a self-evident good, obviously benign. Complacent confidence in their own virtue follows. To be most suspicious of that which serves our own interests, and even more our own cherished self-images, seems a good rule of thumb to me.

I do not advocate the abolishment of compulsory education or the state's abandonment of education to the private market (whether through a voucher system or other means). Since education is currently the primary means toward economic well-being, it is crucial that the state do everything in its power to provide equal educational opportunity to all its

citizens. (The failure of government—federal, state, and local—in the United States to provide anything like an equal education to all children is amply documented in Kozol [1992].) My concern here is how intellectuals, particularly humanist intellectuals, use schools and the university to acquire cultural authority even as they continually complain that they do not have as much authority as they deserve. Those complaints almost always involve the denigration of other sources of cultural values, attitudes, and identification.

Three historical points about the institution of compulsory education must be stressed. The first is that required schooling is a creation of the liberal state, as if the extraordinary freedom granted to adults in liberal polities must be purchased at the price of an unprecedented subjection of children to the state. The terror of what freedom would produce necessitated the long indoctrination of citizens during childhood. This desire to make citizens worthy or capable of freedom is tied directly to the transformation of liberal polities into democratic ones during the 19th century. Liberal and conservative elites all shared a fear of the *demos*. The necessity of subordination and deference was the conservative response to that fear; the necessity of education was the liberal response. For Mill and Arnold, the masses' ignorance is alarming, but their weak-willed susceptibility to outside influences is even more alarming. Citizens must be given the wherewithal to resist the blandishments of demagogues and crass commercialism. A strong, non-anarchistic democracy will go hand-in-hand with the ability to keep the market in its place, only one facet of a more complex society. While education schemes evidence a laudable faith in the potential capacities of the people, their dark underside is the conviction that the people are only ready for democracy if they become more like us, the educated and enlightened ones who will serve as their teachers. Fear of democracy and fear of commercial culture merge in writers like Tocqueville and Flaubert, then get carried into the twentieth century as condemnations of "mass culture" and worries about the ways that "mass media" influence political opinions. In sum, the state got involved in education because it wanted to control its citizens, not because it wanted to undercut or supplement the selves shaped by commercial culture.¹⁰

Secondly, education, almost from the start, gets tied to nationalism, to the effort to bind citizens to the state through patriotism. I need not rehearse the details of nationalism's origins in the period from 1750 to 1850;

10. Tony La Vopa of the Sawyer Seminar will recognize his influence on this paragraph.

that work has been done elsewhere.¹¹ States needed large citizen armies during the Napoleonic period, but were also susceptible to the intellectual fear that the dissolution of traditional communities and the growth of cities dissolved the “social glue” that mitigated the individualistic competition of each against each. Liberal individualism and the growth of capitalist economic relations were underwritten by a nationalism that seemed to guarantee that the center would hold and that a common cause would unite the individuals freed to pursue their own life projects and their own economic good. School becomes a key place for inculcating this common tie to the nation.

Third, far from being hostile to commerce, school is, from the beginning, tied to training for employment, not just to responsible citizenship and patriotic sentiments. That literacy and technical competence contributed to national prosperity was a truism by 1870, and the last third of the nineteenth-century links educational credentials (especially high school and college degrees) to a readiness for employment that still provides the economic rationale for students’ efforts today. The tug-of-war between schools as sites of vocational training and non-instrumental cultural education begins almost at the same time as the establishment of required schooling for all.

So school was never solely the humanists’ preserve. Liberal polities had multiple, though not particularly compatible, aims in establishing public education, and I would argue that the development of education over the past 130 years has only proliferated those aims. Once securely in place, it is no wonder that various different social groups would strive to get a foothold in the schools, to use them to further their own designs on children and the polity. If the state ever had much control over schools, it lost that control long ago. Schools are inefficient shapers of identity partly because students are subjected to so many messages in school. (I discussed other causes of schools’ inefficiencies in chapter 2.) I am always skeptical of arguments, inspired by Foucault, that stress the state’s powers of subject-formation.¹² For a start, the liberal state is not, in theory or aspiration,

11. Among a multitude of recent studies, Anderson (1991) has been especially influential. He points to “the large cluster of new political entities that sprang up in the Western hemisphere between 1776 and 1838, all of which self-consciously defined themselves as nations” (46)

12. Miller (1993) provides one example of such arguments. The “cultural-capitalist state,” he writes, “needs to produce a sense of oneness among increasingly heterogeneous populations at a time when political systems are under question by new social movements and the internationalization of cultures and economies. It works to forge a loyalty to market

the Hegelian state. It does not explicitly aim for a unified whole of which it is the consummate expression and within which individuals are fully articulated. Even its reliance on nationalism is usually refracted through the “land” more than through the “state.” That’s why fiercely patriotic Americans can also be fiercely anti-government. Furthermore, the contemporary state is a multi-headed beast, with a limited ability to insure how its directives are enacted in practice. The state’s left hand often does not know how its right hand is counteracting it, while its functionaries are often using state institutions and power to pursue their own agendas. The ability of the state to act consistently across time and in different places is extremely limited.

Humanist teachers are in the belly of this confused and stumbling beast, and my argument is that they should not dream of more effective state power or more effective pedagogies as techniques for the furthering of their particular vision of the good life. Let’s try, instead, to affirm the inefficiencies and contradictions of schooling while also being somewhat more skeptical about the humanist vision. What evidence do we have that the masses are not prepared for citizenship; that the masses lead thin, attenuated lives; that alienation, narcissism, or schizophrenia characterize the modern individual;¹³ or that the humanist holds the key for escaping these desperate conditions?

Intellectuals—in flight from family, religion, business, and local communities—not surprisingly scorn the sites that anchor identity formation for most people. The republic of letters, the realm of ideas, and professional cohorts have afforded intellectuals the means to escape from local bonds they found narrow and constricting. But does that escape necessitate or justify denigrating those left behind? Is it possible to lead a good life in total ignorance of Nietzsche or Shakespeare or Virginia Woolf? Intellectuals hardly have exclusive claims to moral probity. And it is not obvious that “culture” in an Arnoldian sense is a firmer bulwark against

economics and parliamentary democracy, as well as a sustainable society through the formation of cultural citizens, docile but efficient participants in that economy-society mix” (xii). This account suggests a unity of purpose for “the state” that I find hard to credit.

13. “Alienation” comes from Marx (1978), especially the section entitled “Alienated Labor.” The term subsequently figures prominently in Western Marxist and existentialist diagnoses of the ills of humans under modern economic and social conditions. “Narcissism” comes from Lasch (1979) and “schizophrenia” from Jameson (1991, esp. pp. 25–31). These three terms, and these three writers, are only cited here as representative of a long-standing tradition of critique that insists that individuals lived maimed, unsatisfactory lives in modern societies, with capitalism and/or liberalism often cited as cause.

commercialism than family, religion, or local commitments. What intellectuals consume is different, but they consume as avidly as every one else does, and with more means (usually) to do so.

I am not arguing for ignorance or against education. I am saying that humanists have not made a convincing case, either in their apologetics or in their behavior, for the benefits of the liberal education they espouse (whether that espousal takes the traditional form of extolling exposure to the great books or the less content-specific form of extolling the development of "critical thinking skills.") Education is one among many sites of identity formation, and I think we teachers would be better off thinking of education as adding to the mix rather than as correcting the deficiencies of the other sites. We are not our students' saviors in an otherwise utterly deplorable world. To think that we are saviors guarantees our condemnation of them when they reject our wares, and of society at large for not valuing us for our indispensable work. Our students' benefiting from what we can offer them does not depend on their repudiation of their non-school based identifications. The crux here is a caricatured picture of commercial culture dear to many humanists, one that overstates that culture's triumph in our time and its utter lack of praiseworthy qualities. This is a picture formed, by the way, on the flimsiest grounds; if scholars presumed to characterize the Renaissance in utter ignorance of texts from the era or academic studies of it, we would deny their work publication. But humanists don't read the massive written record of the business world, nor pay much attention to academics who have studied business culture. Cultural studies needs an ethnography of business to match its sophisticated ethnographies of consumers. Then we would stand a chance of getting past the fatuous opinions of commerce that now pass unchallenged.

The same tendency toward wholesale contempt can be found in many intellectuals' attitudes toward family, religion, and patriotism. The fetishization of "critical thinking" and "distance" in much intellectual work exhibits this suspicion of satisfied belonging. I share all these prejudices of the intellectual, but I think we should avoid transforming such prejudices into justifications for our authoritative rewriting of students' identities. I do aspire to change my students' lives by prompting them to reevaluate their primary commitments, but the goal of being explicit about the components of identity does not inevitably necessitate their repudiation.

In a pluralistic culture, school needs to take its chances among multiple sites of identification. In my diffident view, liberals should be ex-

tremely wary of all appeals to state power, especially in matters involving the formation of beliefs and of decisions about how to live one's life. Does that mean the state should get out of education altogether? No. For three reasons, at least.

First, education is an absolute necessity for participation in the contemporary economy. State action is necessary to rectify inequities of inherited wealth and status. Plus (arguably) the state has an interest in general economic prosperity. A well educated workforce is a benefit to the nation—and benefits citizens individually as well. It is worth adding that even if education is geared toward its economic benefits, targeted training for specific jobs would not provide the greatest return. Intellectual skills of a more general order are, in any time frame but the extreme short term, more valuable. Humanist forms of education can be justified economically, which is not to slight or recommend abandoning non-economic justifications.

Second, society benefits from the codification of received knowledge and the effort to reexamine and extend that knowledge. It is simply not true that a free market will, on its own, produce anything and everything deemed valuable. Citizens in a democracy have every reason to look to the state to supply goods the market will not, just as they look to the state to rectify market created inequities in certain crucial domains (health, opportunity, care for the elderly). The arts and humanities, especially in the United States, often depend on state subsidies, yet find it hard to legitimate such expenditures in terms of utility. The educative value of the arts and humanities is generally conceded and, thus, their position in schools is fairly secure (the humanities more so than the arts). But their value as repositories of knowledge and producers of new knowledge is less universally accepted, mostly because prevailing paradigms of knowledge do not easily accommodate what the arts and humanities offer. Such disputes aside, my general point is that markets can fail to provide what at least some people value, and the state may be used by citizens to overcome that deficiency. Education is so generally valuable that the state should be enjoined to provide it for all.

Finally, the state has some interest in knitting its various citizens together into "a society." This is tricky, but the events of the past twelve years in Eastern Europe, Canada, and elsewhere have made me reevaluate my prior conviction that fears of anarchy or anomie are usually unjustified, that centripetal forces in modern societies outweigh centrifugal ones. As a pluralist, I still want to be a minimalist here. The key is the co-

existence of different individuals and groups, not their merger into a whole. But my understanding of democracy includes the belief that selves are socially constituted through their relations with others and that democracy, beyond its procedural elements, points toward transformative public, dialogic interactions among citizens. These connections are only possible if lines of communication across various differences remain open. The state can and should be used to overcome segregation of every sort: racial, economic, status, ethnic, etc. Democracy needs public spaces where everyone intermingles. The market has proved itself a great separator in many, albeit not all, ways. It divides (into “niches”) to conquer and creates spaces that, by a kind of economic filtering, encourage people to associate only with their own kind. Much advertising, of course, relies on the ploy of linking ownership of this thing to becoming one of this desired kind. It is typical of American liberalism that the state has only tried to establish truly inclusive public spheres (in schools and workplaces primarily) fitfully and often ineffectually. The rights of private property have been allowed to supplant fully open public spaces throughout American history. The current permission for wealthy partisans to crowd out full public debate during elections is only the latest instance. Since the geographical segregation of money and race in our country leads to radically unequal schools, a voucher system—tied to need and serving to shatter the local funding of schools in favor of more centralized, equal funding—looks potentially attractive. But the fact that vouchers would enable a market-like fragmentation of schooling, with every self-defined identity group setting up a school, is for me the decisive argument against them. Schools exist not just as repositories of received knowledge, but also as sites of inclusive public interaction where the need and means to communicate across lines of difference are acknowledged and provided. Let me only add that schools—and the state—cannot do this work alone. If such public interactions only take place under state compulsion, then society is in parlous condition. I agree with those who argue that a vibrant, voluntary “civil society” is crucial to the survival of pluralistic democratic polities.¹⁴ The state cannot create the cultural conditions for sustaining democracy by fiat, just as it cannot unilaterally shape the identities of the students it educates.

14. The relation of “civil society” to the state in democratic polities has been a major topic in political theory for the past fifteen years, inspired by the actions of dissidents in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland, before 1989. See Cohen and Arato (1992) for a comprehensive overview of the subject. Also useful are Keane (1988), and Calhoun (1992).

Given these arguments in favor of state-run, compulsory education, my final position does not look very consistent. Humanist intellectuals should resist the temptation to use state authority to bolster their particular vision of the good life, their particular belief that commercial culture bears all before it and produces miserable, pathetic, deficient, and passive selves. The intellectuals' visions must take their chances in the general rhetorical cacophony that is a democratic society. Yet I would also acknowledge the market's extraordinary power, not so much in relation to the content it purveys as in relation to its ability to shape the form taken by civil society, the non-state public sphere. The market's tendency to give wealthy voices an advantage over non-wealthy ones and to segregate groups of citizens from one another can and should be remedied by state action. Since education has become a necessity, and since we have decided that the state should supply this necessity, then intellectuals may use their institutional platform for promulgating views not likely to get a full airing in commercial fora. But they should not enlist state power to gain their views additional leverage on their audience's endorsement.

We often distinguish authority from power by saying that power compels obedience irrespective of assent whereas authority garners agreement and respect that are freely given. In a pluralistic society, cultural authority should be diffuse, with many possible allegiances available for citizens. These various allegiances and the multiple cultural identities that derive from them will not all be compatible and they will not, in their aggregation, yield a unified culture. The state should promote interaction across lines of difference, should create public spaces where such dialogue occurs, and should monitor access to such spaces to insure equality. The state may even subsidize certain groups and voices when they lack the resources the market provides to other groups for appearances in public spaces. But the state should not endorse any particular cultural vision, just as the state should not align itself with any particular religion.

Accepting this position creates a fairly sharp distinction between cultural politics and economic politics, though this will never be totally unambiguous, since there will always be troublesome borderline cases. In matters of resource allocation and economic justice, the parties involved appeal for state action, either from the legislature or the courts. They want the state to divide the pie in certain ways, or they want the state to remedy market effects. But those who wish to transform the primary allegiances, the values and beliefs, of their fellow citizens cannot (or, I am arguing, should not) appeal for state action. Instead, they must direct their

efforts directly to the citizenry. Of course, that amorphous audience is much harder to contact and much harder to get a response from. So the temptation to address the state instead is ever present. My argument is that those engaged in cultural politics can only ask the state to act to provide access, non-segregation, and equality in the public spheres in which their rhetorical appeals will be made. Given the current situation in the United States, even this limited role for the state gives it plenty to do. But we shouldn't confuse the need for massive intervention in the form of the public sphere for the state's endorsement of any particular cultural vision's content.

My argument with my Humanities Center colleagues also has a theoretical dimension. I want to resist totalized characterizations of culture that posit a centralized source of identity. So I argue that liberalism does not name a culture, that it is not an adequate or useful covering term for the complex and plural conditions in Western societies since 1750. Thus liberalism should neither be seen as the origin of contemporary forms of selfhood nor blamed for not offering an alternative form of selfhood when capitalism is considered the dominant shaper of selves. Liberalism is better understood as a response to pluralism, to the multiple and non-shared identifications of citizens. Historically crucial was the recognition (only after much bloodshed) that unity of religious belief had been lost forever in the wake of the Protestant Reformation; thus modern politics had to discover how to exist in spite of fundamental religious differences. Liberalism, then, is a set of strategies for organizing political life in the face of diversity. It obscures the specifically political questions that liberalism addresses to make liberalism solely responsible for identity formations that occur at multiple sites within a society. Some of these sites are certainly more sympathetic to liberal political arrangements than others, and we might even claim that some of these sites are consonant with certain liberal priorities (such as peace and individual well-being). But the many sites stand in complex and varied relationship to liberalism. Liberalism, then, is neither the cause of contemporary forms of selfhood nor the remedy (if a remedy is needed).

I, of course, cannot enforce my diffident liberalism, or my attempt to reign in more grandiose accounts of what liberalism encompasses. I can only try to persuade you (as I will continue to do in the next two chapters) that totalized explanations of social and identity formations are less productive for a democratic politics than decentralized, pluralistic ones. And I believe that it is both analytically and practically useful to separate

questions of institutional political responses (such as tolerance, individual rights, freedoms of speech, movement, and association) to pluralism and to capitalism (remedial state action) from efforts to foster pluralism in face of the forces that oppose it (one possible task of cultural politics). One crucial pay-off of this analytic separation is its reminder that politics does not entirely take place within the purview of the state. State-to-citizen relationships are political, but I am with Hannah Arendt in believing that we lose much of what can be valuable in politics if we ignore citizen-to-citizen relationships in public spaces—relationships that are, ideally, unmediated by the state. Diffident liberalism aims for that ideal. For that reason, my plea is that practitioners of cultural politics form allegiances with the state only under extreme duress. I do not want a “national cultural policy” emanating from the NEH or any other governmental agency, as some of my National Humanities Center colleagues advocate.

THE UNIVERSITY

My argument so far mostly pertains to compulsory education prior to university. How does a pluralist account of culture alter our understanding of the university? Basically, I agree with John Guillory and Bill Readings that the university can no longer legitimate itself as the place where young people acquire the culture common to all educated people.¹⁵ The notion that access to status requires a veneer of culture is not entirely dead, but it is certainly dying, especially in America. Bourdieu’s account of “cultural capital” does not translate very well from France to the United States. Education, especially a college degree, is more than ever the divider in terms of economic prosperity in America. But status differences, which are less strong in America once you get outside certain very rarified circles, do not map to initiation into “high” or any other kind of culture of the Arnoldian sort. Pace E. D. Hirsch (1988), there are no specific things the educated person is expected to know. Rather, the educated person is supposed to be “smart”—a portmanteau term that covers any num-

15. Guillory (1993) connects the rise of literary theory to “a certain defuncting of the literary curriculum, a crisis in the market value of its cultural capital occasioned by the emergence of a professional-managerial class which no longer requires the (primarily literary) cultural capital of the old bourgeoisie” (xii). Readings (1996) argues that the university “has outlived itself, is now a survivor of the era in which it defined itself in terms of the *historical* development, affirmation, and inculcation of national culture” (6).

ber of competencies, the most important of which (perhaps) are the capacities to carve out a prosperous life for self (and family) and to negotiate a successful, non-traumatic career in a constantly changing economic realm.¹⁶

It doesn't matter what your university degree is *in*—and matters less each year you are removed from campus. (It does matter where your degree is from.) The proliferation of programs and departments at the university over the past thirty years has spawned the multi-versity. There is nothing we give to *all* of our students. (Even Freshman English has gone by the boards as schools adopt Writing-Across-the-Curriculum programs.) Each student gets only a part, and each gets different parts, of what the university has to offer.

This situation poses grave problems for the humanities, because their legitimation has almost always been phrased in universalist terms. The argument has been that everyone, even the non-major, needs to read Shakespeare and Dickens and study the French and Russian Revolutions because they are an essential part of our culture, our tradition. We have used the cultural authority accrued by the humanities as the repository of tradition to justify the insistence that all educated persons should read and study literature and history. But now that the goal of being an educated person in that "cultured" sense has lost its hold, the humanities find themselves unprepared to make different kinds of arguments about their value.

Humanists find themselves, as always, threatened by discourses of economic utility. That's an old story, albeit a still important one. But I think a newer story is our current need to make arguments that convince both ourselves and others that while it is true that society does not need all university graduates to have studied Shakespeare, it is valuable for some university graduates to have done so. This, essentially, is the case that physics, sociology, and religious studies have made for years. They don't claim their courses should be required of all students, only that the university should provide the opportunity for some students to study these subjects. I don't think English, history, and philosophy—even if they rely on more general arguments about critical thinking and/or communicative skills in lieu of claims about their specific subject matter—will long be able to convince anyone that they offer access to some essential knowledge, viewpoint, or aptitude that not only cannot be acquired elsewhere in the mul-

16. *Ex post facto* thanks to Jeff Williams, from whom I have stolen this idea.

tiversity, but also should be a required part of every student's education. We humanists have not begun to understand ourselves and to articulate that understanding to those who fund our activities in partial terms yet. That vocabulary, those arguments, need to be developed.

More generally, the university always needs to legitimate itself in the eyes of those within it and those outside of it. Attention to shifting legitimations would indicate shifts in where and how the university feels challenged, as well as shifts in its self-image. While the university's economic utility is always an issue, I think we can identify changes in emphasis lately. The economic benefit of degrees is not currently a big issue. Universities are not particularly anxious about selling themselves to students these days as they were from 1974 to 1994, a time when the number of college-age youths was low and the percentage of those youths attending college was also low. Current realities are clear: getting a degree pays—and thus the percentage of college-age students attending college is at an all-time high.¹⁷

This influx prompts a different concern: efficiency in credentialing students. Colleges and universities, especially public institutions from the middle-tier on down to the community colleges, are facing tremendous pressure to be cost-effective. Fantasies of distance-learning, which would supposedly lessen capital and maintenance costs for physical plant and possibly labor costs for faculty (although such savings have not manifested themselves anywhere yet), are part of this drive to produce more degrees at lower cost. So is the increasing use of adjunct and part-time faculty. With respect to efficiency, the humanities, with their penchant for small classes and their army of extra PhDs, are especially vulnerable. Moreover, humanities degrees remain economically dubious.

The humanities' response to erosion of tenure lines, the threat of distance learning, and the effort to increase class size has been to preach "quality" over "quantity" or to talk about more intangible public goods, like democratic citizenship, supposedly better served by the way we've educated our students for the past fifty years. I do not disagree with such claims for our deserving a place at the university, or even a modicum of cultural authority. I am even willing to defend our cherished teaching

17. College enrollment rates of high school graduates move from 45.1 percent in 1960 to 55.4 percent in 1969, but then decline through the 1970s (although not back to 1960 levels), bottoming out at 49.3 percent in 1981. Over the past fifteen years there has been a steady rise to the current (1997) all-time high of 62 percent. That number is expected to keep creeping upward. Source: *Digest of Education Statistics 1999*.

methods, although less enthusiastically, since they often hide a lot of laziness combined with a lot of ignorance about the different learning capacities and needs of our students. But we humanists should not expect to convince everyone. A healthy skepticism about our received notions about ourselves is the beginning of understanding how they might sound pretty hollow to the outsiders we are trying to persuade. Camp meetings of beleaguered humanists singing the old tunes to one another do nothing to further our position in public debates. Deep and lasting disagreements characterize a pluralistic culture like ours, and while we need legitimations of our activities that convince ourselves, we also need to consider the possible legitimacy of others' criticisms. We cannot rely on institutional inertia, a few old saws, and some sentimental well-heeled alumni to insure our continued presence on campus. As public money withdraws, private and/or corporate wealth increasingly finances American universities, both public and private. The humanities are unlikely to garner much direct support from bottom-line-driven corporations, but they need to bolster universities' resolve to retain some independence from the supplier of funds, and the tendency of universities to shift their activities toward where the money is. This will be no easy task. Everything in American attitudes toward money since 1970 has run in the direction of those who pay the piper calling the tune. Stock-holders have demanded ever greater profits, thus altering paternalistic firms like Kodak that once offered superb benefit packages and job security for employees while also being a major civic benefactor. I don't have proof (and don't know how I would get it), but my sense is that private donations to the university increasingly are targeted toward specific uses as opposed to "unrestricted gifts." Those who pay tuition—parents and students alike—now often see themselves as customers paying for a service and expect "satisfaction" defined in business-client terms. Tax-payers and their representatives have demanded greater accountability on the part of public agencies, especially schools. (I can't resist noting that such accountability doesn't seem to extend to those who build highways at outrageous costs and with even more outrageous cost over-runs.) We educators are in the tough position of having to legitimate our professional *bona fides*, of having to say that we know better than you do how to educate your children, so you need to pay the bill, but leave us free to create and implement the program of study.

The intensity of these demands from its sources of revenue has everyone at the university on the defensive these days, not just the humanists.

But the humanities have no way to directly generate income. They do not, generally speaking, have a product they can take to market that will secure substantial funds. Their product is education and the cash cow of tuition has just about reached its upper limit. The massive tuition increases of the past twenty years have simply bled that stone dry (except at a few very prestigious schools). There is no more money to be had from students and their parents and the banks from which they loan money. The money chase now is all about the funds needed to augment tuition revenue, which never pays the full ride. The sciences, and to some extent the social sciences, can sell the knowledge they produce in the marketplace. Since the humanities cannot, their fate is more intimately linked to the university's ability to legitimate a certain independence from those who give it money while convincing them to keep the money rolling in. The spenders who want a specific return for their bucks will not be doing business with the humanities' departments.

In this context, I want to list sixteen arguments that universities deploy to legitimate themselves as serving either a generalized public good or as serving the particular needs of its paying clientele. I hope that I have been inclusive here—and would be interested in additions to this list. Most of these will be familiar to my readers, so I do not offer extensive commentary. The various reasons for the university's existence are not all compatible, and they appeal to a wide variety of ways to understand "the good." Part of my point is to illustrate how pluralistic the multiversity is, how many arguments are made about its value. I also hope the list will help my readers think about which arguments are currently ascendant, which less frequently invoked. I have refrained from evaluating the merit of the arguments; the list says nothing more and nothing less than someone in the university legitimates his or her activities this way. Finally, although couched as arguments, I do think that each item listed is tied to things actually being done at the university. In other words, someone at the university is working to realize the vision of the good to which the legitimating argument appeals.

1. *Culture*. The university is a repository of culture, and it transmits that culture to students. Culture is at times understood as a whole, as "common" to the whole society. At other times, culture is understood as multiple and various, with only parts imparted to students.

2. *Civic*. The university produces citizens capable of democracy.

3. *Cultivation.* The university provides the means toward self-formation or personal growth, especially (but not exclusively) in respect to values and meaning. There is a link here between the college experience and maturation. Hence the cultivation of work habits and self-management can also figure here.

4. *Economic worth of the degree.* Beyond the benefit to the individual, the university also provides a means of upward mobility for the able, hence enabling meritocratic access.

5. *Economic impact on the local, state, and/or national economy.* There are various different ways of claiming beneficial economic consequences of the university's existence.

6. *Economic benefits of creating a trained and educated work-force.*

7. *Prestige.* This one is tricky since it is rarely nakedly stated, perhaps because it is less a justification of the university as a social institution and more a justification of this particular institution through comparison with less worthy rivals. There is a lot of talk of "excellence" or of "competitive advantages," but less of the sheer pride in being "No. 1." The brilliance of the US News rankings is their exact replication of the AP rankings of college football and basketball teams, thus transferring the sports fan's obsession with relative status to the more staid ground of the colleges as colleges. Universities attract students and donors and hire faculty on the basis of prestige, just as some faculty activities are geared toward enhancing prestige.

8. *The production of useful knowledge through research.*

9. *The production of useless knowledge through research.* Not as paradoxical as might first appear. "Pure" research may prove useful—socially or economically—in the long term. Universities argue that they can take the long view—and the risk that something might prove utterly useless—because insulated from direct bottom-line concerns. But they will also argue that they can indulge human curiosity, the urge to know, apart from any benefit beyond learning something new.

10. *Autonomy.* The argument here is that freedom, not just from economic pressures but also from ideological, political, or institutional demands, fosters creativity. The new emerges from the unshackled work the university enables. Of course, this argument assumes a positive attitude toward change and novelty. But it is also connected with certain notions of objective knowledge and how it can be obtained. Issues of academic freedom find their place here as well.

11. *Critique*. Another variant of the argument from autonomy. Here the benefit is not new and objective knowledge production, but the untrammled examination of prevailing norms and beliefs. Critical thinking, the ability and freedom to question everything, is linked to self-stretching, but also to the renovation of society.

12. *Moral*. Similar to critique, but with a much more positive spin. Not so much the critical examination of norms and beliefs as their articulation in a form that solicits others' agreement even as it makes one's own values clear.

13. *Creative*. The university encourages and fosters creativity, intellectually and artistically.

14. *Professional*. The university is a major player in the creation and maintenance of professional competencies, and thus protects (and often provides) the goods and services professionals offer to society.

15. *Utopian*. The university models certain forms of social interaction, as argued in my first chapter. I guess a less utopian version is the idea that our students' "social life" during college is also a valuable learning experience. Certainly, we expect students to "experiment" in various ways (sexually, with drugs, with different living arrangements, with different schedules of work/play/sleep) during their college years.

16. *Community Preserving/Community Creating*. A variant of numbers 1 (Culture) and 15 (Utopian) perhaps, but worth a separate entry. The point here is more the preservation and/or creation of a subculture, a particular communal identity that recognizes its difference from the mainstream or the common. Examples range from Brigham Young University and Bob Jones University to Bryn Mawr and other all-woman colleges.¹⁸ Less extreme would be the social networks that originate in college, where people do expect to meet others who will be life-long friends and (sometimes) business associates. And, of course, lots of students form romantic attachments with people they meet at the university.

What should be obvious from this list is that different constituencies want and expect very different things from the university. I take it that all sixteen arguments appeal to someone—and that none of them appeals to everyone. Some of them more obviously fit with humanists' values than others. The thorny issue is whether any of them directly threatens the continued existence of the humanities or, more drastically, the university. Two

18. I owe this point to my colleague David Whisnant.

dangers lurk. The first is that some of these legitimations could actually lead the university down a path that would destroy its integrity or its ability to work in ways that fulfill its other legitimations. I don't believe this is the case, but not everyone would agree. Many in the humanities would argue that the university should never do work in direct return for a fee. I don't see that radical a distinction between sponsored research and paid-for education. In both cases the professor provides something to someone who pays for it. I won't rehearse the full argument here, but will rest content with highlighting the point of contention. My position is that the university can march forward on all the fronts identified by my list; none of the items necessarily excludes the accomplishment of any of the others. I may not like what that guy over there is doing, but his doing that does not prevent me from doing what I deem valuable.

The second danger seems much more real to me: some of the activities of the multiversity will garner financial, institutional, or popular support at the expense of others. Absolute repudiation of some of the activities may occur at certain universities, but such explicit abandonment of current activities is unlikely to occur across the range of all colleges and universities. But drastic shifts in relative resource allocation and status are possible across the board. The humanities are in decline, not, I think, in absolute as much as in relative terms. That is, there has not been an absolute repudiation of the humanities, but instead more attention paid to and money directed toward activities that respond to legitimations that the humanities do not particularly address.

Not surprisingly, with the decline of legitimation in terms of a common culture, the humanities have turned to other legitimations (self-cultivation, creativity, critical thinking, democratic citizenship). I don't think we humanists need—or are likely to find—many new arguments. I think we need to work from arguments, loyalties, and commitments already in place. Our constituencies will be limited; they will not constitute everyone with a stake in the university, perhaps not even a majority. So we may be in the difficult position of all those who strive for minority rights, access, and resources in a democracy. Our position as a minority might help us learn the new non-universal vocabulary I believe we now need to explain what we do to those who stand outside those activities.

I refuse to mourn the loss of the universal. And I absolutely refuse to hanker after a cultural authority we never really had (its existence is always displaced to an ever-receding past). I also refuse to denigrate those for whom the humanities or the life of the mind are not their chosen path

through life. The university is as contradictory, contentious, multi-faceted, and multi-purposed as society at large. It is not our anointed kingdom. The state has a responsibility to maintain the university and a responsibility to insure and increase access to higher education as it becomes increasingly necessary for economic well-being. But that responsibility does not extend to supplementing any authority the functionaries of the university might gain through their thoughtful articulation and promulgation of their view from within it—views then offered (sometimes) to those outside the university as well. Quite the contrary. Our stated views and our displayed activities must do all the work of persuasion on their own.