

# Interventions

## Neoliberalized Knowledge

Wendy Brown

Only a few years ago, “crisis of the humanities” might have referred to the long slow decline in the numbers of university students studying the humanities, or to one or another element of the culture wars—identity politics, poststructuralism, new historicism, cultural studies, politicized teaching and research, Eurocentrism, the politics of literary canons. Today, those topics have the feel of another epoch, and arguments about them look like sporting among the rich, which it turns out they were. In the context of withered endowments and slashed state funding, departments are being shrunk, majors are being eliminated, three-year BAs and online degree programs are being ramped up in the “quality sector,” and vocational education for the many is being promulgated as a substitute for post-secondary liberal arts degrees.

In this context, humanities education and research at public universities are not merely in crisis but in danger of extinction. Outside the university, the affordability and desirability of nonmarketable knowledge for the many is steadily shrinking. Inside, the growing governance of everything by market metrics and rationality (the process of neoliberalization), submits all domains of university activity to principles of accounting and justification in which the humanities fare especially badly and in which humanities practitioners are poorly schooled, unwilling to navigate, or both. As universities are increasingly run as and for business, and as the value of well-educated rather than technically savvy and entrepreneurial citizens declines, the ground for the humanities in public higher education is literally washing away.<sup>1</sup>

If there is worth in humanistic endeavor apart from humanists’ own attraction to and satisfaction in it, if the humanities are vital for the flourishing of humankind and the planet, then we need a hard-headed account of what is threatening them *and* a compelling counter to this threat. As a start on the former, I will analyze two recent episodes in the endangerment of the humanities. The first episode is somewhat parochial, probably not on

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*History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 2011.  
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anyone's radar outside my own small field of study. The second is more widely known.

### **The Penn State Political Theory Controversy**

In 2006, the Political Science Department at Penn State University formally discontinued political theory as a major subfield for graduate students and moved to effectively eliminate political theory from its faculty ranks.<sup>2</sup> In some ways, this decision consummated a long historical trend: since the middle of the last century, when the behavioral revolution wheeled the study of politics in the positivist direction it would take thenceforth, political theory, once considered foundational to the discipline, has become ever more of an epistemological and stylistic outlier. However, the decision by a nationally-ranked political science department to effectively abolish the subfield of political theory was understandably greeted by the political theory world with outrage and condemnation. Petitions were organized and letters sent from the major political theory associations excoriating and denouncing the decision, even threatening boycotts of the Penn State department and its PhD students.<sup>3</sup>

One of my political theory colleagues, however, had the temerity to ask how our condemnation of this act squared with a larger recognition that the conventional subdivisions of political science were bankrupt and counterproductive. Artifacts of Cold War and colonial mappings of knowledge, and of scientific conceits hardened into methodological empires, the subfields are also at odds with political theory's reliance on interdisciplinarity and inclination to rub out bright lines between theory and facticity, empirics and interpretation, political reality and political understanding. Why not applaud and exploit rather than condemn the enfolding of political theory into political science, my colleague Timothy Kaufman-Osborn queried in an American Political Science Association panel devoted to the controversy.<sup>4</sup> On what serious basis, he asked, could we defend an incoherent and nonunified academic enterprise defined mainly in terms of its outsider status to the rest of political science? What identity or boundaries could be attributed to this subfield that were not fictional, partial, policing, regulatory, and/or self-undermining insofar as they excluded political theory from the study of politics proper? Why not seize the moment to urge all political scientists to abandon ungainly and counterproductive subdivisions and turf wars and become scholars of politics again?

Kaufman-Osborn's provocation has certain convergences and contiguities with those of Columbia University philosopher of religion, Mark Taylor. In his widely-read *New York Times* editorial, "End the University as We Know It" (recently expanded into a book), Taylor argues that existing academic organizations of knowledge are objectively indefensible.<sup>5</sup> Hyperspecialization and professionalization, tenure, narrow modes of recognition and the need for a graduate student labor force together maintain a system directly at odds with the teaching and research needed by this world and this generation. In place of existing departments and disciplines, Taylor urges flexible, problem-centered groupings of faculty and research institutes, all of which would have built-in sunset clauses to ensure that they are not perpetuated by narrow institutional interests rather than broader, more accountable rationales.

Certainly Kaufman-Osborn's and Taylor's critical arguments resonate with the extent to which existing academic organization and practices are often anachronistic, interest-laden, counter to fecund or useful thinking and learning. Yet, in the guise of a certain hard-headed realism and lack of sentimentalism about their own fields, both abjure questions about the survivability of the humanistic knowledges they imagine folded into a mix of science, social science, and even professional school research and curriculums. Would the humanities survive the loss of its own fortresses? And, yet, we must also turn the question around: can this treasure survive within those fortresses as they are currently constructed?

To provide some depth to these twin questions, let us return to the particular predicament of political theory within political science. Even political theorists who avow no antagonism toward the field of political science necessarily pursue their work at an angle to it. This is not the result of indifference to "real politics," an honor that more often goes to the mathematicized end of the discipline, but of the inherently nonscientific epistemic orbit in which political theory moves. Even when it does not place "truth" within quotation or question marks, political theory rejects the reduction of truths about political life to neutral description, measurement, models, or testable hypotheses. It sets aside, when it does not forthrightly reject, the truth claims of positivism, formalism, empiricism, and linguistic transparency. Political theory does not inherently refute social science, but does suspend it as an exclusive approach to the themes and topics they share.

However, the overwhelming hegemony on the "science" side makes a reverse of the Penn State situation unimaginable. Political theory is in no

position to abolish or colonize the other subfields (just as Taylor's suggestion that we organize our research and teaching according to problems rather than disciplines does not guarantee humanists a seat at any table while it fairly assures science seats at all of them). And if, over the course of the twentieth century, the growing marginalization of political theory within political science issues largely from the fact that political theory stands for humanities-style inquiry within the social sciences, then this situation is compounded by the steadily widening divide between the humanities and "hard" social sciences. The closer political science draws to the protocols of both science and business (more about the latter in the second story), the more closed it becomes to humanities modes of inquiry. Indeed, science and business protocols are resistant almost to the point of immunity to such modes. What are these modes as they potentially bear on political science? There are, to begin with, developed practices of epistemological and ontological reflexivity that would permit appreciation of the unstable, culturally variable and indeterminate nature of the constituent terms and practices of political life that the humanities could offer. Then there are the probing analyses of subterranean social and political powers which humanities fields have developed in the recent decades, those powers organizing language, bodies, and spaces that in turn construct, array, and relate the collective and individual subjects, identities, and places studied by political science. Too, the humanities feature techniques of reading and interpreting meanings that may be conscious, unconscious, intentional, inadvertent or disavowed, a range for which the social sciences rarely train the eyes and ears. And, humanists have struggled with questions about the weight, shape, and force of history in the present; that is, with thinking about history not simply in terms of examples, accounts of development or context, but in terms of history's power to configure, condition, ghost or constrain our present orders, ordinances, predicaments and possibilities.

Thus, political theory's inflection by humanities concerns and training challenges what political scientists ordinarily take as the epistemological, ontological, and discursive givens organizing the political past and present. This inflection permits, as well, the attunement to nonmanifest powers; the unsettling of meanings, terms and grammars; and the exploration of incoherencies, inconsistencies, and exclusions in how politics is conceived and practiced. All political theory does not do this, of course, but this is the consistently available feature of the humanities-inflected nature of the field.

Yet the very capacities and concerns generating political theory's unique value today also account for its growing marginalization in the discipline, and sustain the diffidence or antagonism between theory and the rest of political science. Theorists approach many of the same topics—from war to globalization to democracy—with different questions, analytics, angles of vision, and supplemental literatures than those of mainstream social science. Yet, as the epistemological and methodological outliers, political theorists are often tacitly or overtly regarded by the rest of the discipline as irrelevant, unreadable, unscientific or all of the above. For students of power and hegemony, this regard ought not to be surprising, appalling, or wounding, nor ought we to imagine that it anoints political theory with virtue. We cannot expect to be cherished by the hegemonic knowledge regimes we work outside of or question, any more than the stinging fly can expect to be loved by the horse.

So how, in this context, does political theory make a case for itself? At this point, we can begin to allow the political theory question to stand for the broader precariousness of the humanities today, for the condition of all fields of study that are neither protected by the mantle of science nor directly productive, applicable, convertible to consultancies or profit. On what ground can and ought humanists defend their enterprise in a time of ubiquitous cultural and academic positivism, slender resources, emphasis on technical and applied knowledge, low expectations of citizen participation in complex problems, and the prevalence of market models for all knowledge and conduct? To build this question more fully, I want to turn from the scientization of knowledge concerned with human action, possibility, and behavior to the second story I promised, this one featuring the neoliberalization of the academy as a whole.

### **The End of the University As We Know It**

The University of California, the largest and most acclaimed public university system in the world, currently faces daunting fiscal challenges. Following two decades of slowly shrinking budgets, in just the past two years state support for the university has been slashed by 20% and that number may well be doubled in the next several years. Meanwhile, student fees at the University of California have increased by 330% since 2000, again with more fee increases on the near horizon. This rapid disinvestment by the state was precipitated by the combined effects of the global recession, the

financial meltdown, and a set of California-specific problems. The latter includes the collapse of enormous housing wealth and the loss of the growth engines provided in the last quarter of the twentieth century by the Silicon Valley and aerospace industries. It includes, as well, choked revenue streams resulting from extreme limits on taxation voted in by the public in 1978, and from years of gridlocked state politics. In short, California's public sector has been a mess in the making for 30 years, one revealed but not caused by the recent economic blowouts. This means that even if there were a significant national or global economic recovery, the California mess would remain.<sup>6</sup>

Neoliberalism, that often confusing signifier for a unique governmental and social rationality—one that extends market principles to every reach of human life—germinated in California during the Reagan gubernatorial years, 1967–1975. It wasn't called neoliberalism then, but rather, Reaganomics, supply-side economics or tax revolts or rebellions against “big government.” Retrospectively, however, one can see at the heart of these reforms basic neoliberal principles of deregulation, marketization, and privatization of all public goods, a forthright attack on the public sector, and the beginnings of casting every human endeavor and activity in entrepreneurial terms. Again, more than mere economic policy, neoliberalism is a governing social and political rationality that submits all human activities, values, institutions, and practices to market principles. It formulates everything in terms of capital investment and appreciation (including and especially humans themselves), whether a teenager building a resume for college, a twenty-something seeking a mate, a working mother returning to school, or a corporation buying carbon offsets. As a governing rationality, neoliberalism extends from the management of the state itself to the soul of the subject; it renders health, education, transportation, nature, and art into individual consumer goods, and converts patients, students, drivers, athletes, and museum-goers alike into entrepreneurs of their own needs and desires who consume or invest in these goods.

Neoliberal rationality takes aim at the very idea of a public good as it strives to make a world in the image of the sentence famously uttered by Margaret Thatcher, one of its most ardent and unabashed proponents: “There is no such thing as society. . . [only] individual men and women.”<sup>7</sup> Neoliberalism thus calls for formerly public goods to be privatized in at least three senses. First, they are outsourced to nongovernment for-profit providers, hence submitted to calculations of profit rather than public benefit.

Second, they are marketed and priced as individual consumer rather than public goods. Thus do toll roads and fee-per-use transport, school voucher programs and high tuition institutions replace publicly funded transportation infrastructure and public education. Third, as both funding and accountability for formerly publicly-provisioned goods are devolved to the lowest and smallest units, these units themselves are forced into wholly entrepreneurial conduct: departments, teachers, students, office workers all have to protect and advance their own interests without regard for common or public ones.

Far more than a challenge to government spending and regulation, then, neoliberal rationality challenges the very idea of a public good—from libraries to pensions, preserved wilderness to public pools, clean transportation to a healthy educated public. Neoliberal rationality also displaces democracy and equality as governing principles in provisioning goods like education; instead of advancing these principles, education becomes an individual means to an individual end, something individuals may or may not choose to invest in. Neoliberalism thus shrinks to a vanishing point the crucial interval classical liberalism established between inegalitarian and undemocratic features of the market on the one hand, and a liberal democratic political and legal order minimally committed to equal access, shared power, and a common good on the other. As this interval disappears, even lip service to such commitments, let alone legal and other institutional realization of them, is replaced with a ubiquitous, saturating market rationality. The market is not merely secured by liberal democracy, as it was in previous modalities of capitalism, but comes to govern the institutions and practices of “democracy” and to exhaust its meaning.

In the United States, this challenge to democratic power sharing and equality secured by public goods appears as early as California’s Proposition 13, the 1978 voter-ratified legislation responsible for reducing California’s current per capita spending on public education to forty-eighth in the nation—this from a state that generates more wealth than 95% of the countries in the world. Conventionally described as a populist tax revolt, Prop 13 thwarted California Supreme Court decisions requiring property tax revenue to be redistributed such that schools in rich and poor neighborhoods would be funded equally. In this regard, Prop 13 was not merely a rebellion against taxes but against court-mandated equality; it rejected the very value of quality public education for all. It was also something of a rebellion against one of the most

rudimentary principles of liberal democracy: in addition to capping property taxes, the law it enacted stipulated that all state revenue measures—from taxes to budgets—would henceforth require a two-thirds legislative majority. So, in addition to subverting the principle of quality public education as a shared public value, Prop 13 took aim at democracy itself: no mere political majority would have the power to fund a public sector.

California's Prop 13 accomplished overtly and in plain sight what would soon become a more subtly and routinely implemented neoliberal norm: the erosion of the very idea of public goods like education, of progressive taxation to support them, of equality as a matter of access and opportunity, and of shared power as the essential content of democracy. As these principles saturate the culture, they easily subvert the mission and educational content of the public university. At the same time that education is rendered a consumer good in which students invest (often by incurring considerable debt) to advance their own prospects, articles and blogs everywhere question the relevance of a liberal arts education to prospects for economic success. The value of being an educated individual is reduced to its income-earning capacities; being an educated *public* registers no value at all by this metric. On the other side, universities are considered appropriately run as firms—articles and blogs everywhere are scolding them for doing anything less—and erased are the lines that have long distinguished business and university worlds at the level of finance, organization, or rationale.

The neoliberalization of public universities, often referred to as a process of “privatization,” is not simply a matter of converting them into private universities. In fact, the process of making public universities entrepreneurial submits them to far more vulgar forms of marketization, with less protection of their general mission and specific goals, than private nonprofit institutions suffer even today. Like all large nonprofits, private universities are vulnerable to deep involvement in the finance capital and stock markets; their missions and priorities may be influenced or compromised by large donors and corporately endowed research institutes and professional schools. But precisely because Yale, Swarthmore, and Tufts have long been structured as private entities oriented to an elite segment of the population, because they have explicit practices for titrating the effects of being tuition-driven and reliant on large donors (practices that prevent excessive parental and donor influence on the structure and curriculum of the university), and above all, because their students and donors are frequently investing in precisely the



liberal arts education they have on offer, private universities have a plethora of ways of protecting themselves from the kind of merciless configuration by neoliberalism now besetting the University of California. Indeed, they are largely cushioned by the long promise their mission has fulfilled: to produce and reproduce a broadly educated economic, social, and political elite. To see this from a more general perspective, we need only remember that capitalism in the metropole is less harsh and more regulated than at its poorest and most recently conquered edges. The third world enterprise zone sweatshop contrasts with boutique production or the pleasures of working at Google or Pixar just as the neoliberalization of Paris or New York's Upper East Side is less vulgar and violent than the neoliberalization of Port au Prince. And, if neoliberalism always produces harsher effects in peripheral sectors and nations, then the neoliberalization of public entities—their literal selling off—is often crudest of all.

Thus, rather than the ambiguous term “privatization,” the more ungainly one, neoliberalization, most effectively captures what happens to education, students, and the public as state funding is replaced by a combination of corporate support and skyrocketing tuition and indebtedness in “public” higher education. At the University of California, its effects include the following:

*Decreased commitment to educating California's best high school students, a shift from meritocracy to plutocracy, and a retreat from equal opportunity.* As a full fee-paying international elite replaces a portion of middle-income California students, access to high quality public education is increasingly driven by family income rather than by student merit or public commitment to an educated citizenry.<sup>8</sup> Thus does that old liberal democratic axiom, equality of opportunity, compress in both meaning and practice.

*Intensified inequality in every university strata and a diminished sense of shared purpose across the university among staff, faculty, and students.* Neoliberalization has wrought huge differentials in faculty salaries within and across departments, divisions and schools.<sup>9</sup> It has also generated enormous and growing differentials in department and divisional resources along with proposals to variably price undergraduate majors and degrees according to demand, expense of instruction for the degree, and predicted future income. Apart from the stratifications these practices produce, they mark the end of a shared purpose across the university, departing as they do from the principle that diverse costs and revenue capacities ought to carry and supplement each other. Some

curricula and research require expensive labs and equipment or subsidies for field work, others only a great library. Some have ready external grant support, others not. Some subject material can only be taught and learned in small and intimate settings; others may be suited to large lecture halls and even on-line learning. Only when the university is conceived as a whole, serving a wide public purpose, can these differences be accommodated. That shared purpose is devastated by the entrepreneurial principle that each operation lives or dies according to its ability to float its own boat.<sup>10</sup> The recent decision by the UCLA business school to “secede” from the university and go fully private is only an extreme expression of this phenomenon.

*Decreased support for all nonentrepreneurial elements of the university and increased support for those regarded as potentially commodifiable or directly profitable.*<sup>11</sup> This not only spells trouble for the humanities, arts, and soft social sciences (which actually subsidize the sciences through teaching loads and comparatively inexpensive costs), it endangers all basic, exploratory, and speculative research, the kind widely understood by scholars as the knowledge fundament from which applications develop. Neoliberalization also means research increasingly contoured by and to corporate and foundation funding, research both curved toward potential sponsors and which risks overt compromise or corruption by the need to serve, attract, or retain them. No longer a problem confined only to the sciences, medical and business schools (where the often scandalous influences of Big Pharma, Big Oil, and Big Banks on research questions *and* results are well documented), the pressure on humanists and social scientists to find external support for individual research, institutes and even departments now induces all to ask: “What can we study that will sell?” Apart from displacing scholars’ own interests, questions, or approaches, this has an obvious dampening effect on a number of traditions in the humanities, including the study of classic texts, absorption with great philosophical questions, pursuit of seemingly arcane but potentially ground-shifting historical problems, and work in critical theory.

*Jeopardized academic freedom.* Academic freedom is subtly challenged by the constriction on free-ranging scholarly imagination and innovation entailed in the press for applied and commodifiable research, a press that sometimes openly contours the nature and findings of academic research. Neoliberalization also tends to silence faculty concerns about the influence of certain large donors.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, academic freedom as we have known and protected

it for decades in this country cannot survive in universities configured as corporations and reliant on corporate support: what private enterprise rewards, let alone tolerates, intellectual independence or public critique of its means and ends among its personnel?

*Retreat from public and common values and concern with the public good.* The effects here range from retrenched commitments to educate the public, to retrenched commitments to a broad liberal arts curriculum, to retrenched commitments to research oriented toward public benefit. The more that public universities depend upon corporate funding and formulate their research and educational products as provisioning the market, the less they will serve and promulgate an order of values apart from capital appreciation and profit. When this is combined with yet another effect of neoliberalization, the replacement of principles and protocols of shared governance with managerial and business principles, and increased involvement by non-academics in academic matters (whether corporate funders participating in institutes or managerially-minded administrators deciding academic priorities), neoliberalized knowledge is likely to reach a peak heretofore reserved for dystopic genres of fiction.

Again, it is important to be clear about what is happening here. Imbrication with the world of financial and corporate capital is not new for either public or private universities. What is novel is the degree to which the university is being merged with this world and remade in its image—its powers, needs, and values. This is the merging that promises to radically transform the university's conception of its enterprise along with the organization and content of its practices. This merging is corroborated by a neoliberalized public that increasingly judges universities through market metrics: the enhancement of earning power for students and the development of profitable research.<sup>13</sup> Neoliberalization replaces education aimed at deepening and broadening intelligence and sensibilities, developing historical consciousness and hermeneutic adroitness, acquiring diverse knowledge and literacies, becoming theoretically capacious and politically and socially perspicacious, with education aimed at honing technically-skilled entrepreneurial actors adept at gaming any system. Again, neoliberalization is not merely a question of who pays for instruction (states, donors, or students), or for research (the public, government, or corporations), but of the values and principles organizing content, priorities, and assessments.<sup>14</sup> When neo-

liberalization is complete, when all academic knowledge, and indeed, all university activity is valued according to its capacity to augment human, corporate or finance capital, the humanities, if they exist at all, will be barely recognizable. At this point, it is not only medieval English poetry, Sanskrit, and political philosophy that disappears from the curriculum, but thinking, teaching, and learning that pertains to questions of what, apart from capital accumulation and appreciation, planetary life might be about or worth. This is the disappearance of the humanities, to be sure, but also of an educated citizenry and hence, of the soul and sinew of democracy.

### **Humanities and the Resistance to Neoliberalization**

What is to be done? What kind of case and/or cocoon can we make for the humanities that could protect against erasure by scientific paradigms on one side and neoliberalization on the other?

Let me first identify what I'm fairly sure will not work, such as vague rhetoric about critical thinking. There is a neoliberal market for thinking to be sure, but what contributes to the appreciation of human capital today is not what humanists call critical thinking, but innovative technological thinking on the one hand and strategic-tactical thinking on the other. Nor does critical thinking have much appeal to an increasingly disheartened and anxious populace feeling anything but a surfeit of meaning and possibility. More generally, the claim that the humanities school students in developing, making, and honing good arguments, while true, does not strike me as having the purchase it once did. Alas, the quality, as opposed to the technical or rhetorical effect of arguments, appears ever less important in a neoliberal world. Nor is our place likely to be secured through encomiums to great books, great traditions, or even great civilizations. Columbia and Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge, will remain willing conservators of such things for a few more decades, but this willingness will not extend to dollar-starved public universities and their socio-economically anxious clientele. Like critical thinking, great historical ideas and literatures do not address what markets or students think they need. If we are going to preserve curricula featuring such works, and I think we should, it will have to be through a rubric other than appeal to their intrinsic value.

Yet I also think we are unlikely to make a successful case for the humanities within the frameworks of science and neoliberalism: such efforts will not only fail to protect us but, as we know from endeavors to date in this

domain, they have terribly deleterious effects on humanistic inquiry itself. We are already suffering from metrics borrowed from the sciences—“impact factor” to judge the value of our writing and journals, page counts and Google Scholar counts dominating the assessment of scholarly “output.” For a vivid picture of the humanities submitted to a grotesque fusion of scientific and neoliberal measures, one has only to look across the pond at the effective dismantling of British higher education in the humanities through two decades of regulation by the Research Assessment Exercises (RAE), recently renamed and recalibrated as the Research Excellence Framework (REF).<sup>15</sup>

It is obvious enough that the more the humanities aim to comport with entrepreneurial or scientific criteria, the less magisterial, imaginative and critical they will be. Perhaps more counterintuitively, the less relevant to public life and public values they will be, and it is this relevance that holds whatever promise of a future we have. Neither scientific nor entrepreneurial criteria will save us, and to the extent that they save some remnant or trace, it will not be one of much value. Rather, the challenge facing humanists today is to persuade a public that our worth lies apart from science and the market and that this elsewhere is one that a democracy, a self-governing or even self-regarding people, cannot do without. This means developing a compelling account of what we do that articulates with extant public meanings, desire and anxieties without capitulating to the dominant normative valuations and schematics of them and especially without submitting to neoliberal criteria. The point is not that the humanities are beautiful yet useless, or that humanities research, like space exploration, has future potential benefits for humankind that cannot be predicted—two common ways of defending the humanities today.<sup>16</sup> Rather, this value pertains to the kinds of knowing and feeling beings the humanities generate, as well as the kinds of knowledge the humanities circulates about and in cultural, political, and social life. The trouble is that such beings and knowledges rarely comport well with neoliberalism or science—they are not scientific and are not what “the market wants.” Our task, therefore, is to make them into what people ought to want, what democracies need, what a habitable human and planetary future cannot do without.

In this regard, it is important to remember, and build upon, the extent to which the humanities stand as the antithesis of what neoliberalism is making of the world and its inhabitants, its reduction of both to a platform for capital accumulation and appreciation. They are thus a prophylactic against

the reduction of us to specks of human capital, against the flattening and hollowing of self and world toward which neoliberalism drives. This makes them critical, not by nature, but by virtue of their positioning in a neoliberal world, not because humanists tend to be on the left or love critical thinking, but because the humanities counter the one-dimensionality of *homo economicus*. They speak to, cultivate and elevate precisely what a neoliberal rationality would extinguish in us individually and collectively—not only historical, philosophical and literary consciousness and viewpoints, not only notions of the political exceeding interest and featuring shared power and purpose, but the play of ambiguity, vulnerability, awe, ambivalence, psychic depths, boundary, identity, spirit, and other elements foreign to neoliberal rationality.

But here's the catch: the majority of humanities research today barely permits our cognition or memory of these powers. Disciplinary professionalization and norms have contoured our research, along with much graduate training, so much toward professional debates and literatures that the broad and public value of the humanities is hardly apparent to many of its practitioners, let alone to outsiders. I am not speaking here of mere esotericism—quarrels over a few lines of Shakespeare, a new historical contextualization that changes the meaning of a phrase in Augustine's *Confessions*—but of the way in which the disciplines and subspecialties have created their own insulated lexicons, knowledges, debates, and systems of recognition and recompense. If the university as a whole increasingly resembles a corporation, the knowledge business today is a monstrous hybrid of priestly orders and niche industries.

The wager, I think, has been that professionalization will save the humanities from budgetary chopping blocks. Protected by our journals, societies, ladders of recognition, protocols of research, and regulated hot topics, we imagine a security that would not be available if we bucked these conventions and renewed the purposes that make humanistic inquiry legible, attractive, and compelling to a (buying) public. I think this is a serious miscalculation. What provides legitimacy and a modicum of protection in the short run will not secure us in the long run. Indeed, the Penn State story with which we began, and the story of other eliminations or attempted eliminations of prestigious humanities centers—the Department of Philosophy at Middlesex University, the Center for Ethics at the University of Toronto—are reminders that markers internal to a particular discipline constitute no protection against metrics that devalue the discipline altogether. As importantly,

professionalization undermines the passions, practices, and interests that would justify humanities to the public and even to the larger university at the moment that neoliberalized knowledge criteria threaten to eliminate it from standard university educational and research programs.

This is not to argue against esotericism, close readings, or concern with obscure features of canonical texts. These are constituent elements of our endeavor, including in projects drawn from or seeking to think about contemporary ethical, aesthetic, cultural, or political life. However, we cannot rest our public or even academic merit on this kind of endeavor and expect to be cherished or preserved for it. Nor is this to argue that every humanist ought to be a public intellectual; such bids from scholars mostly result in foolishness. Rather, it is to underscore the importance of drawing our research problems from, and contouring our teaching toward, worldly or pedagogical rather than professional orbits, so that even our deliciously arcane moments retain a legible connection with purposes broader than our own small professional universes.

Let me compress this last point to conclude: for the humanities to survive the convergent challenges of scientization and neoliberalization within and outside the academy, we do not have to become marketable, immediately applicable, or scientific in method, but I think we must recover our connection and value to enriched human life. This means turning away from comportment with professions that provide us our own academic quarter and storefront, a comportment that has rendered us unable to explain or justify our value to the public or even other university colleagues, leaving us instead with either a useless nose-in-the-air posture toward those too ignorant to appreciate what we do or an equally useless moral righteousness about how good and true, if undervalued, we are. Saving the humanities thus requires resisting norms of neoliberalism and science and many of the professionalizing norms of our own disciplines. Only through such resistance can we make and exploit the link between humanistic inquiry and prevent the complete neoliberalization of knowledge and humanity. Our work has the potential to be a literal weapon against neoliberal rationality and its cannibalization of every kind of subject—academic, human, nonhuman. This work can barricade what may be most vulnerable, grand, precious, or worthy in human existence and knowledge from neoliberal destruction. It can also challenge a neoliberal table of values with alternatives. But this is only possible if we recover in our work as scholars and teachers what is ineffably moving, sub-

lime, or meaningful in the humanities. It is only so if we place these elements at the heart of a campaign to save higher education from being reduced to an appendage of capital's latest and most remarkable modality.

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## Notes

1. Many others have identified and written about this problem. One of the very best is Frank Donoghue, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (2008).

2. The discipline of political science in the United States is subdivided into four main fields: American, comparative (i.e., non-American), international relations, and theory. "Methods" is now often considered a fifth major subfield and there are a panoply of minor fields, e.g., area studies, public law, behavior, formal modeling.

3. These letters, along with Timothy Kaufman-Osborn's paper on the problem, "Political Theory as Profession and as Subfield," and a set of critical responses appeared in *Political Research Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Sept. 2010). There is some overlap between a portion of the current essay and my contribution to that discussion, "Political Theory is Not a Luxury: A Response to Timothy Kaufman-Osborn's 'Political Theory as a Profession,'" 63, no. 3 (Sept. 2010): 680–685.

4. Kaufman-Osborn, "Political Theory as Profession," 655–673.

5. Mark C. Taylor, "End the University as We Know It," *New York Times*, April 29, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/27/opinion/27taylor.html>; the book is *Crisis on Campus: A Bold Plan for Reforming Our Colleges and Universities* (2010).

6. See Richard Walker, "California: The Glow is Off the Golden State," <http://ucbfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Walker-California-Crisis.pdf>.

7. Margaret Thatcher, interview by Douglas Keay, 23 September 1987, published as "AIDs, Education and the Year 2000!" *Woman's Own*, October 31, 1987, 8–10.

8. One dramatic example of this pertains to the move, amidst the recent crisis, to double the numbers of out-of-state admits and decrease California admits to UC Berkeley. (Nonresident tuition is more than that of in-state tuition, and nonresidents are also proportionately less reliant on financial aid.) Displacement of in-state by out-of-state admits will effect a change not only in the socio-economic but ethnic-racial composition of the UC student body. Foreign elites and white students from out of state will displace what would have been the bottom 10% of in-state student admits, a strata with a large group of under-represented minorities. As important is what is happening to median income students, those who would finance their education through increasing indebtedness. In-house analyses from UC's Financial Aid and Scholarships Office suggest that, rather than shoulder this indebtedness, such students are "transferring down" to the substantially cheaper California state college system.



9. Even among ladder-rank faculty, salaries in a single department now range from \$60,000 to \$300,000, and a constitutional law or rational choice scholar hired as an assistant professor in political science for \$75,000 per year could be hired in the law or business school on the same campus at more than twice that, a discrepancy that does not even take the measure of amenities such as research and secretarial assistance.

10. Christopher Newfield has established that humanists actually subsidize the sciences through large and inexpensive undergraduate teaching loads combined with negligible research expenses. This contrasts with the widely held view that humanists live off the overhead of large science grants. In fact, as Newfield and others have shown, grants fall short of covering the large expenses of infrastructure for scientific research: the sciences remain the most costly, revenue-absorbing domain of the university. See chap. 10 of Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University* (2009).

11. There is a gap between perceptions and reality in this domain. For example, major campus medical schools sometimes run in the red, as do scientific research endeavors mentioned in note 10. Here again it is important to underscore the extent to which neoliberalism is a governing rationality, not simply a set of economic facts.

12. Chancellor Robert M. Berdahl, "The Privatization of Public Universities," (inaugural lecture, May 23, 2000, Erfurt University, Erfurt, Germany), <http://cio.chance.berkeley.edu/chancellor/sp/privatization.htm>; Richie Zweigenhaft, "Is This Curriculum for Sale?" *Academe*, July-August 2010, <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2010/JA/feat/zwei.htm>.

13. University of California, "UC President Proposes Plan to Address Fiscal Crisis," news release, July 10, 2009, <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/article/21485>.

14. One need not even subscribe to the top-down thesis of opportunistic neoliberal reforms in Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007) to see how such values are especially easy to advance amidst budget crises of the sort currently faced by public universities.

15. Stephan Collini, "Impact on Humanities," *Times Literary Supplement*, November 13, 2009, [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/the\\_tls/article6915986.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/the_tls/article6915986.ece).

16. See, for example, Stanley Fish, who argues that "higher education, properly understood, is distinguished by the absence of a direct and designed relationship between its activities and measurable effects in the world," "The Last Professor," *Opinionator* (blog) *New York Times*, January 18, 2009, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/18/the-last-professor/>; Stephen J. Mexal, "The Unintended Value of the Humanities," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 23, 2010, <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Unintended-Value-of-the/65619/?sid...h>.