

The Crisis of the Human Sciences

The Crisis of the Human Sciences:
False Objectivity and the Decline
of Creativity

Edited by

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein

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P U B L I S H I N G

The Crisis of the Human Sciences: False Objectivity and the Decline of Creativity,
Edited by Thorsten Botz-Bornstein

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INTRODUCTION

THORSTEN BOTZ-BORNSTEIN

Technocratic consciousness reflects not the sundering of an ethical situation, but the repression of ethics as such as a category of life. The common, positivist way of thinking renders inert the frame of reference of interaction in ordinary language, in which domination and ideology both arise under conditions of distorted communication... The reified models of the sciences migrate into the socio-cultural life-world and gain objective power over the latter's understanding. The ideological nucleus of this consciousness is the elimination of the distinction between the practical and the technical. It reflects, but it does not objectively account for the new constellation of the disempowered institutional framework and systems of purposive-rational action that have taken a life on their own.

—Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, 1968.

There is a lot of talk about crises in the media. The crisis we best remember is the most recent financial crisis commonly referred to as the Great Recession but we are also well acquainted with a whole range of other crises such as the crisis of religion, of society, the oil crisis, the housing crisis, the crisis of education, of the family, of ethics, the environmental crisis... New terms such as “crisis management” or “crisis intervention” appear on a regular basis. As Umberto Eco noted already in 1983: “Crisis sells well” (Eco 1976: 126).

Is there any particular reason to talk about the “Crisis of the Human Sciences?” The Crisis of the Human Sciences is a broad concept, which makes any in-depth exploration difficult. The Crisis of the Human Sciences deals with a crisis in education; some might hold that it deals with a crisis of culture. In any case, the Crisis of the Human Sciences is related to the crisis of science and the role science plays in society. What distinguishes the Crisis of the Human Sciences from all the other crises mentioned is that its subject term refers to a more complex entity composed of two words and not only of one: “human” and “science.” The crisis might reside in one phenomenon or the other, or in both phenomena, or it might reside

in their relationship or in the meaning that both phenomena convey when appearing together.

When hearing of the Crisis of the Human Sciences, most people will think of funding cuts in certain academic fields, of the decline of theory, or of falling numbers of students in some disciplines due to bad job prospects. However, all these parameters are relative and many might hold that the glass is still half full. Indeed, there remain many positive things to say about the human sciences: those students who study these disciplines are remarkably engaged and humanities departments continue offering opportunities for students and teachers to express themselves intellectually and civically. Half a century ago, intellectuals such as Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and Lionel Trilling would speak to extremely large audiences, but so do Slavoj Žižek and A.C. Grayling today.

Other people will formulate a scathing criticism attesting that in the world of academia, centralization and over-professionalization are increasingly leading to the disappearance of a critical environment capable of linking academic disciplines to the “real world.” Absurd evaluation processes foster these tendencies and create a sterile atmosphere by preventing interdisciplinarity and creativity. Or they will point out that, due to the centralization of editorial power in the grip of large university presses of Anglophone countries, the content, quality, and range of modern publishing has become more and more predictable.

A further point of criticism is the increasing technicization of theory, which can very easily play into the hands of technocrats. The growth of scientism tends to fragment ethical categories and to distort the discourse between inner and outer selves. In the field of philosophy, for example, many branches suffer from an empty professionalism excelling in ahistorical and nonpolitical exercises often justified through appeals to false excellence. These critics maintain that the human sciences should rather operate in a concrete cultural environment able to influence procedures on a *hic et nunc* basis. They should not entirely depend on normative criteria whose function can too easily become to hide ignorance behind a pretentious veil of value-neutral objectivity.

The present volume reunites scholars working in different fields of the humanities all of whom are responding to what they perceive as a Crisis of the Human Sciences. The authors concentrate on educational problems, on the philosophical foundations of the humanities within the entire building of the sciences, and on economical determinants interfering with the development or simply the survival of the human sciences.

Naturally, the teachers of the human sciences are most concerned with the decline of these disciplines. Most authors in the first section observe

the decline of the educational standard of the student and indicate diverse reasons, among which are social homogenizations spurred onward by the boarder-crossing consumption of products (Gottschalk) or the weakening of the mother tongue of the child which has become unable, due to the overuse of television translations, to master the necessary skills of the classical Arabic language (Satti and Akbar).

The volume has a regionalist emphasis as it deals with many concrete problems apparent in the region of the Arabic Gulf. Stephen Keck, for example, urges Gulf leaders to ponder the long range value of a place which would go beyond vocational education and offer its graduates a broader conception of the world. Kevin Gray points to the decay (or non-existence) of humanities instruction in the modern university in general and particularly in the Gulf. The philosophical foundations of the Crisis of the Human Sciences are examined a reevaluation of the role of philosophy in contemporary culture (Zavaliy). Economic implications of the crisis concern practices of financial officers whose questionability in terms of ethics and professional standards can be revealed only by the human sciences. The latter have “identified issues leading to the collapse of major corporations while the economic sciences [were] actively involved in manipulating financial results and financial positions within the confines of generally accepted practices” (Ankli, Palliam & Awwad). Similar defects – though in an entirely different field – are detected by Helen Lauer who shows that scientific forecasts which predicted the devastation of African countries through AIDS “have not been corroborated by facts on the ground. If the statistics were correct, populations would have plummeted by 2010. Instead, population figures continue to steadily increase in Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa.” Again, this shows the importance of the human sciences as well as the difficulties it has to make itself heard in the contemporary “scientific” environment.

PART I.
EDUCATION

CHAPTER ONE

SCIENCE, CULTURE, AND THE UNIVERSITY

THORSTEN BOTZ-BORNSTEIN

The compound term “human sciences” refers to those sciences that examine everything which is not nature. The human sciences examine humans, their histories, their cultures, and their behaviors and can appear in the form of anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics, comparative literature, musicology, etc. The task of all sciences, no matter if natural or “human,” is to reveal recurring generalities, to create concepts, and to establish laws and systems. Compared to the natural or “hard” sciences, the human sciences are able to engage in the examination of what remains immeasurable or of the ever changing dynamic present in the phenomena they observe.

Historically, the human sciences are indebted to German historical thought on the one hand, and to the French system of social thought, on the other. At some point, positivists and empiricists like Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill imposed more exact and scientific standards upon these sciences. By gradually reducing the historical dimension of the human sciences, positivists and empiricists made the human sciences more “superficial,” but also more analytically refined.

The Human Sciences and Culture

The foundations of the human sciences have never been clear. The human sciences are cultural sciences in the twofold sense of the term: they examine culture while being themselves part of a cultural process. Culture is the intrinsically human component that turns these sciences into human sciences. Fernand Braudel found that today we “more naturally tend to call some abominable misdeed a ‘crime against humanity’ rather than against civilization, although both mean much the same thing” (Braudel 1994: 7). Culture is human which is why the Crisis of the Human Sciences is related to a crisis of culture or might even signify a crisis of culture.

But what is culture? Culture is not simply everything which is

man-made because in that case, the natural sciences' scientific productions would be a part of culture too. Though some people adhere to this universal definition of culture, most generally we prefer for this extremely broad range of human activities the term *civilization* and not culture. Roughly speaking, culture is what the human sciences examine while the natural sciences examine nature. Still, the definition of culture is a tricky task that has led, during the last 250 years, to a large number of controversies making any unanimously accepted definition of culture so difficult that I will not even attempt it here. Let me rather quote Matthew Arnold's account not of what culture *is*, but of what he believes culture should *generate*. In *Culture and Anarchy*, which is arguably the most important book on the notion of culture in England, Arnold points out that culture should foster "a fuller harmonious development of our humanity, a free play of thought upon our routine notions, spontaneity of consciousness, sweetness and light" (Arnold 1869: 195).

Things turn out to be even more complicated if we consider that the human sciences do not only *examine* "culture," but that they are also *transmitters* of culture. Today there are even good reasons to argue that the human sciences are the *main* transmitters of culture because religion (at least in Europe), the family, and society are involved in deep crises of their own and have considerable difficulties transmitting culture. Are these difficulties linked to a simple decline of religion, the family, society, and the human sciences or are they linked to a general disinterest in culture? Allan Bloom, in his best-selling book from 1987, *The Closing of the American Mind*, believes that there is a decline of culture, that culture is responsible for its own decline, a decline that will carry away towards its abyss also religion, the family, society, and, finally, the human sciences. This enables him to link the crisis of culture transmission and the crisis of the human sciences to the same root, which is the decline of culture: "The cause of this decay of the family's traditional role as the transmitter of tradition is the same as that of the decay of the human sciences: nobody believes that the old books do, or even could, contain the truth. So books have become, at best, 'culture' i.e., boring" (Bloom 1987: 58). Lionel Trilling, at his time, like Bloom, an extremely popular "human scientist," is of the same opinion and writes about the contemporary "disenchantment of our culture with culture itself" (Trilling 1943: 3).

Any such reasoning equates the Crisis of the Human Sciences with the crisis of culture. *If* we accept this, the next step must be to find reasons for this crisis. There are many options. Some will attribute the crisis of culture to the absurd life style of capitalist consumer societies. Some will point to globalization and its standardization which creates a lack of diversity of

cultural expressions. Some people will put, at last, part of the blame on the influence of scientific methods (readily adopted for the purposes of modern society's "industrialism") when applied to cultural phenomena. The Humanities are about "being human," writes Keyan Tomaselli and "being human cannot be encapsulated in the relative crudity offered by numbers. Being human requires a soul..." (2010: 2). The latter way of reasoning leads us to the question of the human sciences' relationship with science, which is ambiguous to say the least, being locked up in an eternal dilemma.

The Human Sciences and Science

What relationship do the human sciences have with science? Let us continue Allan Bloom's line of thought and suppose that the human sciences are branches of the body of science attempting to transmit culture (which he believes has become "boring") in a more or less scientific fashion. Is this actually part of the crisis or is "science" the panacea able to solve or mitigate the announced crisis of culture? Many people have argued that the scientific treatment of culture leads to an *evaporation* of culture because it transforms tradition into bits of information. Already Tocqueville saw that "in a democracy tradition is nothing more than information. With the 'information explosion,' tradition has become superfluous" (from Bloom, p. 58). Tocqueville equates culture with tradition, which makes sense in the present context. However, if we equate culture with tradition, it turns out that even the precursor of science, the ever so cultural *philosophy*, has been rather critical of "culture." Plato's ideas of universality and rationality are strictly opposed to local, traditional, or "cultural" truths. For Plato, scientific (philosophical) truth must be universal and should not consider relativistic claims issued by "cultures."

This dilemma becomes a major challenge in the Eighteenth Century as thinkers are facing immense difficulties when trying to reconcile the intellectual acquisitions of Enlightenment with tradition. Immanuel Kant solved the problem perhaps in the most elegant way by avoiding any talk of a "crisis of reason" but by formulating, in a more constructive fashion, an explicit "critique" of reason. For Kant, it does not make sense to speak of a crisis of reason simply because reason cannot be automatically associated with truth. Kant designed particular devices through which abstract (scientific) reason can function within a concrete "cultural" environment by constantly supervising itself. Reason is limited, but if we know how to handle this limitation properly we will never face a crisis of reason. Consequently, we will never face a crisis of culture either.

Today Kant's ideas, as well as the subsequent project of German Humanism to combine Enlightenment with classical human values, might stand out as an ideal model of what the human sciences are supposed to be. We still hear the echoes of these thoughts pounding through contemporary Liberal Arts colleges. In the end, however, even the German thinkers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries did not manage to reconcile two phenomena that modernity would conceive as increasingly antagonistic: culture and science.

In the Nineteenth Century, the advance of science, together with industrialism and free-trade, created what Matthew Arnold would call an "industrialism culture" (Arnold, p. 78), that is, a new type of culture clearly opposed to the "free play of thought" or to the "sweetness and light" so dear to Arnold. In the new capitalist economy, traditional literati (in the style of Baudelaire or Zola) will gradually lose the monopoly of intellectual trendsetting. The advent of new middle classes will spell the end of the traditional intelligentsia composed of "generalists" such as philosophers and poets and replace them with "experts" who will rely more and more heavily on methods, hard science, and technology.

From then onward, positions become rather extreme. Culture will see science as its enemy and deem it more and more necessary to limit any scientific invasion into its territory. Skepticism towards positivistic and scientific thinking receives an enormous push during and after World War I in Europe when the belief in "progress" is profoundly shattered. After World War II, the camp of the human sciences has definitely decided to define itself as eternally resistant. Jacques Ellul, in his famous writings from the 1960's, regrets that "technique has taken over the whole of civilization. Death, procreation, birth – all must submit to technical efficiency and systematization" (Ellul 1964: xxv). For Ellul, technique in the sense of a "totality of methods" for achieving efficiency in all fields of human activity is a "coupling of rationalistic thinking (...) and a specific cultural value of efficiency" (128). Here it seems that science is no longer searching for enlightenment able to free humans from ancient constraints, but merely a technique working – blindly and presumably "value-free" – in the service of a restrictive system whose only recognized value is "efficiency."

Some thinkers formulate the problems that emanate from the combination of "scientific" values with "culture" in terms of a "crisis of science," though what is actually meant is a crisis resulting from the sciences' incapacity to deal with culture. Edmund Husserl, in *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (1934-37), explains that the scientific objectivity characteristic of natural sciences (which is a result of the increasing

mathematization of nature) is bound to neglect the subjective, historical, and dynamic part of human life from which science once emerged. Yes, culture subsists, but it is affected by a scientific discourse relatively unable to sustain an idea of “culture” in the Arnoldian sense as “a fuller harmonious development of our humanity” or as the “spontaneity of consciousness.” In the 1970s, Jürgen Habermas defines the problem most aptly by speaking of the elimination of the distinction between the practical and the technical: “The reified models of the sciences migrate into the socio-cultural life-world and gain objective power over the latter’s understanding” (Habermas 1971: 113).

The Human Sciences and Values

If we follow these authors that have been writing about culture and science over a span of one and a half centuries, it turns out that the real danger is not that culture will disappear. The danger is rather that one day its essence will be deprived of its intrinsic values or of its “sweetness and light.” Most probably culture will end up as a hopelessly overstretched notion. Seen through the scientific lens, *everything* can appear as culture. According to Allan Bloom there is “the drug culture, the rock culture, the street-gang culture” (Bloom: 184) which Bloom criticizes as “the lack of culture [which] has become culture.” Bloom’s point might appear as overly conservative but he does indeed raise an important question: Can “cultural values and virtues,” qualities that former “human scientists” had been able to spell out concretely, survive within this concept of culture? Within contemporary discussions of culture, it has become naïve to ask about those values. Clive Bell, in his pre-war works on culture and civilization, would single out civilization as “the flavor given to the self-expression of an age or society by a mental attitude” (1973: 121). Moreover, he would not hesitate to state “tolerance, receptivity, magnanimity, unshockableness, and taste for, and sympathy with pleasure [as] prime characters of civilization” (168). Emerson, in his writings on culture says that civilization is supposed “to bring people to extreme delicacy of sentiment, as in practical power, religion, liberty, sense of honor and taste” (1971: 19). Today, the values that Bell and Emerson still dared to name, appear as too individualistic: they do not fit into any scheme of scientific, “value-free,” universal truths about “culture.” It seems that the only “value” left is the one that Ellul had called the “cultural value of efficiency” plus some general guidelines. Under the x-ray of science, cultural “sweetness and light” disappears leaving only a skeleton called “human rights” or “democracy.” Habermas summarizes this situation by saying that the

“technocratic consciousness reflects not the sundering of an ethical situation, but the repression of ethics as such as a category of life” (1970: 113). This is what constitutes the Crisis of the Human Sciences.

Some people remain adamantly optimistic. In June 2010, the President of the British Academy, Sir Adam Roberts, declared the notion of a two-culture society where the natural sciences vie against the human and social sciences, to be “sterile and outdated.” Roberts is begging the question. How can a crisis that has such deep historical roots and which has been reinforced century after century, decade after decade, suddenly be outdated? Roberts seems to insinuate that both entities have fused or that they are about to fuse. But if that is the case, then this very concept of fusion refers back to the above relationship between the human sciences and natural sciences which represents a problem and not a solution.

Corporate Culture

In principle, specialization, quantification and formalization, and even the increasing impact of technology on any sort of investigation, do not make a crisis. To believe that it does is to confuse the symptoms of the crisis with its source (cf. Schrag 1980: 9). The crisis consists in the fact that an “industrialist” society treats specialization, quantification, and formalization as an end in itself and thus reduces culture to a skeleton. Unfortunately this tendency has also become current in academia.

About three decades ago, Arnold’s “industrialism culture” began to invade the universities, which also affected human science departments. Arnold Toynbee had complained about the “industrialization of historical thought (1934: 1),” but he could hardly imagine how bad things would become one day. Lewis Gordon has called the prophets of this new academic culture the “academic managerial class” (2006: 9). Among the most outspoken pieces of criticisms of the new academic economism is Frank Donoghue’s book, *The Last Professors*, in which the author explains how “corporate interests and values are poised to overwhelm the ideals of the liberal arts and to transform the university into a thoroughly businesslike workplace” (2008: 1). Lionel Trilling had noticed this tendency already in the 1950s: “More and more, as the universities liberalize themselves, and turn their beneficent imperialistic gaze upon what is called Life Itself, the feeling grows among our educated classes that little can be experienced unless it is validated by some established intellectual discipline, with the result that experience loses much of its personal immediacy and becomes part of an accredited societal activity” (Trilling: 10).

Universities have changed a lot within the last thirty years. In university X, only Coca Cola products can be distributed as a result of contractual agreements. Universities make contracts with brands like Nike, which produce T-Shirts with university logos (made in China). The current salary differentials of faculty inside some universities would be typical for big corporations and used to be unthinkable in institutions of learning. Branding and lobbying has become one of the main academic activities, not to speak of administrative obligations that nobody had ever heard of only ten years ago. Within this world of bureaucratization, transparency, efficiency, productivity, accountability, competition, ranking, over-evaluation of short-term output, and forced specialization, the academic (if we may still call him like that) seems to be playing the role of a zombie. In the departments of “Dead Human Sciences” the living dead are “doing their jobs,” but only few of them continue to manifest the appetite for the breadth of inquiry that typified earlier ventures in academia, nor do they seem to have the time or interest to develop personal intellectual convictions. There is very little, if any, support for true intellectualism and the people who still pursue this are stigmatized as bohemians or poets. Paradoxically, the specialization of scholars drags even the traditional academic monograph into a crisis. Today everybody is supposed to be a “specialist” yet able to write – for commercial reasons – for an audience that exceeds the limits of her field of specialization.

Thorstein Veblen recognized efficiency and productivity as foreign to the human sciences (1899: 95). Now these qualities are imposed upon the academic world in the name of some questionable utilitarianism. Few people seem to remember that the kind of specialization common in the natural sciences as well as in the corporate world contradicts the Socratic idea of wisdom as the most general knowledge of the good. When Matthew Arnold said that to know culture is to know “the best which has been thought and said in the world” (p. viii), his ideal of culture was highly compatible with philosophical knowledge. At present, the human sciences are moving further and further away from it.

Philosophy

Talking about my own field, philosophy, I should say that this crisis began long before the continental analytical divide and that philosophy has long ago lost the capacity to follow the Socratic idea of wisdom. Other branches of the human sciences fare much better. What *philosophical* idea could actually be more interesting and more powerful than the ideas of Freud and Max Weber? Nietzsche’s perspectivism, Wittgenstein’s ordinary

language, Heidegger's Being, Derrida's *écriture*, or some highly abstract analytical notions? It is here, right before the First World War, that philosophy began to isolate itself even within the field of the human sciences. Afterwards, this process of isolation has been pursued in the most extreme fashion by analytical philosophy while continental philosophy survived much better by fusing with other disciplines of the human sciences. Living an isolated life and being submitted to purely scientific ideals, analytical philosophy can much more easily be integrated into the culture of industrialism. This development is known as the establishment of "philosophy as a profession," which began in the 1920s and 1930s in the Ivy League universities and which is a rather sad chapter indeed.

Conclusion

The human sciences can only subsist if they establish themselves within a clearly defined niche where they can remain distinguished from the natural sciences as well as from the corporate university that is trying to win them over in the name of an industrialist concept of science. This does not mean that they should look only inward and isolate themselves from the world. The right balance between recreation and reinvention is the biggest challenge. Many liberal arts colleges are following this path: trying to remain inspired by a humanist ideal of the university as a privileged place cut off from the constraints of business and everyday politics in which they can enjoy freedom of inquiry and intellectual pluralism. Here the human sciences can continue working on the project to which they are linked by destiny: the reconciliation of culture and science, a project that begins with Socrates and by which philosophy and the human sciences remain defined.

CHAPTER TWO

EDUCATION AND THE TECHNOCRATIC
UNIVERSITY:
REFLECTIONS ON THE PURPOSE
OF THE UNIVERSITY

KEVIN W. GRAY

In the chapter, I explore the question of the relationship between the self-understanding of the universities, and the decay (or non-existence) of humanities instruction in the modern university, particularly in the Gulf. In so doing, I ask why we should care about the humanities generally, and relate the critique to the technocratic (self-)understanding of the university. Ultimately, I will reflect on the relevance of Karl Jaspers' (and others in that tradition) work on the university. I will argue, contrary to many, that the division between research and teaching (and perhaps research and the economic demands placed on teaching) is actually undesirable: both for civil society in general and for the instruction of the humanities in specific.

Looking around the Gulf region, it is difficult, if not out-right impossible, to find universities which focus on anything other than imparting technical skills to their students; even those universities which claim to be liberal art schools are often (if not always) engaged in teaching humanities courses in so far as they aid critical thinking and writing (at best) or (at worst) these universities offer humanities courses because they are a useful-window dressing. It should go without saying that this conception of the university is extremely far removed from many of the most progressive discussions of the role of the university in the past (to provide but two examples to illustrate my point: few of the so-called universities which have proliferated offer courses in languages other than English and Arabic; majors are hardly ever offered in the humanities other than in politics).

The evolution of universities into technical schools can be traced to a series of events. The increased technization of the academy has emerged

out of increased competition between institutions for students, increased funding pressures, and the growth of university enrollment. These changes have all lead to an emphasis on the training of students in technical subjects. These problems are well-known and have been rehearsed elsewhere in the literature. However, I will argue that it is not merely technocrats who have contributed to the problem: the progressive view of the role of the humanities gives too much away. I will contend that in much progressive discourse on education there is reason to be fearful for the future of the university.

If contemporary discourse in the United States about the crisis in the universities is to be believed, the principle task of the university (and the humanities in particular) is to educate paying students to think, read and write critically. To take but one example, in the recently published, much-discussed *Academically Adrift*, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa discuss the dismal findings of longitudinal surveys about student learning in the United States. Their study found particularly worrisome results concerning student learning: many students reported never taking courses that require reading 40 or more pages a week, or writing 20 pages a term; similarly, many often spend less than 5 hours a week studying.

Undoubtedly, that students are allowed to take such easy courses is a matter of concern. But why it should be so is less clear. Nonetheless, the claim that what a university does should be measured in terms of student learning is hardly Arum and Roksa's alone; it dominates the literature. Derek Bok, for instance, the former President of Harvard, is quoted by Arum and Roksa, as saying that:

With all the controversy over the college curriculum, it is impressive to find faculty members agreeing almost unanimously that teaching students to think critically is the principal aim of undergraduate education (Arum and Roksa 2011: 2).

I doubt that Bok's statement is empirically true of faculty at universities in the United States, but even if it were, it hardly amounts to a justification for his project. Nonetheless, why students do not learn at university is central to the aforementioned study, and marks a good point of entry into my argument. Arum and Roksa's argument about the failure of student learning boils down to the following claims: students do not progress at universities because of a toxic mix of student apathy towards education as a means to anything other than getting a job, faculty apathy towards teaching, faculty research concerns, and a pact between all involved not to rock the boat.

As to the former (that is, apathy), many students go to university with

what researchers call a “credentialist-collegiate orientation” (Arum and Roksa 2011: 70). They attend school with the aim of getting a job. Moreover, the continuing rise in college tuition seems to exacerbate the problem (Arum and Roksa 2011: 15). Students who will be heavily in debt must be able to pay off that debt (or at least make payments against interest charged on the balance accrued) upon graduation.

As to the latter, it is well-known that student evaluations play an increasingly important role in decisions about retention, promotion and tenure. Faculty surveys consistently show that student satisfaction has become an important measure of teaching skill (Arum and Roksa 2011: 7). As a consequence, faculty design courses which are less difficult in order to coexist with the students who will be evaluating them. If faculty get better reviews by not pushing students, the authors ask, if “students are able to receive high marks and make steady progress towards their college degrees with such limited academic effort, must not faculty bear some responsibility for the low standards that exist in these settings?” (Arum and Roksa 2011: 5).

I do not find either of these problems particularly interesting; anyone who has taught recently at a university will recognize them immediately. What interests me the most are the middle two problems identified by the authors: apathy towards teaching, and the importance of research (which they see, perhaps correctly, as correlated). At schools in the United States, even at what were formerly so-called ‘normal schools’ (i.e. teacher training colleges), faculty report the increasing importance of publications (Arum and Roksa 2011: 7). At these former land grant schools, where the change in identity has been perhaps the most pronounced of all universities, this has led to what Ernest Boyer, for instance, calls a change in faculty loyalty, which has moved “from student to the professorate, from general to specialized education, and from loyalty to the campus to loyalty to the profession” (Arum and Roksa 2011: 7).

While these changes might be true, they represent a peculiar American understanding of higher education. I think tracing these problems to the actions of faculty is to miss the point entirely. Unlike Arum and Roksa, I do not believe that these problems are peculiar to faculty (though blame should perhaps be apportioned to them), but are ultimately a result of the unfortunate evolution of the self-understanding of the university in the Anglo-Saxon world – an understanding that is becoming more dominant worldwide, particularly in the Gulf.

The German Model of the University

Let us contrast this model of education with the German model and attempts to reform it following the Second World War. The last major reform to the German university system occurred as part of the Humboldt reforms during the early nineteenth century, where a wide range of theoretical studies were introduced to the university curriculum as aids to the cultivation of the whole person through a broad liberal education. Schools were reformed to allow for all to enter and training schools (i.e. military schools) for the elite largely abolished (Sorkin 1983: 62). The post-war German context saw a debate between conservatives and liberals over the future of the university, and the role of the university in producing truth (versus the requirement that it educated students for employment (Hohendahl 2011: 159).

Karl Jaspers saw himself as a representative of the Humboldtian tradition (Hohendahl 2011: 162). In 1945, he returned to his post as president of Heidelberg University, charged with the task of repairing the august institution after the war. In so doing, he took over the reins of a university that had a proud tradition dating back six hundred years. More to the point, returning as president gave Jaspers a chance to reflect on the role of the university in a democracy and to return to a text, *The Idea of the University*, he had written in 1923, prior to the rise of National Socialism. He published a revised version of that text in 1961 to discuss the role of the university in German society at a time where rising tensions existed between students, faculty and the government at a whole. In the same year, Jaspers authored an article published in *Die Zeit*, wherein he summarized his argument. There, Jaspers, borrowing heavily from German idealist presuppositions, describes the relationship between the university and the city as follows. Jaspers writes:

The university is tied to a city, but a university is not possible in every city. Only there, where the university is a witness to the possibility of freedom through truth, can the city, when it wants to be free and to possess truth and is founded in such a way, want a university. Only when a city fundamentally identifies itself with the spirit of science and truth, is the idea of the university possible (Jaspers; translation by the author).

The university, and the scholars within it, can only be effective, Jaspers argues, and serve society at large, when the university is tied to the community as a whole and serves as a representative of the spirit of the age. The university binds the city and the intellectuals together, while remaining forever conscious of the spirit of the age. Conversely, the

university, as the instantiation of a certain self-understanding of the city, when separated from this founding idea, withers and dies. Concerning the demise of the classical university, Jürgen Habermas, whose comments we will examine below, writes: “Once the unifying bond of its corporative consciousness disintegrates, the university too ceases to form a whole” (Habermas 1989: 101).

Because of his other philosophical (i.e. Hegelian) commitments, Jaspers sees the university as a physical manifestation of objective spirit. Making the relevance of Jaspers’ theory of the university clear in the modern world is rather difficult; as Habermas remarks in his discussion of Jaspers’ book, “the philosophy of German Idealism by its very nature required a unity of teaching and research” (Habermas 1989: 110). If this is no longer possible, or if knowledge has become so fragmented as to render it difficult, than Jaspers’ ideas will need to be reworked to provide continued relevance.

Ultimately, Jaspers’ thought is very much stuck in the bourgeois model of the university, where the university – as it has been since Humboldt’s time – should exist as a training ground for future generations of a country’s elite (Habermas 1971: 13). However, what is interesting about this self-understanding of the university, besides the fact that it may at first glance seem inapplicable to the modern world, is how different it is from the American model of the university. Not only does it go against much recent literature on the university (i.e. the works discussed above), it goes against even the classical American and liberal models of higher education, whose classic works, such as those of Thorstein Veblen, see the university as a depoliticized entity, one designed to encourage research by its staff while educating students for careers (Arum and Roksa 2011: 10; Thorstein Veblen 2005). It is this depoliticization of research, I will argue, which encourages the unfortunate separation of teaching from research, which is so problematic for humanities’ instruction (Arum and Roksa 2011: 17).

While Jaspers’ model of the university captured the most progressive elements of German idealist thought, it ultimately proved to be unsatisfactory. In the 1960s, two particular challenges emerged to Jaspers’ model. First, conservative neo-Hegelian sociologists like Helmut Schelsky argued that the systemic character of the production of knowledge denied the possibility that regulating overarching ideals might unite the university. The development of multiple social subsystems meant that the university and research could no longer be governed by one set of internal values. Second (and on the opposite end of the political spectrum), Jaspers text was immediately rejected by student activists in Germany, who argued that it was almost certainly too conservative. Jaspers believed that the university could strengthen the democratic convictions of the age. However, the students responded, the idea that a classical German university might serve

as a bulwark of democracy was belied by the passivity of German universities in the face of the National Socialism Regime. Members of the German SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) argued that the death of over-arching governing ideals meant the universities were better served if they understood their mission as training students for contesting political power and navigating a fractured lifeworld. For these members of the SDS, the self-understanding of the university should be linked instead to the capacity for will formation (this is the so-called “democratization of the university”) (Habermas 1989: 118).

Both of these critiques reflect the rationalization and differentiation of the lifeworld. Only one, the second, provides a research program that correctly reflects the challenges of modern political life. Following Habermas and others, I believe that we can identify six changes in modern society which take us away from Jaspers’ model of university:

1. The rise of varied disciplines leads to a fragmentation of research into different centers that have little in common with each other, even if they exist inside the same organization. Some writers even go so far as to describe this as the inevitable result of the production of knowledge under conditions of post-modernity (though I do not believe we need to go that far – I think it sufficient to remark that the lifeworld has become fragmented into different realms of specialized knowledge);

2. There has been a shift away from pure science to the production of technically-productive knowledge. This corresponds to a change in the epistemic moment at which knowledge is produced, and means that more research is directed towards the development of technical capabilities and skills;

3. As a result of one and two, universities are no longer seen as the repository of universal (i.e. Enlightenment) values, which previously shaped all activities that occurred inside (Turner 1998: 73). Instead, universities are composed of separate subsystems each developing technologically-productive knowledge;

4. The tension between universalism and nationalism, always present at the university, which made the university a creator of national language and culture, has been vitiated by the globalization of knowledge and the university (Turner 1998: 73-75). Universities have become at most interpreters of culture generally;

5. Increased funding pressures have increased demands for the professorship to engage in economically rewarding research; and,

6. Following the Second World War, tertiary education has been opened up to the masses. This meant that students were no longer guaranteed (as they once had been) entry into the elite of society following a course of university study. Instead, the university came to exist to guarantee

at most an occupation – the nature of which, and thus the appropriate courses of study, have also changed (O'Mahony 1998: 51).

In Habermasian terms, these changes must be conceived of in terms of the development of different structures of rationality inside the lifeworld. The university has traditionally engaged in the reproduction of culture, the institutionalization of cognitive rationality, and institutionalization of instrumental rationality (Delanty 1998: 112). The classic model of the university, posited by Jaspers, saw no separation between the three. Under that model, cognitive and instrumental rationality were subsumed by the reproduction of culture; the subsumption of other models of rationality to culture is destroyed by the fragmentation of knowledge. However, the fragmentation of the lifeworld does not mean the end of the universities role in navigating a culturally fragmented modern world. The remaining question, which I have left for the final section, is what is to be done, and how any proposed solution might affect the human sciences.

What Must Be Done?

Obviously, Jaspers model is outdated. Nonetheless, I believe that it provides an important starting point for a discussion of what the university at a time when its very nature is under threat. In many ways, there are more similarities between Jaspers' conception of the university and that of the student activists than there are differences: after all, both saw the university as a bulwark of democracy and a producer of culture (albeit it in different ways). Of course Jaspers problematically assumed that there must be such a thing as an idea of the age (the objective spirit of the city, etc.) in order for the university to function; yet undoubtedly, as Habermas also has noted in his commentary on Jaspers' book, this is no longer possible. As we ask what is to be done, we also must ask how these two ideas can be reconciled.

I believe that it would be a mistake to follow Schelsky and to assume that absent some such overarching ideal, the only possible task of the university is to impart technical skills and encourage the development of technically-exploitable knowledge. And I believe, moreover, that it is a good thing that the university does not represent the ideal of one age. After all, “[t]he corporative self-understanding of the university would be in trouble if it were anchored in something like a normative ideal, for ideas come and go” (Habermas 1989: 123).

This brings me back to my critique of the Anglo-American understanding of the university. It seems to me that if the debate about the role of the humanities is purely about the formation of students, then the

defender of the humanities has ceded far too much to his opponents. Put quite simply, it is the worst fallacy of technocratic reason that all there is to life is employment. It should go without saying that there is more to life than jobs, and it must be stressed that the link between the university and employment is a relatively recent innovation (the link between the university and the governing elite, or the link between the university and the production of national culture in fact has lasted much longer).

What should we take then from the six points that I listed earlier? First, I think we are right to be pessimistic about the future of the university. Some facts seem here to stay: the university will never again be (if it ever was) the producer of one nation culture; the fragmentation of autonomous fields of knowledge inside the university, alongside such similar fragmentations in the lifeworld, is also here to stay. Universities will always be large. What can change, however, is how the university expresses its own self-understanding of why it educates students. Universities can do a better job of explaining why it is that they educate students, and what the value of the humanities is – beyond mere employment.

To finish, let me return to the general theme of this paper: the Gulf. What we see at universities in the Gulf, as educators, is a version of the crisis in the humanities writ-large. Fees in the region are, if anything, higher than the United States. The pressure to get jobs is very high (particularly among non-citizens); male students, in many cases, must find employment upon graduation or find themselves unable to remain legally in the country. Moreover, the universities here are all very recent innovations (for example, the United Arab Emirates University was founded in 1976; Kuwait University in 1966), and are often exported (quite literary) from overseas (*viz.* the Anglo-Saxon world). They do not have a history of promoting citizenship or national culture.

Finally, there is quite simply no conception of the university as a place that encourages political consciousness. In fact, one could argue that such a self-understanding of the university is openly discouraged. That said, if the fragmentation of reason is a concern in modern society (and its fragmentation into multiple technical sub-disciplines each with their own ideological self-understanding), then this particular understanding of the university reflects both that concern and the prophylactic use of reason to overcome it. By failing to assert themselves, universities (and all who possess a similar communicative competency) allow for other ideologies to assert themselves. A neutral self-conception of the university moves, sadly, very rapidly becomes an economy self-understanding. And, thus, finally, any change that moves away from understanding education as the education of future employees and producers would help reinstate the humanities at the center of a politicized world.

CHAPTER THREE

RUSKIN, THE CHALLENGES FACING VICTORIAN UNIVERSITIES, AND THE CURRENT CRISIS IN THE HUMANITIES

STEPHEN KECK

The birth, development and maturation of new universities in the Arabian Gulf invites re-consideration of the practice and status of higher education in modern societies. The crisis of the human sciences has had and continues to have many dimensions, including articulating the place of the university in society. Situating the university into its broader social, national and regional contexts, will remain a perennial issue; connecting that larger set of requirements to issues involving the integrity and quality of thought (and the knowledge which is often produced along with it) means that the challenges facing academic organizations and institutions are even greater. These realities are well known in the present: the idea of a ‘crisis in the humanities’ is now commonplace. This paper will highlight the manner in which some of these issues were refracted in Victorian Britain in order to provide some historical perspective on the contemporary situation—as it is manifest in both the Gulf and elsewhere.

Adapting to Social Transformation: The University in Victorian Britain

To that end, it is useful to recall John Ruskin’s (1819-1900) relationship with the university—principally Oxford—because it reveals both some of the salient issues faced by Victorian universities and also the way a major nineteenth century intellectual attempted to meet the challenges he perceived facing what later generations would call ‘the humanities’. Much of the scholarly attention which has been devoted to the British universities in the nineteenth century has focused upon these institutions

because they can be understood to be harbingers of much greater social transformation. It is worth recalling that over the course of the nineteenth century Britain experienced social, economic and cultural alteration at least as profound as those which are shaping the GCC countries in the early 21st century. Most prominent, perhaps, were the changes associated with industrialism; some of its more positive products were displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Palace; its many destructive consequences were chronicled by writers such as Charles Dickens. Therefore, it is instructive to study the trajectories of British universities in the nineteenth century because the ways in which these institutions developed might well inform the debate about the maturation of higher education in the Arabian Gulf. This is an immense (and interesting) topic in its own right, but a few salient points can be made about their growth. Since this conference is focusing on the crisis of thought, it makes sense to highlight the status of 'liberal arts' in each university setting. The existence of 'liberal arts' in GCC universities has been acknowledged from their beginnings; however, with the British universities they had always played a dominant role until the twentieth century.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there only a handful of universities (mainly Oxbridge and London) and they were not inclusive. Oxbridge required its students to be males who were also members of the Church of England; consequently, its denizens were invariably drawn from the aristocracy, leading merchant families and from clerical backgrounds. Against an eighteenth century conception of the university—in which they were largely 'finishing schools'—reform (in the guise of competitive examinations) in the early nineteenth century began to connect academic rigor with these institutions. It should be remembered that the syllabus was in Latin and Greek, which further re-enforced the institution's exclusivity—well articulated by the pathos of Jude Fawley in Thomas Hardy's masterpiece *Jude the Obscure*. Despite the fact that these institutions were virtual islands from many of the transformative forces which were remaking the country around them, they were not immune to change. These conditions lay behind both Matthew Arnold's emphasis on 'sweetness and light' as an end for modern education and much of John Henry Newman's *Idea of a University*—which remains one of the strongest and most elegant endorsements of liberal arts in the university.

The changes which marked these universities were at once deep and wide-ranging; one way of assessing their impact is to realize their continuing relevance not only in the re-fashioning of British society, but also in discussion about the status and goals of university education in the 21st century. To put the matter broadly, these academic organizations