**ACLS/AAU Humanities Convocation: Reinvigorating the Humanities**

*Reading and Knowing in the Information Age*
**Paul N. Courant**
*Professor of Economics* and *Public Policy*, and former Provost
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Thank you for inviting me into what, for an economist with a green eyeshade, could be a lion's den. It really is an honor to be here. I will give you my one humanistic credential—I went to a college not far from here and got a B.A. in History. I then realized that I wasn't good enough at it to make a living at it. So I believe, as someone whose work is based on methods that are statistical, positivistic, and replicable, that what you do is in many ways more difficult, which is why I didn't do it, rather than easier, which is not the reason that I didn't do it.

Earlier today someone talked about the incomprehensibility of mathematicians' tenure files. I have read a lot of mathematicians' tenure files—it's one of the real joys of academic administration—and I did not understand a word of them. I once was an outside reader on a math dissertation, and asked the candidate to give me a tutorial to the point where I would understand the title of the dissertation. We spent about twelve hours at it, and I'm not sure that I really achieved my goal. But here's the remark I would make: that humanistic inquiry is essential if we are to understand what it is about being a scientist, or what it is about being a mathematician that is part of the human experience of those critters. There is a handful of mathematicians who can talk about their experience as mathematicians in a way that is extremely powerful. This is of course quite different from the way in which they talk about math. The math itself is a math problem; explaining why math animates people is an interesting problem of a different kind, and I think a subject for humanistic inquiry.

I am supposed to talk about technology and new ways of knowing. And, the first claim I want to make is that the new technologies change nothing fundamental about the purposes of scholarship, humanistic or otherwise. Indeed, we get into terrible trouble when we argue to the contrary. The new technologies allow us to do things that we didn't used to be able to do—that is mostly good. It makes some old methods and systems that used to work really well not work so well—that is sometimes good, sometimes bad, always scary. And lots of institutions, notably copyright, pose serious problems for scholarship that were not once even imagined, and that is bad. But, with all of that, examination, interpretation, exploration of what humans do, explanations of why we would want to be human (I like that notion from Don Randel's remarks) is still what we do, and whether we do it alone or not, an infrastructure of scholarship and scholarly communication is essential for the practice of scholarship.

I am now going to quote from the National Science Foundation Cyberinfrastructure Report, and in doing so I note that scientists can also produce eye-glazing texts. "Cyberinfrastructure is the coordinated aggregate of software, hardware and other technologies, as well as human expertise, required to support current and future discoveries in science and engineering. The challenge of Cyberinfrastructure is to integrate relevant and often disparate resources to provide a usable, useful, and enabling framework for research and discovery characterized by broad access and 'end-to-end'

coordination."[1]  I want to suggest that what a cyberinfrastructure in the humanities would be is not as ambitious in a detailed way as this definition, in part because science and engineering are more straightforward methodologically, with the result that scientists and engineers have a much clearer notion of what an enabling infrastructure must be able to accomplish

So back to the infrastructure of scholarship.  We publish, meaning that we make public our work, we read it, we write and talk about it, and thereby collaborate across time and space in the interest of learning and understanding, and even problematizing.  Mostly the new tools make this easier.  And, the phrase "publish or perish" is a moral imperative in this context.  If you are not going to publish, then you are not very interesting to scholarship, to the humanities, to the academic enterprise.  We publish lest our ideas perish for lack of being published.  So, what we have always done, is we read, we write, we publish, we put things in a library so that we can get them back out again, and know what they are and how they got in there.  Technology has changed what is involved in reading, writing, putting, getting, and the operations of the library, but the fundamentals have not changed.  There has always been an infrastructure, a set of relatively transparent and accepted procedures and structures that facilitate scholarship just as roads facilitate transportation.  Given the underlying technologies of print, and of walking to the library, the old infrastructure had just the right economic incentives for universities to build libraries in order to attract the best scholars and scholarship, and for publishers to review, as well as to produce and to edit.  The new technologies change those economic relationships quite profoundly, causing no end of confusion and difficulty, which we will almost certainly get to later, but which I am going to skip for now.

There was also always a second infrastructure, namely the cultural record itself, available in museums, archives, libraries, pulled from studios and attics—the source materials for humanistic inquiry, scholarship and lay engagement with the humanities.  Many of our students who grow up to be stockbrokers go to museums and read literary magazines and serious trade literature, and occasionally even endow humanities centers in universities.  Both as students and as alumni they have had access to much of the same cultural record that we study, and the health of the humanities require that they continue to do so.  The archiving and curating of these materials, of all of those collections, including film, recordings, photographs, literature (both serious and popular), diaries, notes—is an infrastructure for humanities scholarship that has always received serious attention in the academy.  Somewhat surprisingly, in the context of current copyright law, information technology greatly improves our ability to provide a robust infrastructure for using such materials, provided that they are old enough, and puts at great risk material that is born digital, as well as all material that is under copyright protection.

It is instructive that for at least a hundred years, the humanistic discipline that has been the most vigorous adopter of new technologies has been classics.  From the beginning, the classicists have been quick to use photography to record and to distribute, to use chemistry to preserve.  More recently, very fancy technologies turn out to make it possible to read scrolls that can not be opened and to have assembled, not under one roof but at one URL, most of the world's known papyrus. Way to go, classics!

There are many such happy stories at the project level, involving the assembly of materials from disparate places, and making them available for study from any internet-equipped computer in the

---

[1] *Revolutionizing Science and Engineering Through Cyberinfrastructure*: Report of the National Science Foundation Blue-Ribbon Advisory Panel on Cyberinfrastructure. (January 2003). Available at: http://www.nsf.gov/cise/sci/reports/atkins.pdf

world. Many projects have also developed tools allowing the material to be viewed from multiple angles and media, allowing the scholar or user to create collections as they work. The ability to look for strings of text is valuable in many disciplines and many collections. There is a Blake archive, there are virtual collections and archives housed in many different places, there is the Making of America, American Memory, the newspaper example that Tom Mallon talked about earlier is a perfectly good example of an infrastructure of this type.

But at the system level, there is generally much less. The individual projects are expensive to maintain, and not usually organized to work with each other with common tool kits. The tools are expensive to learn, and vary by discipline, by project, by particular university. What would an infrastructure look like here? Well, read the report of the ACLS Commission on Cyberinfrastructure in the Humanities. For a start, the relevant infrastructure would contain an archive of lots of material— say, *everything*—in digital form, well-indexed and findable, easy to use, so that scholars could look at the collection most relevant for the purpose at hand, roll their own collection, if you will. Moreover, I would argue that if this is not done, that which is missing will be very hard to find, for our students, to be sure, because searching the Web is the only way they know how to find things, but eventually for us as well.

Search is so easy, and becoming so much easier, that one already sees people settling for what's good enough, if it's easy to find. And it's always easy to find something on the web, so it's our duty, for posterity, and to avoid really bad term papers which we will have to read, to make sure that the good stuff is relatively easy to find. And, again, in the humanities, what I want to suggest is that the most important thing to do is to collect all the material in a way that is relatively easy to get at digitally from almost anywhere. The tools will come, and they will come project by project, they are a different layer in the development of a research infrastructure. The sciences, which have always been about instrumentation, have a more detailed notion of the interplay between data and tools, but the beginning actually has to be—dare I use the word infrastructure—putting all the data in one (virtual) place. And indeed, one can imagine, at the end of this exercise, in a hundred years or so, a very interesting conversation between humanists and scientists about what the word data might mean, or even what the word datum might mean.

It is going to be really hard to assemble the data for the humanities, and the most important barrier is neither money nor technology. Far more important is that everything published after 1923 (under current U.S. law) cannot, as a general matter, be legally copied digitally except perhaps for preservation. That is a lot of material. And by the way, almost all of it is out of print, so the notion that there is an appreciable economic value for most of it is just silly. No one is trying to sell it, and in a very large number of cases the owners, if they exist, don't know that they own it, which makes getting permission rather difficult. And, I have to note here that much of the problem is due to changes in copyright law that had nothing to do with digital anything, although the interaction with digital information technology is particularly nasty.

I have a nice story from my colleague Tobin Seibers at the University of Michigan, who writes about visual culture and was trying to do a book about still lifes, and wanted to use Clinique ads in his book. (Remember Clinique ads, which had these marvelously rich photographic depictions of various products with kind of witty, pun-istic captions underneath them?) So he wanted to use those, and to talk about them in a serious way, and no university press that he spoke with was be willing to publish that material without explicit permission of the right-holder, even though it is plainly obvious that publishing these old advertisements in the context of scholarly criticism would be a fair use under copyright law. This is the kind of case that we should be willing to take to whatever level of court may

be necessary, yet university general counsels, university presses, other presses, won't touch it. That is extremely bad news for what we are trying to accomplish in scholarship.

I want to make the general claim that scholarship *is* fair use, period. There are other things that are fair use that aren't scholarship, but pretty much any scholarly use is fair use, and, when I get to policy implications I am going to say that we should articulate that case vigorously.

Digital technology adds another layer of difficulty with three more sets of problems. First, we have technical issues with preserving digital materials. I do not want to emphasize these because they take our eyes off the more important issues, but they are real, and they add to the fear, uncertainty and doubt of the enterprise as a whole, and therefore they make it rather hard to establish the best course of action. If the provost said to the library, "Okay, collect everything digitally and preserve it forever, how much is that going to cost?" the library at this moment would say, "We don't really know how much it's going to cost," and then would make up a huge number. This makes the conversation that much harder to have. But, as I said, the technical issues are distractions; I am confident that we will resolve these problems fairly soon.

Much more serious is that the doctrine of first sale, which applies to books, does not apply to licensed material, and licensing is becoming increasingly prevalent for both books and journals. Licensing gives the rights-holders far more control than they have with print. The library does not own most electronic journals and other copyrighted materials in electronic form. Generally, it has the use of these materials under license, and so has to pay fees forever to continue to use them, and to rely on publishers to make the materials available. But it is worse than that, as James O'Donnell has pointed out elsewhere. A publisher can actually revise licensed material without leaving tracks—when a mistake is made and discovered, or when the material is troubling in some way. That is a perfect disaster for scholarship. One needs to know what people were reading when they read it, in order to make sense of what happened next, and if publishers can revise licensed material to eliminate the offending version of the journal article, we are in terrible trouble. And because we do not own this material, we can not preserve it reliably, and don't tell me that the publishers can be relied upon to preserve it reliably. Publishers can't find books that they printed in 2001! And so, the threat to the fundamental infrastructure of humanistic inquiry, the cultural record itself, makes acid paper look like an easy problem.

We have available to us two futures that look wildly different. One of them is a rich set of indexed, searchable collections of text and images, eventually sound and video, the grand customizable collection in the sky. It can be used as a rich index to original materials, as well as a substitute for them in many cases, and as a set of blocks to recombine in new and interesting ways. The more it gets used, like most things, the better it gets, and as a vital bonus, it reconnects scholarship with a broader and interested public because it is available to them too, on pretty much the same terms that it is available in the academy. Then there's a wasteland, which is the pervasive unavailability to anyone and everyone of contemporary, back to the 1920s or so, cultural materials. You can not look at this stuff. You can not or will not be able to find it because it is too hard to do. You can't quote from it because rights clearances are impossible. Yes, there may be some progress on orphan works, but much of the material is not orphaned, although it is difficult to find who has rights to it. Publishers and others people seem to think that they are sitting on gold mines, or they don't know whether they are, and so we just sort of back off and don't dare make materials available in digital form because there might be rights problems down the road.

Tom Mallon said that he thinks copyright is important. As an author, so do I. But I am willing to bet that when Tom wrote *Dewey Defeats Truman*, a book that I took great pleasure in reading, he actually wasn't much motivated by royalties that would accrue to his heirs seventy years from now. (I could be wrong, economists like to believe that people take account of the distant future, but nobody else believes it.)

The humanities are at risk here. We risk the loss of our own source material. There is nothing to assure that there will be ubiquitous access to material currently protected by copyright, amenable to the use of tools that will be available for other materials. There will be a hole in our history. This is bizarre, in part because there is almost no money in that hole. And, as I said earlier, our students won't find the good stuff; they'll find the bad stuff if the bad stuff is what's easy to find on the web.

Before I close, let me make a point that I should have made earlier. Somewhere between 95 and 97 percent of the copyrighted material in the University of Michigan library (we discovered this as we started the Google project) is out of print. We really ought to be able to work out an arrangement with the publishers and with the rights holders that would give us access to that material in digital form in a reasonable way. And if some wonderful book that was written in 1963 that nobody has read since 1965 is suddenly rediscovered because it gets put up in digital form, and people say "Wow, this is great," and they can find the rights holder and the rights holder can make money from it on some reasonable terms, that's wonderful. Let me tell you, it won't happen often, but when it does happen, it is nothing but good news. We have not made these arrangements with publishers and rights holders and we have to figure out how to do it.

So, what are the policy implications of all this? First, push fair use aggressively. *You* have to do it. These are your data. Scientists are going to take care of the data they need but the cultural record is the essential data of the humanities and you won't have access to it and won't be able to use it unless the case is made vigorously both in the public sphere and in universities.

University presses should lead on this. University presses are our creatures. We should work with them to figure out how best to be as open and engaged as possible in the mechanisms of scholarship and the material requisite for scholarship. And again, university presses should lead on fair use, and their provosts and general counsels should promise them that if they get sued on a good fair use claim, we will take it all the way to the Supreme Court because we have to be able to articulate that case.

Earlier I remarked that there are many projects in the humanities that use digital technologies and associated tools, but that individual projects tend to stand alone. To the extent that proposals made to deans, provosts, foundations and other potential sources of funds include a discussion of how materials developed in a given project can be used by other scholars, such proposals will be more attractive. Moreover, the materials can then become part of the richer cyberinfrastructure envisioned in the ACLS report and in my remarks today. A reasoned claim that research can be used by others makes the case for support of that research stronger. The buzz changes from "Oh my God, how are we going to preserve that?" to "This can become part of our developing set of digital materials and tools." That will be good news. And it leads to a straightforward and compelling statement about a good use for money in the humanities. A scholar in the humanities asserts that she needs release time to develop these data. Well, any provost will get that; provosts give release time to physicists all the time so that they can develop data.

Finally, we have to think through what is distinctive about university libraries and what of this shared archive and collection that is envisioned by the ACLS commission and that I have been talking about

today can be made broadly available.  There are a lot of resources in American university libraries, there is budget, expertise, and enormous skill on the part of librarians in finding things and helping us and our students figure out what's the good stuff and what isn't.  We should be expansive about sharing what can be shared so that we can promote the collaborations across time and space that are at the heart of scholarship.

And I think that's about what I have to say. Thank you.

*Reading and Knowing in the Information Age*
**James O'Donnell**
*Provost*, Georgetown University, also *Delegate,* American Philological Association

### Ambition for the Modest[1]

Few scenes in literature have become more trite than the one in Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* in which the archdeacon brandishes a copy of a newfangled printed book against the figure of the cathedral outlined against the sky and exclaims, "Ceci tuera cela!" The printed book has not yet slain the cathedral or the spirits that lie within, and indeed the most abundantly overprinted and over read printed book of this decade is devoted to lively doings in Paris churches and the like.

Hugo's image persists. In 1994, a memorable conference held at the University of San Marino on "The Future of the Book" concluded with our host, Umberto Eco, brandishing a laptop computer in one hand, a paperback book in the other, and quoting the archdeacon with a question mark: "Ceci tuera cela?" Our conclusion that day and the abundant evidence since suggest that the answer is, again, "Non!" But there can be no denying that the book and the digital data store are drawn to each other fiercely and irresistibly, and each sees its future weirdly and permanently entwined with the other.

For the talk from which this paper is drawn, I had meant to re-enact the primal scene of technological change by brandishing my laptop in one hand and a copy of the most exciting new work of scholarship I have read this year in the other. The laptop is considerably more advanced than Eco's and now holds all five million words of Augustine's works in Latin, plus a raft of Cicero and Ovid and Vergil and the like, slews of Rilke and Nietzsche, all of *The Divine Comedy*, all of Scott-Moncrieff's Proust and four volumes of the French, and a fair amount of what may be described as inadequately provenanced copies of the works of a well-known and now deceased author (who would undoubtedly be furious to see these unauthorized copies on the fan website to which he is subjected), not to mention dozens if not hundreds of scholarly articles downloaded from JSTOR and Project Muse.

The book in my other hand in this imaginary tableau is an impressive one: Chris Wickham is the new Chichele Professor of Medieval History at Oxford, whose *Framing the Early Middle Ages* is a work that transforms its subject permanently, bringing old and new evidence together with discipline and judgment, pointing clearly towards new and strong lines of interpretation without becoming a thesis-hammering work of argumentation. The learning, the intelligence, and the restraint of the book assure it a central place in scholarly debate for many decades to come. It would be the perfect counterpoise to my laptop, a vivid physical reminder that the humanistic professions continue to produce powerful and important work that makes the old new, the familiar unfamiliar and revealing.

But the exigencies of modern life prevented me from my juxtaposition, because Wickham's book is 900 pages long – pages I turned this winter with the eagerness I brought to my first reading of *The

---

[1] This is a slightly revised version of the text originally presented.

*Hound of the Baskervilles* in 1959 – and too bulky to fit in my carry-on luggage. I could imagine having a digital representation of it, but for all its urgent contemporaneity, it was still conceived as a book for print, not a database or a website. That *intellectual* nature of book-ishness is deeply planted in our culture and will persist in many forms, even when those forms more and more often include digital representations. In the humanities, at least, the future of work that is not merely, as the saying goes, "born digital," but "*thought* digital" still lies almost entirely before us.[2]

The belabored point of my juxtaposition of work and media is to frame a response to the ACLS-facilitated report on "cyberinfrastructure" whose release was scheduled for a few weeks after our meeting. That document lays out an agenda, indeed, for necessary next steps (and completion of first steps already taken) to shape the future working conditions and achievements of scholars. My expectation is that it will meet an audience ready to respond to it and take in a concerted way those steps for which we have not yet, as a profession, had a good road map. Progress of this kind is a necessary but far from sufficient condition for assuring the health and future of the humanistic studies.

This is a good moment, therefore, for taking success in those efforts a little bit for granted, in order to think our way into some considerations of what the humanities have been, are, and may become in a future age when we *no longer* speak of cyberinfrastructure at the ACLS any more than we now speak there of electrical infrastructure or highway infrastructure. The task has an urgency about it. We know enough now already of the environment of digitally-enabled communication to realize that our privileges are at risk.

I say "digitally-enabled communication" because it is important to realize that even much of what we see that is not obviously done on or with a computer has been transformed in the last decade by the digital revolutions. The editing and production of video materials, however delivered, is easier and cheaper than ever, the quality of high-definition video stunningly better than ever (and therefore our eyes will be drawn to it for even more hours of the day), and the superabundance of channels of distribution – let's see, shall I watch cable TV tonight, or see what Netflix has delivered, or click on a video-on-demand link on my computer? – all depend on the digital matrix from which these objects spring. Print media, the websites of familiar print media, and the endless resources of digital libraries that I print out for myself all depend themselves in turn on digital tools of preparation and management. No piece of newly printed material that you can hold in your hands did not have some digital life before it was committed to paper.

That new environment challenges our privileged place to speak. The pulpit of Hugo's archdeacon lost much, but not all, of its hold on public attention (and some clergy of course found and find new pulpits to reach large audiences), and now in turn our own classrooms can feel the charisma of place leaking out of them. Fifty years ago, classicists like Moses Hadas, Gilbert Highet, and Whitney Oates were radio personalities on the fine stations and networks in New York and their classrooms still places where the voice of authority spoke uncontested. Today I cannot pretend to speak as the voice of authority uncontested in a space where the very smart student in the second row with her laptop is ready to throw one misspoken word back at me in a trice – and I am ready to be delighted by her intelligence and enterprise. Nothing will change that, emphatically not the Canute-like insistence of some faculty that students be deprived of the use of functional information appliances in the sacred classroom space – for nothing will chase people from the sacred space faster than to disempower them when they are there.

---

[2] The new Digital Innovation Fellowships administered by ACLS, the first of which were awarded this spring, will sow seeds for work of a different sort.

In the welter of voices that pummel us from the cablesphere, the blogosphere, and the wikisphere, the recession of the humanities academic from a position of authority continues apace. A few of us – but not many of *us* in fact – emerge in the new guise of "public intellectuals," a role all the more problematic in that it must be shared with people who have none of our justifiable claims to the authority of knowing that comes from practicing one's trade in a community of inquiry and collegiality.[3]

And we see around us the signs of the fading of our reputation, even our disrepute. The Jefferson Lecture on the Humanities this year cannot be excused for the lamentable, indeed culpable obscurantism and flat out untruth that he larded into his remarks. The authorities on the development of human cognition, consciousness, and speech – I think of people like Daniel Dennett and Steven Pinker – had to be startled to hear that the Lecturer averred that evolution had come to an end eleven thousand years ago with the acquisition of human powers of speech and that culture had now decisively triumphed over nature. What is worst about this pathetic display, however, is that there are many, even well-wishers of ours, who will take this embarrassing spectacle as evidence for the deterioration of our own standards and disciplines.

The words of a recent Nobel Prize winner, responding to an interviewer, are equally sobering:

> I think these universities have passed their peak. The very idea of the
> university may be finished. . . . I feel that these places ought to be wrapped up
> and people should buy their qualifications at the Post Office.

Not including scientific qualifications? – interjected the interviewer.

> No, those must remain. But the Humanities - they seem to me to be worthless
> disciplines.[4]

I must make this point unmistakably clear: There is no point in arguing with such statements. Practicing humanists know they are untrue and can assert that eloquently, even prove the point to our own satisfaction in the blink of a parakeet's eye, but that means nothing if those who say such things or hear them with assent are unmoved.[5] And we are not without responsibility for the rise of such attitudes, and certainly share responsibility if they persist in spite of us.

How then shall we act? My goal is not to preach resistance, defense, or defiance even at the price of decay, nor even reinvigoration. I rather suggest we should ask afresh the question what it would take for the humanities to succeed not only a little beyond what we fear might happen but far beyond what we dream could happen.

The leitmotif of my suggestions is the old line of Terence:
> *homo sum: nihil humanum a me alienum puto*.
> I am human: there's nothing human that's alien to me.[6]

---

[3] Some very good books for general readers by distinguished ancient historians sell far fewer copies than the quite bad books of Thomas Cahill, for example. Such disparity lies partly in the willingness of the non-scholar to tell a story so simple that no scholar could regard it as usefully true.

[4] V.S. Naipaul.

[5] A quick Google search would find the passage just quoted and identify the speaker; to name him here might encourage dismissive explanation that I think in fact inappropriate for the reasons stated in my text.

[6] My translation is not a modern prettification, for "homo" in Latin is the word that English forgot to acquire, a gender-undifferentiated word for "human being," as opposed to both "vir" (man) and "femina" (woman). It is used, for example,

In that spirit, this is a moment for renewed commitment to inclusiveness and to ambition.[7]  If we carve out a quiet little niche for ourselves, we can easily succeed, and find it growing quieter and smaller with each passing year.  If what we do has the value we know it has, then we should expect it to flourish greatly and work to that end.

The domain of our ambition can reasonably be divided among questions of discipline, questions of substance, and questions of method.  I shall address a few of them, by way of exemplifying a style of thought and strategy.

In matters of discipline, first, we can and should reposition ourselves in the organon of the arts and sciences.  We owe ourselves at last the opportunity for intelligent rebellion against the shackles that C.P. Snow threw over our heads with his famous lecture on "The Two Cultures."  For many years, I had an inkling of what dissatisfied me about Snow, and when F.R. Leavis or Roger Kimball flailed away at him, I knew they were missing the point entirely, indeed catastrophically.  I was then gladly instructed by Karl Popper, in an essay called "A pluralist approach to the philosophy of history."  Snow's error, and a pernicious one, was in believing himself and then enabling those outside the natural sciences to believe, that there really does exist a fundamental difference in modes of knowing between scientists and what he called "literary intellectuals" and we might call humanists.  To believe that requires us to believe in a fundamental and, I am quite sure, false dichotomy between the world of nature and the world of humankind – something I might be tempted to call, and in calling it both praise a venerable elder of our tribe and affirm his reading of the formative culture of the early nineteenth century and its lasting influence today, a natural supernaturalism.  To observe the distinctiveness, within the order of nature, of the cultural products of human beings is one thing, but to extrapolate from it the notion of a different and artificial order of being that requires different modes of knowing and authority is to hearken back to a long period of digression in medieval and modern Christian thought.[8]

The late French Jesuit Henri de Lubac, whose scholarship on the early church earned him papal censure early in life and a cardinal's hat late, transformed the historical study of theology in 1946 with publication of his book, *Surnaturel:  études historiques*, in which he showed beyond doubt that the notion of a supernatural order, something separate and divided from the natural, was a late medieval invention at best and not an ancient or integral part of Christian thought.  Religious thinkers have absorbed this lesson with difficulty, when they have absorbed it at all, but it is curious the extent to which our public and private rhetoric of the humanities seem to have missed it entirely, continuing to proclaim a watered down version of non-ecclesiastical spirituality even when all divinity has been evacuated from it.

That "exceptionalism of the humanities" saps our intellectual integrity and undermines our authority in the wider society more than any other single fact.  In asserting our abstinence from the habits and modes of inquiry of the critical intellect as they have evolved and been fought over – even at the cost of life itself – in the last centuries, we sacrifice more than I think most of us ever suspect.  As long as

---

of a fetus whose gender is not known or of a living person whose gender has been rendered ambiguous, as when the priestess at Delphi speaks with the oracular voice of a male god.

[7] Thus it is quite true to say that papers delivered at scholarly conferences should not be mocked for their abstruse vocabulary and rebarbative arguments, but we should ask what else we could do to make the value and progress of our studies better known.  The ideal state is one in which reasonable journalists would be embarrassed to make fun of our peccadilloes and eager to praise our virtues.

[8] Indeed, our practice has the effect of confirming the Jefferson Lecturer's exceptionalism of which I spoke above.

we assert or assume that we are immune from the rigors of quantification, of falsification, and of a reliable and predictable peer review among scholars of all biases, we surrender any reasonable expectation of being heard with respect by those outside our cloisters.[9]

One way forward is to remind ourselves of the origins of the "liberal arts," an institution whose modern instantiations have little or nothing to do with those origins, as is often the case with intellectual institutions. The trivium and quadrivium of late antiquity took root as disciplines of the mind to give it mastery of both word and number, discourse and reckoning, to enable both tools to free the mind of slavish acceptance of the apparent disorderliness of the perceived world and to help it see the underlying orderliness and *ratio* of words and things. How often are humanists directly involved in defining, much less providing, the courses that fill new-found quantitative skills requirements for undergraduates? Not, I think, often enough for a profession that uses words like "probably" and "certainly" and makes assertions about such classes as "the nineteenth-century novel" without having read, or even seen, the vast majority of books that category comprises.

To shake off the great set of blinders that lets us think ourselves outside the domain of the natural sciences would be a great achievement and should be a task of our time for our profession, but we blinker ourselves in other equally culpable ways. To the false dichotomy between science and culture I would add the one that runs in many ways even deeper in western societies, between the world of culture and the world of enterprise and trade. Without commerce, we would still live in the ancients' version of the golden age – lying about naked under the trees, feeding on nuts and berries. But the same Romans who sang persuasively about that golden age were the ones who had rigidly enforced in their own aristocratic society a distinction between the true nobles – the senators who made money the old fashioned ways, that is by inheriting it or by stealing it – and the second order worthies of their society, the *equites* or knights, the mere businessmen. That haughty disdain not only for engaging in trade but even for understanding anything of its workings led eventually to the immoral moralism that prohibited lending money at interest, than which no religious decree more likely to lead to the miserable poverty of the great majority humankind has been imagined.

In the academy we know, "business" appears as an object of study infrequently, except in the gated communities of our business schools. Business ethics is, we all agree, a subject of great urgency, and therefore to be taught in business schools by individuals whose standing (that is, whose compensation) there is not very high. (One effect of our interest in business ethics is to persuade businessmen that ethical thought is a way for outsiders to exercise control over them – a control they reasonably distrust.) Economic history may be imagined and sometimes studied and taught, though it is rather in abeyance at the moment and seldom reaches the more profound level of history of business itself. Departments of philosophy and religion can be entirely innocent of such concerns, as are often departments of foreign languages and literatures – for note the common critical and institutional assumption that the natural purpose of learning a foreign language is to read the literature, not to do business with real people who speak that language. Departments of English in recent times have paid a bit more attention to the subject, as when critics excavate the financial records and dealings of the fathers and brothers in Jane Austen, but the business dealings of literary men themselves are regularly ignored.[10] (When was the last time you read a biography of a modern literary figure of no inherited

---

[9] We cannot objectively measure how far the exceptionalism of the humanities has been fed by the architecture of our campuses, often literally monastic in form, and by the curious insistence on adhering to medieval costume for our public rituals. We should at any rate recognize that these are modern choices, not a natural and unmediated measure of continuity with a venerable past.

[10] The exceptions in this domain are real, but still exceptions; see, for example, Lisa Jardine's splendid *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (1996) or William E. Wallace, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo: The Genius as Entrepreneur*

wealth that told you how much money he or she made by writing and selling books and lecturing on them?  I call no examples to mind, though I have hardly sought them thoroughly.  But how much did the Montreux Palace cost each year?  How much did Vladimir Nabokov make for the translations of his Russian works, and how much more than he would have made if he had left the task to others?  How much was left when Nabokov and his widow, Vera, passed away?  And how much more does that estate make each year?  Are these questions *irrelevant* to the study of literature?[11])

A calm and rational study of the history of wealth and poverty and their manifestations in the artistic artifacts and the normative thought of cultures would have many benefits, not least that of opening minds to us of many who now return our own disdain – too often ideologically expressed – for the world of filthy lucre with a disdain of their own.

To the humanities of science and the humanities of enterprise, I suggest that we have finally to renew our commitment to the humanities of a global society and to the historical record.[12]  We are as a tribe reasonably adept at insisting, against the tendencies of the world outside our walls, on the value and importance of cultures beyond American borders and of history before the range of living memory.  But if we look again more closely at the courses we teach and the faculty staffing that we deploy, I am sorry to say that we are still far too ready to acquiesce in our national particularism, exceptionalism, parochialism, and presentism.  I am wont to boast, for example, of Georgetown's history department, that it has more scholars focused on non-U.S. than U.S. history, and that is still, alas, unusual.  But if I deployed my historians as a man from Mars, curious to know our history, would do, we would be much stronger still in Asian, African, and Latin American subjects, and much stronger in ancient and medieval subjects than we can hope to be now.  Lynne Brindley, the visionary and effective CEO of the British Library, has just thrust that institution into the future with a new collecting strategy that will emphasize at far greater levels than ever before materials from and about China and India.  One can only say:  about time, and indeed well past time.  Many universities require today a few courses, perhaps even a language, that take students beyond their native borders.  Does any require that every major be genuinely global in its reach?  Does any American university teach American history fairly, frankly – and from the outside?  Why not?  We have edged towards a broader institutional view of the world, but there is still a chasm between where we are and where we should be.[13]

The consequences of the misprisions I have sketched here are many and baleful:

First, we are seen to be the creators and managers of a space for the survival and flourishing of ideology of every stripe, the intellectual equivalent of kudzu.  We are usually credited with preferring leftist ideology to rightist, as though that distinction mattered when what is at stake is the sacrifice of intellectual independence and integrity.  The practices that let themselves be read this way – and that too often *are* what they seem to be – are not only deleterious in themselves, but they legitimize and encourage relativism, obscurantism, and a belief in truth by majority vote.  Many humanists will admit,

---

(1994 art historians find out most easily that they are historians of a trade as well as an art).  I much admire a recent article (12 May 2006) by William St. Clair in *TLS* on the political economy of publishing in the UK before and after the year 1800.  The milk and water Marxism of some literary humanists earns no more respect outside our cloisters than does the milk and water Freudianism of others, and deservedly so.

[11] Bryan Boyd's marvelous biography shies away from all such questions, occasionally reporting Vladimir Nabokov's salary at Wellesley or Cornell, but offering no useful insight into the finances of the successful writer.

[12] Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism* (2006) has reinforced my understanding of the ways in which multiplicity and diversity can and indeed must coincide with commitment and principle.

[13] History and literature show the U.S.-centric curriculum most clearly, while other fields distinctly emphasize European cultural production (notably art history and music, but also to some extent philosophy and religious studies), while still underplaying the history, culture, and challenges of the rest of the world's population.

when pressed, to having peeked at the list of *101 Worst Professors* in a recent book by David Horowitz. What evades observation too often is the way in which Horowitz embodies the very relativism he deplores, with his bizarre notion that university faculties should, *a priori,* represent in a "balanced" way the political views of the broader society. I cannot understand that as anything but a belief in truth by majority vote, a belief no responsible academic can share.

Let me put this more pointedly. If you would tell me that an active acceptance of the current state of research and practice in evolutionary theory is a mark of a "liberal" perspective and a rejection of it[14] is "conservative," then I have simply to say back that exactly 100% of academics must and should be "liberal" on those terms, plain and simple. Period, full stop, and no room for argument.[15]

Not only do our misprisions throw us into intellectual league with our worst enemies, but they separate us from our friends. Our colleagues whose annual assembly is not the ACLS but the American Association for the Advancement of Science often do not know what to make of us, while our colleagues in some of our professional schools and in particular our business schools are often made to feel, by our various snobbisms, like poor relations at our tables – except that they make a lot more money than we do and not infrequently feel smug about that. We need those allies, not least because *every* sector of the academy today suffers from incomprehension and funding challenges from the marketplaces in which they operate. This talk was first given a few hundred yards from the spot where Ben Franklin famously declared that "We must hang together, gentlemen . . . else, we shall most assuredly hang separately." *De nobis fabula narratur.*[16]

But finally, the worst effect of our failures to shape and propel our profession is that the flag that we should fly above others is seen to falter, the one proclaiming the power of inquiry, skepticism, and collegiality to demolish error and advance understanding. If "terrorism" represents a fundamental and intolerable denial of the very conditions of existence of civilized society, failure to assert and live that power of the intellect in our universities renders invalid our claim to the respect and resources of the society we educate, counsel, and lead. (I believe that shaky claim explains the marginalization of our voices in debates over the "war on terror.") We must, I believe, be ambitious in this regard, because any failure of ambition is a failure to achieve the one mission that justifies our existence.

So here we are: increasingly marginalized and losing market share in a downwardly mobile profession.[17] I have outlined the main directions of ambition that we need to pursue. Note that I do not spend time, for example, insisting that we need to work harder teaching our students to write standard English. First, it is obvious that we must do that; but it is also clear that they will succeed best when we not only work at that task but engage *them* with greater enthusiasm and passion in the

---

[14] "Not my field," as we say, and I acknowledge the possibility and the importance of reasoned scientific dissent, even insurgency, leading to revision and improvement of the current state of the theory; but I do not see that this is in question anywhere today, while unenlightened rejectionism is deplorably common.

[15] When I spoke these words at the ACLS/AAU convocation, there was widespread applause, to my dismay. I did not mean to give aid and comfort to those who think "liberalism" and "conservativism" are antipathetic to each other and in so doing feed the self-interest of politicians who dare not become statesmen.

[16] Horace, Satire 1.1.69-70, "mutato nomine de te / fabula narrator": "just change the name: it's a story about you."

[17] The opening pages of the AAU "Reinvigorating the Humanities" report has a snapshot of the data that suggest our plight, but could be made more sobering if the timelines on some of the graphs showing numbers of degrees and majors could be extended back 40 years to show the secular declines. Of particular importance at these meetings of the ACLS was a program session devoted to the project for "Making the Humanities Count" – an initiative led out of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to provide accurate and useful numbers by which we can measure our needs, our ambitions, and our successes.

larger missions of our tribe.  Our ambition and our success is what can make our students *want* to write as well as we do, and that is half, or perhaps two-thirds, the battle.

There are real questions of method and tactics to be addressed, and I will fall short of addressing them, because they are best handled by field officers in the trenches, and this is not a talk about Georgetown and what we do in our trenches to fight these battles.  Two tactical tasks above all others need to be taken up and mastered.  First, the task for libraries beyond the age of Google, mass digitization of texts, and the sudden switch from an economy of scarcity of information to an economy of abundance of information.  I have spent much time in the last two decades in the company of research librarians and have every confidence in their ability to think one step ahead of the competition and define a vital and effective role for themselves.  When I worry about them, it is because I worry about myself:  that is, myself as provost, and other provosts, presidents, and boards, who need to empower their librarians, support them tactically, and invest in them strategically.  Those investments are still among the most important deployments of capital that we make as universities.

The task for the professors themselves is less well-defined but fundamental.  How do we, on the one hand, remain true to our core tasks of inquiry and discovery while at the same time standing forth as representatives of the principles that underlie our scholarship to an audience beyond our traditional ones?  There are credible voices whose books make it into the chain stores, whose blogs are read with attention (and deserve to be), and perhaps even, once in a great while, whose faces appear on television, if only to be flattered by talk show hosts or sound-bitten for a program on the History Channel whose theme and production values counteract the scholarly ethos and credentials of the talking heads.  There are small victories to be won in those ways, and those battles must be fought.  But we must not lose sight of the aims of the war.

The mission of our campaign must be diversity, inclusion, and upward mobility – for the reinforcement of the privileges of elites is an effort not worth the candle.  And it must be the pursuit of truth – truth hedged around with contingency and uncertainty, but withal truth, that is, the sum of assertions for which there is evidence and that have proved so far insusceptible of disproof.

We know we have not won that war, because we live in a society in which it is widely accepted that diversity is at best a silly aspiration and at worst an irresponsible one; and in which it is widely accepted that credulous and irresponsible opinion is a functional substitute for truth.  We are thought to agree with those views.  Our concerns are thought to be marginal; the skills we impart thought to be irrelevant and unnecessary.

The implicit thrust of my argument has been that the humanities are imperiled by failures of imagination and self-awareness on the part of disciplines that have more to offer than even they surmise.  But argument of this sort can become part of a broader river of discourse which changes course only slowly if at all.  To bring these considerations to a more tactically effective point, I want to engage in a little historical experiment:  a history of the future, as its practitioners call it.

Imagine for a moment that at a meeting of the Americas Council of Learned Societies (now expanded to embrace all the learned societies of the western hemisphere) in the year 2026, held in the "hot city" of that decade, the burgeoning cultural capital of the west, Havana, some of us and many of our successors find themselves awash in good feeling, celebrating the dramatic rise to intellectual and cultural ascendancy of the humanistic disciplines.  Let us dare to think that we could at that date be hearing of booming enrollments, strong funding, and a demand for new Ph.D.'s outrunning our poor

powers to supply them.[18]  If some brave soul should stand up on that occasion to outline the history of the twenty years that pass between now and then, what would she have to say in order to make that revolution intelligible?

Some of that history would have to be quite beyond our immediate control.  The one revolution – and not an entirely unlikely one – that would have to intervene globally would be the realization that the discovery and propagation of new, renewable energy sources will mean not the collapse of the old petro-based economy, but rather an economic renaissance in the mature economies, a boom in the emerging economies, and even economic hope and growth in the most beleaguered economies of the planet.  I will press a little further, for purposes of this fantasy, and ask you to imagine that even the petro-economies of Africa and Asia find a new lease on life and a culture of political openness.  I say again, a fantasy, but the purpose is to help us find some directions.

So what would *we* have done to make the most of the opportunities of a newly prosperous and peaceful planet?

First, we would have taken heed of leaders like Don Randel and their weariness with the disciplinary taxonomies imposed by the nineteenth-century German university and reshaped our faculties and our curricula to reflect the true history of humankind and the real environment in which we live and will live.  No university will dare to be ethno- or nation-centric in its distribution of faculty positions studying the history or culture.  If anything, a bias in *favor* of relatively remote and emerging societies – African, Asian, South American – will be seen as an important contribution to preparing students and creating knowledge that will serve a global community and not only propagate the economy and culture of northwestern Europe and north America.  We will, as well, have found disciplinary constructions that can link our expertise institutionally to the social and natural sciences through common concentration on understanding the history and future of the large themes that preoccupy human concern:  security, energy, environment, health. (There will be universities where *those* four themes become the names of departments or even schools, academic units that then clamor for the guidance and conceptual formation that humanists can offer as facilitators, integrators, and analysts.)  The hallmark of our success will be that humanists are engaged in *every* department and *every* school of the most successful academic institutions, and are hotly competed for.

Second, the institutions we inhabit will have found new and successful ways to make the value of academic learning and analysis palpable and available to the individuals, corporations, institutions, and governmental agencies and organs of every nation.  We will have recognized the fundamental similarity in structure and competence of the great university and the international consulting firm, and we will have seized our due and proper share of their market.  Every industry and every enterprise will have recognized that the disciplines of inquiry, skepticism, and collegiality make us uniquely qualified to offer guidance and advice based on our ability to remain focused on the strategic, long-term, macro-scale while rooting those concerns in unhurried attention to detail.  We will, especially, have found our niche in working in emerging market regions of the world to help other societies shape academic institutions that genuinely meet the needs and lift the ambitions of those societies – and we will, in return, have used our own engagement with those cultures and societies a source of renewed strength

---

[18] Lest I be thought fanciful, this was indeed the urgent issue reported by B.J. Whiting, Delegate to the ACLS of the Medieval Academy of America, in 1953 (*Speculum* 28[1953] 633-34), representing the alarm of the Council at the thought that a national academic faculty of 50,000 would have to grow to 90,000 by the year 1965 in order to keep up with the demographic demand.  This news was reported as staggering.  The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports (http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos066.htm#emply) that "Postsecondary teachers held nearly 1.6 million jobs in 2004," at least a quarter million of them undeniably humanistic.

to our core activities at home.  As the People's Republic of China set out to build hundreds of new universities, it will have found that American and other "first world" partner institutions were more valuable as mentors and guides than as competitors looking to open new campuses and draw revenue from over the horizons of their ordinary sphere of activity.

Third, but also first of all, the quality of the scholarship that we will have produced will earn the unforced admiration of the most rigorous of professionals and, at a distance of the educated general public as well.  We will have utilized the new tools of scholarship and communication that our age has provided to build stronger collaborations among scholars, to develop more robust and reliable collections of books, artifacts, and indeed databases on which to draw for our work with less dependency on the particular place and space in which a given scholar happens to work, and we will have guaranteed the quality of our work by developing mechanisms of peer review and post-publication review that are far more consistent, rigorous, and predictable than anything we know today.

Is that history of the future unrealizable?  I do not believe that it is, but I also believe that those who think so should be challenged to say exactly why and to say exactly what *else* we then must do to assure the survival and prosperity of our tribe.  We must have no patience with strategies that assume we might barely preserve most of what we now have or that imagine a slow managed decline or a retreat to monastic purity and poverty.  Nor should we blame others for our challenges and confine ourselves to marketing what we already are and seeking funding without taking the time to make what we offer more worthy of funding.  We do what we do because it is worth doing and because it is important and because it is needed.  And if that is so, we should expect success, plan for it, and be clear-eyed and energetic in achieving it – and then expect the support of our fellow citizens.

Each generation is challenged to connect our core commitment to memory, to inquiry, and to understanding with the concerns of *all* of the leaders of society, everywhere.  But each generation faces that challenge in a slightly different form and must respond in appropriately different ways.  In the end, we must expect and act to seize afresh the attention and respect of the elders of our tribe and the ambitions and dreams of the young.  For we are assured of no lasting place on this earth and must earn again afresh every day.  That task is more urgent than ever, and will not abate in our lifetimes.

American Council of Learned Societies - View organizer profile, list of upcoming trade events, trade fairs, business conferences, seminars, expositions and other events organized by American Council of Learned Societies. American Economic Association Chicago. Chicago, United States #Business Services. 6 Interested. VIEW MORE. American Council of Learned Societies as Event Organizer. FLAGSHIP EVENT. African Studies Associat... 5 Tembi Charles Reviewed African Studies Association on 04 Dec 2018 Student at Penn State University. This was an excellent platform for Africanists to meet and exchange ideas. The only thing I found challenging was the programme. Three UC Davis humanities scholars are among 78 American Council of Learned Societies Fellows for 2018. The grant competition drew nearly 1,150 applicants for awards of $40,000 to $70,000 to support six to 12 months of full-time research and writing. The UC Davis awardees and project descriptions, summarized from abstracts: Hsuan L. The Retirees Association bestows this honor in recognition of outstanding service to the association, additional community service, contributions to UC Davis during employment and â€œinnovative problem-solving and advocacy activity of benefit to UC Davis retirees.â€ Hamiltonâ€™s UC career spanned nearly 30 years, concluding as vice chancellor of the Office of Administration from 1991 until her retirement in 2003. Grants support research by faculty at teaching-intensive colleges and universities. Congratulations to Bathsheba R. Demuth F'15, Jack A. Goldstone F'84, Meghan Howey F'14, David A. Pietz F'95, & Amy Erica Smith F'19. RECENT FELLOWS. Yalcin Ozkan Righting a Death on the Job: The Politics of Fatal Work Accident Lawsuits in Turkey. Yalcin Ozkan. The frequency of workplace deaths in Turkey places the country among the most unsafe economies. This project reveals the lawâ€™s contribution to this hazardous labor regime by examining its emphasis on monetary compensation as a... Association of American Law Schools Founded: 1900 Admitted to ACLS: 1958. Publications. Sign up for ACLS news.