Torn Halves: Political Conflict in Literary and Cultural Theory

(1996)

Robert J.C. Young

Chapter 8
The Idea of a Chrestomathic University

> 'When an University has been doing useless things for a long time, it appears at first degrading to them to be useful' – Sydney Smith

Should education have any use? Put like that the question seems hardly worth asking, let alone answering. Yet this apparently absurd topic constitutes the major issue that has dominated debates about higher education in Britain for the past two hundred years. What is most remarkable is that such a controversy should have managed to sustain itself into such extreme old age; a suppurating scission within British culture, through which British culture repeats its irreconcilable antagonisms.

It is true that not even Oscar Wilde dared to assert publicly, at least, that universities should be like art – that is, perfectly useless. But to suggest that universities should be useful, that they should teach practical forms of knowledge, has been, for many, to go too far. And that has not been because like Foucault, they have

suspiciously characterized the university as an 'institutional apparatus through which society ensures its uneventful reproduction, at least cost to itself':[1] on the contrary, they have considered that society is best served and sustained by the universities teaching knowledge that is useless. The wisdom of the university, in this account, should not have a use value: it should be outside the circuit of exchange, its very exteriority assuring its special value as a signifier, no doubt transcendental, that guarantees the stability of society itself.

This by no means implies, however, that the university's particular function is to embody the principle of reason, as the Germans were to argue.[2] No English university (English because the systems elsewhere in Britain are separate and would require altogether different analyses) is founded on reason.[3] If the principle of reason is itself situated on an abyss, the first and most famous universities of Britain, Oxford and Cambridge, by contrast, were founded quite literally on a void, a dissemination, that is as a result of an academic diaspora.[4] If we pose the question of the basis, principles and function of the English university, we find that, suitably enough for a country with an unwritten constitution, there is no founding document or even prospective philosophical account of the function and system of the university such as those which formed part of the national reconstruction in Germany after the Napoleonic invasion. All that can be found is a charter by which the state granted the university certain privileges. In this sense, no English university can claim that it thinks that it knows what it is doing. Even the institution of the Ph.D. had no more glorious rationale than that in the 1920s, discovering that their Master of Arts degree could not compete with the Ph.D. of foreign universities

in attracting overseas graduate students, British universities pragmatically introduced a doctorate of philosophy.[5]

Nor in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, can there be found any conflict of faculties such as Kant describes, if for no other reason than because by then the higher faculties of theology, law and medicine, had largely disappeared, leaving the faculty of arts in uncontested domination.[6] But if there was no internal conflict within the universities, the state itself constantly challenged the validity of the knowledge that was taught within them. The history of the universities in the nineteenth century is about the contestation of academic freedom in that sense: do the universities have the right to teach what they like? Does the state have the right to call into question the knowledge that the universities impart – and given that the universities are themselves by definition the highest authorities on the subject of knowledge and its validity, what are the grounds on which the state opposes them?

To contest the prerogative of the universities is no easy matter. Oxford and Cambridge – which have always most seriously defended their right to teach useless knowledge – are, as ecclesiastical corporations, founded on nothing other than the Logos itself. No lesser word than the Word has constituted the authority of the university – exclusively from the beginnings of the University of Oxford in the twelfth century to the founding of the secular University of London in 1826. For six centuries Oxford and Cambridge held a monopoly over university education in England. The charters by which they were established, which guaranteed them certain forms of freedom from the state, and allowed them to exercise a monopoly over the degrees necessary

for candidates for ordination in the Church of England, together with the successive endowments which they accrued over the centuries, meant that they became wealthy – and, in the opinion of some, virtually useless.

It is generally agreed even by the official historians of the universities themselves that by the eighteenth century they had fallen into a serious decay:[7] testimony after testimony can be found of their degenerate condition in this period. One of the best known is Wordsworth's description of Cambridge in the *Prelude*, published after his death in 1850 at a very timely moment, just when the university was under investigation by a Royal Commission. Gibbon recalls of his tutor at Magdalen College, Oxford:

> Dr Winchester well remembered that he had a salary to receive, and only forgot that he had a duty to perform. Instead of guiding the studies and watching over the behaviour of his disciple, I was never summoned to attend even the ceremony of a lecture; and except one voluntary visit to his rooms, during the eight months of his titular office, the tutor and pupil lived in the same college as strangers to each other.[8]

Magdalen's response to Gibbon's criticism was to institute a special section in the College Library (which exists to this day) devoted to books written by fellows of the College.[9] The state of the universities at this time is most economically summed up in Adam Smith's remark, which seems to have gone uncontested, that 'in the university of Oxford, the greater part of the publick professors have, for these many years, given up altogether even the pretence of teaching'.[10] College fellowships were regarded as a reward for achievements

attained rather than implying any obligation to teach; other considerations were also important – even in Newman's day, Oriel College was the only college in Oxford that elected its fellows on the sole grounds of academic merit.[11]

This strength of Oxford against outside interference was to some extent a reaction to the events of the Civil War, when Oxford, having been Charles' most loyal royalist stronghold, was subsequently forced to reform itself and to appoint the radical supporters of Baconian new science such as Wallis and Wilkins who were nominated by Parliamentary commissioners. This was not, at least, as extreme a measure as Milton had advocated, who had wanted to abolish the university altogether. With the Restoration, the old loyalists were reinstated, and the former radicals moved to London.[12] The university's loyalist history meant that it became impervious to outside pressure, all the more strongly enforced by the dark memory of the activity of the commissioners around the Civil War period. Demands for reform began to be made again with increasing vociferousness in the eighteenth century but achieved little. The universities argued that, as ecclesiastical institutions, no contract with the state existed beyond that between church and state; their close affiliations with the government kept them unharmed. Until, however, the state itself changed once again: in 1854, despite strong opposition particularly from Oxford (which argued that it had already revised its academic arrangements satisfactorily, in 1636), the state reasserted its ultimate legal powers and rewrote the statutes. The subsequent history of Oxford and Cambridge during the nineteenth century is a story of reforms directly or indirectly imposed upon them. This history is not a reassuring one

for any advocate of an absolute academic freedom.

Paradoxically enough, until the time of J.S. Mill it was the Liberals who attacked the principles of a 'liberal' education. The assault on Oxford and Cambridge from outside the universities focused on two related issues: the exclusion of dissenters, that is, any one who was not a member of the Church of England, and the university curriculum – both of which were justified by the same doctrinal truth. In 1809, declaring that he had been long waiting for the opportunity, Sydney Smith attacked the whole rationale of the classical education which formed the syllabus at Oxford (Cambridge by contrast demanded a little classics, but mostly pure mathematics). In the place of truth Smith substituted use: 'the only proper criterion of every branch of education', he argued, is 'its utility in future life'. According to this criterion,

> there never was a more complete instance in any country of such extravagant and overacted attachment to any branch of knowledge, as that which obtains in this country with regard to classical knowledge. A young Englishman goes to school at six or seven years old; and he remains in a course of education till twenty-three or twenty-four years of age. In all that time, his sole and exclusive occupation is learning Latin and Greek: he has scarcely a notion that there is any other kind of excellence; and the great system of facts with which he is the most perfectly acquainted, are the intrigues of the Heathen Gods: with whom Pan slept? – with whom Jupiter? – whom Apollo ravished? These facts the English youth get by heart the moment they quit the nursery; and are most sedulously and industriously instructed in them till the best and most active part of life is passed away. Now, this long career of classical learning, we may, if we please, denominate

> a foundation; but it is a foundation so far above ground, that there is absolutely no room to put any thing upon it.[13]

Smith concluded that 'nothing would so much tend to bring classical literature within proper bounds, as a steady and invariable appeal to utility in our appretiation [sic] of human knowledge'. In this way he set up the terms of a debate that was to continue to the present day.

His attack stirred Oxford to the extent of provoking a series of ripostes. In 1810 Edward Copleston, the Professor of Poetry, published *A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review against Oxford*, and, then, *A Second Reply ... to the Calumnies*, and even *A Third Reply ... to the Calumnies*.[14] It was hard to defend the Oxford curriculum in terms of the idea of a liberal education, since, with its exclusive emphasis on Latin and Greek, it could hardly be described as liberal; nor could Copleston invoke the other meaning of liberal in the sense of freedom, given the severe financial, gender and religious restrictions on attendance at the university. So instead he fought his ground on the long-established claim, so often to be repeated subsequently, that if a literary education did not prepare the student for any specific kind of employment or profession, its very lack of specificity meant that it prepared him (women were not admitted) for everything. Citing Adam Smith on the increasing partiality and narrowness of perspective that results from the division of labour among the professions, Copleston argued:

> In the cultivation of literature is found that common link, which, among the higher and middling departments of life, unites the jarring sects and subdivisions in one interest, which supplies common topics, and kindles common feelings, unmixed with

> those narrow prejudices with which all professions are more or less infected. The knowledge, too, which is thus acquired, expands and enlarges the mind.... And thus, without directly qualifying a man for any of the employments of life, it enriches and ennobles all. Without teaching him the peculiar business of any one office or calling, it enables him to act his part in each of them with better grace and more elevated carriage....
>
> There must be surely a cultivation of the mind, which is itself a good: a good of the highest order; without any immediate reference to bodily appetites, or wants of any kind.... And if Classical Education be regarded in this light, there is none in which it will be found more faultless.[15]

A sublime elevation versus a rational ground, a glorious truth versus vulgar utility, knowledge for its own sake versus debasing instrumentality, quality of mind versus practical needs, the universal versus the particular: such were the terms of the debate which, in spite of local variations, has remained the basis of discussions of university education from that day to this.

Copleston's argument reflects the extent to which the university's function had by the nineteenth century come to be seen as providing young men with a version of the civility and refinement which in former times they would have acquired from a sojourn at the royal Court. Copleston assumes that the recipient of such a form of education is in a position to disregard such trivialities as 'wants of any kind'; in other words, that the student does not need education in order to provide the wealth to support him afterwards. It seems likely that classical literary education survived precisely because anyone who could afford at that time to go to Oxford or Cambridge was by definition not in need of a profession,

and therefore was not in need of anything but a gentlemanly education. This is clear from the failure of attempts to transplant the Oxford model to the new University of Durham in 1832, founded because in the year of the Reform Bill the Church of England was afraid that the Government might appropriate some of its surplus wealth; thirty years later, however, Durham still had no more than forty-six students.[16] A similar fate befell the new Catholic University of Dublin, founded in 1852, whose rector, John Henry Newman, ironically provided in his rectorial addresses the most eloquent defence of this idea of university education. The 'cultivated intellect' that is its object produces the true gentleman, whose magnanimous and fastidious qualities are described by Newman with some fervour for several pages.[17] However, the reality of such high ideals, at a university designed solely for Irish Catholics who had been oppressed and prevented from holding office or power for several centuries, was rather different: as Newman himself admitted, 'the great difficulty is that there seems to be no class to afford members of a University'.[18] In fact, only the useful part of the university, the medical school, survived.

If certain class interests were involved in the idea of a literary education, the authority of the Anglican Church – in Britain constitutionally part of the state – was also at stake, as well as its power to control university education. For this reason, as Newman's lectures make abundantly clear, the dispute over useful as against useless knowledge is also an argument about secular, or free thinking, versus religious education – and about the place of religion in knowledge generally, which was, in the sphere of natural philosophy, being increasingly contested. This is apparent from the

controversy that surrounded the founding of the University of London in 1826 – the first English university designed to teach useful knowledge. What shocked the more conservative members of the public, including Coleridge who immediately announced that he would give three lectures on the subject of the university, which he never gave, was that the University of London was, as it was termed, a 'godless university'. This meant that the Church of England's monopoly over university education had at long last been broken: the teachers were not required to be clergymen as they were at Oxford and Cambridge, students did not have to take a religious test by swearing allegiance to the doctrines of the Church of England in order to matriculate, and religion was not even taught.

The University of London was founded if not on reason as such, then at least upon the reasoned argument of the utilitarians that a university should teach useful knowledge. It was modelled not on Oxford and Cambridge but on the Universities of Edinburgh and Virginia, and, particularly, the new reformed universities of Germany, from which it took the professorial and lecture system. Its intellectual inspiration was derived from the ideas of the radical utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham, whose mummified body is still preserved in University College London, and which – rather less reasonably – on the instruction of his will is carried out to take its place at certain college functions each year, allegedly on the grounds that his silence will amount to more sense than the rest of what is said. Bentham, though too old to take an active part in the planning of the new university, had established an important precedent in his *Chrestomathia, Being a Collection of Papers explanatory of the Design of an Institution, proposed to be set on foot under the name of the*

Chrestomathic Day School, or Chrestomathia School, for the Extension of the New System of Instruction to the higher Branches of Learning. For the Use of the middling and higher Ranks in Life of 1816.[19]

This remarkable work proposed a new system of instruction designed to produce more effective teaching, based on the latest theories of associationist psychology; it also advocated the abolition of flogging, the admission of girls on an equal basis with boys (a principle that University of London, however, did not endorse until 1878), as well as such details as the employment of what Bentham with his love of abstruse terminology called the 'Psammographic principle', that is, the use of sand-writing instead of slates. The school itself was to be built as a panopticon, so as to allow the most economical use of the teacher's capacities, with additional instruction by pupil-monitors on the 'Madras system' (so called because the method had first been tested in Madras in India). Efficient forms of teaching, together with a detailed scheme of progressive structures through which knowledge could be taught, meant that instead of just a 'scraping together', as Milton had put it, of 'so much miserable Greek and Latin', pupils could be quickly taught an impressively wide range of knowledge. So J. S. Mill, who was himself instructed by his father on strictly Benthamite principles, reckoned that by the age of eighteen he was, in intellectual terms, twenty five years ahead of his peers.

An influential review of the *Chrestomathia* in the *Westminster Review* of 1824 suggested pointedly that its method could be adapted to higher forms of learning, declaring, 'here then is a machine of immense power capable of producing the most extraordinary effects'.[20] Accordingly, the University of London adopted

Bentham's 'chrestomathic' principle, chrestomathic, as Bentham himself explained, meaning 'conducive to useful learning' (he might have added that the word was not, as a word, an example of itself). This spanned the whole range of contemporary knowledge at both a theoretical and technical level, as is evident from Bentham's 'Chrestomathic Instruction Tables' and encyclopaedic 'Art and Science Table', a tabular diagram in which every branch of art and science is arranged in an 'exhaustively-bifurcate mode' that demonstrates how each is conducive to well-being or 'eudaemonics'. Notwithstanding his definitions of ethics and aesthetics as functions of *Pathoscopic pneumatology*, with aesthetics defined as *Anergastic* (no-work-producing) and *Aplo-pathoscopic* (mere sensation regarding), what is not clear in Bentham's account is quite what reconciles the chrestomathic with the eudaemonic, how an institution that is conducive to useful learning at the same time produces happiness. Bentham attempts to reconcile them through a tortuous definition of 'eudaemonics' as the maximization of well-being. However, it was to become evident that the double object of utilitarianism produced a bifurcating tendency that could not be permanently resolved by a neologism or the containing power of a very long sentence.

Undeterred by such difficulties, however, the 1825 *Prospectus* of the University of London announced that 'the object of the Institution is to bring the means of a complete scientific and literary education home to the inhabitants of the metropolis'.[21] The University therefore offered comprehensive instruction in all forms of knowledge – in medicine, engineering, mathematics, the sciences, political economy, law, classical and modern languages, Hindustani and Sanskrit (suggesting the

extent to which the university, many of whose original shareholders were British administrators and businessmen in India, was designed to service the Orientalist needs of the East India Company, a colonial connection developed with the subsequent founding of Imperial College) as well as, for the first time in an English university, 'British literature'.[22] The kind of professors appointed, who were mostly Scottish or German, with a few from Cambridge, ensured that the university taught the most advanced subjects and forms of knowledge of its day. Except, that is, in British Literature, where a candidate, whom Bentham supported, specializing in the new Scottish rhetorical studies, was passed over in favour of a traditional moralist, as a gesture to the evangelicals who had given the university such strong support.[23]

New forms of knowledge, as always, involved important political stakes.[24] Arguments for changes in education were quite clearly part of a power struggle: the University of London embodied, for the first time in competitive institutional form, the counter-ideology of the radical middle classes, particularly that of the dissenters. British higher education since that time has been the product of these two different systems whose politics and effects can still be found at work today. Schematically but only provisionally we could characterize them as the ecclesiastical, conservative model and the vocational, radical model, corresponding, as the opponents themselves often specified, to the politics and religion of the upper and middle classes. The first, identifiable with Oxford and Cambridge, the Tory party and the Church of England, regarded the universities as sustaining the state by embodying its religious and cultural heritage in an elite form of

education for the ruling class. Here the university's function was to be an organ for the transmission of truth, with knowledge regarded as an end and a good in itself, a form of morality and of doctrinal veracity. Pedagogy, consequently, was the privileged activity for such an institution which remained hostile to the idea of 'research' or the 'advancement' of knowledge; its preferred subject area was not the future but the past, particularly the Bible, the Graeco-Roman tradition and the literature of the classics.

By contrast the competing radical educationalists rejected the ecclesiastical notion of truth as both partial and political: their strategy, however, was not so much to challenge it on the grounds of its class interests as to characterize it as useless, a manoeuvre later modified with great success into the long-running opposition of 'science' versus the 'arts'. These liberal utilitarians and nonconformists argued that knowledge should be up to date, useful, practical, changed according to the results of theoretical investigation and scientific research, and taught in a democratized secular form. At their most radical, the liberals regarded education as a political force, not only for their own benefit but also as a potential means of liberation for disadvantaged groups, such as religious nonconformists, women, the poor, colonized peoples, in fact anyone suffering political oppression.[25]

Thus the possibility of social change through education, first advocated by Helvétius, was already the radical position of the utilitarians and liberals, such as Bentham, Mill, or Wollstonecraft, in all of whom there can be found a deep commitment to education and its power. These utilitarians were also radical in ways that are once again being endorsed today – advocating rights for women, for instance, and the rights of minorities against

established groups. It was the utilitarians who promoted the cause of education, suffrage, women's rights, or the abolition of slavery, in the nineteenth century. Although they placed much greater emphasis on the possibilities of education rather than change in the capitalist system to which they remained fully committed, in some respects the utilitarians were less different from Marx than he himself was prepared to admit: Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) formed the basis of all radical, anti-Tory politics throughout the nineteenth century until the advent of socialism; in their different ways, furthermore, both Marx and Adam Smith were economic determinists. Bentham, a philosopher whose legalistic mind is comparable only to Kant's, was a vigorous advocate of a welfare state with free education, sickness benefits, minimum wages and guaranteed employment. It was Bentham who declared of the German idealist philosophers long before Marx's more famous statement in the theses on Feuerbach: 'The Germans can only inquire about things as they are. They are interdicted from inquiring into things as they ought to be'.[26]

The radical utilitarian ethos of science and practicality remained sufficiently powerful for there to be comparatively little space for intervention in the area of higher education from the socialist movement that developed in the nineteenth century. The position of the British left with regard to education was one of profound ambivalence. From Owen onwards, the labour movement did regard access to knowledge as a means to political power and social transformation. But following Marx's critique of Smith and later utilitarians, socialists were hostile to an ethics of knowledge in which education is designed to be useful and amounts to the learning of skills necessary for efficient capitalist production;

similarly they had learnt to be wary of such progressive educational institutions as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge which was designed to teach the poor the virtues of political economy. Socialists therefore tended to form an unholy alliance with more conservative outlooks which stressed the value of a general education. This also suggests a tacit acceptance of the political reality by which the possibility of social change through education was already the radical position of the utilitarians and Liberals. One effect of this was the striking absence of a politics of higher education identifiable with the aspirations of the working class. The lack of any effective socialist argument for higher education partly accounts for the extent to which the issues of 'truth' versus 'use', arts versus sciences, continue to dominate the politics of education.[27]

This lacuna can partly be explained by the fact that the political aspirations of socialists at this time were fixed on the demand for a national system of primary – let alone university – education, which was not to be made compulsory until 1880.[28] In the second place, the elitism of higher education meant that it was never regarded as a possible means of enabling the generation of a mass movement, but was rather seen as a force of opposition to it. The latter perception was not entirely mistaken. The two antithetical ideologies of higher education, ecclesiastical and vocational, were initially embodied in two different kinds of universities: Oxford and Cambridge, and the University of London. The latter acted as a spur both to the creation of the so-called civic or 'red-brick' universities during the course of the nineteenth century, which were often founded as technical colleges and funded by industrialists, and to the reform of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge from

the 1850s onwards. This meant that, to a large extent, the conflict between Tory and utilitarian Liberal interests was internalized into institutional differences within the university system. It also gave different disciplines specific class identities: even today, arts and science tend to be associated with different taste cultures, with the arts firmly middle class, science as lower middle or working class.[29]

By the 1830s and 1840s, the political differences between the upper and middle-classes become less marked in the face of increasing working-class agitation. The gradual rapprochement between the dissenting middle-classes and landed gentry in the face of a militant working-class also brought about a compromise over the role of higher education. This is best exemplified in the writings of John Stuart Mill, who, while regarding the institutions of Oxford and Cambridge 'with sentiments little short of utter abhorrence', nevertheless rejected the utilitarian objectives of reform.[30] Mill advocated instead university reform that would bring about 'the regeneration of individual character among our lettered and opulent classes'. In advocating the function of the university as an 'institution of spiritual culture' for 'forming great minds', Mill laid the foundations for the theory of the university that would be elaborated by Newman and Arnold.[31] From this time on, the universities were mobilized as a significant form of resistance to working-class demands, not only in terms of creating and preserving an ethic of a shared national culture, but also through the strategy of what might be termed institutional imperialism. For the alternative self-help institutions of education, such as the mechanic's institutes, often set up by the working classes themselves were, as Engels complained, gradually taken over by the

state and turned into technical training colleges; in the twentieth century they were eventually safely absorbed into the state education system as new universities and polytechnics.[32] And as the older working-class institutions became universities, so they gradually lost contact with their radical origins or the class for whom they were originally set up to cater.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the question of access to higher education was a topic of constant debate. Political agitation moved through a succession of excluded groups, from dissenters, to women, to the working-class. The latter two are well represented in the literary sphere from Tennyson's *Princess* (1847) and Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1896).[33] From 1854 onwards Oxford and Cambridge were gradually opened up to excluded minorities; in 1902 the first student grants were awarded, and other movements were initiated about this time which tried to extend the reach of education, such as the university extension movement, and the Worker's Educational Association. Important though these innovative developments were, the question of access has always tended to exclude consideration of the function of universities as such, particularly in socialist theory. The left has never succeeded in defining a politics of higher education that can be distinguished from those already in operation: on the one hand, a distrust of the gentlemanly mode tends to lead it to emphasize more practical and vocational forms – hence the founding of the polytechnics by a Labour government in 1966 – on the other hand, distrust of education as merely a training in those skills currently useful for capitalism, of arguments such as Chadwick's for the purely economic value of education, has led the left to endorse the notion of education for personal self-improvement that formed the

basis of the self-help institutes, but which, by emphasizing the benefits of mental development for the individual, comes intriguingly close to the conservative and later Liberal position. This explains why the radical left in the literary sphere, such as the left Leavisites, in many ways merely invert the older ecclesiastical position of the university as an institution of spiritual culture. It is time to look at its theoretical arguments more carefully.

Useful Uselessness

It is not without significance that the most famous analysis of the university by an English writer, that of Cardinal Newman, should take the form of a defence of the idea of the university as truth itself. Newman's work could be said to define the English idea of a university, as against all contemporary alternatives which were based on foreign models, be they Scottish or German. Although at the very moment when he was proposing such an ethos, the university which inspired it was already in the process of being reformed by the state, Newman's idea of the university remains the basis of a whole educational and political ethic.

Newman's lectures, gathered together at various times under different titles but best known by the last, *The Idea of a University* (1852-73), demonstrate an ambivalence between an endeavour to reassert the religious basis of education against the advance of secular, scientific knowledge and an attempt to treat religion as separate from the general idea of a 'liberal education' whose function would be to produce quality of mind, social cohesion, and, ultimately, the religious truth from which it was initially separated. While

Newman tries on the one hand, to justify the idea of a university education as one of knowledge for its own sake, on the other he attempts to establish the place of theology as the faculty that functions as the architectonic, or idea, of all the diverse knowledges in the university.

Newman bases his idea of a university – ominously enough – on what etymologists consider to be a false derivation, claiming that a university 'by its very name professes to teach universal knowledge'.[34] This allows him, according to what Freud would characterize as the logic of the broken kettle, to offer three defences of the role of theology in the university: first, if a university is a place of universal knowledge, then it must include theological knowledge; second, while all such knowledges must be understood in their connections together in an institution that claims to teach universal knowledge, only religious knowledge can complete and correct the other sciences and give each particular field an appreciation of its place from the perspective of the whole; and, third, if theology is not taught, then its place will be usurped by the sciences which will teach other, irreligious, doctrines instead. Theology is thus, like philosophy for Kant, both a part of the system of the sciences of the university and also that part which operates over and above the rest. It does not, however, have the function of judging the truth of other forms of knowledge, as it does for Kant, but of fusing such knowledge of partial truths into a higher truth, truth itself, correcting the 'false peculiar colouring of each' into the Platonic whiteness of the Idea (153). Theology is both a science in itself and the product of all other forms of knowledge, a higher knowledge of the philosophic mind which transcends all others; the perspective of the whole which it provides comprises the function of a university

education, with the result that it finally becomes identified with the institution of the university itself. As Newman puts it, the student:

> apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that his education is called 'Liberal'. A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life .... what ... I have ventured to call a philosophical habit.... This is the main purpose of a University in its treatment of its students. (96)

What, however, Newman is obliged to ask, is the *use* of such an education? The answer is none. None, that is, if use is thought of only in terms of 'ulterior objects', such as training for the professions or for commerce. Knowledge, he counters, does not require a use, for it 'is capable of being its own end. Such is the constitution of the human mind that any kind of knowledge, if it be really such, is its own reward' (97). Knowledge is aestheticized to the extent that it becomes a condition of mind, of judgement and of taste; finally involving no formal learning at all, merely requiring the company of fellows, of nature, or solitude, the haunts of the scholar gypsy (132-3). In his attack on London University Newman goes so far as to suggest that he would prefer a university which did nothing at all over 'that which exacted of its members an acquaintance with every science under the sun' (129).

Such knowledge as the university teaches need have nothing useful in view: it is a good in itself. It may be useless but not valueless. Yet if the good is an end in itself, it cannot stop itself from producing an end beyond itself, a surplus which will, in turn, be useful.

> though the useful is not always good, the good is always useful. Good is not only good, but reproductive of good; this is one of its attributes; nothing is excellent, beautiful, perfect, desirable for its own sake, but it overflows, and spreads the likeness of itself all around it.... A great good will impart great good. If then the intellect is so excellent a portion of us, and its cultivation so excellent, it is not only beautiful, perfect, admirable, and noble in itself, but in a true and high sense it must be useful to the possessor and to all around him; not useful in any low, mechanical, mercantile sense, but as diffusing good, or as a blessing, or a gift, or power, or a treasure, first to the owner, then through him to the world. I say then if a liberal education be good, it must necessarily be useful too. (143-4)

Knowledge, therefore is its own reward. But if it has no use value, it brings a surplus value in its wake, the good, which is indeed useful: the 'state or condition of mind' (105), that is the product of a liberal education, in turn produces 'the gentleman':

> Liberal Education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman. It is well to be a gentleman, it is well to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life; — these are the connatural qualities of a large knowledge; they are the objects of a University. (110)

The story of the spontaneous generation of a liberal education does not, however, stop even there.

Although Newman claims to separate the benefits of a liberal literary education from those of religious education, he does so only to unite them again in the

same terms, so that the second is the product of the first. For if the object of the university is a gentlemanly condition of mind, then this philosophic expansion produces a spiritual reward, whereby the perfection of the intellect becomes indistinguishable from the form of religious truth: 'Religious Truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge. To blot it out is nothing short, if I may so speak, of unravelling the web of University Teaching' (71). Newman mixes his metaphors, literary and religious, blots and webs, in order to appropriate that comprehensive knowledge which, as John Barrell has argued, was contested in the eighteenth century between the 'man of letters' and the 'gentleman'.[35] Newman resolves this by effecting a synthesis in which the two contending parties are uplifted into a higher universal term – the university.

A university training, according to Newman, aims at elevating the intellectual tone of society, 'at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power'; its function of producing health is to act as a safeguard against 'excesses and enormities of evil' and 'social disorder and lawlessness' (162-3). The product of the university, the gentleman, is 'at home in any society, ... has common ground with every class' (155), so that he functions as a kind of meta-person who unites society as he unites knowledge. This elevated position that the gentleman occupies in society clearly corresponds with the form of knowledge that produces such a character; just as the philosophical view produced by the liberal education produces a comprehensive view of things, keeps knowledges in

check, and holds them all together, so the gentleman does the same for society at large. Indeed in some of Newman's descriptions, knowledge and society become indistinguishable from each other as the function of the university expands with ever more imperial metaphors:

> We count it a great thing, and justly so, to plan and carry out a wide political organization. To bring under one yoke, after the manner of old Rome, a hundred discordant peoples; to maintain each of them in its own privileges within its legitimate range of action; to allow them severally the indulgence of national feelings, and the stimulus of rival interests; and yet withal to blend them into one great social establishment, and to pledge them to the perpetuity of the one imperial power; – this is an achievement which carries with it the unequivocal token of genius in the race which effects it.
>
> > Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento [*Remember thou, Roman, to rule the nations with thy power*]....
>
> What an empire is in political history, such is a University in the sphere of philosophy and research. It is ... the high protecting power of all knowledge and science, of fact and principle, of inquiry and discovery, of experiment and speculation; it maps out the territory of the intellect, and sees that the boundaries of each province are religiously respected, and that there is neither encroachment nor surrender on any side. It acts as umpire between truth and truth, and, taking into account the nature and importance of each, assigns to all their due order and precedence. (370)

It is in this context of this 'philosophy of an imperial intellect' (371) that the significance emerges of Newman's stress on the stability of the institution of the university

and its authority derived from 'a connected view or grasp of things' set against the 'random theories and imposing sophistries and dashing paradoxes which carry away half-formed and superficial intellects' (11, 13). 'Such parti-coloured ingenuities', Newman affirms, are one of the chief evils of the day, discoverable in the extempore productions of periodical literature and journalism that divides everything up according to the demands of the moment; it is university education that can act as a bulwark against them. For Catholics in particular it is important that people should be taught a wisdom safe from the excesses and vagaries of individuals, embodied in institutions which have stood the trial and received the sanction of ages, and administered by men who, unlike the reviewers, have no need to be anonymous, for they are supported by their consistency with their predecessors and with each other. The complicity between such a view of society and the function of knowledge in the university begins to become apparent. The role of the university as an institution is to act, strictly speaking, as a form of politics, reconciling the conflicting interests and opinions of society through an authority which can call upon a tradition more substantial than any individual.

If this account begins to sound like a description of the Catholic church, or an anticipation of T.S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', its theory of institutions is essentially derived from Burke. Newman makes his argument by invoking the aid of a powerful conservative literary-political tradition. As will have become obvious to any student of Romanticism by this point, the product of Newman's literary liberal education, 'the philosophic habit', is remarkably similar to what Wordsworth and Coleridge termed 'the philosophic

mind'. Newman's description of the place of theology in relation to the university, of the university in relation to knowledge, and of knowledge in relation to the state, repeats a version of Coleridge's theory of organic form, where the 'esemplastic' imagination fulfils not a critical or scientific differentiating function but a metaphysical cohesive one, holding all knowledge together as a whole by endowing it with 'life' and a spiritual centre. Philosophy, says Newman, must be the form of knowledge: 'its matter must not be admitted into the mind passively, as so much acquirement, but must be mastered and appropriated as a system consisting of parts, related one to the other, and interpretative of one another in the unity of the whole' (156). Like the Coleridgean imagination, its high truth is opposed to fancy; its special function is 'to draw many things into one' (369) and to show how they form a whole or a system:

> it would communicate the image of the whole to every separate portion, till that whole becomes in imagination like a spirit, every where pervading and penetrating its component parts, and giving them one definite meaning. (123)

Naming this process 'culture', Newman identifies it with the good that will soon be shown in the Platonic form of the 'Eternal and Infinite' — the Idea of a University (185).

What often seems to be less obvious to students of Romanticism is the no less political than spiritual function of this impressive form of unification. Newman claims that

> the process of imparting knowledge to the intellect in this philosophical way is [the University's] true culture; that such culture is a good in itself; that the knowledge which is both its instrument and result is called Liberal Knowledge; that such culture, together with the knowledge which effects it, may fitly be sought for its own sake; that it is, however, in addition, of *great secular utility*, as constituting the best and highest formation of the intellect for social and political life. (183) [emphasis added]

The defence of useless knowledge can be made because such knowledge serves an important and indeed highly useful function in the service of the state. That secular utility was first spelt out by Copleston in a passage which Newman himself cites verbatim: 'In the cultivation of literature is found that common link which, among the higher and middling departments of life, unites the jarring sects and subdivisions into one interest...'.[36] It only remained for this reconciling, healing function to be extended to the lower 'departments' as well for the course of literature, and the university itself, to be set. Even useless knowledge, it seems, turns out to be useful. This dialectic exactly repeats, as one might expect, the fate of the corresponding theory of the work of art defined by its purposelessness, which was developed and endorsed so enthusiastically by the academic institution in the same period. As Martin Jay puts it:

> The principle of idealistic aesthetics – purposefulness without a purpose – reverses the scheme of things to which bourgeois art conforms socially: purposelessness for the purposes declared by the market. At last, in the demand for entertainment and relaxation, purpose has absorbed the realm of purposelessness.[37]

Plebification and Popularization

It is not hard to chart the relation of the secular utility of Newman's university back to Coleridge's *On The Constitution of the Church and State According to the Idea of Each* (1829) or forward to Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), where an ecumenical 'culture', often indistinguishably literature, philosophy and religion, provides both an intellectual and social function of cohesion.[38] For his part Coleridge, in what he pointedly terms his 'concluding address to the parliamentary leaders of the Liberalists and Utilitarians', makes the connection quite explicit between his attack on 'the commercial spirit' of secular and useful knowledge and his advocacy of the necessity for a counter-balance in the institutional conservation of religion and the state:

> a permanent, nationalized, learned order, a national clerisy or church, is an essential element of a rightly constituted nation, without which it wants the best security alike for its permanence and its progression; and for which neither tract societies nor conventicles, nor Lancasterian schools, nor mechanics' institutions, nor lecture-bazaars under the absurd name of universities [i.e. the University of London], nor all these collectively, can be a substitute. For they are all marked with the same asterisk of spuriousness, shew the same distemper-spot on the front, that they are empirical specifics for morbid symptoms that help to feed and continue the disease.
>
> But you wish for general illumination: you would spur-arm the toes of society, you would enlighten the higher ranks *per ascensum ab imis* [by ascent from the lowest levels]. You begin, therefore,

> with the attempt to *popularize* science: but you will only effect its *plebification*. It is folly to think of making all, or the many, philosophers, or even men of science and systematic knowledge. But it is duty and wisdom to aim at making as many as possible soberly and steadily religious; – inasmuch as the morality which the state requires in its citizens for its own well-being and ideal immortality, and without reference to their spiritual interest as individuals, can only exist for the people in the form of religion. But the existence of a true philosophy, or the power and habit of contemplating particulars in the unity and fontal mirror of the idea – this in the rulers and teachers of a nation is indispensable to a sound state of religion in all classes. In fine, Religion, true or false, is and ever has been the centre of gravity in a realm, to which all other things must and will accommodate themselves. (69-70)

Coleridge could hardly have made the alliance between truth and power, between politics and knowledge clearer. The very extent of his claims indicates the scope of an argument which provides a carefully articulated basis for Newman's description of the place of the university in upholding this scheme of permanence and progression. Coleridge's text is an extremely complex one which would require a detailed separate analysis: here I would only remark the deep complicity between a literary and a political ideology in a founding text of a literary theory that in the twentieth century has been supposed to be defined by the separation of the two.

Arnold's purposes, though more secular in tone, work towards the same end. In *Culture and Anarchy* he transposes Newman's idea back to the university from which it was derived – although in its own way Arnold's Oxford remains just as much an ideal, even if

already tainted by reformist government interventions:

> Oxford, the Oxford of the past, has many faults; and she has heavily paid for them in defeat, in isolation, in want of hold upon the modern world. Yet we in Oxford, brought up amidst the beauty and sweetness of that beautiful place, have not failed to seize one truth: — the truth that beauty and sweetness are essential characters of a complete human perfection. When I insist on this, I am all in the faith and tradition of Oxford. (61-2)

In evidence of this Oxford spirit, Arnold cites Newman himself and his attempt to uphold the power of the Anglican Church over the university during the Tractarian movement. Arnold, like many lapsed Christians of the nineteenth century, wished to preserve the religious perspective by presenting it in as ecumenical a form as possible. In the face of the potentially dangerous, growing calls for democracy and socialism, culture could act as a force of civilization upon the people at large, particularly the anarchic Irish and the English working classes. The repository of culture, the ideal towards which the whole country should strive, Arnold posits as nothing less than the material institution of the university itself: it acts as a bastion against anarchy — specifically class division — preserving and producing a metaphysical aspiration that can counter political unrest:

> [Culture] does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready made judgements and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light. (70)

Although Arnold can no longer appeal to religion for this ideal, its secular substitute, literature, can function just as effectively. If for Marx, the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat constitutes, as he puts it, 'the great lever' – *mochlos* – 'of the modern social revolution', for Arnold literature is the power that can dissolve the division on which that lever pivots.[39]

After Arnold literature became the privileged embodiment of a culture assigned the role of truth both within the university and in society at large. Whereas for Kant the lower faculty of philosophy judged the rest by the truth of reason, in England this function, abandoned by philosophy, was appropriated by literature which gave judgement according not to rational but poetic or Platonic truth.[40] We might speculate that if religious truth was followed by poetic truth as the architectonic of knowledge, the contemporary assertion of political truth as the most comprehensive metalanguage, specifically and noticeably in the realm of literary theory, is an attempt to win back that higher function extending over society at large – Newman's 'imperial intellect' – which poetic truth has now lost.

The influential 1921 report for the British government by Sir Henry Newbolt, *The Teaching of English in England*, gave official endorsement to Arnold's position, and, as has been argued, set up the terms of the form and function of the teaching of literature in secondary and tertiary education that have been maintained ever since. Significantly enough, Newbolt cites Wordsworth's discussions of education in *The Prelude*, Newman's *Idea of a University*, misquotes Arnold as claiming that 'culture unites classes', before concluding that an education based upon the English

language and literature would dissolve the debilitating effects of class differences through an appeal to a civilizing common national 'English' culture.[41]

The discomfort felt at the discovery of the explicitly political nationalistic and racialist origins of English as an educational subject, corroborated even further by demonstrations of its role in the service of colonial subjugation in India, has resulted in a call to transform literary studies into cultural or communication studies, that is to shift its attention from an elite to a mass culture.[42] Literature and the literary as such have certainly been under attack of late, and in many quarters they now have very strongly marked negative connotations. But what suggestions about changing the object of literary studies have neglected is the place of literature in the theory and institutional practice of the university as a whole – which cannot be changed quite so simply. In other words, to convert the disciplinary object from English to Cultural Studies merely inverts the site of its truth. The attempt by Raymond Williams and his followers to reappropriate the Arnoldian cultural tradition for an oppositional position preserves intact its political and ideological function in the university and in society at large. This has led to some acute political difficulties in recent years.

Since 1979 the policies for higher education of the Conservative government have been conducted strictly according to the terms of the debate that I have been charting. The disorienting part, however, is that they have, as it were, come from the wrong political corner, invoking not tradition and the value of a general education but rather all the utilitarian arguments against the humanities to advocate science, and more skills-oriented usefulness instead. For more traditional literary

critics, this has presented no problem, for the whole literature of the nineteenth century was already to hand: Leavis even refers to the anarchy, barbarianism, or, as he likes to put it, 'Americanism', that he is fighting against as the 'technologico-Benthamite' age. Nothing illustrates so clearly Leavis' place in a tradition of argument about the function of education than this anachronistic and no doubt deliberately inelegant phrase. Dickens' *Hard Times*, to which Leavis attached special significance, is the most famous literary attack on what was represented as the utilitarian view of education, but it is easy to find many other writers of the 'great tradition' who opposed such a philosophy just as passionately.[43] As a literary critic, therefore, one is already positioned in the debate: both in terms of the arguments of the literary and critical texts themselves, and in terms of the very existence of one's own discipline within the institutions of higher education; even current Conservative education policy was partly initiated by the *Black Papers on Education* of a literary journal, the *Critical Quarterly*.[44]

The difficulty for literary theorists, when faced with a new 'technologico-Thatcherite' assault on the humanities, was that the terms by which their subject was established historically, and the only effective ones with which it could still be defended, were those of the cultural conservatism and humanist belief in literature and philosophy that 'literary theory' has, broadly speaking, been attacking since the 1970s. When theorists found themselves wanting to protect their discipline against successive government cuts they discovered that the only view with which they could defend themselves was the very one which, in intellectual terms, they wanted to attack. You might say that the problem was that the oppositional literary or theoretical mode was not

the oppositional institutional one – a situation that in itself illustrates the limitations of oppositional politics. In short, for theorists the problem was that in attacking humanism they found themselves actually in consort with government policy. This has meant, effectively, that it has often been left to those whom they opposed to defend the study of the humanities as such: symbolized when the University of Oxford, traditionally the main object of utilitarian hostility, refused to award Mrs Thatcher the customary honorary degree given to British Prime Ministers.

A curious historical mutation has thus occurred by which the Conservatives, as they claim, have indeed become the radical party, if not of today, then of yesterday, by returning to a middle-class radicalism which regards not Edmund Burke as its founder, but Adam Smith. This means, however, that they, in turn, are also already positioned in terms of their attitude towards education and the universities.

Useless Usefulness

In the mid-1980s, Mrs Thatcher began telling interviewers that what the press called 'Thatcherism' was really nothing other than the philosophy of Adam Smith, an identification institutionalized in the most influential and radical government 'think-tank', the Adam Smith Institute. Legend has it that when Keith Joseph became Minister for Education in 1979, his first act on arriving at the Ministry was to give a copy of *The Wealth of Nations* to all his senior civil servants. In the context of today's renewed demand that knowledge be useful, therefore, university teachers of the humanities in Britain, who have

been feeling the brunt and uncertainties of successive educational cuts, followed by a cycle of unfunded expansion, since the Conservatives came to power, might find it worth their while to turn to *The Wealth of Nations* to discover what theory of the university it involves.

The origins of the utilitarian arguments that we have been rehearsing could be traced back to Milton and Locke at the very least – with their own attendant political contexts of protestantism and republicanism. But in the sphere of university education, it was Smith's account that laid the basis for the subsequent attacks on the inefficiency of the universities, the uselessness of classical education and the counter-proposals for science and vocational training. In a letter of 1774 Smith claimed that 'I have thought a great deal upon this subject, and have inquired very carefully into the constitution and history of several of the principle Universities of Europe'.[45] The results of his research are to be found in Book V of *The Wealth of Nations* where he broaches the question of what is now called public expenditure, and addresses such topics as defence and the administration of justice. Education appears in a section entitled 'Commercial Institutions', which discusses the public institutions designed to facilitate commerce and to instruct the people. In certain cases these pose the problem that however beneficial they may be for society as a whole they cannot be left to the efforts of individuals because the profit obtainable from them does not repay the expense that members of the public would need to incur in order to maintain them. Education falls under the category of a non-economic institution whose ultimate benefit nevertheless makes it 'in the highest degree advantageous to a great society' (V.i.c.1). Smith then focuses on the difference between what might be called

the immediate and deferred profits of education: education is an institution whose use-value cannot be measured by the immediate exchange value of its product, or, to put it another way, whose cost is greater than the immediate exchange-value of the product that it produces, that is, the newly-graduated student.

Smith solves this difficulty by elaborating a version of an educational theory that was to become popular in the 1960s and has recently given rise to precise quantification exercises at the Department of Education and Science: that is, the theory of human capital, developed by T. W. Schultz and Gary Becker.[46] Smith formulates this theory very succinctly when accounting for wage differentials: one of the factors he points to is that 'the wages of labour vary with the easiness and cheapness, or the difficulty and expence of learning the business':

> When any expensive machine is erected, the extraordinary work to be performed by it before it is worn out, it must be expected, will replace the capital laid out upon it, with at least the ordinary profits. A man educated at the expence of much labour and time to any of those employments which require extraordinary dexterity and skill, may be compared to one of those expensive machines. The work which he learns to perform, it must be expected, over and above the usual wages of common labour, will replace to him the whole expence of his education, with at least the ordinary profits of an equally valuable capital. It must do this too in a reasonable time, regard being had to the very uncertain duration of human life, in the same manner as to the more certain duration of the machine. (I.x.b.6)

Smith illustrates his argument in relation to apprenticeships, adding that 'education in the ingenious and in the liberal professions, is still more tedious and expensive. The pecuniary recompense, therefore, of painters and sculptors, of lawyers and physicians, ought to be much more liberal: and it is so accordingly' (I.x.b.9). For Smith, this line of reasoning suffices to excuse the state from any necessity for providing such forms of education.

On the basis of this, Smith is fiercely critical of any subsidy for higher education which he considers would only lead to an academic freedom that would be abused. The human capital theory of education allows him to consider the remuneration of teachers, as well as the contents of courses of instruction, from the perspective entirely of market forces. Smith contends that the best system occurs where teachers are directly rewarded according to the estimation of their students — a system under which Smith himself worked in part at the University of Glasgow, and which was originally proposed for the University of London.[47] Any form of endowment, salary, or organization as a corporation will, he argues, set a teacher's duty in opposition to a teacher's interest; as proof of this, he instances the state of the University of Oxford. Similarly, all forms of university discipline over students Smith merely considers to be 'contrived, not for the benefit of the students, but for the interest, or more properly speaking, for the ease of the masters' (V.i.f.15). In other words, they are an attempt to assert authority through force where it cannot be derived from intellectual respect.

Through an historical analysis Smith argues that Latin and Greek originally made up the curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge because of their ecclesiastical

function: 'What was taught in the greater part of those universities was, suitable to the end of their institution, either theology, or something that was merely preparatory to theology' (V.i.f.19). The courses, as he shows in some detail, were developed for the needs of the education of ecclesiastics, not for men of the world or for the education of gentlemen. In other words, even at Oxford and Cambridge the teaching was originally organized according to a criterion of utility that has now been forgotten, with the result that the universities continue to teach these courses in a debased form: 'In some of the richest and best endowed universities, the tutors content themselves with teaching a few unconnected shreds and parcels of this corrupted course; and even these they commonly teach very negligently and superficially' (V.i.f.33).

This has occurred because the universities are now insulated from any need to respond to market forces; such protection means that any estimate of the value of knowledge becomes irrelevant. For Smith, academic freedom in effect means simply that the public institutions of education teach knowledge

> universally believed to be a mere useless and pedantick heap of sophistry and nonsense. Such systems, such sciences, can subsist no where, but in those incorporated societies for education whose prosperity and revenue are in a great measure independent of their education, and altogether independent of their industry. (V.i.f.46)

Few improvements in philosophy, he comments, have been made in universities; they have acted instead as the shelter of 'exploded systems and obsolete systems'. The

poorer universities (that is, the Scottish), in which teachers depend upon their individual reputations, have been more forward looking and receptive to 'the current opinions of the world' (V.i.f.34). At Oxford and Cambridge, by contrast, 'the diligence of publick teachers is more or less corrupted by the circumstances, which render them more or less independent of their success and reputation in their particular professions' (V.i.f.45). The universities' imperviousness to market forces becomes a powerful weapon with which Smith attacks academic freedom: the academic cannot be left to his own devices because laziness will encourage him to continue to think according to systems that in the eyes of the world are outmoded and useless. Instead, Smith proposes a form of contract, or bargain, between the imparters and receivers of knowledge, founded on a direct relation between reward and the use of such knowledge, an idea that has also today once again found favour.

The belief in market forces means, however, that Smith nowhere considers the possibility that it might be the market itself that resists new ideas or proposals for change. Can it be assumed that the market is always right? Smith's argument seems quite convincing until, in the next paragraph, he compares the academic system, where a gentleman finishes his education ignorant of everything that is of interest or use in the outside world, with the education of women: they, by contrast, are taught 'what their parents or guardians judge it necessary or useful for them to learn', that is, 'either to improve the natural attractions of their persons, or to form their mind to reserve, to modesty, to chastity, and to oeconomy: to render them both likely to become mistresses of a family, and to behave properly when they have become such' (V.i.f.47). Unlike the Benthamites and utilitarians, the

Whiggish Smith was no advocate of feminism or of equal opportunities of education for women: suddenly usefulness has become a criterion that ensures the ideological control of certain groups. In other words, it enables education to fulfil a double function, facilitating useful knowledge and useful social control, both in the name of the general good. However, the latter role must necessarily conflict with Smith's overriding moral imperative, the ethos of the free market.

The logic of this aspect of the argument is brought out when Smith reverses his position according to which university education ought to operate solely on the basis of market demand and suggests that the state ought to provide for the education of the working class – who might well neither demand it nor be able to pay for it. Smith argues that whereas people of rank and fortune will look after the education of their sons, who will then take up chiefly intellectual occupations providing variety and stimulation, the division of labour that has been accentuated under capitalism means that work for the poor has often been reduced to a few mindless activities. This situation has the effect of reducing the populace to a condition of virtual imbecility; the state ought therefore to provide education 'in order to prevent the almost entire corruption and degeneracy of the great body of the people' (V.i.f.49). Smith suggests that some basic education in reading, writing, and arithmetic, geometry and mechanics could be provided by subsidized schools, financed, on the Scottish model, by local parishes. The reason for this apparent benevolence on the part of the state is then given very clearly:

> The more they are instructed, the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which,

> among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders.... They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, upon that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government. (V.i.f.61)

This theory of what Samuel calls 'nondeliberate social control' is entirely predicated upon an Enlightenment belief in the power of reason that never countenances the idea that the interests of the poor may be at variance with those of the ruling class.[48] Smith's suggestion should, however, also be seen in the context of contemporary opposition to any education for the poor whatsoever on the grounds that it might lead them to question their poverty and work less efficiently. Marx, who was scornful of Smith's prescription for education to alleviate alienation 'in prudently homeopathic doses' as he puts it in *Capital*, notes how Garnier, Smith's more conservative French translator, protests at this point.[49]

But *The Wealth of Nations* is a theory of contracts rather than conflict, in which institutions are utilized as a means of resolving through mutually beneficial bargains the different self-interests of individuals into the general interest of society as a whole – on the face of it, at least, a benevolent theory of institutions, though not it has not been much appreciated by the universities when turned into a recent device for allocating funding. The strategy becomes clear when Smith goes on to suggest that the state should also encourage regular carnivals (V.i.g.15) – it is hard to understand why it is that those who make claims for carnival as radically subversive of the social order always forget to mention that Adam Smith shared

their enthusiasm. If Smith proposed education and carnival as a way of easing the ills of alienation, the opportunities a state system of education afforded for the behavioural training of the industrial classes – to be taught the benefits of the 'preventative check' – were soon recognized by Malthus and others, as Godwin, the great critic both of Malthus and of state institutions, had predicted.[50]

This points to a significant paradox in the logic of Smith's account of the free market, where an attack on public educational institutions for the wealthy is accompanied by a prescription for public instruction for the poor. The ambivalence of the place of education merits attention, for its function points to nothing less than a problem in the theory of *The Wealth of Nations* as a whole. If Smith was the first to produce an economic interpretation of history, the progress and increase of the wealth of nations leads paradoxically, in his account, to a moral and material decline.[51] The material decline is based on a proto-Malthusian principle of economic growth that leads to a population explosion which, in turn, produces eventual economic stagnation. Smith attributes the ensuing moral decline as a condition of reduced well-being produced by the effects of industrialization, described at length in one of the best known passages of the book:

> In the progress of the division of labour, the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour, that is, of the great body of the people, comes to be confined to a few very simple operations; frequently to one or two. But the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in

> performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and as ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgement concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life.... His dexterity at his own particular trade seems, in this manner, to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues. But in every improved and civilized society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it. (V.i.f.50)

Smith contrasts this state of alienation with the conditions of what he calls 'barbarous societies', that is societies before/without manufacturing and foreign commerce, where necessity spurs the population into a quickness of intelligence:

> In such societies the varied occupations of every man oblige every man to exert his capacity, and to invent expedients for removing difficulties which are continually occurring. Invention is kept alive, and the mind is not suffered to fall into that drowsy stupidity, which, in a civilized society, seems to benumb the understanding of almost all the inferior ranks of people. (V.i.f.51)

According to the first theorist of capitalism, then, the division of labour necessary for the economic progress of commercial societies leads to an intellectual and moral decay – an alienation that sounds strikingly similar to the argument of a later theorist. The paradox in Smith's whole account is that whereas the free market is supposed to lead to the increasing well-being of society for some it produces a material and moral deterioration. Smith's analysis of the effects of the division of labour, therefore, eventually does lead to a class division in which the different interests of society conflict. This is the point where the contract founded on Smith's assumption of a constant characteristic of 'human nature' – the mutual interest of a desire for 'self-betterment' – breaks down and antagonism begins: it is here that Marx's analysis, which substitutes the dialectical logic of historical progression for a static notion of self-interest, could be said to start.

Yet, Smith does offer one major palliative with which he attempts to sustain that contract, that is, the general education of the populace. This, he suggests, would be primarily an education in the principles of useful sciences, particularly geometry and mechanics, which would be of practical help in the trades to be followed later in life. But by itself this would be contradictory, insofar as education, which is supposed to be an anodyne for the effects of capitalism, would merely constitute a training for the trade that would go on to produce capitalism's enervating effects. Smith therefore proposes that such education would involve what he terms 'the necessary introduction to the most sublime as well as to the most useful sciences' (V.i.f.55). But what would be the use of a knowledge that is 'sublime' in a

scheme according to which everything must be justified by its usefulness? E.G. West draws attention to a significant passage in the earlier description of the virtues of a barbarous society before the division of labour:

> Though in a rude society there is a good deal of variety in the occupations of every individual, there is not a great deal in those of the whole society.... In a civilized state, on the contrary, though there is little variety in the occupations of the greater part of individuals, there is an almost infinite variety in those of the whole society. These varied occupations present an almost infinite variety of objects to the contemplation of those few, who, being attached to no particular occupation themselves, have leisure and inclination to examine the occupations of other people. The contemplation of so great a variety of objects necessarily exercises their minds in endless comparisons and combinations, and renders their understandings, in an extraordinary degree, both acute and comprehensive. Unless those few, however, happen to be placed in some very particular situations, their great abilities, though honourable to themselves, may contribute very little to the good government or happiness of their society. (V.i.f.51)

Capitalism, therefore, though it reduces diversity for each individual, increases the total variety at play in society as a whole. Those who can contemplate this reach a state of comprehensive understanding unavailable to anyone in a precapitalist society. Unless, however, they 'happen to be placed in some very particular situations', such philosophers can contribute little to society's happiness. 'Notwithstanding the great abilities of those few, all the nobler parts of the human character may be, in a great

measure, obliterated and extinguished in the great body of the people' (V.i.f.51). West comments that:

> Smith seems to have been cautiously hopeful about the prospects of such 'philosophers' communicating their new knowledge and excitement to others through the medium of specially devised institutions. Provided that the intellectual delight of contemplation could be shared throughout society, order, contentment, fulfillment, and the pursuit of excellence would be ensured for all.[52]

Why should Smith have had to be cautious? Whatever place or institution he may have had in mind in his comment about 'some very particular situations', it is obvious that this special function for society's philosophers, who have access to a form of sublime knowledge which could feed into the general education system as a palliative for capitalism, cannot be justified insofar as it contradicts the very grounds for the basis of public institutions of higher education that Smith has been at pains to elaborate.[53] According to the logic of *The Wealth of Nations*, those institutions should be restricted to the utility of the knowledge that they can sell and which the student can accumulate as a form of capital for his own increased remuneration. To impart knowledge on the grounds of its sublimity for the alleviation of the population as a whole could form the basis of no such academic contract based on market criteria.

Even therefore according to the rigorous analysis of Adam Smith's economics, in which education is constituted solely according to market forces, knowledge outside the orbit of a strict criterion of utility has to be invoked in order to provide something beyond the system that can save it from its own consequences. That

philosophical knowledge can only not be assigned to the university because, having in the first instance been rigorously excluded, its introduction would contradict the rest of Smith's argument so absolutely as to call his entire premises into doubt. Smith therefore leaves his suggestion hanging on the borderline of the aesthetic and the political, outside the logic of his text in the sublime aerial situation of the philosophers he describes – doubtless the very place of the idea of the university itself.[54] The conclusion we, as readers, may draw is that in *The Wealth of Nations* the university, though in the first instance made directly useful, is then called upon to fulfil a role strikingly similar to that which it would be required to play in the theories of Newman, Arnold, or Leavis – who nevertheless present themselves specifically in opposition to the utilitarian ethics of the function of education in a free-market economy. At the same time the university could be said to be in the unique position of being both an example, as J.S. Mill was to argue, of 'market failure' and, as Smith conceded in his special prescription for philosophers, the necessary palliative for the failure of the market.

As it stands in *The Wealth of Nations*, with little apparent prospect of those who possess such higher knowledge being placed in the very particular situations from which they can contribute to the happiness of society, Smith's account means that the paradox for the universities is that the more useful to the state that they are, the quicker the system to which they contribute will succeed and therefore go into decline. In other words, the most beneficial thing the state could do to ensure its own survival would be to encourage the universities to be useless. Or to put it the other way round, the most politically subversive thing you could do would be to

help the universities to be useful.

Useful uselessness

But first it would be worth recalling that if you cannot stop uselessness from becoming useful, neither can you stop usefulness from becoming useless. The differences between the utilitarian and the humanist accounts of the universities are more like spectacular reversals of each other: if for Smith, the university was required to operate by a criterion of immediate usefulness, it was nevertheless in the end called upon to exert a unifying synthesis over society at large, while for Newman, though usefulness was initially rejected in favour of the cultivation of the individual mind, nevertheless that mind finally became so cultivated that it could exercise the useful function of ensuring the cohesion of the state. What becomes clear is that both ideas of the university, which seem to be set directly in opposition to each other, are equally necessary to the state, as is the conflict between them. To enter into that conflict by identifying with one is to remain blind to the extent to which each is implicated in the other.

Useful for whom, though? Newman comments: 'Utility may be made the end of education, in two respects: either as regards the individual educated, or the community at large' (141). This locates a fundamental dissension in utilitarian doctrine: the overriding good of happiness assumes that that of the individual and the general good of the state are the same. But the principle of utility, the means by which this happiness is achieved but which quickly becomes an end in itself, increases the polarity by which it can be measured either from the

perspective of the individual or from that of society. According to Smith, it is the institution, economic or otherwise, which reconciles the conflicting interests and demands of the two. Here we get a different take on the opposition between immanence and transcendence: the function of the academic institution is to reconcile these two antithetical perspectives in a 'universal particular' or 'concrete universal', as was evidently the project of many nineteenth-century philosophers and literary critics. But despite this philosophic conformity to political need, the educational institution also seems to exacerbate the division: because of its double function with regard to the individual and to society, it finds it hard to face both its addressees at the same time. Education can be measured according to its use for the individual, in which case it may well be seen pragmatically, in terms of a qualification, but it will also tend to lead to ideas about knowledge being a condition of mind, and, at its extreme, require no formal knowledge at all; alternatively education can be measured according to its use for the state, in which case it will end up being employed in the service of production and social control. In the latter case, its function is not so much to mediate as to coerce a form of reconciliation between the individual and the state, a necessity most glaringly stated in the classical economists' belief that children should be taught the principles of political economy so that they could learn at any early age the principle of mutual interest that the theory of political economy assumes as its basis.[55]

This division around which the theory of the university spirals, starting from this double end of utility and well-being, recurs in an increasing number of bifurcations that repeat through such apparently fundamental differences as those between science and

arts, or research versus teaching, or instrumental knowledge versus knowledge for its own sake. The arguments around these divisions are not so much about alternatives as an acting out of an internal conflict within educational theory, itself restaging the agonistic structure of a society that does not add up. Thus the differences between the utilitarian and the humanist are more like spectacular, dislocated and distorted reversals of each other: for Smith, the university was required to operate by a criterion of immediate usefulness, it was nevertheless in the end called upon to exert a unifying synthesis over society at large. For Newman, though usefulness was initially rejected in favour of the cultivation of the individual mind, nevertheless that mind finally became so cultivated that it could exercise the useful function of ensuring the cohesion of the state. What becomes clear is that both ideas of the university, which seem to be set directly in opposition to each other as radical to conservative, are equally necessary to the state, and so is the conflict between them. To enter into that struggle by resisting one with the other is to remain oblivious to the extent to which each is implicated in the other and will only ensure the loss of any point of leverage whatsoever. The university too pivots on the torn halves of our culture; it bears the scars of capitalism, but in repeating them, it finds itself also marked with the stigmata as a sign of divine favour. The aporetic scission within culture articulated by the useful and useless university also enables a fulcrum for cultural critique.

The question today's philosophers need to ask is in what ways and with what effects can the university, useful and useless, both inside and outside the market economy, functioning for the needs of that economy but also necessary to it as a surplus outside that economy,

provide a point of dislocation? The problem is more complicated than Derrida's prescription of 'working at the outer limits of the authority and power of the principle of reason' because the idea of the university is already predicated on the doubled dissonance of providing useful and non-useful knowledge.[56] The deconstruction of the institution of reason is doubtless a particularly French concern; unlike the Kantian university, the English university is not governed by the monological principle of non-contradiction: founded as an institutional incarnation of the Logos, it has also incorporated its own instrumentality, the orientation of its knowledge, within its dialectical operation of useless and useful, inside and outside. Although its function as a surplus outside the market-system might seem to offer some possibility of perspective if not of power, the fact that that surplus is not only necessary but also reabsorbed by the market in a second more complex stage of the economy casts serious doubts on the university's ability to function in any oppositional position from the 'outside' as such. The market performs according to a contradictory economy, and succeeds in making that outside integral to itself. The same assimilation of such an inside/outside structure could also be said to hold for the relation of the intellectual to the institution. Though the knowledge of the university may appear to be without a market value, and to operate beyond that circuit of exchange, its very exteriority gives it a special value that helps to ensure the internal stability of society itself. The university itself thus reveals itself as the body behind the 'hidden hand' which, in Mandeville's phrase, turns private vices into public benefits. This means that the university comprehends both the principle of reason and that which operates at its very

limits. In other words it already includes the excessive place of resistance to instrumentality that Derrida advocates – which is what enables it to function as an institution that harnesses the interests of the individual to the needs of society, designed to ensure that the two are not conflictual. In order to do this, however, the university must be permanently at variance with itself: the dissension produced by this dislocation is acted out interminably in educational theory and practice.

(1992)

Notes

1. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice,* 224. On the following page Foucault argues that the events of May 68 were sparked off by the attempt to transform the university from a liberal to a technical institution. Cf. Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*.

2. The texts of the German idealists on the subject of the university are collected and translated in *Philosophies de l'université,* eds Ferry, Pesron, Renault. See also Derrida, 'The Principle of Reason'.

3. For education in Scotland, see Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland*; for Wales, see Jenkins, *The University of Wales*.

4. Historically, both universities were founded as a result of academic dissipation: the conventional method for resisting disagreeable attempts at Papal control was for the university simply to disperse itself when faced with a Papal edict: thus Oxford began as a result of the dissolution of the University of Paris in 1167, Cambridge as a result of that of University of Oxford in 1209. See Rasdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, III, 11-13. No one has yet suggested such a response to the increasing government control experienced by British universities in the eighties and nineties.

5. For a full account see Simpson, *How the Ph.D. came to Britain.* On the history of higher education generally see Jarausch, *The Transformation of Higher Learning, 1860-1930*,

Stephens and Roderick, *Post-School Education*, and Stone, *The University in Society*.

6. Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*; Derrida, 'Mochlos ou le conflit des facultés'.

7. See, for example, Ward, *Georgian Oxford*.

8. Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life*, 83. Wordsworth, *The Prelude.*

9. I owe this information to David Norbrook.

10. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, V.i.f.8. Further references will be given in the text. For Smith's own experiences at Balliol College, Oxford, see Campbell and Skinner, *Adam Smith,* 23-6. Rogers (*The Eighteenth Century*, 24) notes that Thomas Gray, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, gave no lectures whatsoever; Joseph Spence, the antiquarian, his counterpart in Oxford, did not even live there in twenty-five years.

11. Adamson, *English Education,* 177.

12. See Webster, *The Great Instauration*. For debates on the role of the university at the time of the Civil War which at that time was identified above all with the training of the clergy for the established church, see Hill, *The Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution*; *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England*; and Kearney, *Gentlemen and Scholars.*

13. Smith, review of R.L. Edgeworth's *Professional*

Education (1809), 44, 45-6.

14. Copleston, *A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review against Oxford; A Second Reply ... to the Calumnies*; *A Third Reply ... to the Calumnies*. Copleston was, until 1810, a fellow of Oriel College; he was later to become Bishop of Llandaff (see Copleston, *Memoir of Edward Copleston*).

15. Copleston, *A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review*, 111-12, 168-9.

16. Green, *British Institutions*, 108.

17. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 179-81.

18. Cited in Newman, *Select Discourses from the Idea of a University*, xi.

19. Bentham, *Chrestomathia*.

20. Smith, 'Literary Education', *Westminster Review* 1 (1824), 68.

21. *Prospectus of the London University*, 1. For a history of University College, see Bellot, *University College London*; for the history of the University of London, see Harte, *The University of London 1836-1986.* Court's *Institutionalizing English Literature* appeared after this essay was written; focusing on the study of English Literature, in many ways its detailed discussion of utilitarianism and university education complements the account given here.

22. Simon, *Studies in the History of Education*, 122.

23. For a full account of the first professor, the Rev. Thomas Dale, see Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies*, 18-25. Dale's moralisms were subsequently superseded by the more utilitarian factual sciences of philology, historical criticism, and Anglo-Saxon studies. Eventually Oxford began to feel the effects of the arguments that it was not abreast of modern knowledge; at this time, for instance, as Simon notes, at Oxford, which considered itself the centre of theological and classical studies, 'there was almost complete ignorance of the great advances in historical criticism and philology' (87). Oxford became a good deal more receptive to historical criticism during the course of the nineteenth century, but it is perhaps characteristic of its slow and stately pace in the advancement of knowledge that it has kept to the historical method ever since

24. In 1824, for instance, Baden Powell, Professor of Geometry at Oxford, wrote: 'Scientific knowledge is rapidly spreading among all classes EXCEPT THE HIGHER, and the consequence must be, that that class will not long remain THE HIGHER. If its members would continue to retain their superiority, they must preserve a real pre-eminence in knowledge, and must make advances at least in proportion to the classes who have hitherto been below them. And is it not a question, whether the same consideration does not in some measure apply to the ascendancy and stability of the University itself?' (*Quarterly Journal of Education*, Vol. IV:8, October 1832, 197-8, cited by Simon, 92).

25. 'Knowledge brings with it the want and necessity of political amelioration, a necessity which must be satisfied'

declared the opening issue of the *Westminster Review* (1 [1824], 81).

26. Cited by Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism*, 436. For Marx's comments on Bentham, the 'arch-philistine', see Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 758-9, n.51.

27. For an account of socialist politics of education in the nineteenth century see Simon, *Studies in the History of Education*; *Education and the Labour Movement*; *The Radical Tradition in Education in Britain*; and Vaughan and Archer, *Social Conflict and Educational Change in England and France 1789-1848*.

28. Primary education was not made compulsory until ten years after Forster's 1870 Education Act (see Musgrave, *Society and Education in England*, 45). William Forster was Matthew Arnold's brother-in-law.

29. Cf. Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

30. Mill, 'Civilization' (1836), in *Dissertations and Discussions*, I, 193.

31. Ibid, 196, 195.

32. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 244.

33. For the history of women's struggle for university education, see Killham, *Tennyson and the Princess*; Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*; Delamont, *The Nineteenth-Century Woman*.

34. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 19. Further references will be cited in the text. For detailed analysis of Newman's essays, see Culler, *The Imperial Intellect*.

35. Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730-80*, 207.

36. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 147, citing Copleston, *A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review*, 111.

37. Jay, *Adorno*, 122.

38. Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State*; Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*. Further references to both these volumes will be given in the text. Analyses of *On the Constitution of the Church and State* include Colmer, *Coleridge, Critic of Society*, Mill, *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*; and Morrow, *Coleridge's Political Thought*. For Arnold's other writings on the university, see Arnold, *Schools and Universities on the Continent* (1865-7); see also Connell, *The Educational Thought and Influence of Matthew Arnold*, 269-70; Walcott, *The Origins of Culture and Anarchy*.

39. Marx, *Selected Writings*, 575.

40. The authoritative text, widely deployed in this context, for literature's claim to the highest form of Platonic truth is Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* (1821), first published in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* in 1840. Baldick, in *The Social Mission of English Criticism*, cites an article from 1860 by H.G. Robinson, entitled 'English Classical Literature', which illustrates perfectly the extent to which literature takes theology's function as a meta-subject,

claiming its cohesive function through its access to a higher truth at the most ecumenical level:

> Large views help to develop large sympathies; and by converse with the thoughts and utterances of those who are intellectual leaders of the race, our heart comes to beat in accord with the feeling of universal humanity. We discover that no differences of class, or party, or creed, can destroy the power of genius to charm and instruct, and that above the smoke and stir, the din and turmoil of man's lower life of care and business and debate, there is a serene and luminous region of truth where all may meet and expatiate in common. (66)

41. Newbolt, *The Teaching of English in England.*

42. The argument, for example, of Eagleton's *Literary Theory. An Introduction*. The standard account of the political strategies of the institution of English Literature as a university discipline is Baldick's *The Social Mission of English Criticism;* for its mission in India, see Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*.

43. Apart from those mentioned, other obvious examples would include Wordsworth, De Quincey, George Eliot, T.S. Eliot. These values are not confined to the conservative right: similar assumptions provide the basis for E. P. Thompson's arguments in *Warwick University Ltd*.

44. Cox and Dyson, *Fight for Education: A Black Paper*, and *Black Paper, 2: The Crisis in Education*. For Leavis' writings on the function of the university (for him, more or less synonymous with that of English Literature) see *Education and the University*, and *English Literature in Our*

Time and the University.

45. Letter to William Cullen of 20 Sept, 1774, in *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, 174.

46. Schultz, 'Investment in Human Capital'; Becker, *Human Capital*. For the relation of the 'Human Capital' theory to Adam Smith see Skinner and Wilson, *Essays on Adam Smith*, 340-1, 573-4.

47. In England at least salary according to student numbers has never been introduced, on the grounds advanced by J.S. Mill that the university is an example of what he called 'market failure', that is because 'the uncultivated cannot be competent judges of cultivation' (*Principles of Political Economy*, II, 519). A different form of assessment, through research, is now the norm, which has the effect, logically at least, of making teaching the least important part of an academic's job, and according to Smith's principles at least, the one that he or she is therefore most likely if not to neglect, at least to put as a last priority. In this sense, those arguments put forward in the 1850s by those at Oxford and Cambridge against the idea of universities as research institutions have to some extent been justified.

48. Mark Blaug, 'The Economics of Education in English Classical Political Economy: A Re-Examination', in Skinner and Wilson, *Essays on Adam Smith*, 568-599, 591. See also Hollander, 'The Role of the State in Vocational Training: The Classical Economists' View', and Vaizey, *The Economics of Education*.

49. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 484.

50. Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 616-7. State education was endorsed by Malthus in his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, who saw the advantage of this system of control–in this case, of the population.

51. On this aspect, see Robert Heilbroner, 'The Paradox of Progress: Decline and Decay in *The Wealth of Nations*', in Skinner and Wilson, *Essays on Adam Smith*, 524-39.

52. E.G. West, 'Adam Smith and Alienation: Wealth Increases, Men Decay?', in Skinner and Wilson, *Essays on Adam Smith*, 522. On the classical economists and education see also West's useful essays, 'The Role of Education in Nineteenth-Century Doctrines of Political Economy'; and 'Private versus Public Education, A Classical Economic Dispute', in *The Classical Economists and Economic Policy*, ed. Coats, 123-43.

53. In the early part of *The Wealth of Nations* Smith by contrast does not excuse philosophers from the general process of the division of labour: 'Philosophers, or men of speculation, whose trade is not to do anything, but to observe everything ... upon that account, are often capable of combining together the powers of the most distant and dissimilar objects. In the progress of society, philosophy or speculation becomes, like every other employment, the principal or sole trade and occupation of a particular class of citizens. Like every other employment too, it is subdivided into a great number of different branches, each of which affords occupation to a peculiar tribe or class of

philosophers; and this subdivision of employment in philosophy, as well as in every other business, improves dexterity, and saves time. Each individual becomes more expert in his own peculiar branch, more work is done upon the whole, and the quantity of science is considerably increased by it' (I, i. 9). For further discussion see Barrell, *English Literature in History*, Chapter 1.

54. For Kant's account of the essence of the university as the sublime, see Derrida, 'The Principle of Reason', 6. An extended analysis of the role of the philosopher in the *Wealth of Nations* would obviously have to relate it to that of the impartial spectator in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). For an analysis of this figure and its relation to that of the 'Ideal Observer', see Campbell, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, and D.D. Raphael, 'The Impartial Spectator', in Skinner and Wilson, *Essays on Adam Smith*, 83-99.

55. See Skinner and Wilson, *Essays on Adam Smith*, 575.

56. Derrida, 'The Principle of Reason', 14.

Publication history

Original publication: 'The Idea of a Chrestomathic University' in *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, ed. Richard A. Rand (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1992), 97-126. This revised version in Robert J.C. Young, *Torn Halves: Political Conflict in Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, New York: St Martin's Press, 1996) 184-221.
Web version published 2007

To cite this version:
MLA Style: Robert J.C. Young, 'The Idea of a Chrestomathic University', *Torn Halves: Political Conflict in Literary and Cultural Theory* (1996). 1 June 2007 [access date]
http://robertjcyoung.com/THchapter8.pdf