The New Atlantis
A Journal of Technology & Society

Science, the Humanities, and the University II

The Technocratic American University

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Due to the emphasis the modern Enlightenment places on the popular dispensation of reason and the rational triumph over superstition, its primary advocates always afforded a central place to the university. Modernity's principles of science and politics, in particular its newly discovered science of politics, required enlisting the university as a weapon against a calcified tradition that was ripe for final and decisive replacement. The victory of human reason could only become complete when the traditional university, the bearer of a now-obsolete intellectual heritage, was transformed into an agent of philosophical liberation.

Given the university's indispensability to the success of the Enlightenment project, and its remarkable revision in the image of modern principles, the problems and contradictions that plague the university today can provide an instructive portal into the failings of modernity as a whole. The modern university's mission to promote the rational autonomy of the individual is in tension with its charge to cultivate the virtues necessary for civic life. This conflict, between the rejection of philosophical authority and the concession to the need for moral authority, reflects modernity's sanguine optimism regarding the coincidence of intellectual and moral virtue. In this respect, both the university and the modern theory out of which it was born take quite literally Socrates' ironic identification of virtue with knowledge.

The modern American university proves especially illuminating in this regard for two reasons. First, our universities are not merely dedicated to the popularization of the scientific worldview, but also to a specific regime: democracy. If democracy is the only regime that can be defended by unassisted human reason, then a university that promotes the unfettered exercise of scientific rationality also, by extension, promotes an attachment to democracy and the civic virtues and obligations that are the requisite conditions of its health. John Dewey argued that education should be wholeheartedly devoted to both democracy and the sciences; Dewey's progressive faith that the "cure for the ailments of democracy is more democracy" made him confident that "whatever changes may take place in existing democratic machinery" in the future would only serve to "make

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the interest of the public a more supreme guide and criterion of governmental activity." His rosy assessment of democracy, a radical departure from the more critical analysis common in classical philosophy, has everything to do with the ascendancy of modern science and its enthusiastic reception. It is in this vein that Leo Strauss could once proclaim: "The difference between the classics and us with regard to democracy consists exclusively in a different estimate of the virtues of technology."

However—and this is the second reason for the special significance of the American university—America is only ambiguously devoted to modernity, having sprung as it were not only from modern philosophical science but also from the classical republicanism and Christian morality that modernity precipitously rejected. The Founders considered the emergence of the United States as a real world power dependent upon the creation of its own centers of higher learning. Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and others argued forcefully for the creation of a national university that would teach both classical republicanism and modern science, cultivating both rational independence and a moral devotion to the regime. This Enlightenment view of the popularization of reason—that traditional morality and the scientific view that undermines it can be taught in tandem free from contradiction—is the hallmark of the contemporary university. Our universities, like our nation as a whole, both embrace and resist the scientific ardor that diminishes those aspects of human life it fails to capture.

It should be no surprise to us now that contentious disputes regarding the distance between our American ideals and the reality of American culture necessarily take the university as one of their primary points of departure. The university has become a mirror we use to scrutinize ourselves at our best and worst, reflecting the fidelity with which we approximate our founding principles. Depending on how one ultimately judges the American tradition, the university is either an instrument of its grateful conservation or its angry deconstruction.

America, Technocratic Republic?

The Founders' frequent appeals to science and the laws of nature, as well as their appropriation of scientific vernacular to describe the essential premises of the founding, indicate that America was from the outset intended to be a kind of technocratic republic. In Federalist No. 1, Alexander Hamilton argued, somewhat hyperbolically, that the new republic was founded on the desire to replace "accident and force" with "reflection and choice" as

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the ground of proper self-governance. While the phrase "accident and force" is evocative of tyranny, it is also aimed at the contingent character of rule by ancestral tradition—in a way, tradition is a tyranny of accidental circumstance. Even the discussion in the Federalist Papers of the United States as an *experiment* in self-governance borrows from the conceptual architecture of science, just as the central notion of the separation of powers seems vaguely modeled on an understanding of energy and force derived from physics. The sentiment, articulated by George Washington, that the "foundation of our empire was not laid in the gloomy age of ignorance and superstition" but rather based on the "researches of the human mind" is echoed throughout the Founders' writings. Similarly, Hamilton confessed that he was reluctant to mine the classical texts of antiquity for guidance, since their speculations could not draw from the "great improvement" exacted in modernity by the new "science of politics."

Nevertheless, the rational universality of the American republic was tempered by the concession that there was something historically particular and idiosyncratic about the circumstances of its birth; James Madison wrote that "no other form would be reconcilable with the genius of the American people." And the formation of the nation was infused with a humble sense of man's insuperable moral and intellectual failings. Instead of the celebration of human reason characteristic of Enlightenment science, Madison endorsed less hubristic expectations "as long as the reason of man continues fallible," and cautioned against the idea that the right bureaucratic contrivances could defeat the "depravity in mankind." He countered the scientific conceit that politics itself could be overcome through asymptotic progress with the realization that even the best form of government presumed an inexpugnable frailty at the heart of humanity: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary."

If Madison is correct that "the latent causes of faction are…sown in the nature of man" and that government is a "reflection on human nature," then any republic must take seriously the cultivation of the virtue necessary to counteract that depravity. John Adams considered civic virtue so central to the health of the American republic that he justified a strong, coercive role for the government regarding its promotion, advocating "sumptuary" legislation that restricted excessive luxury, compulsory military service for the sake of engendering discipline and patriotism, and government-funded moral education. Adams's preoccupation with moral fortitude as the "principle and foundation" of any prosperous and secure republic is reminiscent of classical republicanism, hinting at the American nation's genealogical roots in ancient political morality.

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However, the apparent deference to classical republicanism can obscure more than it clarifies. While the Founders shared with the ancients a concern for virtue, their starting point was not a dependent, radically flawed though rational animal whose life was dominated by the burden of public duty but rather the independent, radically autonomous individual whose political life is centered on his inviolable sphere of private liberty. Following Locke, the Founders tended to begin by postulating equality and freedom; they often characterized the celebration of the noble life as unacceptably aristocratic, submission to authority as inconsistent with individual liberty, and deference to tradition as a surrendering of intellectual independence. The replacement of "accident and force" with "reflection and choice" demands not that virtue is the elusive ground of the best regime but rather the reverse: that the best regime can be willfully productive of virtue through political and educational institutions. Thus, Adams seemed to believe that the general progress of scientific reason would generate similar innovations and accomplishments morally: The Constitution, he wrote in 1790, was "evidently founded in the expectation of the further progress and extraordinary degrees of virtue.... It is allowed that the present age is more enlightened than former ones." Likewise, it would not have struck many as strange in 1787 that, in a single speech, Noah Webster could inspire young students to "unshackle your minds and act like independent beings" and also implore them to use their "wisdom and virtues" in patriotic service to the republic.

In contradistinction to Plato's view that democratic freedom has a tendency to undermine the requisite conditions for virtue, the American Founders argued that democratic forms armed with scientific reason would conduce to a general dispensation of it. Moreover, unlike Plato, who adhered to a strict division between civic and philosophic education, the Founders often understood the perfection of the latter as the guarantor of the former. Washington forcefully advocated the creation of a national university that would ensure that "the arts, Sciences and Belles lettres, could be taught in their fullest extent" and that open-ended intellectual inquiry, even one dominated by the sciences, would produce the "liberal knowledge which is necessary to qualify our citizens for the exigencies of public, as well as private life." Washington seemed confident that such a curriculum would not only generally inspire patriotic fervor but even that it would spark the "assimilation of the principles, opinions and manners" specific to Americans. The fullest consummation of the Enlightenment project is the inauguration of the new higher learning that seamlessly combines the theoretical and the practical, America as real nation and as democratic ideal.

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Lockean Education and Rational Autonomy

Although John Locke's theory of education tends to emphasize childhood development over university instruction, it is important to examine because of the indelible influence it had on early American pedagogic theorists, particularly Jefferson. In sharp contrast to the classical suspicion regarding the family's stewardship of a child's education (Plato famously abolished the family entirely to avoid its corrupting influence on the young), Locke demanded that parents function as the primary educational influence. While Lockean education, as described in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), certainly has a political end—the "welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends on it"—it is not entrusted to political maintenance and supervision; it is almost entirely the "duty and concern of parents." The preference for the family over a school, public or private, is meant to avoid the herd mentality produced by the homogenizing effects of common institutions. In other words, the centrality of the family in Lockean education is dictated by the priority of liberty rather than an attraction to the family as the proper stage for the cultivation of our natural, social virtues.

In fact, so singularly is Locke's view of education directed towards producing a reflexive contempt for authority that even the family is not spared aggressive critique. Parental authority is only "but a temporary one" demanded by the vulnerability of a child in his youth, dispensed with once he achieves "age and reason." Furthermore, while Locke assigns parents the obligations to "preserve, nourish, and educate" their progeny, he also reduces the natural family to a nexus of self-interested contracts between husband and wife, parents and children. The ultimate goal of education, liberation from the tutelage of nature and authority by rational self-exertion, begins with the gradual liberation from the first of our natural tethers, the family. In short, Locke considers the family as an educationally valuable hurdle to be overcome.

The central object of Lockean education, the rational control of nature, begins with the defective natural constitution that originally plagues all children, "their natural wrong inclinations." So while Locke seems to follow the Aristotelian view that education requires the inculcation of proper habits of action, he denies that this is a perfection of their natural potential. While we certainly are guided by "principles of actions," Locke writes in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), they are not moral principles but are found in appetites that if "left to their full swing…would carry men to the overturning of all morality." The

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advantage of any child's natural disposition is that it pines for liberty, but too easily that craving is overtaken by a concomitant desire for "dominion," the "first original of most vicious habits." The natural disorder of children expresses itself in the tyrannical will to power over others, and the conventional response of parents is to subdue this desire with the discipline of the traditional virtues.

However, Locke counsels avoiding feckless appeals to duty, sacrifice, or God, instead suggesting that the only sure route is an appeal to desire—more specifically, an appeal to reward and punishment or pleasure and pain, the only objects that naturally arouse fear. In place of the classical teaching that emphasized the disciplined flourishing of our natural potential, the Lockean approach attempts to contravene nature, to overcome our natural infirmity through natural aversion. The "most powerful incentives," the only ones that count as the "true restraint belonging to virtue," are "esteem and disgrace." The natural desire to dominate others can be sublimated into a desire for honor or prestige, transforming the anti-sociability of natural tyranny into the sociable desire for reputation. Moreover, children can be taught to want to be esteemed for their reasonableness above all things, although at a young age they actually have very limited rational powers. Thus, the Lockean educational program honors children for their reasonableness long before they really are reasonable: children "love to be treated as rational creatures sooner than is imagined" and sooner than is warranted. The ultimate fruition of a pupil's schooling generates a paradox: he learns the gregarious desire to be honored for his rational self-sufficiency.

Even more iconoclastic than Locke's view of the family is his virtual elimination of religious instruction. Locke was deeply worried about the impact a "promiscuous reading of the Scripture" would have on impressionable minds, favoring its replacement by a catalogue of "moral rules" and a "good history of the Bible." The problem of traditional Biblical study, according to Locke, is threefold: First, it replaces a rigorous rational scrutiny of all things with a credulous acceptance of miraculous and supernatural events. Second, it engenders a passive submission to paternalistic authority as our natural condition, rather than the natural freedom and equality of all rational beings. Finally, it preaches that a bountiful nature is the providential bequest of a personal and loving God, as opposed to the provider of "almost worthless materials" that only obtain value from the human labor that transforms them into something useful. The comprehensive human liberation Locke aims for requires the decisive repudiation of the Biblical description of the human condition. The authority

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of God, once taught, is much harder to unseat than the authority of a human father, whose imperfections diminish the respect he can demand, and whose flattery fans the flames of independence. The eternity of God creates a specter of authority recalcitrant to revision. We outgrow the necessary and gentle tyranny of our fathers to become fathers ourselves, but God is a constant reminder of our insuperable limitations.

Locke's precipitous dismissal of religion anticipates its gradual expulsion from the modern university as little more than ancient and benighted prejudice. Furthermore, Locke's obsession with rational productivity is a clear precursor to the careerist turn the university would eventually take, becoming something more like a credentialing center than a place of higher learning; Locke disdained belletristic study long before it was fashionable to do so. The ultimate goal of education, for Locke, is the generation of businessmen and scientists. He says very little directly about civic or political virtues, since the real advancements in a free society are made by private citizens rather than public representatives. In fact, he says almost nothing about philosophic education. The passive and noble contemplation of eternity is exchanged for the active and productive transformation of the here-and-now world.

Still, Locke is keenly aware that rational autonomy is not an unproblematic goal, and his enthusiasm for it is somewhat tempered by a recognition of the obstacles in its way. He begins with the family in part because it seems to be such an inveterate article of nature, the original stage for our impressionable experience of dependence, limitation, and legitimate authority. He sees education as crucial to the conquest of our given nature; he essentially wants children to be taught to pine for their father's station. The university today is far too homogenous and institutionalized for Locke to approve of it, and far more Platonic in that it sees its role as replacing the education of the parent and even remedying its ill effects. The American university aims at a kind of rational autonomy and sees an education in reason as identical to an education in morality; however, it no longer draws upon the reflections of those Enlightenment thinkers on the great tension between moral authority and rational self-sufficiency. Locke promoted the facile harmony between rational independence and moral dependence with so much success that modern higher education does not fathom that there ever was a tension in the first place, that reason and morality aren't simply identical, that rational freedom does not exhaust the whole of virtue. We are far more Lockean than even Locke was and far more confident that, with the university's expert assistance, we can happily complete the process of educative self-construction.

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Jeffersonian Education in Natural Rights

Thomas Jefferson's understanding of education is indebted in many ways to Locke's. On one hand, Jefferson viewed education as a tool for the advancement of Enlightenment principles and so conceived of the university as devoted to the various branches of modern science, including modern political science. On the other hand, he also considered education, especially at the university level, as an indispensable organ for disseminating civic virtue. Jefferson exacerbates the Lockean problem of the tension between rational autonomy and authority by assigning a more explicitly political role to education and more institutional means for its achievement. For Jefferson, the paradoxical goal of education is to produce rational citizens who are both devoted to their country and zealously protective of their natural rights: they are patriotically attached to the state yet compulsively sensitive to its potential encroachments upon their liberty.

For Jefferson, then, education is a certain kind of rational enlightenment that equips us against tyranny—the goal is to "enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom." Where Locke conceives of rational autonomy as an aggressive mastery of nature, Jefferson, despite his enthusiasm for the modern natural sciences, sees education as awakening a protective awareness of our natural moral condition, freedom and equality. While natural rights are individually held, they can only be reliably secured through collective action. "Liberal education," as Jefferson wrote in his Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge (1778), must teach men to be "able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens." Instruction begins with an awareness of our moral inviolability as individuals and ends with the recognition of necessarily cooperative action.

While Locke makes education an almost entirely private matter, Jefferson devoted himself to the creation of a "national" university and advocated for state-subsidized elementary schools. The odd consequence is that, in Jefferson's vision, the government contributes to the defensive strength of the citizenry against its own authority: the task of government-sponsored education is to fortify the people against the potentially abusive tyranny of their representatives. The central tension within Jefferson's view of education between autonomy and authority is sharply expressed in the conflict between two apparently antagonistic goals: the cultivation of self-sufficiency for individuals, and a moral attachment to one's fellow citizens and the state. To an extraordinary degree, Jefferson wants to

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combine solitary suspicion and gregarious ardor—we must be both distrustful and loving of the same object.

This tension can also be seen in the description Jefferson gives of the natural "moral sense" that makes happiness, education, and political life all possible for human beings. He frequently defines this moral sense as the source of our basic sociability—we are fundamentally drawn to moral conduct "because nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and to succor their distresses" (as he put it in an 1814 letter). Contrary to Locke, who argued that whatever principles of action are innate to us are largely inconsistent with morality, Jefferson makes the natural moral sense the foundation of all moral and political life. Jefferson's account of real moral experience is also markedly less abstract than Locke's: Jefferson at least pays deference to the whole moral spectrum of obligation, sacrifice, and even love. He goes as far as to articulate moral life as premised not only upon the entitlements of defensive rights but the selfless devotion to others: self-love, the narrow concern for one's own, is "the antagonist of virtue."

Paradoxically, Jefferson paints the same moral sense in strikingly individualistic strokes. The moral sense accounts for our social bonds with others and the fashioning of community, but moral action is also a useful good for the actor. Jefferson goes as far to call "utility" the "standard and test of virtue" rather than a good in itself. His conception of happiness as the ultimate goal of virtue is colored by a Stoic sense of self-sufficiency: true morality reveals, Jefferson argues in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784), that happiness "does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed [us], but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all just pursuits." In some of his writings, his lionization of self-sufficiency as the apex of virtue and happiness is self-encapsulating, as in this 1786 letter: "The most effectual means of being secure against pain is to retire within ourselves, and to suffice for our own happiness. Those, which depend on ourselves, are the only pleasures a wise man will count on." Instead of an active participation in politics demanded by the small-scale republicanism Jefferson typically subscribes to, the consequence of genuine virtue would be the Epicurean tranquility and contemplative peace that comes with solitude. On other occasions, however, Jefferson seems to claim that the height of human happiness is captured by ceaseless industry or the avoidance of the indolence that so often issues from impractical contemplation and the arts.

Jefferson's account of the university is dominated not only by the sciences but specifically the practical sciences to encourage a sense of rational

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independence and productivity. He generally permits for religious instruction, but a decidedly non-sectarian approach, one that treats its supernatural elements as didactic myth rather than genuine metaphysics, and only to be introduced into the curriculum after a student has been thoroughly steeped in scientific method. The university is also intended to promote patriotism and civic duty by disciplining the natural moral sense, to inspire a decent respect for art and culture, and to open up new theoretical vistas for those rare students of superior philosophic aptitude. Jefferson envisions the university as a conduit for transmitting Enlightenment liberation, but also a means for embracing one's political dependence—it must free us and bind us at the same time. He vehemently advocates for academic freedom for his professors but also argues that their teaching, especially on religious matters, be tightly controlled. Similarly, he extols the virtues of student liberty to engineer their own educational plan but also subjects them to the most austere discipline and supervision.

While Jefferson is less impressed by the abstractions of Locke's account of a radically autonomous, detached individual, he struggles to base his educational program on a fuller account of human experience. He is far more attentive than Locke to that part of the human soul that is not entirely satisfied by either productivity or politics but sees recourse to religion as foreclosed by the modern repudiation of it. And unlike Locke, Jefferson distinguishes between civic, scientific, and philosophic education, but he is also pulled by the modern scientific tendency to reduce a manifold complexity of phenomena to an overly simplistic and monolithic account. While Jefferson could palpably sense the contours of human life that defy its reduction to a featureless scientific view, he finally succumbed to the narrative of Enlightenment victory as he could discover no scientifically legitimate theory to capture it. It is unsurprising that Jefferson read his own highly idiosyncratic political preferences into the university mission, an anticipation of the vulnerability our universities today have to aggressive politicization. Generally speaking, the schizophrenic character of the modern university, incoherently aimed at both moral collectivism and individual rational liberation, owes much to Jefferson's own irreconcilable tendencies and his finally fractured account of the human person.

Hobbes and the Scientific University

Unlike Locke and Jefferson, who both struggled to determine what role religion should play within the educational system, Thomas Hobbes was unblinkingly certain that its effects could only be pernicious. Hobbes

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argued that the universities of his day were pervasively corrupted by the influence of Christian Aristotelianism, which he derisively called "Aristotelity." Instead of struggling to reconcile the rarified heights of rational liberation with the advantages of traditional moral authority, Hobbes mocked religious virtue and ridiculed the conception of a univocal moral good espoused by the classical philosophers as "but a description of their own passions." Hobbes was unyieldingly enthusiastic about the success of modern science to render transparent the whole panoply of human affairs. In place of a sustained reflection on the tension between Enlightenment principles and the moral demands of political life, he announced (in *Leviathan*, 1651) the discovery of the one "true moral philosophy" whose superiority consists in its thoroughly scientific character.

In place of Christian Aristotelianism, which Hobbes calls "rather a dream than science," he substitutes a radically materialistic metaphysics and mechanistic psychology that reinterprets political life through the prism of modern scientific doctrine. The superstitious postulation of "invisible spirits" is replaced by empirically observable matter in motion. A rationally defensible account of political experience, one that has never before been available, should be modeled on the deductive and axiomatic structure of geometry: "The skill of making, and maintaining commonwealths, consisteth in certain rules, as doth arithmetic and geometry."

Hobbes's criticism of the scholastic university is not merely that it continued to function as the bearer of an intellectual tradition that had become obsolete, but rather that it should no longer understand its mission in terms of the transmission of any tradition at all. Hobbes can reconcile the devotion of the university to uncompromised reason and its devotion to the principles of the Enlightenment movement because the two are perfectly identical—the science of politics and the politics of science have been finally rendered theoretically compatible. One of his most fundamental criticisms of Christianity is that its staid interpretation of virtue tends to "lessen the dependence of subjects on the sovereign power of their country." Following Machiavelli and anticipating Rousseau, Hobbes complained that the prospects of worldly political success are diminished by the detouring of citizens' allegiances to other-worldly sources of authority.

According to Barry Bercier in his insightful 2007 book *The Skies of Babylon*, the modern university largely owes its shape to Hobbes's radical critique of its medieval predecessor. Now purged of its Christian influence, its educational mission has entirely succumbed to the "irresistible

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force" of the Enlightenment. The despotism of the Church is traded for the Leviathan of the state, with the university as the principal tool for the popularization of its modern premises.

Following Hobbes's lead, the university has been transmogrified into a center of Enlightenment science that rests upon the "presumed intellectual superiority of mathematical natural science over properly human understanding and judgment," Bercier writes. However, the "relativistic methodology appropriate to the technological sciences" is entirely inappropriate for comprehending the "properly human world," or the "world of persons." Bercier explains that the language of science, suited to the irreverent transformation of nature instead of its dispassionate comprehension, precludes access to those "relationships named by our ancient and still whole and living speech," those pre-political ties that constitute the family, which is the "seedbed and womb of our nature."

Liberated from the twin tutelage of heritage and nature, the university is now untethered in its zealous pursuit of social justice, understood as the achievement of equality and peace. Bercier artfully dissects the language of political correctness, the primary device for the application of "moral pressure" in the service of these aims. In a chapter entitled "The Language of Anger," he argues that diversity, now accepted as the *summum bonum* of our educational institutions, is really a febrile response to a caricature of the West as a "reactionary, repressive, and monolithic center." In order to impose the uniformity of thought that a moral re-education in diversity paradoxically requires, the university calls on the social sciences to transform every natural human relationship into an arbitrary construct that rests on a political misdistribution of power. As Bercier notes, "a kind of synergy arises between the anger and the sciences as they are blended together into a single language."

Bercier seems to suggest that the ultimate problem of the modern university as an instrument of Enlightenment science is its goal of individual autonomy via the rational control of nature. This goal is at tension with itself: on one hand, it puts man in a posture of mastery toward nature; on the other, it shares the Lockean denigration of nature, *of which we are a part*, to worthless material for productive labor. Our elevation to mastery requires a debasement from our status as purposeful beings once understood as the peak of glorious creation. Those who follow Hobbes in remaking the university, Bercier writes, "obliterate reference to what in us transcends any of our institutions and thereby block our access to the interior and substantive sources of freedom." Even our desire for mastery, much like our desire to "exercise governance," Bercier writes, is evidence

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of our "desire for immortality achieved through works and deeds that endure in the world and in human memory."

For all his rhetorical bombast, even Hobbes still evinced some sensitivity to the problem that obsession with scientific method would produce a shallow, denuded anthropology that trades a serious and deep appreciation of lived human experience for deductive rigor. Despite frequent claims that the categories of modern science exhaust the totality of human life, he conceded in *The Elements of Law* (1640) that the formulation of scientific hypothesis was parasitic upon a reflection on prior experience. Hobbes also argued in *De Cive* (1642) that unlike the axiomatic rules of physics, civil philosophy is "grounded on its own principles sufficiently known by experience." Hobbes denied Socratic political philosophy the status of science, but admitted that some kind of self-knowledge acquired through introspective reflection on the experience of our own passions and desires is absolutely necessary to political science. He was clearly aware that science does little to aid genuine and deep self-reflection, and even that such intense scrutiny of ourselves is "harder to learn than any language, or science." Unfortunately, Hobbes's most lasting bequest to the modern university is not this circumspect admission but rather the intemperate promotion of a scientific ideology that, in reducing man to his material parts, forecloses any such access to the self.

Conservatives and the Technocratic University

Conservative commentators proffer two entirely reasonable but not obviously compatible criticisms of the modern university today. First, they admonish administrators and faculty alike for creating an intellectually oppressive environment; instead of inspiring an open exchange of ideas through Socratic inquiry, they impose speech codes, a stifling regime of political correctness, and a heavily politicized program of moral indoctrination designed to recruit students to the favorite causes of leftist activism. On the other hand, conservatives reprimand the same crowd for being excessively permissive, even libertine, when it comes to issues of morality, especially the realm of sexuality. Hyper-liberal universities today are simultaneously too restrictive and too indulgent, seamlessly if incoherently vacillating between the two extremes.

The two criticisms only seem contradictory, though, when viewed in isolation from the modern university's historical context. Today, the university still claims to champion the perfection of reason, even if the idea of rational liberation, following the postmodern deconstruction of it, has

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been whittled down to the virtue of nonjudgmental tolerance. Moreover, the university still claims to function as the shepherd of young students' souls, although its latent Hobbesianism prevents it from using such old-fashioned and overly religious terminology. It still claims the moral authority of *in loco parentis*, going so far as to radically reform—rather than merely reinforce—the moral teaching provided by inexpert parents. Today's college administrators actually do break from their intellectual inheritance in no longer being haunted by a worrisome skepticism that their institutions are not properly suited to the tasks assigned to them, or that the tasks themselves are mutually exclusive.

While conservative critiques chastise the university for its opposition to free and unimpaired philosophical exchange, they also censure it for no longer taking seriously its commitment to civic education—the task of inculcating not just the virtue necessary for democratic participation but also the patriotic attachment to the nation that is its precondition. In effect, conservatives are duplicating the Enlightenment tension between authority and rational liberation that generated the precipitous decline of the university in the first place. Essentially, conservatives want to combine the rational and erotic elements of the human soul but often without a clear idea of what this means. They instinctively and rightly understand that the disciplines have become disordered and disconnected, and that, in turn, the curricular requirements at even the best of institutions no longer abide by any unifying principle. However, they are no longer certain what could offer such a unity of either man or the disciplines that would serve him.

Much of the conservative critique's confusion is a symptom of its intellectual debt to the most influential book written on the topic, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). For Bloom, the dampening of our erotic longings, or the woeful flattening of our souls, can be diagnosed in the symptomatic decay of university life and the crisis of confidence in its general mission. Where Bercier attempts to rescue the medieval Christian version of the university as a conduit of tradition, Bloom's objective is to defend the Socratic essence of the university against the effects of promiscuous egalitarianism. Despite his influence on the conservative critique of the university, Bloom's motivation cannot be considered truly conservative: the Socratic university, like Socratic philosophy, is radically detached from political and moral life and so a vehicle of liberation from tradition. For Bloom, the de-Christianization of the modern university would not be evidence of decline *per se* as long as it resulted in the triumph of the life of reason over faith. In Bloom's view, the only true community is the

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community of philosophers—which is tantamount to casting doubt on all real, historical communities, including the university itself.

Classical political philosophy culminates in the view that the highest human wisdom is the recognition of one's ignorance concerning the good life, and therefore a life singularly devoted to the pursuit of this wisdom is the only life worth living. However, the life devoted to such a thoroughly theoretical pursuit is necessarily at the expense of our non-theoretical attachments, which become permanently subject to suspicion. The Socratic lionization of detached philosophic eros effectively produces the same dismissal of tradition as does the Cartesian version of hyperbolic doubt. Consider Bloom's statement to the effect that the life of the philosophers amounts to "participating in essential being and...forgetting their accidental lives." Bloom extols philosophic eros and bemoans its absence from university life, but he de-eroticizes human life by disconnecting it from genuine moral and political obligation. Just as nature is only worthless material for rational manipulation in Enlightenment science, politics and morality provide the intrinsically meaningless experience that philosophy is to transcend.

Bercier—who quotes that line of Bloom's in his own book—suggests that classical philosophy might collapse into nihilism alongside modern philosophy, if not in exactly the same manner. If modern philosophy sacrifices genuine transcendence to win individual autonomy, classical philosophy surrenders the meaningfulness of our lives for the sake of the unfettered transcendence that comprises the autonomy of philosophic life. Bercier further suggests that there is a real kinship between classical philosophy and multiculturalism: both rest upon a "universality and abstraction" that preclude the capacity to "discern the *identity* of a person or body of persons." But, Bercier argues, "personal or national or political identity" are not universals that can just be abstracted away; they are "essentially particular and singular," and the uniqueness of individual human life "eludes all science, both ancient and modern."

Bercier not only acknowledges the Christian beginning of the university as a historical fact but also argues that it should be the university's rightful source of purpose: Man, understood as that part of creation made in the image of God, is "the point of orientation by which the university should chart its course." Man becomes the rightful measure of the university precisely because his own imperfection demands political life for the stewardship of his social inclinations, while his likeness to God points to the transcendent good which limits political life itself; man understood in this way is the "highest meaning of politics." This dual account of

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man—incorporating both the political and that which transcends politics—might suggest that the longstanding contradiction at the heart of the post-Enlightenment university is still present in Bercier's account of the purpose of the university: Does the university exist to "challenge students in the most serious and life-transforming ways" or to "preserve, cultivate, and transmit Western civilization"?

However, Bercier resolves this seeming contradiction by arguing that the university is meant to preserve a *particular* human tradition and even foster attachment to it. In our case, the university "should be dedicated" to the preservation of America itself and to engendering the "responsibility required to exercise governance." For Americans, a "sound education in American history must be the central concern of their education from beginning to end." (This stands in contrast, again, to Bloom. While Bloom certainly recognizes the grand significance of America—he calls our time "the American moment in world history" and suggests that "just as in politics the responsibility of the fate of freedom in the world has devolved upon our regime, so the fate of philosophy in the world has devolved upon our universities"—he nevertheless could not himself be dedicated to any regime except, like Socrates, one that recognized philosophers as kings. Bloom also seems to echo rather than correct a fundamental deficiency of the modern university: in the place of the respect and gratitude that serve as the requisite conditions for the rational scrutiny of our cultural inheritance, the university has adopted a version of Cartesian doubt that presumptuously equates tradition with obsolescence.)

In defending the exceptionalism of the American regime, we defend both a particular regime and one founded in an understanding of universal human rights, the modern articulation of our equality as beings created in the image of God. To grasp man's simultaneous universality and particularity—his transcendence and his immanence, the "right ordering of his nature and the right ordering of his community"—a "sound science of man himself" must become the "keystone of a university education," Bercier writes. Such a science of man can rehabilitate the university mission against the impersonal and inordinately universal character of both Socratic and modern Cartesian science. The unity of the university mission, which is in fact the original goal hidden within its modern transformation, is dependent upon the unity of man, or the devotion to his dignity as a full human person. Conservatives today should join with Bloom in lamenting the de-eroticization of the university's soul, but depart from Bloom by affirming an account of human eros that includes the whole spectrum of our soul's desires and obligations.

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