

Obstacles to Liberal Education in the Modern University

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To be a teacher of the humanities at a university means participating in a community dedicated to enquiring into the good for human beings. As members of a community of teachers, scholars, and students, we share an equality on account of the fact that no individual possesses a firm grip on the truth of that good. As teachers, we are unequal to our students by virtue of the fact that we have dedicated our lives, at least to a certain extent either professionally or even in amateur fashion (in the original meaning of amateur), to the pursuit of the truth to a degree greater than others. Thus, the community a teacher shares with a student, and perhaps with other teachers, is qualified.

Two quotations concerning the one of the great teachers of humanity, Socrates, point to this tension between the teacher in community and the teacher removed from it. The first is from Xenophon, citing Socrates' description of his favorite activity:

Just as others are pleased by a good horse or dog or bird, I myself am pleased to an even higher degree by good friends... and the treasures of the wise men of old which they left behind by writing them in books, I unfold and go through them together with my friends, and if we see something good, we pick it out and regard it as a great gain if we thus become useful to one another.¹

This quote displays Socrates practicing friendship in the sense summarized by the ancient Greek proverb (and in his description of the perfect city in *Republic V*) that in friendship all things are common.

¹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, vi, 14.

On the other hand, in Plato's *Symposium*, we also see a Socrates who intensely converses not with Xenophon or Plato, but with himself, as if conversing with true being itself:

“Your Socrates has retreated into a neighbor’s porch and stands there, and when I called him, he was unwilling to come in.”

“That is strange,” Agathon said. “Call him and don’t let him go.”

And Aristodemus said that he said, “No, no, leave him alone. That is something of a habit with him. Sometimes he moves off and stands stock still wherever he happens to be. He will come at once, I suspect. So do not try to budge him, but leave him alone.”²

It is highly likely Socrates prefers conversing with true being to the exemplars of titanic, prophetic, Dionysian, and tyrannical erotes who speak at Agathon’s party.

The problem for us is that it is the speeches at Agathon’s party, or the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon, that give us our clearest glimpse of Socrates the teacher in action. However, we too deal with exemplars of deformed erotes as well as erotes that are simply unformed, that is, students.

Unfortunately, the problem for us teachers who bide our time in the modern university have additional problems because, as critics like Allan Bloom and, more recently, Anthony Kronman, have argued, the modern university has either given up on enquiring on the human good or it now considers it irrelevant. In place of this central question which has vexed human beings since their creation, and universities since human beings created them, modern universities today seem plagued with a host of obstacles for those enquiring into the human good, as well as

² Plato, *Plato's "Symposium,"* trans., Seth Benardete, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 175a-b.

envisaging this enquiry as a community project for groups of scholar-student friends.

In this paper, I shall consider the obstacles that inhibit efforts to think of and practice teaching and learning as a community effort in the modern university. An assessment of genuine attempts at teaching Socratically in the modern university will be the subject of another essay. I shall use Kronman's account of the pathologies of the modern university and the inability to ask, as a community effort, about the human good in that setting.³ Kronman's analysis of the research ideal, political correctness, and the relationship of science to humanities, invites us to consider three different personality types among the inhabitants of the university, all three of which one might regard as an anti-individual: 1) anti-individual as researcher, 2) anti-individual as representative of "identity," 3) and anti-individual as exponent of modern scientism. I call these "anti-individuals" because they are types of behaviors created by the incentives (material and intellectual) provided by the "regulative ideal" of the modern academy (including research universities and liberal arts colleges). The first is the result of research overspecialization and how that impedes teaching of the human good. The second is the result of the ideological project of "diversity." The third considers the degree to which natural science provides a meaningful answer to modern man concerning the human good, and considers more generally the built-in assumptions concerning human personhood and education that enable the modern natural sciences to have this authority.

³ Anthony Kronman, *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

Assessing these three anti-individuals enables us perhaps to understand ourselves and the challenges we face as teachers and scholars in the modern university with its commitment to the “research ideal.” Kronman’s analysis is compelling though a bit over-idealized, as I shall explain below. His proposed solution in the form of the “conversation” of “secular humanism” moves in the right direction but is insufficient.⁴ That proposal necessitates a second essay on several teachers who, perhaps more than any others in the twentieth-century, forced their students to consider the great question of the human good.

The Researcher as Anti-Individual

In his introductory lecture at the University of Munich in 1958, which was later published as *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, Eric Voegelin dropped a bombshell by demonstrating how Karl Marx (as well as Hegel and Nietzsche) were intellectual swindlers. Their swindle was the result of them having built in a prohibition of questioning into their intellectual systems (or lack of system, in the case of Nietzsche). For someone like Marx, socialist man simply must not ask a question like, what is the meaning of life? Or what is the origin of one’s existence?⁵

Voegelin was the first to teach political science at the University of Munich since Max Weber. It is Weber’s “Science as a Vocation” lecture that structures

⁴ Parts of this essay were originally published as blog posts for the Lehman American Studies Center (<http://lehrman.isi.org/blog/>).

⁵ Eric Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint: The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics; and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5, ed., Manfred Henningsen, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 264-65, 274-5.

Anthony Kronman's argument in *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life* that the research ideal of the modern university does not simply ignore but positively prohibits the same question that Marx prohibits.

Voegelin caused scandal with his blunt assessment of Marx. That Kronman's less blunt but no less incisive criticism has not caused a similar scandal seems to illustrate how deeply the swindle has seeped into the contemporary academy.

Kronman, following Weber (who follows Tolstoy on this question), argues the research ideal of the contemporary university is that of specialization. Researchers mark their tiny corner of the universe in order to make their tiny contribution to the growing stock of scientific knowledge. The modern researcher makes a virtue out of specialization because knowledge of the whole, alleged to be the goal of liberal education, is not only impossible but is taken by the research ideal to be a vice. Because the aggregate of knowledge is seen to grow and progress constantly, the individual researcher can anticipate being obsolete very soon after his contribution, or, at most, his life: "The true scholar wants to be superseded by his successors, just as he wants to supersede those who have preceded him. He seeks originality, but accepts the transience of his own original achievements."⁶

To be a scholar then is to exert "heroic" effort onto the tip of a blade of grass, and then to throw that blade of grass into the wind, forever to be forgotten. To illustrate the "heroic" "ethic of supersession" (Weber) that is demanded of scholars, Kronman quotes the remark of nineteenth-century German chemist Just von Liebig

⁶ Kronman, *Education's End*, 118.

to a friend: “If you wish to become a chemist, you must be prepared to sacrifice your health. Whoever does not ruin his health by studying will not amount to much in chemistry these days.”⁷ Any scholar will likely see a bit of his graduate school experience in this statement. Whether the research ideal is a “heroic” ideal or human folly (most famously illustrated by Aristophanes’ satirical portrayal of Socrates’ disciples, in the *Clouds*, as pale-skinned and starving) remains open to question. Both possibilities are shabby shadows of Paul’s declaration of dying unto the world.⁸

Even so, the researcher is necessarily isolated and the “scientific community” or “republic of letters” is a chimera: “It is the scholar’s own insistence on the importance of originality that compels him to acknowledge the transience of his work, that deprives him of the experience of eternity in the deathless company of his ancestors, and leaves him facing death alone and unconsolated. If specialization is a price that must be paid for originality, then loneliness is too.”⁹ The quest for originality – which finds its counterpart in politics in individualism – undermines the ability of community, both in terms of the making “scientific community” meaningless as well as the university, which might be better described, as Canadian philosopher George Grant did, as a multiversity. Communication is, by definition, impossible among absolutely unique individuals who, in their ultimate particularity, cannot share a common world or academic endeavor. For this reason, one might have to look to university administrators to form the moral and intellectual glue that

⁷ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 281, n. 23.

⁸ E.g., Ephesians 6:14.

⁹ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 120.

holds the university together (one thinks of research services staff who have a better understanding of the variety of research that gets done at a university, and frequently can identify areas where researchers of disparate disciplines can coordinate their efforts).

According to the research ideal, questioning the meaning of life, the goal of liberal education, is unprofessional. Such questions are about values instead of facts, as it has been explained in the past. However, Kronman's argument shows how even raising the question becomes impossible for the researcher. As far back as Aristotle, the question of meaning of life requires a human "life" to be an intelligible unit of analysis. But the researcher's "life" is not an intelligible unit:

The scholar devoted to the advancement of knowledge in his field is encouraged by the research ideal to consider his own death a nonevent, one that lacks significance so far as the work of the discipline itself is concerned. For the researcher who sees the importance of his work in this way, what really matters is the progress of understanding in his field, to which he makes an individual contribution but whose 'life,' unlike his own, has no boundaries at all. From the perspective of the multigenerational enterprise in which he is engaged, the researcher's own mortality has little or no meaning. Within the realm of academic study, the research ideal devalues death. It deprives death of significance for the scholar who embraces this ideal, and makes any preoccupation on his part with the fact of his mortality seem unprofessional and self-absorbed.¹⁰

Weber states the problem this way: "For civilized man death has no meaning. It has none because the individual life of civilized man, placed into an infinite 'progress,' according to its own imminent meaning should come to an end; for there is always a further step ahead of one who stands in the march of progress. And no man who

¹⁰ Kronman, *Education's End*, 128-129.

comes to die stands upon the peak which lies in infinity.”¹¹ The researcher has a meaningful existence only as a contributor to a project of universal humanity, but he lacks any individual significance beyond his minute contribution to the universal. His death, and thus his individuality, is meaningless.¹²

Kronman’s description of the researcher’s judgment of the liberal arts teacher as “unprofessional” and “self-absorbed” implies a moralistic strain. Unfortunately, his language eclipses the intellectual trick with which the researcher must delude himself. Of course the individual researcher is concerned with his own mortality. All human beings have an irresistible desire to question life’s meaning. But the researcher does not look to his research to answer or confront that mystery. He looks to his family, his community, or his church to address this mystery.

Or does he? Academics are notoriously non- or anti-religious. They are not terribly active in their community. And many of them sacrifice the well being of their marriage and children for their career. So it seems they do seek to address their mortality in their research. Perhaps this is why the pomposity of many is based on a fragile ego: they need praise to compensate for the incoherence and meaninglessness of their lives that are this way because the research ideal is incoherent. Yet, perhaps in their waking moments, they recognize the incoherence of looking to their research to give their lives meaning. After all, what better way to

¹¹ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *On Charisma and Institution Building*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 298.

¹² Weber himself, of course, could hardly be described as a specialist. His own activity transcends his general account of modernity. His awkward articulation of his own transcendence has implications for the fate of liberal education in the modern university and modernity in general. That is the starting point of my companion essay in this volume.

face the impasse of one's existential condition than to bury oneself in one's work? This is the advice deans frequently offer their faculty members who suffer misfortune or tragedy in their lives. Of course, this existential impasse might also remind the researcher that, in modernity, the activity of "work" is isolating and necessarily meaningless. As Josef Pieper writes of the worker: "the fixed, mask-like readiness to suffer *in vacuo*, without relation to anything. It is the absence of any connection with reality or real values that is distinctive. And it is because this readiness to suffer (which has been called the heart of discipline, of whatever kind) never asks the question 'to what end' that is utterly different from the Christian conception of sacrifice."¹³ Without making the effort to resolve this impasse, research as an answer to one's mortality becomes a form of escapism, or what Pascal might have called a *divertissement*. The heroic spiritualism Max Weber attributed to the scholar has become a form of escapism.

The alternative to escaping into research is realizing it is a form of work in the manner understood by Weber and Pieper, but to find some other form of calling, frequently in the form of a hobby, to complete one's sense of self. Seth Benardete, a scholar of ancient Greek philosophy, reflects upon two of his teachers at the University of Chicago, David Grene and Peter Heinrich von Blanckenhagen in this light. The former studied ancient Greek political theory and poetry, and was co-editor of *The Complete Greek Tragedies*,¹⁴ and the latter studied ancient art,

¹³ Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans., Alexander Dru, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1952), 16-7.

¹⁴ Published by the University of Chicago Press. For an appreciation of him as teacher, see Amirthanayagam David, "The Legacy of David Grene: A Tutor Remembers a Teacher and Mentor," *The College* (magazine of St. John's College), Winter 2003: 12-13.

especially Pompeian painting. Benardete's *Encounters and Reflections: Conversations With Seth Benardete* recounts Benardete's own life-long study of ancient Greek philosophy.¹⁵ His scholarship combined with the source of wisdom that formed his life. Conversely, Grene and Blanckenhagen were both formed by books other than to those they devoted their professional lives. With Grene it was Yeats, Joyce, and Lawrence; with Blanckenhagen it was Proust and Winckelmann, and Goethe's description of his erotic soul in particular.¹⁶ The disjunction between work and self is more pronounced in the case of Benardete's example of a mathematician who took up ancient Japanese music: "This was to make himself into a being.... [H]e thought [mathematics] is only what he was a professional, whereas the other was the real thing."¹⁷ Since the addition of archaic Japanese music to mathematics is artificial, the mathematician's self is chimerical. In Ronna Burger's words: "The profession isn't enough. People feel they're incomplete and have to fill something in, but the filling in is not connected to the person in any natural way." Or as Robert Berman puts it: "You have someone who does mathematics, but he can't fall back on 'I am a mathematician,' and the 'am' has to get some being, so you look for something to try to be."¹⁸ The modern world, it turns out, fragments one's role and the aspiration one has to be a "someone." This is the fundamental problem of

¹⁵ Seth Benardete, with Robert Berman, Ronna Burger, and Michael Davis, *Encounters and Reflections: Conversations With Seth Benardete*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Benardete, *Conversations*, 31. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Winckelmann and His Age," (1805) trans., Ellen von Nardroff and Ernest H. von Nardroff, in *Goethe: Essays on Art and Literature, Goethe's Collected Works*, vol. 3, ed., John Gearey, (New York: Suhrkamp, 1986), 102-4.

¹⁷ Benardete, *Reflections*, 197.

¹⁸ Benardete, *Reflections*, 198.

justice in Plato's *Republic*, where justice is doing one's job (or vocation is perhaps a better term, since there one's job is connected to one's erotic longings). Yet, in the university, which is the closest to the city of philosophers that we have in the modern world, there seems an insuperable gap between work and longing. Weber recognized it when he regarded the vocation of the scholar a form of heroic spiritualism that now is either a form of escape or requires an unnatural supplement to constitute the divided selves of modern scholars.

Or perhaps the heroic spiritualism has become a form of *libido dominandi*. The moral case for adding to humankind's storehouse of information is that this knowledge better enables human beings to control their environment, or to enact the "relief of man's estate" as an early slogan of modern science attests. Friedrich Schiller, in his 1789 Jena lecture on Universal History tried to solve the problem of how the thinker faces the meaninglessness of his individual death. Schiller invents a new history where one's own class – the middle class, in his case – comes out on top in the fulfillment of history. Eric Voegelin observes: "And why am I doing that, falsifying history and so on? Because that gives me a virtual immortality – being on top of history – instead of a personal immortality in which I no longer believe. It is a virtual immortality: so a substitution of being on top of history as a sense of immortality [in the place of] the lost order of existence."¹⁹ Of course, virtual immortality is no substitute for personal immortality. Moreover, as Immanuel Kant would later observe in his "Idea of a World History From a Cosmopolitan

¹⁹ Eric Voegelin, "The Irish Dialogue," ed., Brendan Purcell, posted online: <http://voegelinview.com/the-irish-dialogue-with-eric-voegelin-pt1.html>. Reference to Schiller is: "The Nature and Value of Universal History: An Inaugural Lecture" (1789). *History & Theory* 11.3 (1972): 321-334.

Viewpoint,” a progressivist view of history, where each generation is the perfection of man (or takes itself to be) infringes on the dignity of the individual because each generation is a mere stepping stone for future generations.

Even so, the modern belief that one belongs to the greatest generation may help explain the attraction of social Darwinism among many academics as form of social myth, according to which they view themselves as simultaneously in constant battle against the dark forces of “fundamentalism” and at the cusp of “figuring out” how to take control of human evolution so as to manipulate it. This position is a moral one, not a scientific one, as the former is a moral battle against “ignorance” based on the false assumption that, in the name of enlightenment, the physical and social sciences can indeed answer the fundamental questions of human existence which it, for reasons explained above, they cannot. The latter is an assertion of power in the name of the moral project of conquering nature.

Yet, science on its own cannot answer what human good it can do. It dogmatically asserts “relief of man’s estate” is the human good without questioning whether this is really so. Modern science prohibits the same question that Marx prohibits. Weber states bluntly the inability of science to answer what good it does: “Whether life is worth while living and when – this question is not asked by medicine. Natural science gives us an answer to the question of what we must do if we wish to master life technically. It leaves quite aside, or assumes for its purposes, whether we should and do wish to master life technically and whether it ultimately makes sense to do so.”²⁰ The “answer” science seems to give when it tries to answer

²⁰ Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” 304.

the question of life's meaning is to control our world. Yet it cannot answer why one would want to do that, and scientists, who tend to promote the beneficial uses of science, tend also to shy away from asking hard questions concerning the destructive aspects of science, including the potential for worldwide destruction and tyranny. They seem to ignore Jean-Jacques Rousseau's argument that civilizational progress does not in fact walk hand-in-hand with scientific progress.

Kronman's analysis of the research ideal makes it difficult to determine how it can coexist with the liberal arts. No wonder the liberal arts are in such straits in the modern university. Yet, things are not totally bad. The majority of researchers are genuinely curious and intellectually honest. They are not intellectual swindlers. Rather, it seems it is the research ideal, under which researchers and nearly any academic in the Western world, has established a set of incentives for modern scholars (as evidenced by the misery of academics whose calling is to teach instead of to conduct research). Unfortunately, the "research ideal" provides not the only set of perverse incentives for the destruction of our humanity.

"Diversity" Proponents as Anti-Individuals

The anti-individual reappears in Kronman's discussion of political correctness, but he also provides a useful way of moving beyond political correctness. Kronman clarifies the challenge the humanities and liberal arts face, and helps us see how to find the place in the modern university to ask the great questions that liberal education has always asked.

In the United States, “diversity” became simultaneously politically and academically legitimated when the Justice Lewis Powell of the Supreme Court argued affirmative action programs are only constitutional if they are taken to promote diversity, which, in the *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* case,²¹ meant racial diversity, but has now expanded to include numerous other forms. Powell judged that not only should universities promote diversity as a way of incorporating minorities as a matter of fairness, but diversity now became a goal of education. For the sake of politics and ideology, the Court explained to universities what their goal should be in providing an education. Kronman observes that Powell’s justification not only gave universities cover to maintain affirmative action, but it also gave humanities departments especially a key role in promoting it. After all, what might an African-American or Latino chemistry experiment look like? One might say that just as a Department of Theology at a Roman Catholic university promotes Roman Catholic doctrine, so too do humanities departments serve the state doctrine of diversity.

The problem with diversity has less to do with it suddenly tying the goal of liberal education to ideological and political liberalism, and more to do with the fact that diversity is utterly antithetical to the goal of liberal education, which is the liberation of the intellect from ignorance and, for Kronman, liberation from fate. Students “engage” with one another not in a conversation of shared enquiry, “facing the same eternal questions that every human being confronts and struggling together to meet them,” but as representatives of whatever groups with which they

²¹ *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* 438 U.S. 265 (1978).

identify: “The individuals exchanging views cease to be individuals, and their exchange ceases to be a conversation.”²² Indeed, the types of identity acceptable to contemporary diversity advocates— race, gender, ethnicity (and sexual orientation, which Kronman does not discuss) – are fixed at birth or can be changed with only the greatest difficulty. What passes for debate and conversation ends up producing dispirited students who understandably feel like “the other” does not understand them, nor possibly can. The more aggressive take their despair and turn it into moralistic finger pointing as a way of guiltting “the other” for treating them like “the other.”

This means identity politics produces a more monistic campus than found at a religious college or university. After all, one can always change one’s religion. Necessarily, then, diversity education becomes a form of finger pointing and instead of promoting genuine diversity, it ends up dividing the world into the binaries of oppressor-oppressed or white male and everybody else. Instead of serving the liberal education goal of liberation, diversity is a form of moralism; it produces a dispirited, guilt-ridden anti-individual instead of a thoughtful individual capable of friendship and genuine liberation of the intellect.

Even so, diversity advocates do not appeal to racialism, gender determinism, and what not so much as appeal to the apparent spectacle that the aggregate of individual identities (which, in fact, are not individual) creates. The moralistic point of diversity is to assert “constructivism,” a way of thinking that views the whole of

²² Kronman, *Education’s End*, 151.

reality as “an artifact constructed by the human beings who inhabit it.”²³ Claims of “right by nature” or “essence” are dismissed as cloaking interests of class, wealth, race, gender, and so on: “For a constructivist, all claims of this sort are projections onto the human world of a false necessity that belies the true generative freedom of the activity of meaning-making from which this world derives its very existence as a realm of meanings.”²⁴

Constructivism sits uneasily with the individual claimants of diversity who view the identities in roughly “essentialist” ways. For instance, few gay activists claim their sexual orientation is as arbitrary as constructivism would suggest it is. Even so, constructivism serves the collective interests of these claimants. Moreover, it serves as a faux-liberation of the will over one’s seemingly unchosen identity. One might be “stuck” with one’s identity, but one always has the will. This form of “liberation” apes the liberation of liberal education, which is one not of the will over identity (as rooted in the body), but one of intellect over ignorance. From this perspective, the polarity of unchosen identity and will perpetuates ignorance.

Kronman provides a helpful way of criticizing constructivism and why it fails to promote the humanities. In doing so, he maps a route out of political correctness that can help the cause of liberal education.

Before offering his two arguments against constructivism, Kronman suggests the claim that constructivists are nihilists is ineffective because constructivists deflect those criticisms as interest-driven. However, Kronman overlooks the deeper point of these criticisms that they point out the hypocrisy of the constructivists who

²³ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 181.

²⁴ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 181.

simultaneously affirm and deny truth. Even so, that criticism is also ineffective against a way of thinking that appears to ignore the principle of non-contradiction, and therefore implicitly takes hypocrisy as a virtue.

Kronman suggests two internal criticisms of constructivism are more effective. As we shall see, they are also more Socratic in so far as they begin with the premises of constructivism and demonstrate why the conclusions do not go where the advocates wish they would.

First, Kronman asks we temporarily grant constructivism to be true in its claim that the human world (and the physical world, according to some versions) is an artifact. The constructivist is still compelled by the logic of his argument that any activity depends on its being carried out in accordance with rules that the person acting is constrained to accept.²⁵

Keeping in accordance with those rules is a precondition necessary for any such act being intelligible at all, and a precondition of our being able to think or say anything whatsoever about it. Kronman appeals to Kant's postulates to illustrate the precondition of action. Constructivism seeks to maximize freedom, but the intelligibility of freedom is predicated on that freedom being constrained as "a necessity that is freedom's coeval enabling partner."²⁶ Recognizing the constraints of freedom, which are rooted in human mortality, is essential not only to political freedom but also to the project of the humanities. Curiously, Kronman omits mentioning the two postulates upon which freedom itself depends: God and human immortality. For Kant, the postulates form the indispensable horizon of our

²⁵ Kronman, *Education's End*, 184.

²⁶ Kronman, *Education's End*, 185.

existence. Whether conscious of it or not, we act as if they exist though we cannot prove their existence. Noting the “hypocrisy” of constructivists is simply another way of pointing out that they can only ignore reality for so long.

Second, even if every value is an expression of interest or pre-rational desire, they are necessarily articulated. Passions are distinguished by “ideality.” Passions necessarily have an object that reason proposes to them. For example, one does not get angry at being mistreated unless one has a notion of what injustice is about. Kronman notes human sexual desire differs from the “thoughtless sexual appetites of other animals” by being formed by an element of fantasy. Since sexual politics is so crucial for diversity, consider Kronman’s appeal to philosopher Jonathan Lear’s discussion of Sigmund Freud on this matter: “An *Instinkt*, for Freud, is a rigid innate behavioral pattern, characteristic of animal behavior: e.g., the innate ability and pressure of a bird to build a nest.... A *Trieb*, by contrast, has a certain plasticity: its aim and direction is to some extent shaped by experience. To conceive of humans as powered by *Triebe*, as Freud did, is in part to distinguish humanity from the rest of the animal world.”²⁷

In the world of political correctness, *Instinkt* appears as identity, while *Triebe* appears as will (though not for Kronman, for whom “ideality” is a product of reasoning). This directedness in human passion, expressed as the difference between *Instinkt* and *Trieb* for Freud, and one might say inclination and choice for Aristotle, or perhaps phenomenal and noumenal for Kant, distinguishes human beings from animals. Stated bluntly: political correctness is a recipe for animalism.

²⁷ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 291, citing Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 123-4).

First we learn to view each other with a “hermeneutics of suspicion” because we assume all opinions regarding the good are motivated simply by some sinister interest of wealth, gender, class, or ill-will (usually described as “prejudice,” which distorts its genuine meaning as “pre-judgment,” that is, opinion). Then, because all opinions or “prejudices” are seen as sinister interests (including our own), we give up feeling guilty that there should be anything of which to be suspicious. The result is that the things for which humans make choices – the materials of liberal education – become harder and harder even to conceive because the “extremes” of behavior, defined in terms of *Instinkt* (but with *Trieb* always sneaking back to help the constructivist explain why constructivism, that is, his own “prejudice,” is not a product of *Instinkt*) end up replacing the noble.

Let us consider two areas of sexual diversity, which are the focal point of so much attention on contemporary campuses, where the predominance of the “extreme” makes it extremely difficult to articulate alternatives. Anthony Esolen explains how the “hermeneutic of suspicion” opened up by public acceptance of homosexuality makes the public expression of male friendship extremely difficult:

If a man cradles the head of his weeping friend, the shadow of suspicion must cross your mind. If a teenage boy is found skinny-dipping with another boy — not five of them, but two — it is the first thing you will think, and you will think it despite the obvious fact that until swim trunks were invented this was exactly how two men or boys would go for a swim. The individual can choose to make a sign or not. He cannot determine what the sign is to mean, not to others, not to the one he signals, and not even to himself.²⁸

²⁸ “A Requiem for Friendship,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, September 2005

[<http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=18-07-021-f>].

This is not an argument critical of homosexuality as it is the manner it gets signified in the contemporary world by the internally contradictory modes of constructivism (and social science, as discussed below). The “hermeneutic of suspicion,” which here gets expressed as titillation, makes the *philia* of male friendship impossible to speak of and to conceive. Thus, males conversing about the good life, perhaps together over a nice dinner and bottle of wine, find themselves looking over their shoulders wondering what signs their actions are sending to the jaundiced public.²⁹ One yearns for more nuanced, ennobling, and, frankly, erotic accounts of male love and friendship one finds in Platonic dialogues.³⁰

In a similar vein, Harvey Mansfield explains how the extreme becomes the standard in another issue facing undergraduate students:

No doubt lurid anecdote and popular myth cause us to exaggerate the actual frequency of campus hook-ups: Most college students do not share in these delights. But most students also believe that “everyone does it,” even if the individual student, for some reason, cannot locate a partner. Thus an active minority sets the tone and makes hooking up a “culture.” When there are no sexual boundaries, either official or informal, the standard becomes the extreme, and all students feel the pressure to appear more promiscuous than they are. The traditional double standard of sexual conduct – more restrictive for women than for men – has been replaced by the single standard of the predatory male.³¹

²⁹ Jennifer Lee, “The Man Date,” *New York Times*, 10 April 2005 (http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/10/fashion/10date.html?_r=2&ex=1128571200&en=5d5b6cc510345905&ei=5070&pagewanted=all&position).

³⁰ For an account of the destruction modern science in the hands of psychologists and sociologists has wrought on the topic of eros, see Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 13-35.

³¹ Harvey Mansfield, “Hook Up or Shut Up,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29 April 2008 (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120943338777251553.html?mod=djemEditorialPage>).

The destruction this distraction causes to students' experiences of liberal education and to their friendship need not be elaborated. Perhaps a franker discussion of the erotics of liberal education, between teacher and student and among students, might help to counter the tendency Mansfield suggests.³²

As insightful as Kronman's discussion of "ideality" is, he is not very successful in bringing this out from the arguments of the constructivists themselves, except to assert that reason's object is necessarily present to desires and interests. He would have been on better ground by observing that the "ideality" of their own interest is to gain liberation from the oppression (imagined and real) of the white male heterosexual European. In other words, the constructivist is a "hip" articulation of indignation at an injustice (real and imagined), as Aristotle would certainly understand. Despite the dead end of despair in one's unchosen identity, on the one hand, and the solipsism of the will, on the other hand, that constructivists get into, Kronman helpfully points out how their own presuppositions actually affirm their participation in the common world of human beings seeking their genuine liberation from ignorance.

Kronman provides illuminating suggestions for starting a conversation with constructivists because he uncovers crucial starting points for conversation.

Unfortunately, as he notes, the advocates of diversity campus politics are more

³² A good starting point might be the discussion in William Deresiewicz, "Love on Campus: Why We Should Understand, and Even Encourage, a Certain Kind of Erotic Intensity Between Student and Professor," *American Scholar*, Summer 2007: 36-46. In response to University of Notre Dame undergraduate requests for advice on how to respond to their "temptations," political philosopher Eric Voegelin used to suggest they intensify their "Wissenschaft." While his advice does not get to the heart of the issue, it serves as a Platonic reminder that the desire for wisdom forms the eros of the whole human being.

“crude” in their thinking. Someone armed with Kronman’s Socratic suggestions hoping to convince a radical diversity advocate of the wisdom of Aristotle would likely come away disappointed. Conversation presupposes the willingness to converse. Willingness to consider these internal criticisms presupposes a certain openness to look within. Unfortunately, arguments are insufficient (though necessary) to convince one to look within. Fortunately, conversation presupposes certain non-verbal virtues that enable conversation. *Philia* and civility come to mind. Indeed, a simple display of affability can open up conversation. Of course, sheer intelligence and the ability to marshal rigorous arguments help too. Finally, acknowledging and perhaps commiserating over the individualistic pathologies that the modern research university sustains (and the research ideal legitimates) might disarm the more reasonable ideologues.³³

Friends of Science?

Kronman’s final chapter takes up “Spirit in an Age of Science,” and elaborates the major philosophical questions concerning not only the nature of the humanities’ place in the university, but also the nature of wisdom and the predominance of the natural sciences and the experimental method in the modern age.

His discussion is somewhat of a disappointment because there he admits the natural and social sciences come closest in knocking off the humanities’ ability to

³³ For *philia* as precondition and end (*telos*) of the moral and intellectual life, see my “Sunaesthetic’ Friendship and the Foundations of Political Anthropology,” *International Political Anthropology*, 1(2) November 2008: 179-93 (www.ipa3.com).

satisfy humanity's yearning for life's meaning. Both come very close to satisfying humanity's desire for knowledge. Thus, physics and economics are the twin queens of the sciences. However, they do not quite do the job. He praises them but sees their limitations. However, in seeing their limitations he does not provide an alternative account of how life's meaning can be striven for, and how the humanities can be positioned to address it in light of the ambitions and limitations of the natural and social sciences.

As the ancient philosophers noted, the desire for wisdom begins with wonder. Kronman makes a useful distinction between the wonder that begins with ignorance ("wonder about") and the wonder that accompanies knowledge ("wonder at").³⁴ We might characterize the latter as delight. He claims, "the natural sciences now have a near monopoly on wonder" because of their ability to explain the natural world.³⁵ According to Kronman, we wonder not only at the world we behold, but also at our awesome ability to bring large amounts of it under our control. The modern world has come to accept Francis Bacon's dictum that knowledge is power.³⁶ After all, the modern experimental method creates a "controlled experience" and manipulates its objects of inquiry. Thus, the experimenter possesses special authority as one who sets up the conditions of control. As a result, for Kronman to claim the natural sciences possess a near monopoly on wonder means that wonder consists both in wondering at the natural world and in man's power. Wonder is a form of self-love. The ancient philosophers would have

³⁴ Kronman, *Education's End*, 217.

³⁵ Kronman, *Education's End*, 219.

³⁶ Kronman, *Education's End*, 214.

disagreed. Insofar as they regarded self-love as the root of injustice, they strove mightily against this modern prejudice.

With wonder as a form of self-love, it is little wonder Kronman views technology in all-encompassing terms in a manner influenced by Martin Heidegger. Technology is man's attempt to control his environment. It is "the ambition to eliminate every constraint that prevents us from doing as we please."³⁷ "All we can imagine is more technology."³⁸ Its ambition is to liberate human beings from fate (the same goal as constructivism, which he claims is the governing ideology of political correctness).

Perhaps the clearest expression of this ambition to overcome all constraint is the biotechnological quest to overcome death, the ultimate limitation (or fate) human beings face. Yet, it is here that Kronman rightfully identifies the self-contradictory nature of technology. Even if we could engineer human bodies not to die, it would create meaningless lives: "An immortal existence can have no purpose, in the strict sense of the word, and the longing we sometimes think we have for immortality is not a longing for life in which our purposes might finally be achieved, but an existence that is free of the burdens of purposefulness that are the mark of our humanity – for an existence that is no longer human."³⁹ The dream of technology would lead us into a lonely and meaningless existence not unlike that of the

³⁷ Kronman, *Education's End*, 210.

³⁸ Kronman, *Education's End*, 209.

³⁹ Kronman, *Education's End*, 232.

immortal Homeric gods who need to partake in the spectacle of the mortals so they too can participate in what is good and noble.⁴⁰

Thus, that Kronman can provide a critique of the emptiness of technology indicates the erroneousness of his claim that “all we can imagine is more technology.” But showing the emptiness of technology differs from providing an alternate narrative to the narrative of the dominance of the physical sciences and technology. Kronman does not provide the latter, but in fact gives up too easily by explaining why the physical and social sciences seem to have a monopoly the public explanatory power of the way the world works. Yet, their authority, however established by the “regulative ideal” of technology, seems as illusory as the ideal of technology itself.

According to Kronman, the physical and social sciences (which are based on the quantitative mode of analysis of the physical sciences) enjoy authority for best satisfying the human yearning to know and because of the utility of knowledge (e.g., inventions, predictions of physical events and human actions) they generate: “Science today enjoys the authority it does not only on account of the practical inventions that flow from it and from their capacity to satisfy our desire for control, but because it satisfies more fully than any other form of knowledge we possess a second elementary desire, the desire to understand.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ See, Diana Schaub, “Ageless Mortals,” *Cato Unbound*, 5 December 2007 (<http://www.cato-unbound.org/2007/12/05/diana-schaub/ageless-mortals/>).

⁴¹ Kronman, *Education's End*, 215.

The physical sciences are based on the experimental method, which provides for near-perfect knowledge in “aligning theory and observation.”⁴² In it, the universal and particular, the abstract and empirical, are united: “The experimental method is a technique for liberating our powers of reasoning from the limits to which sense experience otherwise confines them, while at the same providing a mechanism for testing the soundness of reason’s abstractions against experience itself.”⁴³ The experimental method perfects the aspiration that Aristotelian science holds in the power of theoretical knowledge to “preserve the appearances.” Aristotelian science aspires to remain consistent with common sense, which Kronman asserts is denied by the social sciences especially. Jonathan Swift’s satire of the Royal Society and modern science in the form of the Laputians, with one eye pointing above and one below, but none focused on the intermediate, the human, is a splendid lampoon done out of an Aristotelian spirit.

Whereas Aristotelian science attempted to synthesize *theoria* with the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) entailed in knowing particulars, the experimental model undertakes a “fusion of mathematical and empirical truth, the mathematization of reality.”⁴⁴ The “solidity and objectivity” of the experimental method, along with the technologies it produces, provides it with its public authority.

Even so, the “truths of modern science, expressed in mathematical terms, are thus arrived at by a manipulative method that permits us both to use our experience

⁴² Kronman, *Education’s End*, 213.

⁴³ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 213.

⁴⁴ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 214.

and to transcend it.”⁴⁵ The “manipulative” experimental method creates a “controlled experience,” meaning the “mathematization of reality” is the expression of the researcher’s experience of reality. It is the language of the subject conceptualizing his or her environment, or “the product of our intellectual manipulation of the world” which allows researchers to create the technologies that feed into our dreams of liberation from fate.

With the emphasis on the researching subject’s conceptualization of reality, Kronman indicates that the experimental method repeats Immanuel Kant’s alleged installation of the priority of the subject. Kant is frequently said to have reversed the epistemological question from “How does the subject know reality?” to “How does reality conform to the categories of understanding?” For Kronman, the experimental method similarly prioritizes the subject over the object of scientific inquiry, which is based on the myth that all knowledge is generated from the subject himself. This is the researcher who sets the conditions of control over the experiment. It is therefore unsurprising Kronman identifies wonder with self-love. The scientific researcher, alone in the controlled conditions of his laboratory, is the font of scientific knowledge. Reality is mathematized. His authority takes on added weight by virtue of his social prestige as the exponent of the most satisfying form of knowledge available in our time.

Even so, scientific research does not really follow the idealized version expounded by the “experimental method” as outlined by Bacon. The researching subject no more imposes her categories on infinitely plastic matter than does matter

⁴⁵ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 214.

provide undiluted categories to the researcher. The process of research is more like that described by Michael Oakeshott, who describes the researcher as an inheritor of a tradition of learning, and who draws upon non-discursive intimations for understanding as much, if not more, than “method.” The findings of research are not so much superimposed upon the object of research as they arise in the practice of research.⁴⁶

Put another way, the quest for empirical knowledge presupposes that empirical knowledge cannot define itself. As seeing does not know it is seeing, so too empirical knowledge presupposes a knowledge that is not empirical in order to define it as empirical (e.g., what a researcher counts as a prediction must derive from a form of knowledge other than prediction itself). The activity of scientific research presupposes a type of knowledge that enables science to occur. Empirical knowledge gives way to that which makes things appear empirically and that which enables the researcher to know them empirically. Similarly, mathematical knowledge (which purportedly forms the basis of empirical knowledge) must also give way to that which makes it mathematized and that which enables the researcher to formulate it in such terms. In other words, mathematical knowledge presupposes a subject-object dichotomy that simultaneously points beyond that dichotomy while incapable of accounting for that pointing beyond. In short, scientific reason tells us that knowledge is a mode of being, not a holding of being at a distance: “When man discovered reason as the instrument by which he opened

⁴⁶ Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 13.

toward being, there had all along been the implication that being opened toward him through reason.”⁴⁷

For Kronman, the social sciences (especially economics), like the physical sciences, “satisfies... our desire to understand the mechanisms of human society for the sheer pleasure of such understanding itself”⁴⁸ as well as providing reams of useful data on such things as “opinion-testing devices to frame positions and develop strategies, and their constituents depend on these same devices to judge the performance of those in office.”⁴⁹ The “systematic and impersonal forms of knowledge” of the social sciences have replaced the premodern reliance on “statesmanship and personal allegiance and on the basis of common sense and anecdotal knowledge.”⁵⁰

Kronman’s estimation of the social sciences is probably the weakest part of his book for reasons in addition to those listed above. Practicing politicians use the filtered results of social science their aides glean for them as part of their deliberations, but they would be quite surprised to learn they do not need to

⁴⁷ David Walsh, *The Modern Philosophical Revolution: The Luminosity of Existence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18. By focusing on the “turn toward existence,” Walsh provides a reading of modernity that challenges the predominant scientific myth of the subject-object dichotomy. For example, he disputes that Kant reversed the epistemological question by demonstrating Kant, and subsequent modern philosophers including Hegel, Schelling, Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida, and Kierkegaard placed priority of existence over essence (though not in terms of existentialism). One of the implications of Walsh’s analysis is that technology is not the iron cage that Heidegger and Kronman think it is. I have assessed Walsh’s project in light of the topic of friendship in, “Friendship in Light of the Modern Philosophical Revolution,” *Fideles: A Journal of Redeemer Pacific College*, vol. 4 (forthcoming).

⁴⁸ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 226.

⁴⁹ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 221.

⁵⁰ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 220.

practice the practical wisdom associated with statesmanship and that they do not rely on personal allegiances and anecdotal knowledge that gets conveyed from those allegiances. One might consider Michael Oakeshott's criticism of "rationalism" in politics.⁵¹ Or one might consider German scholar Tilo Schabert's empirical (though not positivist) treatment of Francois Mitterand during German unification as a case study that undermines Kronman's Weberian claims.⁵²

The larger problem with Kronman's treatment of the social sciences is that he retreats somewhat from his criticism of the anthropological reductionism found in characteristic of political correctness. There he criticized the claim made by exponents of diversity that all moral and political claims are simply expressions of interest or desire. He pointed out that all passions have an element of "ideality," meaning all passions or interest exist at some level of articulation and self-awareness. In other words, non-rational inclinations are at some level mixed with reason and choice, and are therefore subject to rational analysis.

Kronman's rejection of reductionism is the basis of his muted criticism that social science's quantification of human behavior includes "a number of simplifying assumptions about the sources and character of human motivation," including "the inherently purposive nature of the human actions they study."⁵³ Kronman notices the limitation of social science, but, unlike Walsh (discussed above), fails to think through its implications. One such avenue would be to consider the mathematicization of human behavior (i.e., so it can be predicted), which is

⁵¹ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 5-42.

⁵² Tilo Schabert, *How Politics is Made: France and the Reunification of Germany*, trans., John Tyler Tuttle, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009).

⁵³ Kronman, *Education's End*, 224-225.

predicated on a view of human nature reduced to Freud's *Instinkt* (though in most cases of modern social science, usually for economic advantage). Social science in this reductionistic mode, as Harvey Mansfield points out of behavioralism's treatment of the Constitution, provides a model of choice that filters out the people's ability to make choices; or as William Riker once said of his model that identifies the interests rational actors pursue: it "permits one to transcend the obstacle of the existence of choice."⁵⁴ Behavioralism is an especially reductionistic mode of social science, but any social science that fails to account for practical judgment and choice is necessarily drawn into an undertow back in that direction.

Social science, then, amplifies what Freud called *Instinkt* over *Trieb*, or what Aristotle called passion over choice, or what Kant called phenomenal over noumenal. By transcending "the obstacle of the existence of choice," social science posits a false liberation. It seeks to liberate human beings from fate by placing them under fate. Only the social scientist himself, the subject who conceptualizes reality, seems to escape this fate.

While social scientists have largely been chastened of behavioralism, this reductionist tendency can still be seen among evolutionary psychologists who have difficulty accounting for choice, and thereby end up speaking as though genes have intentionality when they enable humans to perform highly specific and culturally

⁵⁴ Harvey Mansfield, *America's Constitutional Soul*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 159.

particular tasks. Curiously, it seems physicists also have the tendency to speak as though subatomic particles have the human characteristic of intentionality.⁵⁵

These peculiarities of social and physical scientists aside, for Kronman, both derive their authority from “rigor, objectivity, impersonality, a reliance on quantitative methods, [and] the framing of hypotheses that are vulnerable to empirical disconfirmation.”⁵⁶ Again, this assessment is limited by Kronman’s failure to think through the movement toward that which enables reason’s rigor, objectivity, and impersonality (terms still bound to the subject-object model of scientism). Recall the social and physical sciences gain these qualities by attempting a synthesis of universal and particular knowledge, of synthesizing the abstract with the empirical. The experimental method claims to fulfill the Aristotelian aspiration of combining *theoria* with *phronesis*, except the experimental method rejects the personal (or “anecdotal”) knowledge that the Aristotelian aspiration implies in favor of impersonal knowledge. While for Aristotle, the combination of *theoria* with *phronesis* is expressed in the human personality by the full activation of the intellectual and moral virtues that are most exercised among friendships of contemplatives, it is unclear of what the personal expression of the “fusion of mathematical and empirical knowledge” consists.⁵⁷ I should remind the reader that Aristotle considers it immature for people to expect the study of human phenomena to have the same precision as physics.

⁵⁵ George Anastaplo, “Yearnings for the Divine and the Natural Animation of Matter,” unpublished manuscript (http://www.joelrich.com/anastaplo_yearnings_%20021208.htm). This manuscript is prepared for Anastaplo, *Reflections on Life, Death, and the Constitution*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

⁵⁶ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 225.

⁵⁷ I have elaborated these connections in light of Aristotle’s understanding of friendship in “‘Sunaesthetic’ Friendship and the Foundations of Political Anthropology.”

Kronman's previous chapters on the research ideal and political correctness elaborated distinct character types associated with both phenomena currently found in the modern academy. More accurately, the research ideal and political correctness are associated with their respective anti-individuals. For the research ideal it is the anonymous researcher whose work selflessly adds to the project of humanity's knowledge, but his own individual life is meaningless; political correctness is associated not with conversants engaged in the common quest to understand their humanity, but with anti-individual representatives of particular identities whose inability to converse results in them engaging in guilt-ridden moralizing.

Kronman provides no explicit discussion of the personality who faces the contradiction of technology: that of its meaninglessness and the apparent intellectual satisfaction gained by the experimental method. However, as indicated above with the manner in which he speaks of the priority of the researching subject over the object of research, this personality seems to be the scientific researcher generating his own concepts in the act of setting the conditions of control in the experiment. This is manifest in Kronman's inability or refusal to distinguish wonder at the reality we behold from the self-love we enjoy at beholding our power to control. This blurring of wonder and self-love at first sits uncomfortably with the modern scientific ideal of subject-object, which appears to be the basis upon which the researching subject can examine objects with disinterest. If we push further, though, we notice, with Kronman, that the subject necessarily manipulates the objects of study by predetermining the manner of conceptualizing them. A major

rethinking of scientific reason seems necessary. By postulating human wonder in terms of that which is beyond us and at ourselves, Kronman provides a distant echo of Kant's famous dictum: "Two things fill the mind with ever and new and increasing admiration and awe: the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me."⁵⁸ However, there is a big difference between Kant and Kronman's explanation of the spirit of science. For Kant, the moral law is autonomous, which ensures the purity of motives in pursuing it. Conversely, the scientific researcher takes credit for his power to control.

At least the scientific researcher would be foolish for taking credit. He cannot take credit if he also understands himself as an anti-individual whose meaning of life is the solitary activity of adding a thin blade of grass to the mountain of human knowledge. "Humanity" is the object of his moral action. And so, one might respond by saying the researcher is not foolish because he can take credit for being part of a team, which happens to be the aggregate human project of controlling nature. But this response too is insufficient. For technology is not as sovereign as Kronman's Heideggerian despair – expressed as, "all we can imagine is more technology" – leads him to claim. That Kronman understands the limits of technology means we can imagine more than technology.

Secular Humanism: A Solution?

⁵⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans., Lewis White Beck, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 166.

But what is this “more”? And what form does that “more” take? Kronman argues that the humanities, or “secular humanism,” is this “more.” Secular humanism rests on three assumptions: 1) the pluralism of human goods is compatible with the existence of a common human nature; 2) there certain patterns of the good life that have proved historically compelling for humans to study, imitate, and live; and 3) the principles upon which these patterns are subject to decay and renewal.⁵⁹ Kronman notes secular humanism opposes religious dogma, whose truths cannot be contested, and the research university, which rejects the very activity of enquiring into the good life. His treatment of religious dogma as well as upper education at religiously affiliated institutions is simplistic (though Augustine is one of his intellectual heroes). More perplexing about his defense of secular humanism is that his account of “Spirit in a Scientific Age” undermines secular humanism. I think the humanities can be defended against the false claims of scientism, but we need a better guide than Kronman.⁶⁰

Even so, the best examples of secular humanism can be found in various programs offered at elite universities and colleges, including his own Directed Studies program at Yale. But this is inadequate because the humanities are to form the whole person, which takes longer than the first-year of university. Moreover, the humanities are to provide guidance in how the whole personality is to be developed over the course of a life. A one-year program in Yale’s Directed Studies is inadequate, as is a four-year “Great Books” program at a place like St. John’s College (which Kronman does not discuss). He dismisses church-affiliated colleges and

⁵⁹ Kronman, *Education’s End*, 76-81.

⁶⁰ See Walsh, *The Modern Philosophical Revolution*.

universities as “fundamentalist.” However, this is misguided and simplistic. The Program of Liberal Studies at the University of Notre Dame or the Great Texts Program at Baylor University, which Kronman ignores, are excellent programs, and their religious contexts enhance instead of deprive students of the fruits of a humanities-based education.

Key to this “more” is figuring out how the aspiration to knowledge – expressed by Aristotle and by the modern experimental method – can best be sought in a way that surpasses the limits of the technological model, both in terms of technology’s aspiration to control, and in terms of the libidinous anti-individual researcher. For Aristotle, the unity of *theoria* and *phronesis* as expressed in the full activation of the intellectual and moral virtues, was practiced by contemplative friends.⁶¹ Plato’s Academy, the inspiration of the university, was understood as such.

Can friendship in this Platonic-Aristotelian sense be practiced in the modern world? Perhaps in small groups, but it would be difficult to expand this into the political friendship Aristotle sees as uniting the *polis*. The modern state requires a “divine power,” which Aristotle took to be needed to guide a large state. While perhaps not divine, the social prestige of modern science’s quantification of knowledge is gained by the ease with which numbers are communicated to large masses of human beings. It is simply easier to communicate to large numbers of people in a modern state by simple numbers and statistics than with the forms of speech, intellectual perception, and physical gesture characteristic of contemplative

⁶¹ Heyking, “‘Sunaesthetic’ Friendship and the Foundations of Political Anthropology.”

friends. Think tanks understand the power of simple statistics whenever they seek to sway public opinion on some public policy matter. In my own country, one of the more vivid examples of this is the Fraser Institute's "Tax Freedom Day," when Canadians learn they "work for themselves" instead of "for the government" after the beginning of July. Such statistics prove more effective than any number of seminars on the economic theories of Hayek. The quantification of knowledge can only appear to have the impersonal qualities of "solidity and objectivity" in a modern world where personal relationships among citizens are lacking. Or stated more precisely: impersonal knowledge is authoritative when one lacks the language to express genuine personhood because one knows only how to focus on the "external" qualities of human beings to define them.⁶² The quantification of personal and social reality is the expression of modern man's alienation.

Kronman provides a way of seeing the alienation inherent in the modern way of knowing, which grounds the modern university. He provides a way of defending the humanities to fill in the gaps of this modern way of knowing. But the humanities, at least in his account, remain the mortar that fills the gap; they are not the foundation. He has seen the limits of the modern way of seeking the meaning of life but the alternative to which he points requires a more fundamental rethinking about the pursuit of wisdom in the modern university.

⁶² A recent attempt to defend a fuller account of personhood is Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference Between "Someone" and "Something,"* trans., Oliver O'Donovan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

