

**Chapter 3**  
**The Idea of Organic Growth in Higher Education**

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**Forum Futures**  
**Exploring the Future of Higher Education, 2000 Papers**

Forum Strategy Series, Volume 3

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## CHAPTER THREE

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# THE IDEA OF ORGANIC GROWTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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James Engell

Engell attributes the decline of the humanities in higher education to three factors, all of which are related to money. He stresses the need for today's campus leaders to reexamine and establish the essential purposes and functions of higher learning and outlines a model centered on the *entelechy* of higher education. This *entelechy*—the coordinated fulfillment of several different goals and goods—can serve as a guide for educational leaders, helping them to take decisive action that will shape organic, institutional growth rather than reacting to imposed, external forces largely beyond their control.

*It is clear that higher education may not be afforded the opportunity to undergo organic change, stemming from within at its own pace, but rather will likely be subject to external forces and threats that compel swift and systemic change in the nation's traditional colleges and universities.*

DEVLIN (1999)

*New inventions, fresh discoveries, alterations in the markets of the world throw accustomed methods and the men who are accustomed to them out of date and use without pause or pity.*

WILSON (1909)

We employ various models—economic, historical, or managerial—to address the accelerating changes that now are sweeping higher education. Without relying on any particular discipline in the humanities, this chapter offers a broadly humanistic model. The first step in creating such a model is to ascertain the purposes and functions, the *entelechy*, of higher education. *Entelechy* means the striving for perfection in a series of goals taken together as a whole. The word comes from

the Greek *enteles*, meaning complete or full, which in turn derives from *telos*, or goal. An entelechy demands we envision how to fulfill the potential of the whole by coordinating and giving proper relative weight to a set of varied goals and the goods they seek to achieve. For each institution, this entails a particular inflection or emphasis. “The single most serious problem of our universities is their failure to adhere steadily to their own purposes,” states Hanna Gray. “No university is strong,” Bart Giamatti claims, “if it is unsure of its purpose and nature” (Axtell, 1998, pp. 213–214).

The entelechy of higher education involves an instrumental economic good, an associative intellectual and social good, an instrumental civic and political good, and two final goods: one moral or ethical and the other the seeking of knowledge and ideas for their own sake, which is the final cause of all the other goods.

Education acts inevitably as an instrumental good; it readies individuals to undertake specific tasks, careers, and professions. To insist on knowledge as a good in itself while refusing to consider its application is impractical except in repressive regimes. It conjures up a caricature of the ivory tower, akin to Laputa in Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, where inhabitants, knowing only abstract math and music, cannot use a plumb line to build houses, which collapse randomly and kill citizens. Basic skills support any economic undertaking; much education as an instrumental good must occur by the time mandatory schooling ceases, one reason Hedrick Smith extols German and Japanese secondary systems (Smith, 1995, p. 100–125). If we are sensible enough to get our children to a genuine twelfth-grade level of literacy and numeracy (admittedly, a large “if”), this instrumental good will be well on its way. But in a technological, complex society, higher education and professional schools continue this instrumental function, which, as an economic good, is assumed, supported, and promoted by an increasing number of colleges and universities in practice, marketing, and mission statements. Public universities, such as the system in Massachusetts, advertise the personal economic returns to higher education on radio as their chief asset for applicants to consider. The word *success*—meaning individual economic success—punctuates college advertisements and redrafted mottoes. Politicians press hard for it. Parents demand it. Life insurance companies remind clients of it. Businesses often see it as the *raison d’être* of education.

Beginning in the early 1980s, money came to be seen, for many Americans, as a good in itself, an end rather than a means, something automatically conferring status, class, power, even virtue (Lapham, 1988; Taylor, 1989, pp. 1–21). Moreover, in terms of economic changes and behaviors, aren’t parents and students acting rationally when they seek a prestigious institution (even if it’s not a good match), when they accept merit- not need-based scholarships, bargain for aid, and elect a major for its perceived economic value? If by rational we mean to act in ways yielding more money, the answer is yes. Studies reveal that a school’s name correlates

with later earnings; the major correlates with earnings after graduation. And in a competitive society this behavior is self-reinforcing. As long as hiring and salary decisions are made so categorically, the spiral will steepen: the same studies reveal that it makes no difference how well a student actually performs—only the name on the degree matters (Maull, 1998). This mocks the touted byword *excellence*. There are choices here: actively support or passively accept this system as “rational”; let it increasingly drive applications, admissions, majors, “intellectual” choices, and institutional competition; or question this behavior, create incentives to counter it, even fight it as one that might breed a universal wolf swallowing all else and making the economic instrumentality of education its only good.

This “rational” behavior intensifies in part because higher education is neither regulated nor self-regulated heavily. Governments require accounting procedures, but institutions are free to set salaries, build buildings, target applicants, solicit funds, merge, advertise, outsource, compete, offer varied scholarships and loans, establish branches, invest, specialize, diversify, even monopolize. A market of higher education so unregulated and competitive contains a paradox: many institutions are presumed to pursue the same general ends—intellectual, civic, economic, and idealistic ends that serve learning and society—but many institutions compete against each other in doing so. In order best to serve those larger, shared goals, to what extent should they compete? Or cooperate?

Bart Giamatti became commissioner of baseball for more than love of the game. However different their activities, suggestive similarities exist between professional sports and higher education. Both groups of institutions serve a complex set of national and communal ends—recreative, economic, social, and educational. Both are presumed also to promote larger ideals—the game, sport, values, knowledge, and research. It cannot be the object of one team to drive others out of existence. Beat them on the field, but don’t bankrupt them. Yet after the advent of free agency, it became painfully obvious that in those less regulated sports, wealthier teams bought the best players. Those players, often winning a championship, stayed only until better offers came along. Frequently, the team that bought them couldn’t afford to keep them. Case in point: the Florida Marlins. Correlation of team wealth and win-loss records is a minor scandal in major league baseball. To combat these inevitable, increasing imbalances, some leagues regulate themselves contractually through salary or payroll caps, guaranteed minimums, unionization and arbitration, rules for drafting and free agency, mandatory sharing of TV revenues to even out major and minor markets, procedures for adding or moving teams, and the power of commissioners beholden to no one team. This serves the health of the sport and is condoned by law. Nothing like this, as far as I know, exists in higher education. (Professional sports lack tenure, but everyone on the roster must be full-time with all fringe benefits.)

If the federal court decision banning schools from sharing financial aid information is any indication—a decision only MIT had the courage to fight—then the courts do not grasp that higher education serves larger, less tangible communal goods as well as individual, tangible interests; that higher education might at least be accorded some options analogous to those open to the dignity of professional sports, such as antitrust exemption (Collis, 1999, pp. 12–13); that education, a unique form of commerce and trade, should be treated uniquely.

Higher education acts as an associative good when it promotes awareness of, and derives benefit from, the lives of others and what they pursue as knowledge, either for its own sake or as a practical instrumentality. Empathy is a hoped-for result; the broader aim should be critical reflection and reasoned discussion, an ideal identified in Renaissance courts, Enlightenment salons, and American colleges by the same word: *conversation*. Learning, then, creates a social and socializing experience, one intensely intellectual when those jostling together are gifted, reflect different backgrounds, and harbor heterogeneous ideas, values, and interests (Hansmann, 1999; Goethals, Winston, and Zimmerman, 1999).

At all levels of learning, knowledge may be pursued for its own sake. If we as a society lose this habit, we shall spend down intellectual capital and fail to replace it. Our capacity to wonder, to be curious, will atrophy. The wellspring of advancement, pure or applied, remains the quest for knowledge as its own end. This is an end or good desired for itself. It is also the final cause of all other goods in the entelechy (Popper, 1962, p. 5).

We soon ask what possible uses that knowledge might or should serve. This questioning is a moral or ethical good. It differs from pursuing knowledge for its own sake; it differs from pursuing it in order to fulfill a particular purpose or to solve certain problems. To ask the possible ramifications of knowledge is a venture not limited to practical questions. Properly speaking, it is philosophical and humane. It forms the basis for organizations such as the Union of Concerned Scientists and Physicians Against Nuclear War. In fact, unlocking the atom offers a series of examples. First came theoretical knowledge sought for its own sake. No one in the early days of nuclear physics worked in order to produce weapons of mass destruction or any other “product”—not Planck, Schrödinger, Bohr, or Einstein. Only later did the exigencies of circumstance and the sophistication of technologies assembled for one purpose permit practical applications: extreme destruction, a problematic source of power, food preservation, medical advances. Each use entails various decisions to implement it or not: deploy the weapon, a political, military, and moral judgment based on values established and debated since before the founding of nation states; irradiate food; build nuclear power plants; use radiation therapy; avoid electromagnetic radiation and its risks. Some decisions override economic incentives.

Genetics presents a similar case. The monk Gregor Mendel did not envision interferon to treat hepatitis. Franklin, Watson, and Crick did not conjure cloned sheep nor trade wars triggered by genetically altered crops. Mendel simply wanted to know why some peas were wrinkled, others smooth; from that he formulated his general laws of heredity. How that knowledge and all it engendered should now be used entails, again, ethical and economic decisions. Though the results of knowledge can be perverted, we cannot prevent abuses before the fact nor predict favorable outcomes. How exactly to use knowledge is rarely a matter of obvious application; it is a long test-essay, not multiple choice—a contest of values, and occasionally a calculated risk. In the humanities, results can be misused, but, more often, the methods and approaches can be trivial, foolish, or twisted by prejudices of all kinds (Bate, 1986, pp. 217–218).

Yet none of this could even be considered if first we did not seek knowledge for its own sake. Specific needs will find specific solutions, but general needs are the hardest to supply. The Promethean spark came before Bessemer furnaces or Frankenstein's creation. An irreducible element in the search for knowledge is the unpredictability of its application.

In education, then—a pale word for that innate drive in the species' quest for answers to the riddles that surround us, existing as we do briefly on a speck of cosmic dust falling through the most tremendous room—first to seek knowledge and ideas for their own sake and then to debate the ethical application of knowledge in an intellectually disinterested fashion are therefore always to be accounted goods in and of themselves.

F. Scott Fitzgerald says that the ability to keep seemingly contradictory ideas simultaneously in one's mind defines intelligence. The entelechy of higher education means several coordinated ends regarded together as producing different kinds of goods. It is both possible and necessary for higher education to serve all these functions; we welcome it as an economically instrumental good, hope for it as an associative intellectual and social good, insist on it as a good in itself—as a final cause—when it seeks for knowledge and ideas for their own sake, and nurture it as a moral good when it investigates, in a disinterested way, the ethical application of knowledge and ideas.

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## Economic Pressures

But education as an instrumental good geared to competitive gain, coupled with competition among educational institutions, can form a juggernaut threatening to eclipse the other goods and, ironically, subvert its own. To aim only for the instrumental while expecting education to proceed in the general pursuit of

knowledge is like expecting a fickle stream constantly to power a mill without first damming it into a pond. To see higher education as primarily an instrumental good—to diminish the pursuit of knowledge sought for its own sake as a self-justifying good and to belittle education as an associative good in the process (who wants to know what someone else is doing if it doesn't contribute to the career you're making?)—is too easily a consequence of following short-term economic “incentives.” These will always be linked to practical problems in a technological, capitalistic society whose aim is to create more wealth and to be not only competitive but first. An unregulated, competitive, instrumental economic good seen as the final cause will slowly but surely choke the other goods. Instrumental means—for they are means, not true ends—will be seen as the only end. The entelechy will be destroyed. Young people will find the only attractive, rewarding fields of study are those that meet one or more of three benchmarks: fields that promise (even if the promise is illusory) high wages if pursued as a career; fields that study money; or fields that, within educational institutions themselves, draw money with large grants or gifts.

What if the ideal of knowledge sought for its own sake is devalued, even lost? Several things perish with it. Obviously the possibility of ever converting such knowledge to any practical ends vanishes, a kind of cutting off your nose to spite your face. Aside from examples in nuclear and genetic science, we know thousands of chemical compounds and threatened botanical species whose use remained and or still remains inert until catalyzed by some later mind; if we did not know the properties of the rosy periwinkle of Madagascar we could not preserve the world's most effective treatment for childhood leukemia. The list is endless; many technical applications are unforeseen, some serendipitous.

Another loss is idealism. The best nursery of ideals is the disinterested pursuit of knowledge and ideas and the ethical consideration of how to apply them; to tear down the idealism of learning tears down every ideal.

Another thing threatened if we diminish the free pursuit of ideas, knowledge, and values divorced from maximum economic gain is the attraction of studying different fields of knowledge without first committing to vocational choice. This loss is devastating to any society but particularly to a democracy where freedom to choose and move between jobs or careers is an opportunity inherent to liberty and one contributing to the pursuit of happiness. The effects of this loss won't surface right away; in fact, if everyone learns simply to become more productive, a temporary boost in productivity will result. But within a generation, that approach will deprive any citizenry of perspective, relation, and the ability to connect one field of knowledge with another. We will be forced into ordinary ways of thinking and into predictable, discipline-bound “solutions,” exactly what we have

stereotypically criticized other nations (not without some reason) for pursuing at the expense of individual initiative and idealism.

All this assumes freedom of choice, essential to democracy. An understanding of several fields is key to such choices because the issues faced by a citizenry asked to decide them through their representatives require that education be an instrumental good for civic and political reasons in a way analogous and allied to, but not identical with, its economic instrumentality. Scholarly debate is, or should be, the standard for a democratic society's procedures of verification and dispute over ideas and policy. If all inquiry serves vested interests and is circumscribed in advance, then in time few inquiries (and none of them controversial) will be pursued to their end. No one fears this outcome more than defenders of a free press. But such political wisdom cannot be achieved by pursuing only economic competition. As Leo Marx, one of the great exponents of American studies in the later twentieth century, states, "The utilitarian idea of the multiversity, and the fragmented . . . conception of knowledge which it favors, are at odds with our presumed commitment to democratic . . . values" (Marx, 1975, p. 12). George Washington realized this political truth when he urged in his farewell address that we "Promote, then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened." Education as exclusively an economic instrumental good is characteristic of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. It coexists comfortably with control of the media, a caste system of jobs, early specialization, even censorship. One egregious example of a turn away from knowledge for its own sake and away from democratic or open ethical deliberation would be China's "cultural" revolution. Intellectuals were driven away from the cities and their books in order to chase birds from seed in the fields. China sabotaged its intellectual capital for two generations. It was the Great Leap Backward.

To repeat, in an ever more competitive world there is a danger that education as an instrumental economic good will attenuate education as an associative intellectual and social good, erode it as a civic good in a free society, diminish it as a moral good, and threaten it as a final good in which knowledge is sought for its own sake. Once the associative, civic, moral, and final goods are enfeebled—and we cannot assume they will thrive on their own without our active help and participation—then education will be a competitive tool bereft of the ability to impart democratic, critical thinking, to transmit cultural values and inheritances, or to discover knowledge with unforeseen, multiple applications. Two related illustrations: the dismissal of Dr. Jerome Kassirer, editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, represents, as the Dean of Tufts Medical School, Dr. John

Harrington, puts it, “the triumph of money over medicine.” Dr. Kassirer opposed the decision of the board of that journal, the Massachusetts Medical Society, to endorse, for gain, unrelated products and services over which the Journal has no control or oversight. A similar selling out of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* triggered the dismissal of its editor (Tye, 1999).

The keystones in the arch containing the three instrumental and associative goods—economic, social, and civic—are these two goods: the ethical deliberation over how knowledge should be used and the pursuit of knowledge and ideas as an end in itself, which is the final cause. These two goods do not preclude the other goods; foundational, they facilitate them, a fact recognized by every major myth ancient and modern, West and East, whether Plato’s cave, the Promethean spark, Pandora’s box, the trees of knowledge and of good and evil in Eden, the Faust and Frankenstein myths, or Confucius’ idea of *li* and the person educated and disciplined to realize true humanity (*jen*). Knowledge pursued for its own sake and values deliberated in disinterested fashion generate and humanize all the other goods, as well as being potentially complicit in evil misapplications. All great moral and religious systems of the world teach the need to enlighten general knowledge with moral commitment—yet they also recognize the economic, civic, and associative valences of knowledge. But remove the justification of learning pursued as the life of the mind for its own sake and as disinterested ethical deliberation to serve humanity, and all other goods soon will be perverted. For American education to forget this would be tragic hubris. The instrumental goods will become skills for authority without self-criticism and barkers for productivity without cultural inheritance or true curiosity.

Are these warnings moved against money and wealth creation? Not in the least. Like any form of power and exchange—oil, steam, the atom, language, statistics, or human imagination—capital in and of itself is a purely neutral quality of force. It is always better to have more of it rather than less. “To him who hath it shall be given, and to him who hath not even that little he hath shall be taken away.” The Twain School of Money sums it up well. When anyone complains, quoting scripture for the purpose, that love of money is the root of evil, think of Twain’s remark: “Yes, all money’s tainted. Trouble is, ’tain’t enough.” Yet as every major moralist has affirmed for millennia, it is rather how, how far, and to the exclusion of what else money is pursued that counts; and, once possessed, what one does with it that determines its ethical worth.

Economic prosperity within and outside universities has the potential to insulate institutions from future shocks and constant pressures. It might allow the humanities to flourish on a level not markedly beneath other fields, which is where the humanities are now. Reckoning the last thirty years (especially since 1982), the brute fact is that by every term of prestige and quality measured—faculty salaries, fac-

ulty positions created, percentage of adjunct professors, expenditures on physical plant, SAT scores, number of degrees awarded, expansion of high quality graduate programs, and alumni, corporate, and government gifts and grants—the humanities have fallen farther and farther behind (Engell and Dangerfield, 1998). Few educational leaders articulate this fact; fewer urge that anything be done about it. The situation is somewhat cyclical, but the ups and downs transpire while the whole travels downwards; imagine one point on a wheel rolling downhill. Prosperity of the last generation coincides with an overall degradation of the humanities. If we recall the entelechy of higher education, something better could result.

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## The Problem with Prestige

If any model for organic growth is more than a house of cards, it will prompt change, confirm selected present practices, and merge the two.

## Competition and What Counts

Increasingly, we compete for students, money, faculty, endowments, and yield ratios. Competition is a mantra. The contests spin like pinwheels in a fireworks display, faster, brighter, so intense that now the mere reputation of “having” the best rank, the most money, is seemingly what matters, often fixed upon by the media and holding astonishing sway over applicants, parents, even counselors. Bald quantitative scores, amounts, or ranks seem what must be known. These markers possess the power of authenticated status, and measuring them becomes an end in itself (though an earthy Texan might describe these contests with a certain locker room phrase). This obsessive striving overshadows and thus jeopardizes the real ends and goods—scholarly, personal, and social—of the institution. There are no algorithms for complex human behavior, no ranks for distinct entelechies. Excellence, ultimately, cannot be measured or pursued adequately in these often trivialized forms. If it is, it becomes a hollow shell, and if we boast of its counters, we may lose sight of what, supposedly, is being counted. Longinus, echoed by the critic and historian Sainte-Beuve, said it well: nothing so much resembles a hollow as a swelling. Whether *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, yields against the nearest competitor, or endowment building, even as we remark that they are only indicators, we credit them more than we suspect because they have become the only indicators commonly voiced and used. Admittedly they have use, but we need to remind ourselves that they are inherently not intellectual or scholarly; they have nothing to do with the application of learning, they may tend to divide rather than unite the larger community of learning, and they carry

no ethical content whatsoever. True symbols of excellence not only mirror excellence, they actually are that quality itself.

Rankings and measures of “excellence” now pursued create status and reputation as final goals or goods in themselves when at best they are shorthand signs of instrumental goods within the institution. But prestige is derived from prestidigitation, “ juggler’s tricks” in Latin. True reputation comes from knowing and cultivating the thing itself, the institutional entelechy in all its interrelations over a span of time. Metaphorically, more of Peter Lynch’s methods of research, investment, and evaluation, and less day trading, quarterly panics, and street rumor would serve us, as educators, better. Henry S. Pritchett, astronomer, later president of MIT and then president of the Carnegie Foundation for Teaching until 1930, in his address to the University of Michigan in 1905, “*Shall the University Become a Business Corporation?*” praises the democratic spirit of land grant institutions and remarks how they might vie with older ones “in a rivalry [in] which we may well hope to see the noble rivalry of the scholar rather than a rivalry of riches, of buildings, and of numbers.” His wisdom is not anachronistic.

The intensification of institutional striving for competitive goals measured by dollars, numbers, or ordinals can whip up heady fixations. It has all the earmarks of addiction. It intensifies itself; more and more of it is required to satisfy the desire; increasing resources drain into it; it distracts us from concrete tasks and personal relations; it makes cooperation difficult; it can prevent larger community; the addiction becomes a burden whose only relief is deeper addiction. Might one renounce, openly and publicly, certain yardsticks as commonly accepted indicators of institutional worth? Or, at least, recall Pritchett’s advice, as well as Einstein’s: “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

## Cooperation

Though each school has its unique entelechy, many, at times proximate in location, share larger ideals and aims. As well as competing, they must exploit every chance to unite strengths, cut costs, and serve their communities better. One area where this is happening but must happen much more is libraries. The most common form of grant in the humanities is funding to travel to a research library. An inevitable institutional and economic Darwinism is reducing in this country the number of research libraries considered truly adequate for many fields. So, whether through J-STORE, consortia to share periodical costs (greater than book costs), digital sharing, interlibrary loan, use of the Library of Congress cataloging system, agreements to share faculty and even student patrons, or linking up with public systems, libraries must cooperate or deteriorate. Is it a stretch to carry this

to building maintenance, security, athletic facilities, health care bargaining power, and the like? These complex moves, some with legal or labor ramifications, might be impractical at certain schools, but cooperation in higher education, mergers of certain types, if you will, must be vigorously explored.

### Leadership and Governance

Organic growth could imply—or from it might be inferred—a slow, predictable process. Such an inference would be myopic. A coming hard freeze requires quick protection; we now know that our most organic form of growth, biological evolution, proceeds at highly uneven rates and responds dramatically to rapid environmental changes or cataclysms, such as massive meteor impacts. Real organic growth encourages institutions to throw off both the addiction to mere status and the inertia of traditional rest; it permits swift executive actions. These ideally are predicated on vertical as well as horizontal consultation, genuinely frank and open. They entail knowing the longer histories of institutional operations (at times overlooked by peripatetic or new administrators or faculty). Then presidents, schools, divisions, even departments must be ready to act, not react, to shed the false conservatism of forms and structures, among them any structures and attitudes of top governance, that can thwart organic change (Collis, 1999, p. 22).

To balance the autocratic and consensual aspects of the university is ever a challenge. However, the new complexity and regulations universally agreed to that have characterized the last twenty to thirty years will, if not dealt with boldly, continue to grow entirely on their own, internally, without any new addition; this bureaucratic growth will quash both autocratic and democratic strains of governance. (Parkinson's Law, a serious, statistical study of office-running aspects of the British Empire, makes instructive reading applied to universities.) Leaders will feel like Gulliver tied down in Lilliput; faculty, students, and staff will feel like pawns in a Kafka novel. Can we cite anyone who demonstrates that all or even the majority of growth in academic administration and staff is attributable to government regulation and external requirements? (I have searched and cannot.) Gardens need vigorous weeding—often.

The split between administration and faculty, between “advancement” and “academic” leaders, seems to be deepening. This endangers the entelechy of higher education as a whole. Fewer experienced professors seem trained or inclined to administer whole institutions or significant aspects of them; more administrators build careers on managing the essential undertakings and appurtenances of scholarship and teaching rather than participating directly in them for a decade or two. Can we not work from both ends: identify, cultivate, and train faculty as administrators above the departmental level; increase the faculty

willing to serve, full- or part-time, for specified periods, in administrative roles; seek career administrators with a demonstrably successful span of teaching or research, not just a line on the resume?

The entelechy of an institution should be reflected in its trustees and governing boards. At that level, Pritchett warns against “administration of experts by [educational] experts.” He goes on to say that perhaps no “wiser councilor” exists than a businessperson “of large sympathy and of real interest in intellectual problems.” The last quality is paramount. Admittedly, these people “are almost as difficult to find as are great teachers” (Pritchett, 1905, p. 297b). But we must find them, and they should abjure the habit, which some practice, of measuring the success of their chief executive officer (a title used by Pritchett as early as 1905) in purely quantitative ways—how much money raised, how many square feet added, what rank achieved? It might be prudent to consider having on these boards at least one faculty member from another institution, one whose interest in organization and management complements the interest in intellectual problems felt by nonacademics on the board. In many cases, trustees meet too infrequently and go into too little detail to be of real help in effecting organic change. Instead, we get lapses, then lurches.

### **Academic Planning and Curriculum**

Organic growth in an era of rapid change demands intensified strategic, long-term academic planning charted by faculty and administrators working closely together on a regular basis, not sporadically or prompted by an upcoming campaign or crisis only. These groups need to be provided with applicable national literature and studies relevant to their tasks, not (what happens all too often) just information gathered internally and reports authored at the institution.

It is desirable to create at the interdepartmental, even the interschool level, permanent rather than ad hoc groups whose sole task is to develop courses and programs that push academic administrative and disciplinary boundaries, either through team teaching, inherently interdisciplinary fields, or both (for example, the environment, human rights, science, and public policy). These groups of faculty and administrators might suggest changes in academic administrative structures themselves as well as in curricula and courses.

In search procedures and hiring, faculty (even administrators) can conduct themselves in counterproductive, amateurish, even unprofessional ways that betray the entelechy of goods that hiring the best possible person is meant to further (Stein and Trachtenberg, 1993). I can confirm this from personal witness, reports of graduate students on the market, and tales from colleagues. Every professor should be versed—through seminars, meetings, reading, or all of them—on the ground rules,

assignments, realistic expectations, activities, advertising, interviewing, prohibitions, and negotiations of the process. Professors in general seem not well trained in hiring. They often do not have time for this long, arduous process. Their efforts may become permanent mistakes that everyone suffers.

Higher education has not escaped the passion for celebrity and name recognition in our society of rapid change and media exposure. In the humanities and social sciences, “star” quality may seem obvious but is, in fact, very hard to determine and often illusory. In those fields especially, more than ever subject to trends, factions, and fashions with short half-lives, informed opinion varies, and to fix on one name rarely furthers organic growth. Sometimes a “star” catches the crest of a wave that has already broken; there is less consensus about who is a “star” than a generation ago. Some “stars” shamelessly milk the system. They count on administrative timidity, on fear of seeming to have failed to bag the quarry, and they frequently waste everyone’s time—and money. Relative equity is not flashy, but organic growth requires attention to it. The hierarchical commodification and segmenting of the professoriate within fields and also between fields harbors perils. If the market is followed fatalistically or constantly trumped, rather than to some degree resisted on principle, the market will become tyrannical, leave no options, and make some jobs and fields so relatively unappealing to the young that few talents will want to enter them.

The resort to adjunct and part-time faculty, after having doubled in the last twenty years, may have bottomed out. It should. Institutions such as Georgia State University are showing the way to more sane, long-term, organic policies: carefully create full-time posts, cultivate the young professionally, commit resources, and two academic generations from now the school will be stronger, its faculty more committed and loyal with higher morale. Few adjuncts are pleased with their situation. How embittered, resentful, and desperate some feel is hard to gauge only because the feelings run so deep. A disaffected teaching force cannot and will not work to help an institution grow or change. Reducing reliance on piecemeal teaching in no way precludes strenuous, periodic reviews of tenured as well as untenured faculty.

Our oldest piece of electronic communication technology (save the telegraph) seems vastly underused. McGeorge Bundy employed it all the time, to great effect, as Harvard’s dean from 1954 to 1960. James Baker, running George Bush’s campaign, made dozens of calls each day. But in our crush of formal committees, conferences, councils, and engagements, usually segregated into separate “administration” and “academic” buildings, we rarely, faculty or administrators, telephone and ask, “What are your chief concerns? Please be candid.” Individual faculty can feel, even cynically, that the layers between them and key administrators are tall barriers. These barriers—as much when they are only perceived

to exist as when they actually do—block growth and change more than we think. What a difference it makes for a dean or provost to call, to cultivate, in informal, private conversations, both intelligent gossip and bedrock opinion, perhaps dispelling rumors on the way. This is not unseemly. Most faculty welcome it; some crave it. With word processors and e-mail, perhaps losing the art of dictation was inevitable. But losing the art of informal conversation between administration and faculty cuts the internal sympathetic nervous system.

### **Student Life, Advising, and Attitudes**

Students need to know the history and entelechy of their own institution, as do faculty. A few paragraphs in a handbook won't do. If there is no recent detailed account, someone in history or a keen alumnus or alumna might write one, if not as a book then as a substantial pamphlet that could also be disseminated digitally. (This would be both scholarship and service.) We might consider offering, even requiring, a short course in American higher education and its history. Of the wealth of material here, much of it recent and well written, most students, incredibly, never read a word—they are not asked to—and only schools of education deign to pick it up. Students are entering “higher education” and should acquire some sense of the entire enterprise, but to most of them it is just a blur. If a requirement for this seems outlandish, perhaps a seminar or series of presentations during freshman week or orientation would not. A section of the bookstore devoted to higher education, to publications on or about the institution, and by people affiliated with it, might be a focal point.

Business and community leaders, journalists, artists, lawyers, physicians, heads of nonprofits—all the better if alumni—can speak about the importance of academic life personally, what it meant and means to them, how they continue intellectual interests and avocations, what opportunities they missed, what new paths were opened (this reverses the all too common, though not intrinsically bad, habit of getting them to talk about their present professions).

Students need advising not only to fill out course registrations but as young adults benefiting from an older adult who gets them to probe more deeply their own motives for shaping their own most fundamental curricular choices and, more than that, for shaping years of their own lives—even, perhaps especially, if they are part-time students. It's not enough to check requirements, achieve “balance,” and ponder different courses. Most students secretly desire—and they always need—serious conversations about the aims and ends of their education and the direction of their lives as a whole. Once a term is not enough. Ten minutes is not enough. How a student conceives of and fits into the entelechy, pursuing instrumental, associative, and final goods, can form one general template for these

conversations. One aim of advising is for the student to develop a grounded sense of hope, the hope to be a better person for experiencing higher education, and to know why; the hope to contribute to some project greater than the individual self, a goal that can harness and subordinate, rather than succumb to or deny, the range of motives for personal success or gain.

We might talk more openly, directly, and publicly about student life than we do. This is not to advocate a return to all kinds of rules. But our policy statements and disciplinary procedures seem insufficient and impersonal. They have all the force and all the impotence of abstract catechisms. The recent Binge Beer newspaper “ad” signed by over a hundred college presidents is a welcome tactic, and one of the best things any administration can do is to set a tone, an expectation. Yet a tone is set chiefly by personal acts of commission and is best set orally, or face to face, not through anonymous policies.

Students rarely examine the academic work of other students; it is virtually “uncool” to do so. Institutions can publicize and insure outlets for this work. Prizes do this, but not well. A better, more consistent and more equitable way is to support publications (print or electronic) that describe or reproduce, with permission, student projects, essays, papers, or experiments, integrating them into teaching wherever possible. Peer effects should at times take effect through the published forms of communication actually used by a community of scholars.

Open forums, even debates, involving students, faculty, administrators, and guests (the mix is key) may seem needlessly to court controversy, but they leverage the presence of the institution to expose and train students in mature deliberation, persuasion, and different points of view. If controversy threatens free speech violations or intimidation, these can be adjudicated if firm rules and publicized procedures are in place.

## The Humanities

How have the humanities themselves reacted to accelerating change, competition, technology, and pressures? Too often they have reacted in self-involved, self-defeating ways. A few humanists stuck their heads in the sand and waited for change to go away. Others fell upon each other in accusations of right and left, traditional and enlightened, canonical and liberating. This produced some positive curricular changes and aired cultural questions. It elicited some lamentable changes too. The debates were not always responsible in scholarly terms; divisions left many embittered. Demographic and theoretical developments of the 1970s and 1980s altered humanistic disciplines, especially the modern languages, but the humanities had little impact on the way higher education views or governs itself. As in certain undistinguished periods of the past, some humanists wrote

prose that even few other humanists could understand. Without grasping either the principles of modern science or the history of philosophy, some fell upon any claim to objectivity or truth in any field. The idea of disinterestedness came under attack. Many humanists urged, and taught, that we are all interested in our own ideologies, and then, either explicitly or implicitly, claimed that this applies equally across the board. The ideal of being disinterested became just another “ideology,” equally suspect. Troubling, too, was one general failure (might it be called ignorance?) of humanists who “discovered” being “interdisciplinary” or, conversely, pursued hyperspecialization. Both groups failed to grasp that, historically (no matter what narrowing had occurred since the 1940s), the humanities had always sought results emanating from other areas of endeavor in order to incorporate those results into judgments of human value, relevance, and historical significance. This is one aspect of Matthew Arnold’s apologia: the humanities absorb and interpret the results of science, knowledge, and technology for our inner lives, values, and ideals. The humanities help direct their uses in light of what we inherit in our cultures, in light of what we cherish yet also criticize, in light of what we must change in order to continue to cherish.

The humanities can better meet our current predicaments if they

- Teach rhetoric and prose argument again, not simply as the correction of mechanical faults in composition, but as logic, dialectic, and persuasion; that is, teach language as that great instrumentality serving all nonquantitative disciplines. In order to do this we must use excellent models of intellectual prose, the vast majority of which are not contemporary; we should stop teaching composition as autobiography and improve the textbooks for it
- Teach what always in the Western tradition accompanied rhetoric (partly because some philosophers viewed rhetoric dimly), that is, moral philosophy, and do so prior to teaching any professional ethics (it is too late then to start)
- Teach the study of religion—not belief in any religion proper but a comparative grasp of the world’s great value systems, which have profoundly religious bases (this is beginning, prompted by new textbooks and new attitudes)
- Seek relevance from the past, not in showy ways, forcing Austen or Shakespeare to be “our contemporary,” but challenging us to ask why certain texts and arts persist, why we find in them ideas and visions that do not die and are not mired in the prejudices of their own times. (“Relevance,” tainted by its use in the 1960s, has always been one goal of the humanities: affect action and conduct. As Whitehead says, the danger of academic study is inert knowledge. Burke argues that, accounting for changed circumstances but not jettisoning wisdom, past models should not be directly imitated but imaginatively applied.)

- Insist on interdisciplinary study rather than talk about it (for example, no Ph.D. program in English that I know of requires formal study in history, history of science, philosophy, government, or religion; languages required have slipped from three to, sometimes, one). In short, revitalize *literae humaniores*, the articulated spine of many disciplines that form the backbone of the humanities—plural
- Ask, in teaching, publication, and promotions, how specialization serves general humanistic ends.

We now have more of past and present expressions of human experience available to us than ever. We have the potential to produce educated individuals who are the least provincial in history. Technology is an added boon. Information systems are sophisticated enough to benefit the humanities. They are revolutionizing libraries and can spread humanistic learning as nothing else since the rise of mass literacy and the printed book. Vast collections are at our fingertips (all English poetry and much prose, from 800 to 1900, for example). “Colleges and universities will be increasingly interested in maintaining an attractive technology environment as the competition for students grows more intense” (Lau, 1999). Without sacrificing traditional print collections and face-to-face conversation and contact, this must become true in the humanities too.

A caveat. Since 1650—Milton being the most recent plausible candidate to have read virtually all that was printed in his own day—there have always existed more key texts and scholarship in the humanities (now even in a single subfield) than any one person can consult, let alone master. The crucial issue is actual time spent in hard reading, careful listening, and painstaking revision. Only 15 percent of college papers are rewritten (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1999). The technology having greatest impact on American society since 1950 may still well be TV. Two separate studies cited by *Time* (August 16, 1999, p. 21) provide sobering statistics: the average American child views 30,000 TV commercials per year, estimated conservatively at 35 minutes each day; the average child aged six to twelve reads 63.7 hours per year at home (11 minutes each day), one-third the time spent viewing commercials, let alone the actual programs. Recall the halcyon predictions from education experts in the early 1950s about the virtually limitless, positive effects of TV? The sad irony is they had good reasons to make them.

Because much of the humanities’ subject matter was written in, or deals with, times before the present generation, it is often assumed that the humanities look essentially backward, concerned with the human condition as it has been rather than as it is or might be. Even someone as sophisticated as Harold Shapiro can regard humanistic education as having stressed mere “indoctrination,” and “some specified set of moral claims” (Shapiro, 1997, pp. 78–79), a judgment that would

have disturbed not a few thinkers venerated in older pantheons: Socrates, for instance, or Erasmus, Mary Wollstonecraft, Samuel Johnson, François Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, John Quincy Adams, George Eliot, or Frederick Douglass. It has been the province of the humanities to preserve in order to reform, to pay attention, even homage, to the past, but to criticize what we inherit, calibrating the fact that social and individual lives change in the present, and that the education of character, the shaping of society, balance what has been known with the pressure of what is discovered. The humanities openly cherish and brazenly criticize and see no contradiction in the two.

Of the implications and actions suggested in this section, some may seem old hat, others doubtful, a few minor; but each stems from a vision of the whole institutional enterprise and the coordination of its constituent parts. Organic growth is as complex as the change that influences it, but it cannot be merely reactive. It will work best if it cleaves to principles and goods best grasped as an entelechy whose formulation itself is not permanent but self-evolving.

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## Rapid Change, Long Views

There is no Golden Age good enough to want to return to. Nostalgia in that regard cheapens history. But the metamorphosis of ideals, the transformation and creation of ideas, the alliance between civic and educational areas, and the realignment of the universe of knowledges—none of this can take place imaginatively without knowing what those knowledges have been and what purposes they and their institutions have served, for society and for individual *Bildung*. Only by knowing the past—including the past of our own institutions—can one anticipate the ways in which organic change might best take place. Constitutional scholars and judges know this. Economic market analysis and risk-taking exemplify it. This knowledge at times is quantitative or experimental; in human institutions it must be expressed and practiced in assimilative, complex ways, quantitatively and qualitatively, the result of which is the capacity to make decisions about people, goals, and motivations, integrating them with decisions about dollars and bytes. Jaroslav Pelikan has studied with care the history of American education. He concludes: “The most successful leaders of modern universities have been those who have come to their task from the ‘business’ of teaching and research, but have then learned to administer the university as ‘business’ without being overwhelmed by it” (Pelikan, 1992, p. 72). In other words, the ends are known and practiced first; then institutional means are mastered and fitted to those ends.

An organic model is not from technology or science, nor from economic and social fields, nor from the separate disciplines in the humanities as we have come to practice them. The model—a distinction with a difference—is broadly humanistic. That broad humanism differs from the usual methods in individual academic disciplines in the humanities, a difference as great as that between the humanities and the sciences or technology. No one discipline can claim superiority of contribution. The idea must come from the whole person, hence the continued importance of liberal education, of the liberal arts and sciences, as a goal in itself and as a foundation for any professional expertise. The premise of organic change, then, is not from “the humanities” in the usual sense; it is humanistic in a larger sense. It does not require someone trained in the humanities to act in this regard as a humanist. And the disciplines that forget this fact most often are the humanities themselves. This is true especially when they trivialize or defend themselves, well, defensively. It will prove wiser to see knowledge and reason and the forms of them “we employ in the various ‘humanities’” as “basically a public inheritance” (Peters, 1975, p. 149). We are all, in David Hume’s phrase, of the party of humanity.

Our national union, our universities and colleges, too, serve society not only with due weight to each individual but with a view to integration. This sense of *architektonik*—of varied activities and knowledges emerging organically through time in interrelated worth as they impinge on human conduct, academies, and civil societies—was once the province of a discipline regarded as consummate. From Plato through Augustine, from Sidney to Kant, this vision was the province of philosophy. (A reminder is the highest degree in arts or sciences, no matter the field, *philosophiae doctoris*.) Its continuation is found in, among others, Schelling, Hegel, Humboldt, and Cardinal Newman, moving spirits of modern universities at Jena, Berlin, Dublin, and elsewhere. This is not the place for an excursus, but we could trace this conviction, too, in the writings and actions of Jefferson, Washington, Lee, Lincoln, Howard and the Freedman’s Bureau, in de Clare, the Wadhams, and the Sidgwicks—all associated with learning at particular colleges or universities.

It must be admitted that this philosophical sense is practiced rarely and taught almost never, perhaps because such a large vision of knowledge, values, and intellectual virtue is not specialized. It cannot be specialized. Anything this important is too important to leave to the specialist mind. The university is an organism with specialized parts, but essentially one body, and it can act as such. Its different parts should not be like walls and gates that separate and imprison, but, as Francis Bacon said, like veins and arteries that connect the larger body of knowledge and its applications.

Universities exist both within and outside what Wordsworth calls the world of “getting and spending.” They must continue to enjoy a special status and relationship with society. We do not want an ivory tower, nor do we want business offices masquerading as a campus. If we need an image, let it be a lighthouse permitting the commerce of ideas and knowledge and preventing their foundering or destruction. And we want that lighthouse, or rather those lighthouses, to work as lighthouses do, impartially but visibly and dependably, over long periods of time for the good of all, as beacons that permit discovery of new territories. Their permeable border with immediate social and economic needs must yet be maintained as a border, a clear independence (Barber, 1989, p. 66; Kennedy, 1997, p. 15). We are all tacit shareholders in every institution of learning. No one, except a wrecker, wants to see any lighthouse fail, especially not another lighthouse keeper.

We must take long views, longer even than those views demanded by financial investments. This is not for our generation alone; it is for a common, not an exclusive, posterity. For the success of this long view the bottom line is not the best metaphor. Ending his chapter “Change From Without” in *Education’s Great Amnesia*, Robert Proctor explores this metaphor and concludes starkly: “The past can have little or no meaning in a society ruled by the bottom line” (Proctor, 1988, pp. 138–139). Yet that metaphor is far from the worst. Mr. Micawber is right about budgets. Income twenty pounds, expenses nineteen pounds, nineteen shillings, sixpence; result: happiness. Income twenty pounds, expenses twenty pounds and sixpence; result: misery. The yearly budget and five-year capital campaign are tools, means to crucial ends. They further the entelechy but are not the entelechy itself.

Any institution encompassing these means and ends by its own specific formulation of them must recognize their interplay in a society in which we all have a stake, in which we attempt to create a more perfect union, the entelechy, if you will, of civic polity, the pattern of which is our Constitution, one that, with its amendments and carefully deliberated motto, *e pluribus unum*, is a political model for organic growth. With its built-in capacity to meet change as interpreted through the generations, that Constitution aims not only in positive terms to establish government, it limits tyranny, balances the whole with the parts, prevents one area or region from swallowing the others, and promotes the general welfare. It aims to admit change but not without check and consent. It works more slowly, thank goodness, than other institutions or corporations. Colleges and universities, like the Constitution, live on a long wavelength. They consist of, and persist in, purposes that should be grasped organically as an entelechy of means, ends, and goods, of causes both immediate and final. If institutions of higher education do not resolve to make every effort to grow through their own principles of organic change, if they do not

seek, reexamine constantly, and strive to maintain their own entelechy, then accelerating change will force them to become organizations whose operations and very existence are dictated from without rather than directed from within.

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