

RELIGION, THEOLOGY AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES

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'The end of the university and the last academic' is a sample chapter from Richard Roberts' important book on the state of knowledge and its 'production'. The full book is available for purchase at the Cambridge University Press website (or at other online stores) at: http://www.cambridge.org/gb/knowledge/isbn/item1168074/?site_locale=en_GB

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CHAPTER 4

*The end of the university and the last academic?*¹

In memoriam:

Donald MacKenzie MacKinnon
(1913–1994)

It is through man's cruelty that the glory of God is revealed.²

We must compromise our principles, and do anything to raise money.³

British universities have for over fifteen years been subjected to something approaching permanent revolution from above, and during this time higher education has been aggregated with primary and secondary education and reconceived as a mechanism capable of producing the numbers and kinds of skill-trained minds required by business and industry at minimum cost, and with the highest degree of standardisation possible. To this end, higher education has been subjected to three stages of reform. First, a gradual programme of greater financial accountability was introduced with the budget-centre system, formula-funding and line-management (1982–6). Second, the 1987/8 Education Reform Act abolished academic tenure and introduced a series of measures, built around the imposition of 'teaching quality audit' (including the application of BS 5750 and ISO 9000), modularisation and semesterisation, and the quinquennial Research Assessment Exercise. This period culminated in a doubling of the size of the tertiary sector and consequent dilution of the meaning of the term 'university'. Finally, in 1997,

¹ This chapter originated in an annual St Leonard's College (the postgraduate body of the University of St Andrews) Commemoration Address entitled 'The End of the University and the Last Academic', delivered before members on 8 November 1992. The long-term consequences of this expression of opinion for me were extremely serious. A succinct version of this address appeared as 'Our Graduate Factories', *The Tablet*, 11 October 1997, pp. 1295–7.

² Donald M. MacKinnon, *God the Living and the True* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1940), p. 88.

³ This is the self-fulfilling prophetic utterance of the Vice-Chancellor of a leading British university in his annual address to academic staff in the mid 1980s.

the Dearing Report envisaged the complete integration of the whole tertiary sector with further education in a flexible continuum, the reduction of state funding, a centralised academic audit mechanism monitored through a single, centrally approved external examining board for all degrees in each discipline, national curricula to assure uniform 'quality', and the implementation of 'benchmarking' and 'graduateness' (psycho-behavioural templates corresponding to each type of 'learning experience'). Now these measures are in the course of implementation: the 'life of the mind' now exists within the confines of national 'programme specifications' overseen by the Quality Assurance Agency (the QAA). The outcome is that in Britain we have created the equivalent of a national thought police. This amounts to the 'end of the university'. The above is in summary terms what has been imposed upon British higher education. What follows is an attack upon these measures, which are, in my judgement, a singular example of that forcible relocation of agency that takes place when the managerial prerogative 'reforms' – and destroys a culture.

I dedicate this chapter to the memory of Donald MacKinnon, formerly Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, to whom I, like many others of my generation active in academic theology and religion, owe much. With his death ended an era; but by this I do not merely refer to the increased distance of the inter-war era, which MacKinnon could evoke with an intense vividness. No, there is now the sense that we have passed over a watershed pertaining to the very nature of the university and thus of the relation between teacher and taught, between intellectual leader and aspirant, that used to be central to the very fibre of authentic higher education. The major contention framing this chapter is that the free-ranging 'intellectual apostolate' of such a great but not flawless figure as Donald MacKinnon has become a functional impossibility in contemporary British higher education.⁴ This I regret.

In advancing such a contention, I write on an issue so painfully close to my own experience that I can only with some difficulty maintain a critical distance.⁵ Yet, for one who dares to invoke the name of Donald

⁴ 'Theological Rhetoric and Moral Passion in the light of MacKinnon's "Barth"', in K. Surin (ed.), *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Pursuing the Thought of Donald MacKinnon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 1–14.

⁵ Yet I share with Pierre Bourdieu an irresistible 'need to gain rational control over the disappointment felt by an "oblate" faced with the annihilation of the truths and values to which he was destined rather than take refuge in feelings of self-destructive resentment', *Homo Academicus* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), p. xxvi.

MacKinnon, the question here at issue, that of enforced change in the university and the creation of 'mass higher education', or what Professor Lord Conrad Russell has aptly termed 'battery higher education', is one from which the personal dimension cannot, indeed should not, be excluded. Donald MacKinnon taught those who came under his influence that the impact of morality and ethics upon the individual should never be ignored or overridden, and that, furthermore, there can be no easy marriage of – or divorce between – the 'moral' person and the 'immoral' organisation. The relationship between individual and institution is radically changed when alien managerial models non-consensually reconfigure universities into 'higher-education outlets' and a fundamental clash with the demands of a *real* university education is engendered. University education is like beer: it can be 'real' or a synthetic *Ersatz*, a concocted simulacrum, and we need to relearn the distinction between the two. This decipherment is, however, not an easy matter as it implies conflict with a massively empowered *Zeitgeist* – and with copious popular prejudice.

In seeking to articulate some of the present dilemmas in higher education in Britain, I call in question a range of further issues which cannot be tackled at this juncture; yet what has happened in the university is a microcosm of societal abuse characteristic of Britain as a whole since 1979. I refer deliberately to 'Britain', yet even the Scottish university in which I once held the tradition-bearing Chair of Divinity had departed from those ideals of the specifically *Scottish* university as the seat of the 'democratic intellect' (George Davie)⁶ and 'community of contested discourses' (Alasdair MacIntyre).⁷ What follows should, nevertheless, be understood as an exercise in contextual analysis in which any particularities serve only to illustrate and heighten emphasis upon the flawed and contradictory general principles that have been imposed upon higher education as a whole. As Professor Lord Conrad Russell has observed:

The current assault by the State on the Universities is thus in a long tradition. Yet within that tradition, it is an assault to which there are few parallels, because it is designed to change all the values by which Universities operate. Perhaps only a clergyman who had lived through the reign of Henry VIII would be capable of understanding how the Universities now feel.⁸

⁶ See George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961); and *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect: The Problems of Generalism and Specialisation in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986).

⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (London: Duckworth, 1990), p. 22.

⁸ Lord Conrad Russell, *Academic Freedom* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

This engagement in contextual theology is undertaken in the spirit of Donald MacKinnon, who in 1972 wrote that 'the reality of apostleship is not proved by a quickly effective ministry of apologetic, but by a long and painful apprenticeship to which the individual knows himself constrained by that which will not let him escape'.⁹ At the very core of what has been forcibly transmuted is a commitment to the integrity of the university as the realm of the critical mind, and this is underlaid by a compound principle no better expressed than by the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote from his Nazi prison cell of the 'natural rights of the life of the mind'. In an incomplete fragment of the *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer asserted that

There are three fundamental attitudes which the life of the mind assumes with regard to reality: judgement, action and enjoyment (play and delight). In these attitudes man confronts in freedom the reality of which he himself forms part, and he thereby shows that he is a man.¹⁰

In this chapter we observe and analyse an imbalance: *judgement* has been expropriated by managerial *fiat*; *action* has been mechanised into the policing of the meaningless circularities of 'Quality'; and *enjoyment* has become the casual pleasure of the 'receiver' or 'customer' who picks and chooses in the 'knowledge outlet'. That task integral to the 'natural rights of the life of the mind', the confronting in freedom of reality, and the proof thereby of one's humanity, has been, as will become apparent, largely elided from the educational task, or made so problematic in execution as to render the efforts of those who attempt it a counter-systemic aberration. No doubt there are some, now perhaps many, who view as a long overdue 'reform' the intellectual cleansing of higher education of powerful eccentricity and the exceptional confrontation with reality represented *par excellence* by a Donald MacKinnon. Such intellectual characteristics are incompatible with the 'mass higher education' criticised in this chapter, but the very existence of critically reflexive search for knowledge is under threat. The university should, to use Vaclav Havel's potent phrase, 'live in truth'.¹¹

Recent changes imposed upon British university and tertiary education constitute part of the general reversal of what the historian Harold

⁹ 'Theology as a Discipline in a Modern University', in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *The Rules of the Game: Cross-disciplinary Essays on Models in Scholarly Thought* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), p. 172.

¹⁰ D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: SCM, 1955), p. 186.

¹¹ Vaclav Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless', in Jan Vladislav (ed.), *Living in Truth* (London, Faber & Faber, 1987), pp. 36–122.

Perkin depicted as the 'rise of professional society'. Professionalism involves the occupational control of work and is distinct from bureaucratic and market-based forms of structuring work;¹² de-professionalisation involves the loss of a relative autonomy responsible to and for tradition. The contemporary manifestations of managerialism and the evolution of a planned, even a command economy in higher education have involved dramatic non-consensual alterations in the self-identity and practice of the academic profession. This is not only because of the latter's enlargement and consequent dilution through the sudden creation of many 'universities' out of a wide variety of pre-existing educational bodies, but also, and more significantly, because of an ineffectively contested bureaucratic revolution from above. In this setting, the socio-cultural identities of the 'university' and of the academic profession, already weak and ineptly (if ever) defined, have been reconstrued by political *force majeure* enacted through a series of administrative and managerial measures that have entailed a dramatic alteration of the largely implicit self-understandings of institutions and their life-worlds.¹³ Academics have become mere 'factors of production': but are they – should they – be more than this?¹⁴

I shall argue that in the absence of effective constitutional safeguards the responsible autonomy and cultural agency (indeed the human rights) of academic staff, which were inexplicit and feeble, have in certain respects been eliminated. The 'natural rights of the life of the mind' have been overridden. Consequently, the pursuit of knowledge and a respect for truth have been subsumed under a system of customer-driven 'packaged learning' through a process of 'turning of diamonds into glass'. Academic resistance has been negligible: theirs is a *trahison des clercs* of the first order. The re-creation of critical reflexivity on the part of the academic profession will involve a collective response, the rebirth of the will-to-be, besides a willingness to engage in a careful analysis of the generation, nature and exchange of cultural capital in society as a whole.

¹² As is forcefully argued by Eliot Freidson, *Professionalism Reborn: Theory, Prophecy, and Policy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).

¹³ A. H. Halsey, *The Decline of Danish Dominion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), has provided a comprehensive but morally vacuous account of developments in academia since the Second World War. Halsey is the kind of sociological realist who simply records without evaluation the inevitability of societal change in a way that an ethicist or theologian cannot.

¹⁴ Academics are not of course alone in this. See Neil Millward, *The New Industrial Relations? Based on the ED/ESRC/PSI/ACAS Surveys* (London: Policy Studies Institute Publications, 1994), p. 133: 'On the basis of the patterns and trends that we have identified – and the continuing existence of a wide range of factors supporting or reinforcing these trends – British industry and commerce appear to be moving towards the situation in which non-managerial employees are treated as "factors of production".'

The retrospective abolition of academic tenure in the 1988 Education Reform Act was merely one factor in the complex disempowerment reviewed in this chapter. Present practice, with regard to the imposition of a crassly inapposite and old-fashioned system of line-management, the unilateral declaration of institutional possession of the intellectual property of employees, multiple systems of 'Quality Audit' and appraisal, the abolition of any meaningful separation of powers in the organisation, the unqualified subordination of academic staff to unaccountable student criticism, the reduction of Senates and faculty meetings from decision-making bodies to reception mechanisms, and pervasive fear, *all taken together*, amounts to a virtual enslavement, the creation of a class of intellectual 'living tools'. These are workers whose political and sociological naivety has permitted the unprotesting expropriation (in accordance with classic Taylorian line-management) of the exercise of their professional discretion, or cultural agency. As a result they are for the most part neutered, miserably complicit in the surgery that has been inflicted upon them. Thus deprived, as Nietzsche might have predicted, many academic practitioners now endorse the reduction of all their colleagues to a uniform self-policed mediocrity.¹⁵

To speak theologically, it is at this juncture that a distinction between the *penultimate* and the *ultimate* has been transgressed: the academic profession has been absorbed into the subtle and infinitely invasive web of a totalitarian managerialism, in the face of which many other social factors in a crisis-ridden society are trivial. For those who believe in the distinctive vocation of the university as a 'community of contested discourses', with a role both exploratory and critical in culture and society, and in its own special ways ultimate, this situation is an unnamed – even unnameable catastrophe. The consequence of disagreement with the new status quo is pervasive dissonance; the price of outright dissent may be total institutional and personal isolation – or worse. Yet, as Baroness Mary Warnock remarked with good intent, but to little practical effect:

In a democratic society, we cannot allow the universities to be despised, for it is from the universities that democratic freedom of thought will ultimately find its support.¹⁶

¹⁵ I am able to confirm the truth of the following remark by Karl Kraus, cited by Pierre Bourdieu: 'anyone who rejects the pleasure and easy profits of long distance criticism, in order to investigate his immediate neighbourhood, which everything bids him hold sacred, must expect the torments of "subjective persecution"'. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Mary Warnock, *Universities: Knowing Our Minds. What the Government should do about Higher Education* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p. 43.

This observation, although admirable in principle, has proved more an ironic expression of secular piety than a prediction of outcomes. It is, however, my intention in this chapter to help clear the ground for those with vision, hope – and will – sufficient to seek to reoccupy lost territory and to rebuild. This is therefore a response, if not a fully direct one, to Baroness Warnock, and also, furthermore, to the admirable Lord Conrad Russell, who observes towards the end of his study of academic freedom:

The first question facing academics is whether battery higher education serves some useful purpose. Those who can answer 'yes' to this question may be able to continue to serve, in the hope that some day, the spark they keep alive may be brought out and burst into flame. Those who argue for this course must first explain what the useful purpose served by the expanded Universities will be, for it is only if an answer to this question can be offered that it is possible to engage in a debate with this approach. I will listen with interest to that debate when it begins, but so far, I have heard no justification.¹⁷

In seeking to resist a seemingly victorious enemy we have first to recognise that the purely formal recognition of academic freedom is inadequate inasmuch as it fails to relate the nature of knowledge to the conditions of its production. In the face of government opposition Lord Jenkins of Hillhead moved an Academic Freedom amendment to the Education Reform Bill on 19 May 1988, which was intended to ensure:

The freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at their institutions.

In some tertiary institutions this defence extends to criticism of the organisation of the conditions of the production and transmission of knowledge; in others such freedom is, *de facto*, non-existent. Thus, for example, the staff contract of one of the newest additions to the university sector specifically permits criticism of the management of the institution. Other (ancient and the more modern) universities offer no such freedom, and the clause governing 'dismissal for good cause' will no doubt exercise the ingenuity of academic managers for whom the generation of 'thematic redundancy' may become a fine art. In reality this managerial euphemism means that as course topics follow market fluctuations, so increasingly peripheral short-term-contract academic staff will become disposable items with an equally short shelf-life. My major point is that unless the

¹⁷ Russell, *Academic Freedom*, p. 110.

definition of academic freedom includes certain rights to organise the production and distribution of knowledge in the setting of 'natural rights of the life of the mind', then that freedom is nominal and vacuous.

Universities have never, it may with some confidence be said, been popular. As F. M. Cornford pointed out many years ago in his *Microcosmographia Academica*, this distaste is traceable to antiquity. The politics of *ressentiment* are not new, as we see when Cornford recalled Plato's observations:

'Any one of us might say, that although in words he is not able to meet you at each step of the argument, he sees as a fact that academic persons, when they carry on study, not only in you as a part of education, but as the pursuit of their maturer years, most of them become decidedly queer, not to say rotten; and that those who may be considered the best of them are made useless to the world by the very study that you extol.'

'Well, do you think that those who say so are wrong?'

'I cannot tell', he replied; 'but I should like to know what is your opinion?'

'Hear my answer; I am of the opinion that they are quite right.'¹⁸

As regards the history of the 'idea of the university' there is, of course, no one single conception.¹⁹ Medieval seats of learning were deeply infused with theological culture, and closely modelled upon monastic practice.²⁰ Even when and where the universities developed away from the monastic enclosure of learning, it was only with French absolutism and the Revolution of 1789 that for the first time universities slipped from the control of the church closer to that of an ever more ambitious and power-hungry state. It is interesting to note the ease with which some ancient educational institutions can move silently from the stone cell of pre-modernity to the iron cage of a Taylorised modernity. As C. F. Lamoignon, a member of the Paris Parlement, remarked as early as 1783:

Education should be under the inspection of the public power, because it should be wholly directed toward public utility and the good of the State, and should not suffer from the variable views of private administration.²¹

¹⁸ Plato, *Republic* VI as cited by F. M. Cornford, *Microcosmographia Academica: Being a Guide for the Young Academic Politician* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1908), p. 9.

¹⁹ The literature is considerable: see J. Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1992), for a wide-ranging survey and bibliographical guidance.

²⁰ The sociologist Stewart Clegg provides an excellent commentary upon the creative possibilities of *postmodern* organisation in his inaugural lecture, 'Postmodern Management', St Andrews, 1991.

²¹ Cited by Elie Kedourie in *Perestroika in the Universities* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1989), p. 17.

At the French Revolution, as in our own time, state power and populism may join forces.²² Indeed, *dirigisme* might well have seemed improbable in Britain, say twenty-five years ago, but the government White Paper of 1987, *Meeting the Challenge*, paved the way for a transformation, the so-called 'reform' of the universities:

Higher Education has a crucial role in helping the nation meet the economic challenges of the final decade of this century and beyond.²³

The assimilation of higher education into national planning required, ironically, the effective *nationalisation* of the universities, a revolution from above, the full consequences of which have now been imposed and enacted. We thus stand at a historic juncture in the history of higher education, from where we can begin to discern the outline of the new Panopticon. This may under certain conditions be legitimately depicted as a *prison house of learning*, when, for example, university staff are subjected to the increasingly intimate long-, medium- and short-term regimes of mind control as the precondition of their being permitted to condition, in turn, the student minds they win for processing. Fredric Jameson's resonant argument in *The Prison House of Language* suggests this depiction of the higher education as imprisonment in an imposed discourse, a pervasive *Newspeak* manipulated by a *nomenklatura* of managerial *apparatchiks* whose selection and future prospects tend to depend upon one virtue alone – unfailing compliance.

As regards the historical idea of the university, for present purposes two conceptions are of importance: first, that of John Henry Newman, and his ideas for a teaching body based on the Keble College of his youth, and second, Wilhelm von Humboldt's University of Berlin, and the idea of a research-driven institution built around extraordinary privileges for an elite professorate and the principles of *Freiheit der Forschung; Freiheit der Lehre; Einheit der Forschung und Lehre*. The newer English provincial universities of the nineteenth century and those founded in the Robbins Report

²² G. Flaubert, *Sentimental Education*, cited in Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, p. 159.

²³ *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, Cmnd 1114 (London: HMSO, April 1987), p. iv. Efforts at educational *Gleichschaltung* tend to share a similar rhetorical tone. It is interesting in this regard to record the words of Minister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung Bernhard Rust in his declaration of the new Student Law of 6 May 1933: Wir blicken nunmehr in die Zukunft. Was der Staat in diesem Augenblick tun kann, das tut er heute und wird er in der nächsten Zeit tun. Er wird der deutschen Hochschule einen Lehrkörper reorganisieren, der dann gleichlaufend und gleichgerichtet mit dem Willen der Nation auch die Aufgabe erfüllen kann, die er in seiner Zusammensetzung, wie ich sie am 30. Januar vorfand, nicht zu erfüllen vermochte', cited in Hans-Jochen Gamm, *Führung und Verführung Pädagogik des National-Sozialismus* (Munich: List Bibliothek, 1990), p. 151.

expansion oscillated uneasily between two seemingly incompatible ideals, the collegial intimacy of Newman's vision and the German model of the research-driven university. It is only in the last ten years that this ambiguity has been resolved by the loosening-up of the meaning of the term 'university' so as to include any institution of sufficient size purveying higher education which can, in the current *Newspeak*, demonstrate sufficient 'Quality'. From the Orwellian standpoint, this chapter amounts to *crimethink* directed into the 'untranslatable' zones of human rights and referentiality.²⁴ Yet, I still labour under the seemingly perverse conviction that universities (and, not least, *Scottish* universities) have a number of distinctive functions; they may even have what Alasdair MacIntyre denotes a 'peculiar and essential function'. Let us, however, begin once more with Baroness Warnock, who is (by contemporary standards) refreshingly radical in her approach:

The crucial difference between university and other forms of education lies simply in its necessary connection with research. For at school, sixth-form college or college of higher education, however good teachers may be, they are generally teaching the received wisdom in their subject. They may be critical of this wisdom; they may hold unorthodox or eccentric views. But it is very unlikely that they will themselves be engaged in discovering new things or publishing reasoned objections to orthodox thinking. They are unlikely to have either the time or the resources to enable them to enter new fields. More important, as teachers, their main task will be to help their students to get on to the next stage, and to pass examinations based on the 'received' view of the subject matter. If they do anything else, they fail in their duty. Thus the teacher, who is nothing but a teacher, is inevitably part of a conservative system, academically speaking.²⁵

It is hardly surprising that Conservative administrations (and their New Labour successor) should seek to extend the teaching function so that it becomes an all-embracing effort. Baroness Warnock continues in terms which indicate the wider implications of the imposed change in all the values of the university. For, she argues,

All of our knowledge must be filtered to us, and passed on by us, through the medium of language. It is essential that there should be those, philosophers, theologians, literary critics, linguists and linguists, who are trained to think critically about the relation between language and the world, and between one language and another. It is only through the use of language that we can think coherently and in general terms about either the past or the future.²⁶

²⁴ See 'Appendix: The Principles of *Newspeak*', in G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949), pp. 241–51. See especially p. 251.

²⁵ Warnock, *Knowing our Minds*, p. 21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Moreover, she concludes,

But with the universities it is different: they must be seen as the source of new knowledge, the origin of that critical, undogmatic, imaginative examination of received wisdom without which a country cannot be expected to have its voice heard, and from which ultimately all intellectual standards flow. It is this critical and imaginative function which is in danger, if civil servants and Ministers show themselves unable to accept the authority of the learned, the academic and the scholarly.²⁷

Recent changes in universities imply precisely an abrogation of the absolute duty 'to think critically about the relation between language and the world, and between one language and another' and its displacement by an alien political and managerial prerogative that calls in question the identity and very continuance of the 'university' as opposed to the 'knowledge factory', the 'knowledge outlet' in a 'battery higher education' system. Given the nature of government policy and the unconstrained, ever-expanding remit of the new managerialism, the assumption must be that this critical, truth-seeking function is now perceived to be redundant. In such circumstances the dual allegiance of which MacKinnon wrote, that is to critical thought and to the 'opening up of the frontiers of the unknown that calls out one's energies' becomes a burden, indeed a positive disability in this new world of the top-down, intellectually managed, 'Quality'-encircled 'battery university' delivering 'mass higher education'.²⁸ It is this freedom that is foreclosed, as we shall see, through the imposition of self-administered and humiliating constraints.

By contrast, then, with Baroness Warnock's optimistic Eurocentric traditionalism, the following is but one example of the questionable and politically motivated (yet basically unchallenged) redefinition of the idea of the university. Lord Chilvers asserted in 1988 that

Every university in its charter is required to disseminate knowledge and, it's a very important point, that knowledge must be universally applicable. That's the meaning of the word university.²⁹

What this actually meant is that the universal dissemination and application of knowledge is the test on the basis of which the retention or elimination of an institution from the category 'university' should be decided. This is a misleading, indeed a perverse, account of the role of

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁸ MacKinnon, 'Theology as a Discipline', p. 169.

²⁹ Lord Chilvers, *Times Higher Educational Supplement* 14 October, 1988.

knowledge in the university which fails to consider the conditions of its production. Once more we may draw a critical parallel. John Henry Newman was on solid ground when he characterised the university as a corporation, and speaking in front of a Catholic audience (keen, as is the present government, to extend its influence), he maintained that

As to the range of University teaching, certainly the very name of the University is inconsistent with restrictions of any kind. Whatever was the original reason of the adoption of that term, which is unknown, I am only putting on it its popular, its recognised sense, when I say that a University should teach universal knowledge. That there is a real necessity for this universal teaching in the highest schools of intellect, I will show by-and-by; here it is sufficient to say that such universality is considered by writers on the subject to be characteristic of a University, as contrasted with other seats of learning. Thus Johnson, in his Dictionary, defines it to be 'a school where all arts and faculties are taught'.³⁰

The enclosure and constraint associated with mass higher education should not surprise us. The massification of higher education involves elaborate modular systems and functionaries who orchestrate their day-to-day operation. This fits all too well the Franco-American theorist Jean Baudrillard's depiction of the 'philosophy of lack of will' characteristic of mass-systems. The full implications of this understanding of the consequences of massification have yet to be successfully ingested by an academic profession that has largely accepted the new role of higher education as the processing of student bio-mass. Baudrillard describes this craven mentality as 'a sort of radical antimetaphysics whose secret is that the masses are deeply aware that they do not have to make a decision about themselves and the world; that they do not have to wish; that they do not have to know; that they do not have to desire'.³¹ Baudrillard's epistemological critique fits the conception of the university as the knowledge outlet and of the academic as purveyor of modules to the 'customers' who browse through course catalogues. Responsibility to the 'natural rights of the mind' has been displaced by the extrinsically managed circulation of complex 'signs' in a controlled, closed system. Baudrillard argues as follows:

In this revolution, the two aspects of value [i.e. use and exchange] which sometimes used to be thought of as coherent and eternally linked, as if by natural law, are disarticulated; *referential value is nullified, giving the advantage to the structural*

³⁰ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New York: Chelsea House, 1983), p. 19.

³¹ 'The Masse: The Implosion of the Social in the Media', in Mark Poster (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), p. 215.

play of value. The structural dimension, in other words, gains autonomy, to the exclusion of the referential dimension, establishing itself on the death of the latter. Gone are the referentials of production, signification, affect, substance, history, and the whole equation of 'real' contents that gave the sign weight by anchoring it with a kind of burden of utility – in short its form as representative equivalent. All this is surpassed by the other stage of value, that of total relativity, generalised commutative, combinatory simulation. This means that simulation in the sense that from now on signs will exchange among themselves exclusively, without interacting with the real (and this becomes the condition for their smooth operation). The emancipation of the sign: released from any 'archaic' obligation it might have had to designate something, the sign is at last free for a structural or combinatory play that succeeds the previous role of determinate equivalence.³²

On first sight this may seem an obscure text, but its significance will become clearer when we explore the system of managerial control, Quality Audit and programme specification. For the moment, however, the reader is invited to substitute the word 'module' for 'sign' in the foregoing passage and to relate this back to Bonhoeffer's conception of the 'real' and its place in the coming into full humanity of the life of the mind. In fact, the success of the university as knowledge outlet requires the most complete uniformity and predictability of modules that can be attained; thus the modules become the equivalent, in Baudrillard's terms, of non-referential 'signs' circulating in a closed economy. In this system of exchange, 'permission' must be sought to alter modules and/or modify the political economy of the module in any respect. Thus, for example, academic staff have to show evidence of the *approval* of external examiners before any minor modification or updating of a course can be submitted for scrutiny by faculty committees, who then in turn may (or may not) allow a change (however small) to be made. This is not a system of consultation, but one of *control* based upon the pervasive but undeclared assumption of the universal incompetence and untrustworthiness of academic staff. This is the Panopticon reborn; an alien interest directs the production and distribution of knowledge.

Startling, perhaps, but congruent with this analysis, is the right-wing commentator Sir Douglas Hague, who outlined a vision of the 'knowledge industry' in a booklet that relishes venomous resentment and oozes a desire to humiliate an enemy long held in contempt:

We are approaching a new Hollywood era. Some UK academics are television mini-stars already. So, even more, are international (or US stars). This will

³² J. Baudrillard, 'Symbolic Exchange and Death', in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, p. 125.

become a very well-paid profession for those with internationally acceptable talent. There will, therefore, have to be programme producers as well as impresarios since knowledge is now being packaged. This really is 'show-biz' – and universities are hopeless at that!³³

Whereas Sir Douglas Hague's tone is often rumbustiously offensive, one may nevertheless have a little sympathy with his impatience at the shortcomings of some institutions and individuals. Hague's vision of the 'electronic cloning' of those designated as the best teachers and of the 'shamrock organisation' (a conception dependent upon the ideas of the management guru Sir Charles Handy³⁴) is spelt out below in structural terms:

What will the university be? The short answer is that it will become a base for a diverse set of people and activities . . . the 'shamrock' organisation, which is now seen as typical of businesses in the 1990s, not least in the knowledge industries. The shamrock has three parts – hence its name: a professional core, a contractual fringe and a flexible labour force.³⁵

In relation to this kind of attack upon the ethical and 'theological' dimension of their life-task, intellectuals and academics (those to whom Bertold Brecht might have referred to as *Kopf-Arbeiter*) are in a peculiarly difficult situation because of the comprehensively internalised nature of their socialisation and the self-willed abrogation of any simple or obvious public-private, work-home delimitation of spheres. This means that the removal of autonomy involves a profound invasion of selfhood, precisely because the opening and reconfiguration of the self has been the necessary condition of competence and effective professionalisation. One very considerable problem associated with academics unused to reflexive analysis is a tendency to divorce the activities involved in the creation and distribution of their knowledge from context, and to be paralysed by a fragile personal individualism which has proved utterly incapable of effective resistance. As it is now argued that individual rights have to be complemented by communitarian cultural rights, so correspondingly it is important to argue for the rights of trained, professional workers to participate in the constitution of the condition and character of their labour. Faced with this external assault a reader might have anticipated a ruthless self-appraisal, new forms of collective organisation and an aggressive

³³ Sir Douglas Hague, *Beyond Universities: A New Republic of the Intellect* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1989), p. 59.

³⁴ See Charles Handy, 'The Shamrock Organisation', *The Age of Unreason* (London: Arrow, 1989), ch. 4.

³⁵ Hague, *Beyond Universities*, p. 57.

response on the part of those who are of a mind to offer themselves in this labour market; this response has not been forthcoming.

So far we have concentrated upon the context and history of the university revolution from above. In order to illustrate this we shall subject to content and rhetorical analysis a brief but wholly representative document. Thus the Principal's *Annual Report* of 1992–3 projected the image of the University of St Andrews into a global market-place. It was, as Professor Struther Arnott, an able and accomplished orator, implied in glossing his own text, a review of progress delivered 'not entirely tongue-in-cheek, to our new "shareholders" at the July 1993 Graduation':

I am the current Chief Executive of the St Andrews University enterprise, a company which must command respect since it has been trading continuously for 583 years. You will recollect that we started business in 1410 as a subsidiary of the Universal Church which had been a major business in St Andrews for more than 600 years before. A competing attraction, golf, had come to St Andrews just before we were set up. Whether we were installed to be an alternative or an additional attraction I am not sure.³⁶

The Chief Executive goes on to speak of a 'major board room row' between 'our parent company over its Chief Executive, the Pope', of 'trading without a licence', the 'loss of an exclusive franchise', and of 'our market diminishing', 'restructuring', and 'restricting St Mary's College to special products' (as it happens, this was divinity), and so on. This document is extraordinary in that it does far more than risk a few oblique figurative allusions to 'raw material' (new students sourced from primary suppliers – the parents), 'value-adding' (what happens to the student at university) and the 'product' (the graduate) as is now fairly normal practice amongst principals and vice-chancellors in British higher education. Principal Arnott has the honest arrogance to unfold a comprehensive vision of the university as 'business', continuing in a similar vein with 'headquarters', 'special products', 'business recovery', 'up and down cycle', 'booming', 'drawing down prices', 'our company has a good designer label, a special market niche and good company policy summed up in two Greek words, which, when suitably translated, tell us "Always Strive for High Quality" (*Aien aristeuein*)'.

The Chief Executive's assimilation of the University's ancient motto into the discourse of 'Quality Audit' is absolutely crucial: it is here that the link between the business discourse and the realities of managerial control

³⁶ Principal Struther Arnott, 'Six Centuries of Service – The Principal's Report', *University of St Andrews Annual Report 1992–3*, p. 4.

is forged at the point at which the revolutionary transition has to be expressed. It is on the basis of the analysis of this public discourse that we may begin to unfold the practical consequences of the functionalisation of an invasive metaphor, the self-replicating virus that now infects the whole higher education system. Thus we shall begin to understand the formal structure that increasingly dictates the function. As prime articulator of a business culture, the Chief Executive would appear to straddle both worlds – but for how long? At this juncture, George Orwell's commentary on the problems of relating 'Oldspeak' to 'Newspeak' becomes relevant:

When Oldspeak had been once for all superseded, the last link with the past would have been severed. History had already been rewritten, but fragments of the literature of the past survived here and there, imperfectly censored, and so long as one retained one's knowledge of Oldspeak it was possible to read them. In the future such fragments, even if they chanced to survive, would be unintelligible and untranslatable. It was impossible to translate any passage of Oldspeak into Newspeak unless it referred to some technical process or some very simple everyday action, or it was already orthodox (*goodthinkful* would be the Newspeak expression) in tendency. . . . Pre-revolutionary literature could only be subjected to ideological translation – that is, alteration in sense as well as language. (pp. 250–1)

Orwell proceeds to argue that, for example, the sense of the opening passage of the Declaration of Human Rights, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .', would be untranslatable from Oldspeak to Newspeak without a fundamental change of meaning. The very notion of the existence of 'inalienable rights', amongst which are 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' would constitute an obstruction to enforced change, analogous I would submit, to the untranslatability of Bonhoeffer's 'natural rights of the life of the mind' into the contemporary 'reformed' university context at present under consideration.

It is interesting to note that whilst the Dean of Arts in his later contribution to the same St Andrews *Report* apparently sought to hold a balance, we nevertheless begin to become aware of the nature of the changes involved, and of the incommensurability of both discourses and practices:

Resource management constitutes the canonical text of the policy-makers of higher Education, many say to the detriment of the humanistic values that should govern our attitudes to knowledge and learning. Nevertheless, let no one deny that good management is a prerequisite for effective teaching and research. To this end . . . [a whole series of structural changes originating with Executive *fiat* are then reported].³⁷

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

In rhetorical terms it is once again important to note the juxtaposition of the 'many say' (those muted voices who feebly protest the integrity of higher education?) with the assertive – even threatening – 'let no one deny'. We must remember that in a line-managed (but basically medieval) university the academic staff were in terms of their oath the *servi universitatis*, the servants or 'slaves' of the University, whose views did not need to be taken into account. In effect, even in the discourse employed to comprehend the motivation of all stake-holders a balance is not maintained: the managerial prerogative is dominant. Thus the Dean of Arts reported that departments have been combined into Schools in order to secure the 'good management' alluded to above, but the continued existence of disciplinary difference in these seven units was to be tolerated solely 'because it was felt that the humanist disciplines could not yield up their separateness without loss to [*sic*] their uniqueness and reputation'.³⁸ It is once more important to note the juxtaposition of the impersonal agency: an 'it' has decided; but the result, a 'yielding', is the language of an enforcement that lies beyond seduction – this is the verbal trace left by the institutional violation of academic and personal integrity.

In the representative institution under consideration *all* significant positions within the academic body (excepting the disempowered deans of faculties, who, far from exercising their traditional role of representing the interests of academic colleagues, were now to police controls on behalf of government-imposed schemes of oversight) have been emancipated from their elected status and reconstituted as appointed posts held strictly within the gift of the Chief Executive. This involved not only the abolition of the principle of the separation of powers essential to democratic practice, but also, most unfortunately, an endangering of the rule of law, because 'law' tended also to become a plastic creature of Executive prerogative. The inevitable result was the emergence of a *nomenklatura* who owed unquestioning allegiance to one individual. Traditional structures that assured a measure of dispersed power were modified so as to facilitate the efficiency of centralised decision-making. In that same Scottish university, for example, the Chief Executive confined all members of Senate to a single comment (duly recorded by the clerks for the future use of the Executive) on any one item of business. With the removal of the right to reply there was no need for debate; and without, in effect, the right to take decisions (Senate having become

³⁸ *Ibid.*

a mere opinion-gathering mechanism, a sounding-board on behalf of the all-powerful Executive) debate becomes pointless: meetings are usually completed in less than half an hour. In the absence of any meaningful separation of powers there could be no meaningful possibility of the publicly expressed disagreement that ought to be the *sine qua non* of intelligent decision-making in a university. The problem is yet again not simply one of discourses in collision: structural changes are required in order to secure the transition from historic university to standardised knowledge outlet.

The centrepiece of the new 'circuit of power'³⁹ imposed upon British universities and higher education is the so-called Quality Standard, the implementation of which has helped give rise to a highly invasive, self-propagating jargon that now inhabits many areas of academic discourse. The Quality Standard BS5750 speaks of

A systematic and independent examination to determine whether quality activities and related results comply with planned arrangements, are implemented effectively and are suitable to achieve objectives.⁴⁰

We may summarise the associated circuit of power in the following terms.⁴¹ The scheme consists of three main elements: (a) Quality Audit; (b) Quality Enhancement; (c) Credit and Accessibility. 'Standards' now in reality belong to a superseded life-world pertaining to academics and their assumed sphere of influence, but in terms of real power standards have been displaced by 'Quality'. Whereas 'Standards' are concerned with levels of achievement set against objective criteria, 'Quality' concerns fitness of purpose, in a context in which purpose is related to managerial prerogative. The result, as argued earlier, is the elision of referentiality.

In consequence, 'Quality control' as it effects university teaching and learning syllabuses is an operational function applied at all levels by an institution to its teaching activities, and is concerned in detail with the way these are organised, undertaken and evaluated. 'Quality assurance', by comparison, is concerned with the way in which a university exercises

³⁹ See Stewart R. Clegg, *Frameworks of Power* (London: Sage, 1989) for a sophisticated account of the nature of power in contemporary societies.

⁴⁰ There are several guides to the implementation of BS5750 and ISO9000: see for example, Lesley Munro-Fauré, Malcolm Munro-Fauré and Edward Bones, *Achieving Quality Standards: A Step-by-Step Guide to BS5750 and ISO9000* (London: Pitman, 1993).

⁴¹ Here we rely upon an introductory talk to academic middle managers given in St Andrews by Peter Adam, then Chief Executive of National Academic Audit. The regulatory regimes and the attendant bodies continue to proliferate, but the basic intentions remain unchanged.

its corporate responsibility for its programmes, courses and qualifications. Through a systemic sleight of hand Quality Audit assumes the existence of the institution's own aims and objectives and is thus ostensibly value-free. Audit does not express views on the appropriateness of these institutional goals. Academic staff are, however, caught between a mechanism (one of an ever-increasing number of such mechanisms) designed to enforce uniformity and an authority that defines those aims and objectives that the Quality Audit seeks to enforce. In effect, the cultural agency and practices and the responsible academic freedom of the university researcher and teacher are conveniently elided between the mutual disavowals of the ruling partners: the jam in the sandwich is squeezed to the point of residual flavour!

The seven questions put by Quality Audit – : (1) What are you trying to do?; (2) Why are you trying to do it?; (3) How are you trying to do it? (4) Why are trying to do it that way?; (5) Why do you think that is the best way of doing it?; (6) How do you know it works?; (7) How do you approve it? – may seem reasonable enough taken on their own in a de-contextualised way, but in reality they run into two major sets of difficulties. On the one hand, the context of their enactment involves the corporate setting of aims and objectives by a collegially unaccountable 'management' or 'Executive' and a series of other controls which turn apparently useful questions into an oppressive and stultifying system of *self-policing*. On the other hand, this forms part of a comprehensive framework in which the preparation, validation and delivery mechanisms, together with the *subsequent* audit of delivery, are not only increasingly time-consuming but also tend inevitably to sever any remaining connections between research and teaching. The abrogation of the latter link weakens any remaining links with a European, in particular with the great Humboldtian, conception of the university built upon the principles of *Freiheit der Forschung; Freiheit der Lehre; Einheit der Forschung und Lehre*.⁴²

An arbitrary check list of measures necessary to secure 'Quality' includes the following: the approval, validation and review of programmes of study and of the teaching, learning and communication processes; student assessment and classification procedures; staff development, training, appraisal and enhancement (with competence – perhaps *compliance* rewards might be a more accurate depiction); verification, 'feedback' and enhancement procedures; research assessment exercises, and so on,

⁴² On German universities, see Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der deutschen Universität: Die fünf Grundschriften aus der Zeit ihrer Neubegründung durch klassischen Idealismus und romantischen Realismus* (Darmstadt: H. Gentner, 1956).

all of which require evidential records in order to protect practitioners. As a result cultural agency does not expire through any single explicit prohibition but dies by a thousand administrative qualifications, each of which weakens the will of a given individual to exist as a critical and questioning intellect. The effect is *cumulative*, and escape comes only through privilege, sacrificial resistance – or departure.

In more general terms, we need to recall an idea of central importance in the last chapter, the assertion that modern line-management involves the ceding and loss of agency. As the management sage Peter Drucker informs us, now the time of 'modern management' has finally come as it is applied to the life of the mind.⁴³ Frederick W. Taylor argued the following, and this text is reproduced for a second time so that its contextual significance may be fully appreciated:

Under the old type of management, success depends almost entirely upon getting the 'initiative' of the workman, and it is indeed a rare case in which this initiative is really attained. Under scientific management the 'initiative' of the workmen (that is their hard work, their goodwill and their ingenuity) is obtained with absolute uniformity and to a greater extent than is possible under the old system; and in addition to this improvement on the part of the men, the managers assume new burdens, new duties and responsibilities never dreamed of in the past. The managers assume, for instance, the burden of gathering together of the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workman and then of classifying, tabulating and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws and formulae which are immensely helpful to the workmen in doing their daily work.⁴⁴

Most academics seem to have passed uncomprehending and silent to their intellectual slaughter; fatally they have neglected to investigate, in accordance with the canonical criteria of their own vocation, that is with critical and above all, *critically reflexive* thought, the weapons of the enemy. Taylor is explicit; his ideas have been transposed virtually without the need for meaningful translation into the context under consideration. Once more, it is salutary to think out the parallel between the following and the redefined 'task' of the esrtwhile academic:

Perhaps the most prominent single element in modern scientific management is the task idea. The work of every workman is fully planned out by the

⁴³ See Peter F. Drucker, 'From Capitalism to Knowledge Society', *Post-Capitalist Society* (London: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1993), ch. 1.

⁴⁴ Frederick W. Taylor, 'The Principles of Scientific Management', in Victor H. Vroom and Edward L. Deci (eds.), *Management and Motivation: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970; 2nd edn, 1992), p. 357.

management at least one day in advance, [but academic audit mechanisms require absolute predictability upto a *year* in advance!] and each man receives in most cases complete written instruction, describing in detail the task which he is to accomplish, as well as the means to be used in doing the work. And the work planned in advance in this way constitutes a task which is to be solved, as explained above, not by the workman alone, but in almost all cases by the joint effort of the workman and the management. This task specifies not only what is to be done but how it is to be done and the exact time for doing it.⁴⁵

Where in this, we may ask, is there space for the ‘democratic intellect’? In an era characterised in managerial terms by lack of honour and trust, total ‘scientific’ control and repeated ‘reforms’ and regular reviews designed to remove any surplus intellectual capacity that might be available for critical reflection on basic axioms, the old system cannot survive except as a dynamic (and penalised) archaism. Any alternative would require an institutional and systemic will to resist. The old system based on implicit trust, the stability necessary for long-term work, and relatively slow, reflected change has been extinguished without any effective protest. Articulation of a critical reflexivity capable of responding to the invasion and functionalisation of alien metaphors is not, however, without cost. Here we may draw some guidance from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in his book *Homo Academicus*. Bourdieu exposes the resistance academics feel to the articulation of their condition:

To understand in this case is difficult only because we understand far too well, in a manner of speaking, and because we do not wish to see or know what it is we understand. Thus it is that the easiest thing can also be the most difficult because, as Wittgenstein says, ‘The problem of understanding language is connected with the problem of the Will.’ Sociology, which of all sciences is the best placed to know the limits of the ‘intrinsic form of the true idea’, knows that the force of the resistances which will be opposed to it will be very exactly commensurate with the ‘problems of the will’ which it has managed to overcome.⁴⁶

The observations made in this chapter should not be construed as the repudiation of a proper place for *appropriate* modes of accountability. What is required is the restoration of a proper balance between a transferred managerial and commercial model on the one side and the proper aims and objectives and the corporate and individual goals of the university *qua* university with its attendant ethical implications on the other. What has been created in British higher education are closed

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

⁴⁶ Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, p. 35.

‘circuits of power’ in which agency is concentrated and centralised, the division of powers and the preservation of proper spheres of competence abrogated, and the integrity and interests of academic staff not merely reduced, but forcibly reconfigured.

As we have seen, it is in the progressive and relentless accumulation of small things that the oppression of the new prison house of learning is most truly felt. In contrast with the trends of assimilation into the managerialised educational delivery mechanisms we may set a distinctively Scottish vision of the university drawn from the reflection of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. I do not have the space in this chapter to spell out all the aspects and implications of this conception, but it is my contention that an institution which does not in general terms permit the positive application of the following principles to the critical examination of the conditions of the production of knowledge fails in its claim to be a university. MacIntyre argues that:

The beginning of any worthwhile answer to such questions, posed by an external critic, as ‘What are universities for?’ or ‘What peculiar goods do universities serve?’ should be, ‘They are, when they are true to their own vocation, institutions within which questions of the form ‘What are x’s for?’ and ‘What peculiar goods do y’s serve?’ are formulated and answered in the best rationally defensible way.’ That is to say, when it is demanded of a university community that it justify itself by specifying what its peculiar and essential function is, that function which, if it were not to exist, no other institution could discharge, the response of the community ought to be that universities are places where conceptions of and standards of rational justification are elaborated, put to work in the detailed practices of enquiry, and themselves rationally evaluated, so that only from the university can the wider society learn how to conduct its own debates, practical or theoretical, in a rationally defensible way. But that claim can be plausibly and justifiably advanced only when and insofar as the university is a place where rival and antagonistic views of rational justification, such as those of genealogists and Thomists (and, we might add, rival systems of human resources management – RHR), are afforded the opportunity both to develop their own enquiries, in practice and in the articulation of the theory of that practice, and to conduct their own intellectual and moral warfare.⁴⁷

MacIntyre proceeds to conclude that: ‘It is precisely because universities have not been such places and have in fact organized enquiry through institutions and genres well designed to prevent them and protect them from being such places that the official responses of both the appointed

⁴⁷ MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 222.

leaders and the working members of university communities to their recent critics have been so lamentable.' It is precisely the compound tendency of recent university 'reforms' to prevent precisely that evaluation of rival and antagonistic modes of justification which nullifies the claim of many proliferating higher education outlets to the cultural status of the true university.

As in religion, so in the realm of the democratic intellect, there is a hierarchy of truths and responsibilities: now is the moment to recover our integral mission and service to an ideal, to the community, and to the people whom we are privileged to serve through teaching and supervision. To speak theologically, a distinction between the *penultimate* and the *ultimate* has been breached. For those who believe in the distinctive vocation of the university as a 'community of contested discourses', a role which is exploratory and critical and in its own way ultimate, the present situation is a grievous affront. The consequences of disagreement are pervasive dissonance, and the price of dissent may (at the very least) be total isolation or what amounts to constructive dismissal.

Fear is often widespread; there is an inner constraint reminiscent, in my view, of the post-totalitarian condition as it is described by Vaclav Havel in 'The Power of the Powerless'. Havel's argument concerns the moral and personal consequences that await those who adopt and enact ideologies in which they do not believe and which they *know to be wrong*. Academics who enforce 'modern management' upon themselves and their peers are the *greengrocers* of our society. In Havel's terms, they post slogans in their shop windows in which they do not believe, and they piously hope that there will be no problems as a result. Consequently, as Milan Kundera puts it, they are purveyors of *kitsch*.⁴⁸ In reality, the loss is not merely a loss of moral authority, but an evacuation of the personality and character. Social evolution may go into reverse: sometime vertebrates revert to empty crustaceans fighting blindly for their territory and the perpetuation of their academic genes. Havel describes a situation which I believe we now face in the era of triumphant capitalism and managerial aggregation:

The profound crisis of human identity brought on by living within a lie, a crisis which in turn makes such a life possible, certainly possesses a moral dimension as well; it appears, among other things, as a deep moral crisis in society. A person who has been seduced by the consumer value system, whose identity is dissolved

⁴⁸ See Andrew Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Shanks draws upon Kundera's conception of kitsch as 'the absolute denial of shit': kitsch is the readiness to celebrate a revolution and dance on the day that good poets are hanged.

in an amalgam of the accoutrements of mass civilization, and who has no roots in the order of being, no sense of responsibility for anything higher than his or her own personal survival, is a *demoralized* person. The system depends on this demoralization, deepens it, is in fact a projection of it into society.⁴⁹

As we have argued throughout, this is not merely a sociological or psychological problem; it is also ethical and even theological. The re-creation of critical reflexivity on the part of the academic profession will involve individual and collective responses and above all a willingness to engage in a comprehensive and careful analysis of the nature, transmission and exchange of cultural capital. In the final analysis three principles are at stake. First there is the *principle of enlightenment: sapere aude!* Dare to know! Have the courage, as Kant says, to use your own understanding: that is, in the present context, critical thought applied to the conditions of the production of knowledge. Second, there is the *principle of the authority of traditions*, that is the continuity of ideas and reflection that society and the thinker and teacher are responsible to. In the formulation, study and propagation of rival traditions (which may well and usually do conflict) there is a legitimate authority inherent in the individual and corporation that possesses and exercises the relevant competences. As Professor Lord Russell points out, the doctor should not expect a manager to dictate the time of discharge after an appendectomy.⁵⁰ Third, there is the *principle of responsible autonomy and critical reflexivity*, which is a contemporary way of referring our attention back to the responsibilities outlined by Bonhoeffer as they concern the 'natural rights of the life of the mind'.

Having started out in our sketch of a tenable idea of the university with a lengthy quotation from Alasdair MacIntyre, we conclude with a passage from T. S. Eliot, who, in arguing for an elitism that subsequently proved to be unpopular (for different reasons) with both the Right and the Left, nevertheless put his finger upon an important truth: too much power should never reside in too few hands. Indeed, at a time when the principle of the separation of powers is scarcely recognised in Britain, especially in higher education, Eliot argued for the indispensability of *friction*:

At this point I introduce a new notion: that of the vital importance for a society of *friction* between its parts . . . in any society which became permanently established in either a caste or a classless system, the culture would decay . . . an indefinite number of conflicts and jealousies which should be profitable to society. Indeed,

⁴⁹ Vaclav Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless', p. 62.

⁵⁰ Russell, *Academic Freedom*, p. 70.

the more the better: so that everyone should be an ally of everyone else in some respects, and an opponent in several others, and no one conflict, envy or fear will dominate.⁵¹

MacIntyre and Eliot are at one in recognising that it is not only the university but modern society as well which must exist as a community of contested discourses. The alternative to such discursive encounter is cultural cleansing with a view to creating a rational monoculture, whether secured by physical terror or by the pervasive fear that now infects many reaches of higher education (and other areas of society too). Bureaucratic, administrative and intellectual *Gleichschaltung* has subverted the critical intellect and has virtually paralysed the cultural agency of the universities and thus deprived a whole people of the fuller realisation of the active democratic intellect.

In short, each reader who aspires to be an active proponent of the university ideal defended in this chapter has to ask himself or herself the questions: how can I teach someone to think critically if I have uncritically submitted to a system in which I do not believe? Can a professor in an ancient university who is systematically stripped of her or his legitimate authority and subjected to the normalisation and forcibly organised mediocrity of a line-managed 'Quality'-controlled environment do other than respond to the inspiration of figures in the tradition worthy of respect, and denounce corruption? This is a rot that seeps from the top down which has then tragically mingled with the decay that has risen from atrophied and enfeebled roots. In such an environment a Donald MacKinnon would not merely be unwelcome – he would have become an impossibility.

⁵¹ T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber, 1948).

PART 2

*Theology and power in the matrix
of modernity / postmodernity*