The Lure of Novelty and the Disappearance of the Public Intellectual:
Thoughts on the Culture Wars [1]

by
Guy V. Beckwith

Auburn University

Abstract: Scholarly discourse has become a chaos of contending viewpoints, due in large part to the growing influence of multiculturalism, deconstruction, and postmodernism. These movements impede efforts to connect the disciplines and to bridge the chasm between the academy and the general public. Going beyond a fashionable postmodern skepticism, and building up a resistance to intellectual faddism in general, will require resisting the market-driven lure of novelty, re-emphasizing rigorous integrative concepts and methods, and fostering the embryonic communitarianism of the intellect that exists beneath the agitated surface of contemporary academic life.

This is a disturbing and disorienting time in the history of the scholarly profession. The academy has become a modern-day Babel: a chaos of conflicting voices and perspectives, made more aggressive in their particularity by three crucial developments: the rise of deconstructionist and postmodern modes of interpretation; the emergence of the movement known as multiculturalism; and the disarray on the intellectual left coincident with the fall of the Soviet state.[2] These forces have contributed to a perhaps unprecedented fragmentation of scholarly discourse—a balkanization of the intellect—for which the image of the damned hosts of Babel, locked into the isolation of separate languages, seems almost too perfect.

Not that the academic world spoke a single language or enjoyed a strong consensus prior to these movements. Those who have pursued interdisciplinarity over the years know only too well that the academy was already fragmented into often jealous and competitive disciplines acting on the premise that reality was somehow organized into clearly marked areas that were their particular fields of study. Each discipline insisted on the sovereign right to develop its own special language and its own analytical methods. Interdisciplinary studies rose up as a response to this highly artificial situation. But efforts to bridge the disciplines have been unable to arrest the larger trend, which has been toward ever greater division and separation: disciplines have themselves divided and subdivided, and although interesting collaborations do occur, what we ordinarily see is the isolation and narrowness of the discipline re-established on an ever smaller, subdisciplinary scale. As historian Page Smith (1990) remarked:

> The comparison of the situation in the scholarly world with the Tower of Babel is an apt one. The Tower of Babel was characterized by a "confusion of tongues": people could not understand each other, for they all spoke different languages. Could we have a better analogy to the academic world today, with specialization piled on specialization and no one in one field able to speak intelligibly with his colleagues in other fields? (p. 189)

Yet now, on top of this old and sadly familiar mapmaker's nightmare of disciplinary and subdisciplinary boundaries, we find new and bolder lines of difference and demarcation imposed by postmodern and multicultural theory, which generally act to intensify and even to celebrate the "confusion of tongues." Not only does this new situation constitute a setback for integrative studies as carried on by workaday practitioners in our colleges and universities; it also threatens to destroy a tradition of generalist scholarship to which we have all looked, at times, for inspiration. I am thinking of those influential public scholars like Lewis Mumford, Lionel Trilling, and Kenneth Boulding, who have been able over long careers to build bridges between disciplines and traditions, in support not only of vital scholarship but of genuine public enlightenment. Many fear that as thinkers such as these disappear, few if any will take their places, because we have created, or blundered into, an academic environment increasingly hostile to the kind of synthetic and interdisciplinary work they did. If this is the case—if we are witnessing the disappearance or marginalization of

the public scholar—it is a tragic occurrence for interdisciplinarians in particular and for the life of the mind in general.

The movement popularly known as multiculturalism provides a good example of the process of accelerated fragmentation. This movement, which began with quite admirable notions of toleration and mutual recognition, is now pushed to chauvinistic extremes, fostering real confusion where it does not foster even darker emotions. The resurgence of racism in the U.S. cannot be explained by multiculturalism, but it finds an echo in its more radical forms: behaviors that signify the grossest kind of segregation in the corner drug store are demanded in the name of ethnic pride and respect on college campuses. I refer to the bizarre resegregation of dormitories and other facilities justified in the language of multicultural theory (Schlesinger, 1992, pp. 103-4). Other forms of multiculturalism, more moderate and rational, are clearly possible, with intellectual roots in the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This movement rejected the abstract universalism and cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment in favor of national and ethnic particularism, and did much to bring folk culture to the attention of the educated as worthy of study and preservation. But the great Romantics never completely abandoned a sense of common humanity grounding and transcending the development of cultural differences; they could, in poetry and in their philosophic writings, attempt a mediation between the universal and the particular. In other words, they remained within the general tradition of humanism, even as they expanded the sense of the value of particularity and multiplicity (Barnes, 1963, pp. 178-81; Collingwood, 1972, pp. 86-88). The weakness of our multicultural ideologists is that they have lost that sense of underlying connection and kinship. Or, to put it another way —and this may be the more accurate description—the old humanism has become so weak, so difficult to credit, after nearly two centuries of sustained critical attacks and several centuries of unparalleled bloodshed and brutality, that the possibility of a common humanity and a strong sense of universal kinship is rejected immediately as contrary to our most profound historical experiences (cf. Stromberg, 1981, pp. 301-2). Thus even otherwise defensible varieties of multiculturalism may tend to neglect the possibility for real communication across ethnic and cultural boundaries, and this bias itself foster the lack of understanding it presupposes and predicts. As a result, historically justified or no, multiculturalism creates new barriers to cross-group identification and communication. The more it succeeds in convincing people that their ethnic cultures are their primary

reality, and that indeed their identities are defined and determined by ethnicity, the easier it will be to accept the personal corollary: that *my* experiences and selfhood can only be shared and understood and given real recognition by a member of my in-group. This tribalization of society is reflected in the discipline I know best, history, by the insistence that courses on particular groups and their histories can only really be taught by members of those groups—otherwise their unique "voices" and perspectives will be lost (Schlesinger, p. 105).

This position has a kind of surface plausibility. We would all agree that one cannot understand the experience of another unless one has some entree to that experience. To observe it from outside and judge it by some external criterion is to practice a false kind of scientific method, since in humans and human events it is the inside—the emotions and thoughts, the decisions and plans, the subjectivity "in and for itself"—that really matters. But literal membership in a group is not the only way to get "inside"; to believe so is to be literal-minded with a vengeance. And being a pure insider introduces epistemological limits of its own. It is only by an oscillation between the insider/outsider perspectives that one has both the raw material to know and the critical distance to know. This noetic oscillation is at the heart of real insight and discovery.[3]

So if our whole purpose becomes to let previously suppressed voices through, and to let them multiply, we are not only scraping away prejudice and obscuring interpretations, but leaving interpretation behind and returning to the chaos it was meant to comprehend. In effect we are returning to the raw materials of history, which F. H. Bradley (1935) called "a host of jarring witnesses, a chaos of disjointed and discrepant narratives" (p. 9). But we are now claiming that the raw materials, expanded in number, are the final product. Only the most radical historical skepticism could accept this situation—and radical skepticism is self-contradictory (Appleby, Hunt & Jacob, 1994, pp. 246-47; Gitlin, 1995, pp. 200-210).[4] We cannot leave the voices of the excluded in their raw multiplicity and mutual contradiction, or merely juxtapose them with the old "Dead White Male" voices in a democracy of babble, without draining the voices themselves of their right to substantial, determinate content which would take up a logical position as correlated with or contradictory of the content of competing voices. A position of radical tolerance without judgment is neither just nor kind, but an underhanded way of robbing each standpoint of its possibility of real significance in itself, and of the possibility of moving beyond itself into the higher significance of mature

intersubjectivity in the community of intelligent and communicative beings (Knox, 1993, p. 21). No dialogue or dialectic can arise from a merely quantitative tolerance of positions (Jay, 1988, pp. 39-40).

   If some strong form of multiculturalism is true—or any form of radical pluralism or perspectivism, for that matter, be it based on ethnicity, gender, class, religious identification, nationality, or ideology—then, speaking for my own discipline, historians have been wasting a lot of time—about 2,500 years' worth—convincing themselves they can write meaningfully about Spartan history or Persian history or German or British history, or the history of the Amish, without being Spartans or Germans or Amish—or that one can write general histories of regions or complex cultures at all. Add a temporal dimension to this extraordinary logic and we soon find ourselves denying that a person of the late twentieth century can under-stand a person or a community of the late nineteenth, or eighteenth, or seventeenth, ad infinitum (and ad absurdum). Real history will have to wait until our resuscitative techniques improve and we can resurrect some fifth-century Spartans and nineteenth-century Germans to write their histories for us—so little credit is now given to the powers of empathy and historical reconstruction once celebrated by people like Mumford, Collingwood, and Toynbee.

   I have no complaint with the multicultural project of expanding the number of voices, and the number of cultural perspectives, speaking historically and philosophically out of the depth of their experiences. In terms of inclusion, of rational comprehensiveness, of simple justice, this is an enrichment of discourse. But not to go on from there toward an integration of perspectives into a stronger whole—not to go from many to one, *e pluribus unum*—is to remain trapped in Babel, in an impoverish-ment of genuine communication attended by an expansion in the noise level. Historical experiences and the perspectives that grow from them are not essences to be isolated and repetitively celebrated in their isolation, but existential raw material to be integrated by means of higher principles that apply to them all.

   "I am human," the ancient playwright declared; "nothing human is alien to me." If we deny the possibility of humane principles that can play the integrative role, no Mumford or Toynbee is possible. Mumford becomes just another dead—though recently dead—white Anglo-Saxon male, cobbling together a fake synthesis out of some vague Foucaultian will-to-power. Such reductive interpretations of the intellectual projects of generalists smack of the resentment Nietzsche pilloried. And, as if to

prove this point, it is only a step from these reductive liberties to personal vilification.[5] The ad hominem argument is no longer an obvious gaffe, but a favored, if unacknowledged, tactic in a war of words. Thus we descend from tolerance to cultural crisis to outright culture wars. For that matter, reduction of the subject to a mere product of the forces of ethnic, gender and economic "inscription" is, in and of itself, a kind of psychic violence. The term "culture wars" is, then, not as hyperbolical as it may seem. Campus debates over curricula, ethnic studies programs, and affirmative action have become so heated as to resemble battles, and the various positions so polarized, in their theoretical presuppositions as well as in fact, that opponents are characterized as "enemies" and treated as such. Given this dynamis, civility itself can become a casualty. With one side cast as enemies of human tolerance and liberation and the other cast as enemies of reason and civilization, even the lowest level of courtesy necessary to talk together about any topic of importance often expires in the crossfire (Lefkowitz, 1998, p. A64).

   Deconstruction and postmodernism are not synonymous with multiculturalism, but they are closely related to it in structure, content, and consequences. When deconstructionists argue that "all interpretation is misinterpretation," they deny the possibility of authentic communication between authors and their readers and between artists and their audiences (Ellis, 1989, pp. 97-112).[6] Yet rather than fall silent, they at the same time celebrate an infinite multiplication of "misinterpretations." Talk about Babel. When deconstructionists deny the formative power of authors and creators they deny the subject power to shape his or her existence; they in effect deny the existential subject per se. This attack on the authenticity of the subject comes from a different direction than that of radical multiculturalism, but the effect is the same: a loss of faith in the human powers necessary to construct and maintain a human world. And the generation of in-group jargon and of complex rituals of deference and recognition in the deconstructionist camp is a perfect example of the abandonment of public discourse that makes a public scholar seem a contradiction in terms. Deconstructive writing is elitist in the worst sense: it is self-consciously and preciously opaque (Ellis, p.16). It creates an even greater chasm of incomprehension between the public and the academy than that which attended the professionalization of the professoriat in the first place, and makes it that much more difficult for the academic to speak with and listen carefully to the non-academic. It also raises new and unnecessary barriers to scholars speaking effectively to one another. If

"style is the morality of the intellect," as Whitehead once suggested, then the deconstructionists have a lot to answer for.

Indeed, more and more scholars are attacking deconstruction as an extreme form of skepticism, running toward outright nihilism. And a noisy nihilism. Others insist that deconstruction is dying or even dead; that it is a fad that has about run its course. Why, then, flog the proverbial dead horse? But if our deconstructive horse is in fact dead, we need to know that it died for the right reasons, i.e. by being refuted rather than merely abandoned for losing the nimbus of novelty. And if a powerful movement like deconstruction is, or was, merely a fad, we need to focus on that fact. For in this assertion lies a crucial issue: faddism itself. In retrospect, it seems clear that the academic scene has fallen under the sway of a number of movements, characteristically emerging from Europe, each successively taking the scholarly world by storm: such movements as psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, semiotics, structuralism, and now deconstruction. Is this part of an intellectual process of discovery and growth—or is the academy as we know it prey to intellectual faddism?

Why has the scholarly world not been more resistant to the extreme versions of these movements? Could one not predict that, in the relatively safe and privileged enclaves of the colleges and universities (especially in the wealthy United States), a steadier, perhaps even duller, but more culturally conservative atmosphere would prevail? That American popular culture might become a babble of disjointed voices and be subject to fads and fashions is to be expected; market forces alone would suggest it. That the academy should become so begs for an explanation. Part of that explanation, I believe, is to be found along the following historical path. Over the past century, and with real acceleration in the last few decades, we have seen the walls between the academy and the marketplace—never really very strong—breached and almost totally destroyed. Some of the signs of a tendency to ape the surrounding commercial ethos have been the deepening of specialization and over-specialization and the spread of an academic form of commodity fetishism. These forces work against scholarship as traditionally defined, and simultaneously work against the possibility of the public intellectual.[7]

What do I mean by an academic form of commodity fetishism? Back in the late nineteenth century, Russian thinker Nicholai Fyodorov, who inspired such writers as Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, vilified the intellectuals of his time for turning ideas and knowledge into private property, so that they could be bartered and sold and made a source of private profit.

Fyodorov was so appalled by this practice that he refused to publish his
own writings, instead passing them around among his students in manu-
script form. Fyodorov rejected publication because he, like Socrates,
believed intellectual culture and its characteristic works to be incommensu-
rable with ordinary for-profit market relations. What, then, would the
Russian or the ancient Greek sage make of the modern academy—a multi-
million dollar corporation run, increasingly, by professional administrators
who know more of fundraising than of rational discovery, and whose
favorite professors are those best able to bring in cash and kudos in the
form of massive federal, non-profit, and corporate contracts and grants? It
is a fiercely hierarchical world, from the lowly teaching assistant making
less than subsistence pay up through the ranks and levels to the Eminent
Professors, the University Professors, the holders of endowed chairs who
make four and five times the salaries of their mid-level colleagues. And
how does one earn these exalted positions? Primarily by multiplying the
product: multiplying books and articles, often regardless of the importance
or unimportance of the subjects or the quality of the research (Smith, pp.
196-98). Academic stardom may grow from a real talent for insight and
discovery, but it can quickly turn into a numbers game. Scientists break
research into smaller and smaller components in order to publish each tiny
step; they often do not know if they will reach a final result. Fields shift
emphasis from books to articles: articles are easier to produce in large,
sometimes mind-boggling numbers. The pressure to publish is so tremen-
dous it often overrides the simplest forms of civility and ethical behavior.
Academic fraud is on the rise: We have professors who pad their vitae or
who plagiarize their colleagues, senior researchers who plunder the work
of their assistants or parasitically attach their names to efforts they have
had little or nothing to do with, "investigators" who fabricate their data
(Smith, p. 193). But I have the unsettling feeling that these scams pale
before the deconstructionist or the reader-response critic or the postmodern
relativist whose ideology justifies an infinite number of declarations and
publications while denying the possibility of authentic discovery or
knowledge (Menand, 1993, p. 16).
   If postmodern relativism is in fact a fad, it too will eventually die,
opening up the floodgates for new movements and new "products."
Academic fetishism helped create it but must, by its very nature, destroy its
creation and move on. But while it lasts it is a miraculous blank check; it
is Aladdin's lamp: fame, fortune—or as much of it as one can grab—
without the need to hold oneself to any very high standard of rigor or proof

(Hughes, 1993, p. 77). The lure of novelty is in fact a very old temptation (Augustine, 1958, p. 409), but in the career of the postmodern intellectual it takes on its most mercurial and most self-satisfied form. The new is publishable, the new is marketable, while the old—even should it be true (for "What is truth?")—has fallen into the public domain, has lost its "sex appeal," and is thus no longer available to power the academic/economic machinery. And, thank the gods of commerce, the new itself grows old, so that it too must give way to something even newer, and justify a flood of career-enhancing books and articles. This mind-numbing profusion of questionable publications is a scandal to the profession. The demand that tenure, promotion, salary, and status be linked with publication and, even more horrifyingly, with *large numbers* of publications corrupts a noble impulse, and transforms the tradition of Socratic dialogue into the self-interested yammerings of programmed academic robots (cf. Menand, quoted in Hughes, 1993, pp. 69-70).[8]

   Should we, following Fyodorov, abandon publication altogether? Page Smith, whose 1990 critique of higher education, *Killing the Spirit*, attacks the obsession with multiplying publications, offers this rule of thumb: we should write and seek to publish only those works that must be written, that we would feel existentially incomplete not having written (p. 197). C.S. Lewis, praised by historian Roland Stromberg (1994) as one of the finest writers of his generation (p. 329), warns us through Screwtape, his demonic tempter, against "that sort of [historical] guessing (*brilliant* is the adjective we teach humans to apply to it) on which no one would risk ten shillings in ordinary life, but which is enough to produce a crop of new Napoleons, new Shakespeares, and new Swifts in every publisher's autumn list" (1961, pp. 106-107). Stromberg frequently invokes, and damns, "neophilia" in art and thought: the "search for ever fresh novelties leads to ever more grotesque inanities" (p. 334). The answer is not necessarily to fall silent, but to subject all of one's efforts to a rigorous interrogation. Perhaps there is something incomplete or biased about the "logocentric" mind. But there is also something missing from the decentered self that abandons the logos for aggressive assertions (Gitlin, 1989, p. 56), untested "insights," flashy neologisms, and a potentially infinite number of sly "misinterpretations."

   As if to demonstrate how far a radical postmodernism is willing to go, we have recently seen culture warriors advance into the territory of the hard sciences in the so-called "science wars." Many scientists feel personally stung when they encounter descriptions of their work as just

another discourse, no more coherent, or valuable, or true to nature than that of the old magicians and alchemists; or when epochal scientific discoveries are credited not to scientists but to obscure social and cultural processes. Witness the academic flap precipitated by Alan Sokal, a New York University physicist: angered by reductive views of natural science as socially constructed, as a rhetoric (Gross, 1990), Sokal wrote a parodic postmodern study of the "hermeneutics of quantum gravity," which cleverly mixed bad science and avant-garde critical jargon. He managed to get this *faux* article, which he describes as devoid of "anything resembling a logical sequence of thought; one finds only citations of authority, plays on words, strained analogies, and bald assertions" (quoted in Lewenstein, 1996, p. B1), enthusiastically accepted by *Social Text*, a prestigious journal of postmodern cultural studies associated with prominent literary theorist Stanley Fish. On the very day of publication, Sokal publicly revealed that his article was, in a word, nonsense, and mocked the staff of *Social Text* and the whole cultural studies movement as scientifically illiterate and intellectually bankrupt. This coup, reminiscent of the celebrated literary hoaxes of Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and their circle, struck a collective nerve. It received front-page treatment in *The New York Times*, followed by a spirited op-ed exchange; it sparked a lead opinion piece in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Lewenstein); and it set off a firestorm of Internet postings. Sokal's satirical thrust, and the rather limp defense mounted by Fish and his supporters, provides an example of the fierce debate about the truth-value of the sciences and the cogency of the studies that approach science as a culturally determined discourse. A strict social constructivist can hardly allow even the "hardest" sciences to remain outside the system; if reality itself is socially and culturally constructed, nature too must be, in some pivotal sense, a construct.[9] A strong multiculturalist finds it difficult to credit Western-style science with any special status, and thus must make room for a plurality of ethnic "sciences" and "natures." The deconstructionist sees the natural as just another text. This challenge to nature as a universal process or context, or even as a Sartrean "practico-inerte," is bound to give rise to strong counterattacks on the part of natural scientists, precisely because they cannot recognize themselves and their activities in the new theory-driven descriptions or square their discoveries with the conception of a plurality of equally valid nature-constructs. Jean-Francois Lyotard argues that science itself opened the door to the postmodern stance: quantum theory, the uncertainty principle, and the nonrational conundrums of micro- and macro-physics

destroyed the old sense of stability (Gitlin, 1989, p. 56). But if that were so, one would expect scientists to experience some shock of recognition in the new discourse-based theories of science. Instead they see a world of difference between their qualified (at times highly qualified) practical realism and the anti-realism of their opponents (Gross & Levitt, 1994).

  For decades humanists railed against the dominance of the scientific worldview, of the mechanistic model of reality, of the lab-coated obsession with facts. We gleefully quoted Dickens' *Hard Times,* in which Thomas Gradgrind leads his charges in reciting the new litany: "Facts, Facts, Facts!" But now in an age of profitable obscurantism and designer skepticism, I for one am beginning to feel a certain nostalgia for the "facts." The effort to delimit the sciences has been too successful; post-modernists undercut the truth-value of science at the very moment of its greatest achievements, and—much more telling—without being able to account for those achievements (Appleby, Hunt & Jacob, 1994, pp. 190-91). In doing so, the attack on science aids and abets an already appalling level of scientific illiteracy. At least in the old days of "physics envy" scholars in the humanities remained on the alert for ways to make their own methods more effective, i.e. for ways to bring to their efforts high standards of accuracy and proof. We didn't know when we were well off. Now we mercilessly unmask the inner contradictions and many-layered biases and limitations of scientists, while lionizing scholars whose "dem-onstrations" turn on puns, on ambiguities of expression and terminology, on assertions thought convincing only because they are offered in the prescribed provocative and insistent tones (Gitlin, p.56; Ellis, 1989, pp. 151-52). Is it unfair to see something self-centered in these decentered selves, to see careerism and arrogant one-upmanship behind the ostensibly humble abandonment of pretensions to scientific objectivity?

  Just as one can reasonably ask if any sort of ethical consciousness remains "after deconstruction," so one can wonder whether, once the current wave of skepticism and relativism has passed, any basis will remain for making scholarly research and communication an accessible and effective social resource. My answer is, tentatively and with trepida-tion, yes. But achieving a renaissance of relevance will require extraordi-nary exertions on the part of academics to curb precisely those intellectual and spiritual proclivities to which we have become so strongly attached: inordinate love of the arcane, of the panache of mastering minutiae, of the pleasures of unchained assertion and self-promotion, and of the rewards of "productivity" and "creativity" irrespective of existential or social value.

Breaking free of such attachments will require, first, a kind of shock therapy (which may in the end be administered by the public and by the mounting pressures of our historical moment), and second, articulation of the powers thought can bring to bear in acknowledging, criticizing, and transcending the forces and institutions that foster the mass-production of nonsense. There is hope of sorts to be found in an ancient yet still embryonic communitarianism of the intellect that exists, as it has for millennia, beneath the superficial but dangerously pervasive Babel of contemporary academic life.[10]

Biographical Note*: Guy V. Beckwith is Associate Professor of History at Auburn University. He is currently completing a book on technology and myth in ancient Greece. He holds an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in history and philosophy of technology from the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Footnotes:
1. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the 16th Annual AIS Conference, "Beyond Babel," held at Duquesne University (1994). While extending the discussion at key points, and updating it, I have nonetheless tried to preserve the rhetorical structure and polemical tone of the original presentation. One note of caution, however: that tone should not be read as a generalized ad hominem attack on any particular thinker or group of thinkers. It is the ideas, arguments, typical practices, and consequences—including ethical consequences—of influential academic "isms" that I am addressing, and (hopefully) placing in an appropriate socio-historical context.

2. While I do not pursue the latter point in this essay, it is crucial in working toward a more complete analysis of contemporary intellectual history. See Stromberg (1994, pp. 287, 306-10), and Jay's invocation of "left melancholy" (1988, p. 2), a sense of frustration and loss of direction which became even more pronounced after the disintegration of the USSR.

3. Versions of this process are explored by practitioners of the dialectical method, and by those pursuing history as a humanistic discipline. See Davis (1989), Collingwood (1972), and Sartre (1968). See also my characterizations (1984/85) of Hegel's integrative methodology, and of the current promise of dialectics (1989).

4. Daphne Patai (1994) excoriates the new fashions in academic discourse as a "cacophony of competing particularisms" (p. A52) in her aptly titled *Chronicle* editorial, "Sick and Tired of Scholars' Nouveau Solipsism." Walter Davis has used the phrase "democracy of solipsism" in similar contexts (personal communication). Allan Bloom (1987) saw a democratization of ideas and positions, i.e. an effort to

make them all "equal," as implied in driving students toward increasingly closed, solipsistic positions (pp. 25-43); this is an important part of the "closing of the mind" that he abhorred.

5. Bruce Wilshire (1990), though primarily interested in explaining the alienation of faculty from students, also sheds light on the psychodynamic roots of academic incivility and irrational exclusionary behavior; see especially Chapter VII, "Academic Professionalism as a Veiled Purification Ritual" (pp. 159-74). He sees obsessive maintenance of strong disciplinary boundaries as another symptom of unresolved and largely unconscious feelings of anxiety and aggression.

6. Carol Nicholson (1987) offers a more conciliatory but still ultimately unsatisfy-ing "postmodern epistemology." To her credit, she saw early on the need to explore the relationship between postmodernism and the integrative studies movement.

7. Cf. Fredric Jameson's position, summarized in Gitlin (1989). Bellah (1997) deftly characterizes the encroachment of the marketplace and the new academic class system.

8. See also the scathing portrait of academic careerism in Davis (1984b, pp. 712-17). "Offending the Profession" answers Stanley Fish's reply to Davis' essay, "The Fisher King: *Wille zur Macht* in Baltimore" (1984a). In the latter essay, Fish's theoretical position is subjected to a devastating critique. Fish returns to the stage in the Sokal controversy outlined above; those who read the Davis-Fish exchange had a very early preview of Fish's response to the physicist's satire.

9. As Goodheart (1995) notes, "Constructivists are not content simply to value *the social*, they must at the same time evaporate *the natural*" (p. 324). It is ironic that at the very moment in history when we have gained the power to truly "evaporate," i.e. to destroy, nature—on our world, at any rate—our theories tempt us to devalue the natural, to cease to believe in nature. Any movement toward ecological and environmental awareness should see in this trend a real threat.

10. More rigorous characterizations can be found in Ellis (1989, pp. 158-59), and in the conception of dialectics as the *Bildungsroman* of existential subjectivity in Davis' *Inwardness and Existence* (1989, pp. 333-42). The call for a communitarian reframing of intellectual activity is logically connected to the ideal of the public intellectual, and to the conception of the philosopher *engage* celebrated by many existentialists. Hegel himself, long thought to be one of the most otherworldly of the major philosophers, saw himself as uncovering a way back (from theory) to intervention in the lives of ordinary people. Communitarians stress the need to balance rights with responsibilities and to abandon atomistic individualism for membership in the "responsive community." Their position avoids the extremes of

abstract individualism and of identity politics. Given the current state of affairs, this movement has much to say to academics of all stripes.

References:

Appleby, Joyce, Hunt, Lynn, & Jacob, Margaret. (1994). *Telling the Truth about History*. New York: Norton.

Augustine. (1958). *The City of God*. (Gerald Walsh, S.J., et al., trans.). Garden City, NY: Image Books.

Barnes, Harry Elmer. (1963). *A History of Historical Writing*. New York: Dover.

Beckwith, Guy. (1984/85). Interdisciplinarity and Dialectics: Integrative Concepts and Methods in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. *Issues in Integrative Studies* 3: 91-103.

_____. (1989). Science, Technology, and Society: Considerations of Method. *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 14:4 (Autumn): 323-39.

Bellah, Robert N. (1997). Class Wars and Culture Wars in the University Today: Why We Can't Defend Ourselves. *Academe* 83:4 (July/August): 22-26.

Bloom, Allan. (1987). *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Bradley, F. H. (1935). *Collected Essays*. (Vol. 1). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Collingwood, R.J. (1972). *The Idea of History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davis, Walter A. (1984a). The Fisher King: *Wille Zur Macht* in Baltimore. *Critical Inquiry* 10 (June): 668-94.

_____. (1984b). Offending the Profession. *Critical Inquiry* 10 (June): 706-17.

_____. (1989). *Inwardness and Existence: Subjectivity in/and Hegel, Heidegger, Marx, and Freud*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Durant, Will. (1950). *The Age of Faith*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Ellis, John M. (1989). *Against Deconstruction*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Gitlin, Todd. (1989). Postmodernism Defined, at Last! *Utne Reader* (July/ August): 52-61.

_____. (1995). *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars*. New York: Henry Holt.

Goodheart, Eugene. (1995). The Fallacy of Constructivism. *Clio* 24:3 (Spring): 323-26.

Gross, Alan G. (1990). *The Rhetoric of Science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.

Gross, Paul R. & Levitt, Norman. (1994). *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.

Hughes, Robert. (1993). *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jay, Martin. (1988). *Fin-de-siecle Socialism and Other Essays*. New York:
         Routledge.
Knox, Bernard. (1993). *The Oldest Dead White European Males: and Other
         Reflections on the Classics*. New York: Norton.
Lefkowitz, Mary. (1998). In Wars of Words, a Role for Rules of Etiquette. *The
         Chronicle of Higher Education* (20 February): A64.
Lewenstein, Bruce V. (1996). Science and Society: The Continuing Value of
         Reasoned Debate. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (21 June): B1-
         B2.
Lewis, C.S. (1961/1967). *The Screwtape Letters and Screwtape Proposes a Toast*.
         New York: Macmillan.
Menand, Louis. (1993). The Future of Academic Freedom. *Academe* (May-June):
         14-17.
Nicholson, Carol. (1987). Postmodernism and the Present State of Integrative
         Studies: A Reply to Benson and His Critics. *Issues in Integrative Studies*
         5: 19-34.
Patai, Daphne. (1994). Sick and Tired of Scholars' Nouveau Solipsism. *The
         Chronicle of Higher Education* (23 February): A52.
Sartre, Jean-Paul. (1960/1968). *Search for a Method*. (Hazel A. Barnes, trans.).
         New York: Vintage.
Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr. (1992). *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a
         Multicultural Society*. New York: Norton.
Smith, Page. (1990). *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America*. New York:
         Viking.
Stromberg, Roland N. (1981). *European Intellectual History Since 1789*. (Third
         Edition). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
_____. (1994). *European Intellectual History Since 1789*. (Sixth
         Edition). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Wilshire, Bruce. (1990). *The Moral Collapse of the University: Professionalism,
         Purity, and Alienation*. Albany: State University of New York.