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World in Strife – Returning to the Humanities

Clive Barstow¹, Jill Felicity Durey²

ABSTRACT

The background of this article relates to a long, ongoing attenuation of the Humanities within universities. The problem is the continuing sidelining of the Humanities in university teaching and research funding. If this attenuation and sidelining continue, the world will be a much more cruel and dangerous place, as there will be no moral or ethical check on scientific and technological developments from a humanitarian perspective. This article discusses some of the fears, hopes and criticisms of the Humanities expressed by scholars around the globe, from western democracies including Australia, as well as from middle-eastern and eastern autocracies. The article examines the challenges facing the Humanities, which range from funding issues to elimination in favour of the Sciences. It contextualises the strengths and weaknesses of the Humanities within a world population, battling for the first time in a century with virus strains requiring new vaccines and the threat of global war. The proposition is that universities and government research funding bodies across the world review and redesign their models to provide equal weighting to the Humanities as well as to the Sciences in teaching and in research.

Keywords: Humanities, Human Beings, Arts, Science, Technology.

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1. Introduction

This article's background concerns the depletion of resources allocated in universities to the Humanities, both in teaching and in research funding, when compared with similar resources allocated to Sciences and Technology. The purpose of the study is to determine how widespread this problem is across the world. While there have been many articles devoted to this problem, the vast majority confine their examination to one country. The uniqueness and importance of this study is that it will widen its purview to survey studies from a qualitative selection of democracies and autocracies from around the world so that comparisons can be made, and conclusions drawn. This study also stresses the vital need for an imminent change in university and government policy.

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2. Methodology

The methodology of this study is not scientific; it is a well tried and trusted humanities method, which conducts its research qualitatively (not quantitatively) through careful selection of detail and analysis. The preliminary literature survey, in the next section, as well as *throughout* this essay will scrutinise the situation in selected countries across the world. The essay will also glance at the international medical and political context, which indicates that the world is becoming increasingly dangerous for current and future generations. Scientific and technological developments are not being sufficiently scrutinised and examined by the Humanities, since the Humanities are increasingly being weakened by inadequate resourcing.

3. Brief preliminary literature review

Daniel Gleason, in America, laments '[t]he posture of servitude' (2020: 191) frequently allotted to the Humanities, since the emphasis in education is now on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics). His only suggestion, though, is for Humanities staff to teach in a way that is 'engaging, relevant and meaningful' (2020: 204). This does not solve the fundamental problem of resources.

Also in America, Cathy Levenson, a biomedical and neuroscientist, advises that Humanities undergraduates could act as research assistants to academic staff, just as science undergraduates assume the role of research assistants for science staff so that they can learn that '[t]he undergraduate research process is a continuum' (2010, 14). While this might seem a worthy aim, Levenson clearly does not understand that research in the Humanities is frequently a solo occupation, as the humanities researcher takes pride for undertaking all tasks involved in the research project undertaken.

Robert Koons, an American philosopher, accuses Sciences for denigrating the Humanities. He believes that the problem began in the seventeenth century, with people like Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) preferring 'the modern fascination with technology as power', instead of 'the classical tradition' (2011: 135). This does not, however, provide help for the Humanities today.

Long ago, in 1998, David Pan, also in America, feared the demise of the Humanities and blamed the replacement of Christian goals by secular ones in universities over a long period of time, as well as the 'unfortunate division of faculty into tenured professors and part-timers' (1998: 106). Pan had no solution to offer to combat these problems.

Toby Miller, once again only referencing America, could only recommend that the private universities, offering literature and history in their hallowed halls of Humanities One, combine their offerings with the public universities, teaching media and communication in the more mundane Humanities Two. They could then, he says, 'reach out' with their 'common cause' to other academics 'in other parts of the campus' (2012: 123). This seems a rather haphazard and risky process.

Australian academics, Tim Pitman and Judith Berman, with regard to research, recommend that 'humanities research funding' be allocated separately 'from that of the sciences', and that the Humanities not be expected to search for non-government funding along with the Sciences (2009: 324). This advice has been completely ignored both by the universities and by government bodies responsible for university funding.

Raymond Tallis, in England, issued a stinging criticism against famous postmodern theorists, Derrida and Lacan, for their scientific distortions and their 'indoctrination' of undergraduates in the name of theory (1999: 41), implying that they were responsible for the demise of the Humanities. This, however, was long ago, and the Humanities have come through the other side of theory now. Overall, the gap in the above works, regardless of their authorial sincerity, is that Humanities advocates have been perhaps too diffident to press their needs and the needs of their discipline as firmly as they should.

The motivation of this article is therefore to be much firmer in its proposition. Its findings are that the Humanities do not have enough critical mass to evaluate the moral and ethical consequences of burgeoning scientific and technological innovations. The contribution of this paper to the literature is to state a firm proposition that relates not only to the country of its authors, or indeed just to the western world, but to the world at large, including autocracies as well as democracies. The article will have sub-headings in the following order: International Medical and Political Context; Fears; Priorities;

Systemic and Systematic Attenuation of the Arts in Australia; The Weakness of Self-Sabotage with the Humanities; Constructive Self-Criticism; and Conclusion.

4. International medical and political context

Every century has its share of crises, disasters and tragedies. So far, the twenty-first century is marking the early 2020s as involving all three of these. Although new vaccines may help us protect our human race from the coronavirus, we are also aware that new strains may require different vaccines. While the media frequently tells us that all hope for surviving the coronavirus rests on an effective vaccine, *The Lancet Psychiatry*, while not denying the priority of such a vaccine, devoted a whole article in the middle of 2020 to the paramount importance of the Humanities. Its title states '[h]ow the Humanities can ameliorate China's health-care crisis'. The article boldly asserts that, '[i]n this globalised world, China's health-care system is not only directly responsible for the care of the country's 1.4 billion people, but also indirectly responsible for medical issues that might affect the entire world's population—as recent events have shown' (Fan et al, 2020: 484). It lists the essential qualities needed in medical doctors administering to the sick during the coronavirus: 'strong mental health, resilience, and a spirit of self-sacrifice' (Fan et al, 2020: 474). This statement comes as no surprise to anyone who has had the slightest brush with the Humanities. Yet the Humanities in universities throughout the world are struggling—for adequate funding, for due recognition, and sometimes even for inclusion in future university directions. 'Over the past century', the article says, the 'advances in the medical sciences have engendered an optimistic spirit among' doctors, but '[r]esponding fully to' chronic diseases has 'threatened that positivity', since it is not possible to rely 'solely on the Sciences' (Fan et al, 2020: 474).

Before the coronavirus can become a memory, new international tensions have also arisen, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's global ambitions increasingly apparent through new alliances. This appears to have taken western countries by complete surprise. Western democratic and eastern autocratic powers have never been so distant from each other in modus operandi and professed ethics. At the same time, Science, lauded since the nineteenth century as tantamount to an omnipotent theocracy, can now be seen potentially responsible for pandemic production and animal/human annihilation.

Why were the warning signs about the potential for a changing axis in western democratic versus eastern autocratic powers not spotted earlier, well before the pandemic? While other global factors like rising neo-liberalism, social media and access to disinformation have all played a part in distracting western powers, reductions in teaching and research in the Humanities have contributed to the present situation. Olena Mykal, in 2016 (published in 2017), wrote of the enormous sums of capital given to Ukraine by China because of its realisation of the former's geographic location and its potential to become a major transit hub, enabling it to sidestep Russia, in its link to European markets (2017: 1-4). To this end, in February 2016, 'Beijing welcomed the launch of a train bypassing Russia' to supply China, among a host of other commodities like corn, with sunflower oil from its enormous sunflower seed processing complex in Mariupol (2017: 5). Much media space has been given to Russia's bombing of a theatre in Mariupol in March 2022, killing 300 people, but the warning signs were there when Russia used rockets to bomb Mariupol in January 2015.

Sergiy Gerasymchuk and Yurii Poita, two years after Mykal, confirm ongoing financial help and deals for Ukraine by China, including 'aerospace projects' and 'space exploration' (2018: 7) as well as 'two landing ships' and 'engines for trainer jets' (2018: 8). While they acknowledge that China's One Belt One Road initiative includes many countries around the world and list 16 other Central and East European countries, they pointedly mention 'Russia's jealousy of military and technical cooperation between Ukraine and China' (2018: 8). At that time, Russia tried to discredit Ukraine to weaken the ties between Ukraine and China (2018: 11), but once again this does not seem to have awakened any resounding media concern in the Western world. Even Peter Tzeng's conclusion in his 2017 discussion paper that Ukraine had substantial legitimacy in its 2016 legal proceedings against Russia concerning the Law of the Sea but would face 'greater jurisdictional obstacles than those faced by the Philippines v. China tribunal' (2017: 20), did not ring loud alarm bells. Indirectly, in addition to neoliberalism, social media and disinformation outlets, the sidelining of Humanities courses has reduced critical debate,

publications and research around history and politics, thereby decreasing opportunities for discussing these international tensions widely and sufficiently warning Western democratic powers to prepare for potential hostilities.

Human beings have always shown themselves able to survive through hope and faith, by planning for the future. The Humanities, the study of human beings—their society, culture, religions, philosophies, histories, languages, literatures, art and artefacts—tell us that. They also act as a behavioural check by providing a knowledge base, forum and means for human beings to decide on the ethical use or indeed existence of scientific and technological inventions. The Humanities work to reveal truths about the human condition. By offering criticality, they give us hope. This is how we know that human beings will endure beyond the coronavirus, regardless of its origins, and beyond nuclear threats of annihilation.

We also know, from studies in the Humanities, that we will have to make changes to adapt and adjust to new situations. In order to do this, we need strong and viable Humanities courses in our universities. The thought of world leaders never having been exposed to history and politics courses is horrendous. If they have not learnt the lessons of the past, the populations for whom they are responsible will be forced to re-live them. University Humanities courses foster awareness of the world at large, in their teaching and exploration of other languages, cultures and politics. It is where international political strategies can be learned and nurtured so that even slight shifts in political affairs can be observed and diplomatically settled or forestalled at an early stage, rather than letting them boil and explode, as has happened in Ukraine.

This article explores some of the well-founded fears raised among Humanities academics, in decades past and present, about the future of the Humanities. It considers some of the criticisms levelled at the Humanities, from within and without the confines of these disciplines. It examines a couple of its weaknesses, and it looks at some of the hopes and plans, already made by some academics in the Humanities, for the younger generation of the future.

5. Fears

Fears, as a result of reduced university funding for the Humanities in, seemingly, all countries around the globe, have kindled the feasible belief that certain areas within the Humanities will disappear. Many academics in the Humanities have articulated these concerns. Maria Nussbaum's foreboding was that democracy would disappear with the diminution of the Humanities, since they 'are being cut away, in both primary/secondary and college/university education, in virtually every nation of the world' (2010: 77). Zhou Xian says that 'the crisis of the Humanities in Chinese academic circles has yet to attract proper attention and discussion' but knows that it has existed there for thirty years, adding that, in recent years, 'the various instances of poisoning and murders amongst Chinese students' are 'a further indication of its seriousness' (2016: 243). Xian stresses that 'the issue is particularly urgent with Chinese universities', as the '[c]ommonly heard terms such as "envy," "jealousy" and "hate" are a reflection of the current risk of being part of a Chinese university community', so 'the Humanities must take practical action to change' this 'direction of development in university education' (2016: 249).

Direct quotations here are necessary to avoid possible charges of hyperbole in western academia. Xian nonetheless acknowledges that the Humanities are failing 'to respond to modernity' (2016: 246). The fears of these two academics, the one in the largest democracy in the west, the other in the largest totalitarian society in the world, may be poles apart in terms of the degree of their anxiety, but they both indicate that the Humanities are a civilising influence on human beings, regardless of the politics of their respective countries. They also signal that they are afraid that this civilising influence could wane so much that it could disappear. Nor is this anxiety exaggerated, given the fact that both countries have given the world serious cause for concern, in 2020, 2021 and 2022, over their questionable handling of the coronavirus and of their politics. In 2022, Russia's destruction of Ukrainian life and property, and Chinese internationally aggressive policies have deepened that concern into fear that humanity on earth could face destruction. While this situation is regularly distorted as a strategy for political gain by successive governments and media outlets, the Humanities seek to bring reason by researching historical and social contexts that give a broader perspective.

The voices of Nussbaum and Xian elucidate additional disquiet. Nor are they the only ones from their countries or from others belonging either to democracies or to autocracies to express their worries. Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson argued a quarter of a century ago that the Humanities were in crisis because they could not possibly compete with the Sciences in research, when teaching allocations were loaded against them, in favour of Science academics, some of whom did not engage in research, yet still benefited from the low teaching allocations. The main reason cited for this problem is that ‘research is easier to justify in the Sciences even if it is nearly impossible to explain’, yet ‘knowledge in the Humanities also must be produced as well as transmitted’ (1995: 10). Linda Pratt is blunter, blaming ‘leaders in higher education defend[ing] the academy in language and value systems’ associated with ‘business and industry’ (1995: 38), at the same time as agreeing with Bérubé and Nelson that the Humanities’ share of research funding and time allocation is far too meagre, when compared with the Sciences. An astute observation from Joan Scott was that the greater the emphasis in universities placed on diversification, the greater the pressure exerted on conformity to the ‘community’ (1995: 294). She pointed, too, to ‘the therapeutics of the personal’ having given birth to theories to support what is now known as identity politics, obliterating objective inquiry (1995: 294).

Over two decades later, Xian voices the same concern that ‘Science, along with other related disciplines, becomes the absolute leader in university research and education, constantly eroding the Humanities’ former ground and making humanists feel that their space is shrinking’ (2016: 244). Yet he notes that the absence of ‘value, meaning and ethics’ in most ‘scientific research’, noticed by ‘many scholars’, is disturbing (2016: 244). These qualities, integral to Humanities research, Xian says, ‘should be the internal logic of all intellectual action’ (2016: 244). Since there are ‘[m]any unimaginable events’ in Chinese universities like ‘campus poisonings, murders’ mentioned above, ‘[t]he issue is particularly urgent’, for Chinese universities are ‘pursuing “excellence without a soul”, and mediocrity without a human spirit’ (2016: 249). When academics in totalitarian countries are sufficiently courageous to voice genuine concerns, their peers in democratic countries should listen and find a way to circumvent autocratic roadblocks for their peers, if they are to help the world at large remain humane.

Even the value project of the Humanities Education and Research Association, set up to measure the societal impacts of Humanities’ research, by interviewing almost a hundred ‘representatives from the academy, policymakers, and civil society’, according to Ellen Hazelkorn, has fallen short of helping the Humanities (2015: 27). Instead of demanding ‘outcomes’, the purpose is to measure ‘impact and benefit’, in terms of ‘contribution to the economy, and for society, culture and the environment’ (2015: 28). Yet not only are the scientists unhappy ‘with this approach’, as they say it ‘favours the physical, life and medical sciences’, but also the Arts and Humanities, who regard it ‘as a threat’ (2015: 28; 29). Hazelkorn, comparing Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway, sensibly attributes the different degrees of each country’s success in this measurement project to their respective economies. While ‘Ireland experienced a dramatic and sudden economic collapse’, Norway ‘was bolstered by its rich oil reserves,’ and the ‘stronger economic base’ of the Netherlands greatly facilitated their performance, according to the criteria of the project (2015: 35). Underlying these albeit well-intentioned projects is the fact that any form of measurement rarely helps the Humanities to shine, since measurement presupposes quantitative methodology, as opposed to qualitative methodology, the realm of the Arts and Humanities. Measurement, to the Arts and Humanities, acts as a straitjacket. Significantly, Hazelkorn felt it necessary to set out her interesting paper on the Humanities like a scientific article.

Still in the Nordic countries and still somehow looking through a scientific prism, but with more of a spotlight on Sweden, is Sverker Sörlin’s discussion of the Humanities crisis. Sörlin, speaking from the vastly integrated citadel of the Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment KTH Royal Institute of Technology, argues that the Humanities in Sweden in particular were plunged into crisis, when they were deemed to be operating ‘in a parochial fashion’, regardless of their ‘decent quality’ (2018: 289). Their fault, determined by the Humanities and Social Research Council of the 1990s, was that their ‘disciplinary evaluations’ pronounced them ‘middle of the roadish’, with a ‘low level of international engagement’ and an ‘absence of genuine theoretical interest and ambition’ (2018: 290). In other words, Sweden’s Humanities academics, at that stage, had chosen not to conform to the late-twentieth-century fashion for applying the theories of *nineteenth-century* French, German and Russian

theorists to their own literature and culture, irrespective of their relevance. Sörlin speaks of the merging of many, often small departments into larger units, citing ‘Gothenburg University’s stunning 42 departments’ decreasing ‘to a mere six a decade later’ (2018: 289). This spiralling-down restructuring, Sörlin says, remains ongoing, her own place of work giving more than sufficient evidence of a continuing attenuating among the Humanities that could eventually eliminate these disciplines.

6. Priorities

For some academics, it is the priorities in higher education that give rise to concerns. Although he does not specifically name the Humanities, it is clear from Theocharis Kromydas’ three categories that he sees the Humanities as the first élite ‘university college’, where ‘Christian values were the core values’ (2017: 2). His second category is the ‘research’ Science model, Cambridge in England, and the Humboldtian University in Germany, followed by the third, technical model, like Strathclyde University in Scotland (2017: 2). Kromydas argues that the first university model was designed for students ‘from the most dominant class’, while the second tier is ‘the mass form of higher education’, transmitting ‘the knowledge and economic roles students subsequently perform in the labour market’ (2017; 2). The third tier he judges to be the one ‘to adapt students and the general population to the rapid social and technological changes’ (2017: 2). According to Kromydas, then, universities have become increasingly established to adjust to the changing world, where more and more people receive a higher education. As he sees it, the élite nature of the original Humanities model is rendering it vulnerable to elimination. At the same time, Kromydas argues, it is the ‘constant marketisation process in higher education’ that is ‘making it less accessible to people from poor economic backgrounds’ (2017: 8). He concludes that the ‘strict economic reasoning in higher education’ runs counter to policies trying to democratise universities (2017: 8). Kromydas does not, however, provide a practical solution beyond saying that ‘economy’ could ‘become a means rather than an ultimate goal for human development and social progress’ (2017: 9). Nor does he appear to lament the disappearance of a role for the Humanities, since he only seems to regard them as disciplines for the élite of the dominant class—a view that surely startles the many academics in the Humanities advocating for equality in race, class and gender issues.

Concerned about the world shifting priorities away from the Humanities, a special conference in 2017 was held in Europe, since the *fons et origo* (source and origin) of the Humanities was in the eleventh-century University of Bologna, the oldest university in Italy and in the world. The World Humanities Conference took place in Liège, Belgium, with the cooperation of UNESCO—United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. The word Science, originally from *scire*—to know, in Latin, means knowledge. This, then, was a clever public relations ploy for the Sciences, in their infancy, to adopt as their collective noun. The rationale for the conference was to halt the ‘marginalisation’ of the Humanities, ‘restore them and impose their presence in the public sphere as well as in Science policies’ (2019, 2). Although it was noted that the ‘discrimination against Humanities degrees is indirect’ and was due to ‘the systematic promotion’ of areas like ‘business management’, it deplored the fact that these new subjects were not recognising ‘the different and unique disciplines’ contributing to the knowledge they are disseminating (2019, 1).

The conference blamed the devaluing of the Humanities on accelerated ‘globalisation, and the widespread use of neoliberalism’, the latter of which had grown exponentially from the four countries of ‘Chile, New Zealand, the UK and the USA’ in the 1980s (2019, 1). What is being overlooked ‘[a]t its core’, is ‘the value of the Humanities’, which should be seen ‘in three independent, mutually reinforcing levels: the comprehensive knowledge, skills and mindset that come with studying the field and which are not easily outdated’ (2019, 3). Not only do ‘history, philosophy, languages and literature’ provide ‘knowledge on that which is fundamentally and irreducibly human’, but also enhance ‘critical thought, acknowledgement of others’, and ‘the ability to adjust to different realities’, all of which are indispensable for ‘any institution, organisation, government or company’ (2019, 3). The conference concludes with the warning that not investing in teaching philosophy ‘pulls away from the basic foundations of knowledge and Science, ultimately furthering the establishment of a post-truth society’ (2019, 4). A few years later, the world is already suffering tragically from globalisation, from blind and deaf neo-liberalism, and from a post-truth society.

7. Systemic and systematic attenuation of the arts in Australia

The practising arts, in universities and within the various Humanities' peak bodies in Australia, have always been an uneasy inclusion due to the unique way in which training and creative research are undertaken. The reasons are complex and can be traced back to the young country syndrome and those of a post-colonial history that has played its part in a modern neo-liberalism that relegates the Arts as a form of entertainment, steering well clear of the conceptual and critical components of Arts practice that underpin all forms of creativity.

While Australia has successfully mirrored the UK in the development of practice-led research and its subsequent recognition by the Australian Research Council (ARC), the practising Arts (as distinct from the study of the Arts) faces a different set of problems from many traditional Humanities subjects. For instance, the practising Arts are measured within the Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) assessment cycles almost entirely by peer review, while the Sciences use a traditional citation-based measure of quality in relation to international benchmarks. Although this approach has contextual relevance, it has exposed fundamental differences in assessment that have clearly disadvantaged the Arts and several Humanities and Social Science subjects and, as a result, places the Arts in a vulnerable position in many institutions seeking higher research rankings as a draw for international student recruitment and resulting income.

In a comparative study of the 2012, 2015 and 2018 ERA rounds, Australian universities showed an improvement of 133 Science-based discipline unit ratings (average 3.4% per university) to above world standard, while for the Arts and Humanities disciplines the improvement was only 30 (average 0.8% per university (Larkins, 2019)). The suggestion in the report is that qualitative peer reviewing appears to apply more demanding world standard benchmarks than quantitative citation-based assessments. Qualitative criticality therefore is endemic in both practice and assessment, and, in this case, detrimental to the survival of the Arts within our universities.

When times are tough, the relationships between institutional fiscal drivers, national funding policies and political strategy are regularly exposed, as are the priorities of government educational policy toward the role of the Arts in a broader strategy of recovery from the pandemic and the pursuit of world peace. While the Arts offer hope and a vision of a better society for all, they are regularly sidelined within a polarisation that prioritises the hard Sciences as the answer to all our problems, when sometimes they have exacerbated international tensions. While the importance of the Social Sciences is acknowledged within areas such as mental health and aged support, the Arts are seen as dispensable until a time when we can afford the luxury of entertainment once again.

Underinvestment in the Arts is a particular problem in Australia, a rich country built on mining and agriculture in which natural resources are sold and bought back as products, a system that is mirrored in the way we consume culture, with little need or obligation to invest in the production of culture in relative terms. Education plays an important role in the balance of knowledge and the co-dependent relationship between the Arts and the Sciences, but this has been severely tested during the global pandemic and international hostilities, whether through concrete physical aggression or through economic and political threats. A report commissioned by the Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts (DDCA), Australia's peak body for the practising Arts, shows a creative sector in crisis. The report states that the intense pressure of the global pandemic in 2020 and 2021 intensified a downward trend in enrolments, compounded by ongoing legislative reforms and sustained reductions of Creative Arts staffing and infrastructure nationwide. The report concludes that sustained government rhetoric in favour of STEM and traditional models of jobs and employment has undermined public confidence in Arts education as a viable career pathway for young people (Newport-Peace, 2021).

The economic fallout from Covid-19 is clearly being embraced as a moment of opportunism (Payne, 2022: 24) and felt around the globe. The Arts therefore face a tough time. For the creative sector to survive we must change the narrative to one in which the Arts and the Humanities are recognised as an essential contributor to the quality of life well beyond the immediate problems faced by the global pandemic and dangerously tense international relations.

8. The weakness of self-sabotage within the humanities

The restructuring and collapsing of discipline departments, described by Sörling, is just one step closer to the closure of Humanities. Yet there have been fundamental ways, in which the Humanities have not always helped their disciplines to flourish. Self-sabotage, however elegantly executed, can undermine the very foundations of any area of knowledge. A quarter of a century ago, Jeffrey Herf identified one area of self-sabotage. He pointed out that not every historian has adhered to objective methods of research or objective reasoning about the past, and some have chosen to masquerade subjective opinions as fact (1995, 157).

Alarming, this practice, Herf believes, poses a ‘threat to academic freedom in universities’, and he urges ‘[s]cholars’ to retaliate ‘against these threats’ (1995, 169). Herf explains that the root of postmodernist obfuscation of fact with fiction originated with ‘unrepentant Nazi intellectuals like Heidegger’ (1995, 154). His self-interest in casting ‘doubt on the possibility of establishing causality in history’ provided Foucault and Derrida with conveniently simplistic theories for elevating their careers, through devout followers applying them slavishly to both fact and fiction, while helping to conceal Heidegger’s and his country’s guilt for war crimes (1995, 154). Yet, once the Humanities disciplines of literature and history equate fact with fiction, and fiction with fact, they obliterate their very foundations. The public, whose funds provide the means for these disciplines to be studied and respected, could be justified in questioning the value of either discipline. Why study these subjects if they are effectively the same? If there is no such thing as the truth, why attempt to seek it? For what purpose are the Humanities, if the truth is not one of their foci under scrutiny?

Another form of self-sabotage has been the perpetual apologising by western Humanities for the perceived wrongs of their ancestors, indirectly recognised 25 years ago by Barry Gross in his indictment of political correctness, now termed “wokery”, stifling open debate and honest inquiry (1995: 126-148), but unfortunately followed later in the same book by the ruse from Gregory Jay and Gerald Graff to weaken what they call ‘wishy-washy debating’ of human conflicts in university classrooms through slyly injecting their own political orientation, at the same time as avoiding open charges ‘of coercing the students’ (1995: 209). From time immemorial, human beings from all over the globe have committed dreadful crimes against those they deem more vulnerable, and we are currently seeing this played out before our eyes in Ukraine and the Solomons. Invasions by the more powerful human groups into the lands of the weaker ones continue to be perpetrated, yet western humanists persist in drowning out the crimes of others by repeatedly chanting ‘*mea culpa*’ (my fault), as if they still hold superior status.

In other words, their arrogance is such that they assume, from their perceived loftier station, that only they can commit wrongful deeds. The muffled snickers and barely concealed scorn, directed at the serial apologisers, are deliberately subterranean, while the market price to be extracted for publicly acknowledging western superiority is calculated carefully in ratio to their continued humiliation. Once again, the public questions why it should fund the study of Humanities disciplines that, seemingly, have no positive contribution to make to society, apart from making dubious apologies. Scientists have also made catastrophic mistakes and have apologised, but they wisely keep moving toward the next positive goal, even if, once attained, the result is negative, as we are seeing now in Ukraine and in Russian nuclear threats. At its centre, empirical research embodies the possibility of success or failure. Failure provides the impetus for another empirical research project, in the hope that success will follow failure.

9. Constructive self-criticism

Many academics have rightly reminded their peers that the Humanities have often faced some kind of crisis. Integral to humanity, how could they not fail to do so? Humanity itself has periodically received blasts, either from nature or from other sections of humanity wanting to establish their superior credentials over those they deem to be weaker. Paul Yachnin refers to these blasts as part of ‘the chronic malaise of the Humanities’ and directs the responsibility for this state of affairs back to the Humanities themselves for their ‘book-based reading, writing, scholarship and teaching’, which he says has brought about ‘weaknesses’, severely detracting from any ‘benefits’ (2016: 1). Cloistered thinking leaves the Humanities in the cloisters, implies Yachnin, who urges academics to follow Shakespeare’s

ploy of translating ‘the literary resources of antiquity and those of his own age into marketable and socially creative theatre products’ (2016: 4).

He suggests that the Humanities have forgotten their essential humanity and strongly encourages them to pierce ‘the outer shell of the academy’ with ‘multiple doors and windows’ to bring ‘researchers and teachers’ out into the community to exercise ‘an active commitment’ to their disciplines (2016: 4). In admitting that some colleagues are already trying to do this, Yachnin cites modern instances, from Julia Lupton’s sharing of Shakespeare by bringing ‘the Arts to all undergraduates’ (2016: 5), to the musical improvisation interface for disabled children by Pauline Oliveras and her colleagues (Oliveras et al, 2011: 172-181). Above all, Yachnin’s plan for the Humanities is to ‘foster new modes of collective creativity and action’ (2016: 5). From being detached from the living world, and being virtually moribund, Yachnin wants the Humanities to re-integrate into society, but first they need to re-connect to the world as it is now.

In agreement with this approach is Corey Campion’s strong criticism of ‘the inefficacy of ongoing efforts by humanists to demonstrate the relevance of their work in the twenty-first century’, which is why they deserve the Humanities to be ‘in crisis’ (2018, 434). He scathingly refers to courses in American universities like ‘Gender and Sexuality in the Germany Army’ as ‘unconvincing’ means of maintaining and strengthening a democratic society (Campion, 2018, 438). The Humanities, he says, should use their strengths to return to the modern world. They can do this through transdisciplinary use ‘of their traditional mission to attain and impart a deeper understanding of the human condition’ by utilising ‘the study of history, literature and art’ to discuss ‘those questions of politics, economics, medicine, and the environment that are so relevant to contemporary society’ (Campion, 2018, 445). Unless they do this, he implies, their disappearance is inevitable—and deserved.

Even more critical of the fossilisation of the Humanities veering off into similarly contentious tangents is another school of thought. Ibanga Ipke, among others like Meynell (2010: 975), criticises modern Humanities for pursuing ‘[t]rivial issues such as identity studies, abstruse theory, sexuality, film and popular culture’, and for abandoning ‘the rigorous search for the truth’ (2016: 55). The Humanities, he argues, have ‘withdrawn from the wider concerns of society’ (2016: 54), but should instead return to ‘the world outside the academy’, ‘to the classical function of the Humanities in therapy’ (2016: 51), and to ‘issues that are the immediate concern of human beings’ (2016: 55). This is if they wish society to take them seriously and agree to fund them, since at present this area of study ‘is looked upon as irrelevant by its patrons’ (2016: 55).

Ipke accompanies his hard-hitting criticism with strong advice for the Humanities to remember that their value as therapy is as old as the Bible and ‘the relationship between David and Saul’ (2016: 61). While recalling that social work came into being from the Great Depression to help human beings whose lives were ruined by those years, Ipke regrets that Humanities scholars have forgotten that the human heart and soul do not need intermediaries like psychotherapists to be healed by the soothing balm of poetry and music. After all, David needed no professional to intercede when he played the harp to soothe Saul (Ipke, 2016: 62). Ipke concludes by asserting that humanity is in need of ‘a humanistic therapy for the sane’ not just for itself, but also for the Humanities ‘to help it rediscover itself’ (2016: 62). The remedy for the Humanities, he hints, will help the world to heal.

The proliferation of new universities in the Arab world has revealed additional problems for the flourishing of the Humanities. The self-criticism by Ahmad Dallal is as hard-hitting as Ipke’s, but he offers a different slant. The decreasing popularity of Humanities is reflected in student choice. In the Arab countries, both parents and students, Dallal comments, opt for the areas of ‘medicine and engineering, and then business and law, or more recently fields such as IT and communications’ (2017: 137). Students, Dallal regrets, only tend to choose the Humanities if their grades are not high enough for them to enter the fields above, or they cannot afford the fees for the professional subjects (2017: 137). A degree in one of the professional areas ‘is seen as a successful career path’, whereas the Humanities are viewed as ‘seemingly non-productive fields of study’ that do not lead to gainful employment (Dallal, 2017: 137). Even when worthy students do select the Humanities as an academic career, there are serious problems prohibiting excellence. Dallal criticises ‘high-impact journals’ for favouring ‘mainstream topics’, and for rejecting ‘cutting-edge, or experimental research’ (2017: 138).

Additionally, the Humanities, as they are at present constituted, ‘have no impact on cultural self-understanding’ in the Arab states, so ‘are divorced from their cultural contexts’, as they concern Western culture and civilisation (Dallal, 2017: 139). Dallal concludes courageously by recommending that Arab universities do not concentrate on professional subjects that are deemed ‘ideologically safe’ (2017: 141). Instead, they should also include, among Humanities offerings, a ‘subject like Hadith’—the record of the words, actions and silent approval of Muhammad—in order to expose it for the first time to ‘the critical perspective’, which is one of the strengths of the Humanities (Dallal, 2017: 141). This means, Dallal states, that there are no ‘critical readings in the present of the legacies of the past’ of Islamic culture and civilisation (2017: 141). Dallal completes his article with his firm assertion that ‘a critical present understanding of the past’ would guard ‘against its abuse by present-day demagogues and lunatics’ (2017: 141). Once again, as with Xian, direct citation is vital to convey exact truths from an autocratic culture to a democratic society that is cravenly terrified of being accused of intolerance. Most important of all, is Dallal’s belief in the Humanities for self-interrogation and self-examination within an autocratic society. Intriguingly, the Humanities in democratic countries are being censured for self-scrutiny that has become too introspective by perpetuating its self-examination for too long, while the Humanities in autocratic countries are being censured for not being sufficiently bold to conduct self-scrutiny in the Humanities of its deeply-embedded ancient culture and beliefs.

10. Conclusion

It is in the interests of autocracies seeking to gain advantage and world power in Science and Technology, as Dallal has intimated, to shut down the kind of discussion and scrutiny that is prevalent in all Arts and Humanities, where it is undertaken in visual Art and music, studied in language, culture, and history and openly interrogated in politics. STEM subjects rarely investigate society in a way that is crucial to our understanding of Science and Technology. For instance, they show society *how* to use and implement technology, but seldom explicate fully *why* society should use a particular technological innovation. While ethical questions on perfunctory application forms may arise for scientific or social scientific research projects, they invariably focus on obviating the potential for litigation, rather than on the actual need or ethical purpose of the research project in the first place. In an increasingly data-driven world, the Sciences cannily concentrate on the false kind of numerical values hinted at by Larkins, instead of involving close examination by expert peers, as in the Arts and Humanities. Western countries have been seduced by international fees from autocratic countries, invariably secured to specialise in Science and Technology, without counting the huge future cost and dire consequences of closing down intellectual inquiry by the Humanities. That cost and those consequences have become tragically clear, during the pandemic and invasion of Ukraine, both of which originate from autocratic countries seeking world domination.

Our findings from our literature review and analysis of selected articles from around the world indicate that universities—the very word signifies inclusion of all disciplines—must change their current policy, and devote greater resourcing to increase the presence of the Humanities alongside the Sciences and Technology. Institutions devoted only to a few disciplines, or even just one discipline can be called schools, colleges, polytechnics or institutes, but they should never be called universities. Another policy change, from our findings, is that western universities should ensure that a healthy proportion of international students studying at western universities must study the Humanities, not just the Sciences and Technology. Additionally, research assessment criteria for the Humanities should be qualitative, not quantitative as it is for the Sciences and Technology. As an extension to this policy there should be a policy ensuring that the Humanities are allocated equal weighting with the Sciences and Technology when research funding is being granted. Finally, there should be an international policy ensuring that World Rankings adhere to the above criteria in all data gathering and assessment. While Western democracies have been fiddling with woke diversions, Rome has been burning. A return to the Humanities will begin the rescue.

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