



## Life Worth Living: The Christian Faith and the Crisis of the Humanities

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### I

It appears that universities—at least the world’s top tier universities—are flourishing.<sup>1</sup> They contribute to our understanding of the world more than other institutions. Often in collaboration with businesses, they help improve the human condition, particularly in the fields of medicine and communications. The wider public holds top tier universities in high regard; people across the globe are in awe of brand names such as “Oxford,” “Cambridge,” “Harvard,” “Yale,” and “Princeton,” to name a few. Parents go to extraordinary lengths—foolishly extraordinary lengths, I think—to ensure that their children are admitted to these universities and are willing to pay, what seems to me, ungodly prices to keep them there. Though those of us who work at such universities often grumble about faculty meetings, the contamination of university culture by a corporate mentality, and bureaucracy—especially about bureaucracy—most of us enjoy working where we do. I often say that if I were independently wealthy I’d pay myself to work at Yale doing what I do (if such arrangements were possible, which they mercifully aren’t!). A happy workforce, a highly reputable brand, a great and publicly significant product, and an abundance of eager customers looking for a scarce commodity—any institution in which all this were true would be flourishing, wouldn’t it?

Implicit in the title of the conference—“Christianity and the Flourishing of Universities”—seems to be a different reading of the present state of universities, a sense that something is not quite right and that Christianity can help. But do universities need help? And can

Christianity as a faith provide it? A conference with such a title might also be about the delight Christians should take in the evident thriving of the best institutions of higher learning. After all, in terms of rigor and creativity of thought, in terms of institutional culture and procedures, in terms of moral reputation and performance, and in terms of concrete help in alleviating need and improving lives, top tier universities, arguably, outperform any select group of Christian institutions. Christians could learn a thing or two from these universities about how to make specifically Christian institutions flourish.

Nevertheless, in this lecture I concentrate on how the Christian faith can help universities do better. For, though flourishing in many ways, universities, even top tier ones, are also in a crisis that touches the very core of their mission.

### II

Anthony Kronman of Yale Law School has offered the best analysis of the crisis that I know of.<sup>2</sup> In 2007 he published a book with an ominous title: *Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*.<sup>3</sup> The title states his thesis tersely: higher education (in the U.S.) is on a dead-end street because we have given up on the university-based discussion of questions of deepest human concern: “What does it mean to flourish, not in one or another endeavor, but as a human being?” or, put even more succinctly, “What is a life worth living?” Kronman’s main purpose, however, is not to complain. *Education’s End* is principally about the “end” understood as the goal rather than the termination. It is a defense of the humanities, an argument that serious re-

flection on human nature and rigorous probing into the character of a life worth living belong at the core of university education. Only when universities take up these tasks again will university education return to its proper end.

What was the right path from which universities have strayed, to end up on this educational dead-end street? Where and why did they take a wrong turn? Kronman distinguishes three phases in universities’ relation to the meaning of life in the history of U.S. higher education. The first phase, which began with the establishment of Harvard College in

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### But do universities need help? And can Christianity as a faith provide it?

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1636, was “the age of piety.” The entire college education “rested on the premise that the ends of human living are not merely a fit subject of instruction but the one subject, before all others, that young men must study and learn” (EE, 46). Students wrestled with the issue within an uncritically accepted religious account of the meaning of life; its goal was to understand such life better and to translate it into everyday pursuits.<sup>4</sup>

The “dogmatic program of the antebellum college” had to be given up, Kronman believes; it was too narrow (not pluralistic enough) and irrational (reason stopped at one point and gave way to the authority of revelation) (EE, 46). The second phase was that of “secular humanism” (EE, 46). It lasted from 1869, the year of Charles Eliot’s ap-

pointment as the president of Harvard, to 1968. This was the golden age of humanities. Under the assumption that it is “possible to explore the meaning of life in a deliberate and organized way even after its religious foundations have been called into doubt,” life’s meaning continued to be an organized subject of instruction. It now became the “special responsibility of the humanities to provide such instruction” (EE, 74). A more pluralistic approach to the subject was adopted, “based on a critical study of the great works of Western literature, philosophy, and art” (EE, 46). Students reflected on paradigmatic accounts of meaningful lives by engaging in a great conversation about compelling alternatives.

In Kronman’s opinion, the third phase is where disastrous wrong turns were taken. It began after 1968, the “year that rocked the world,” as Mark Kurlansky termed it, and continues until today (EE, 46). “In this third phase, the question of life’s meaning has ceased to be a recognized and valued subject of instruction even in the humanities” (EE, 46). What was once the main goal of university education has now completely disappeared from it.

### III

Why did universities abandon grappling with the meaning of life? Kronman identifies two major reasons, or wrong turns. The first is related to the dominance of the research ideal in the university. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, first in Germany and then elsewhere, university professors began seeing themselves primarily as scholars, bracketing questions of purpose and values and striving methodically “to make an incremental contribution to the endlessly expanding knowledge in their fields” (EE, 59-60).<sup>5</sup> The research ideal was key to the success of the natural and social sciences, but, Kronman thinks, its adoption was pernicious for the humanities. Seeking the “clout” of producers of genuine

knowledge, professors in the humanities began to act as “scholars,” “specializing” and “making original contributions” in describing and explaining the bits of the world they were studying. Their profes-

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sional self-understanding had no room for a conversation about life worth living with the thinkers from the past—Socrates, Jesus, Paul, Augustine, Dante, Luther, Shakespeare—as if these thinkers were each other’s and our contemporaries. Such an ahistorical and decontextualized conversation sat uneasily with the research ideal, and professors in the humanities abandoned it as edifying discourse, more akin to pious sermonizing than to the rigorous business of advancing knowledge.

Predictably, professors in the humanities gained no clout in the wider university by adopting the research ideal, mainly because in the humanities no clear link could be established between research and the actual advancement of knowledge. So they ended up trading “a valuable and distinctive authority” for one based upon values they could “never hope to realize to anything like the degree their colleagues in the natural and social sciences” (EE, 135).

By the early 1970s, “the humanities were floundering” (EE, 137). Kronman identifies the second wrong turn as the “culture of political correctness,” which, he more controversially argues, has put them “in danger of becoming a laughingstock, both within the academy and without.” He continues with rhetorical bluster: “Looking to build a new home

for themselves, they have instead dug a hole and pitched themselves to its bottom” (EE, 139).

“Political correctness” is an ideologically laden term. By it Kronman means three interrelated ideas, and (if I read him correctly) only their extreme articulations. The first is “diversity” (“enthusiastic affirmation of a deep connection between judgment and race” [EE, 149] or, as Karl Popper put it in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, an implicit claim that a person is entitled to think with “one’s race” or with “one’s class,” rather than evaluating ideas on their own merit<sup>6</sup>). The second is “multiculturalism” (a conviction that “the ideas and institutions of the West, and the works that embody them, have no more value than those of other, non-Western civilizations” [EE, 166]). And the third is “constructivism” (stressing “the artificiality of all human values and the absence of any natural standards by which to judge them” [EE, 137-138]). Any impulse to explore the meaning of life that remained in the humanities after their ill-fated marriage to the research ideal had now completely dissipated: as reason and truth lost value and as all ways of living were pronounced *a priori* of equal worth, the great conversation about what makes life worth living no longer made sense.

For reasons I cannot explicate here, I am more favorably disposed toward “diversity” and “multiculturalism” (though not toward “constructivism”) than Kronman is. They are not the culprits. On the contrary, exploration of specific experiences, practices, and perspectives of people of different races, cultures, and religions—especially religions—can strengthen interest in humanities.<sup>7</sup> In my judgment, the culprits lie elsewhere. One is the denial of human nature, a problem Kronman mentions in passing (EE, 88). Today, many in the humanities are convinced that there is “no such thing as humanity or human life to be contemplated,” as

Terry Eagleton has observed in *The Meaning of Life*.<sup>8</sup> If that is true, we cannot explore what it would mean to flourish as *human beings*, but only what it would mean to live authentically as particular individuals, to express or craft our own authentic selves by pursuing various culturally conditioned, individually inflected, and changing life projects. On this account of the self, there are as many “meanings of life” as there are individuals. The teachings of Socrates, Jesus, or Nietzsche make no claim on us as human beings with a force of truth; they may only inspire us as exemplars of authenticity and self-construction—or they may not. If this is so, it is difficult to know why they would be objects of serious reflection at the university.

The second and I think more important development feeds into the first (or the second might have helped give birth to the first). I’ll discuss it under the rubric of “preferences,” using that term as is common today. In Western cultures—and, in the wake of globalization, elsewhere—decisions about a life worth

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living are increasingly shaped by the way we make decisions about consumer goods. First, consumption is squeezing out individual reflection about a life worth living by insinuating itself into the place of such reflection. A new consumer good offers itself to our imagination before we can ever grow dissatisfied with the old one, and the endless stream of new goods and services, a veritable opiate for the people, becomes for us as a cornucopia of mystery, protection, and salvation.<sup>9</sup> Chasing after consumer “highs,” we rarely reflect on the character and purpose of our lives.<sup>10</sup>

Second, when we do take time to reflect, we decide between major options about flourishing in life in a way analogous to how we decide between a Ford and a Honda, or between Crest and Colgate. For instance, we speak of our “religious preferences.” But, as Peter Berger noted in *A Far Glory*, “preference,” in the way we use it today, belongs to “the language of consumerist culture,” not to the language of deep and informed commitments, and certainly not to the language of ways of living that matter to us more than life itself.<sup>11</sup> “Preferences” are not formed in prayerful contemplation, through careful reading of sacred texts, or through judicious processes, considering options in a “great conversation” spanning centuries. They emerge as a blend of inchoate longings and calculations of benefits directed at sleek and cleverly advertised goods. You don’t read and discuss Socrates, Buddha, and Jesus, or Luther, Spinoza, and Nietzsche to determine your “preferences;” you listen to what your gut tells you and read consumer reports.

When possible accounts of a life worth living become mere “preferences,” the great conversation about that issue grinds to a halt. We can explore with intellectual vigor what makes life worth living and the values that guide us in life only if we abandon the sphere of “preferences” altogether and realize that visions of what makes life worth living and the values that guide us are, in the words of Hans Joas, “reflexive standards by which we evaluate our preferences [rather than preferences themselves], emotionally laden ideas of the desirable rather than desires as such.”<sup>12</sup>

#### IV

What is lost when the exploration of a life worth living gets squeezed out of the university? For one, the university’s character changes. In terms of the main thrust of what universities are about, they become a combination of research institutes and vocational schools. As

research institutes, universities seek to explain how the world, or various swaths of it, function and to apply the knowledge gained to mastery over the world. As vocational schools, universities prepare students for jobs, which are increasingly knowledge-based.

As sites of research, application of knowledge, and training, universities are immensely important. But if this were all there was to them, they would be seriously deficient. In research and vocational training, the most basic question is “How?”—how things (from galaxies to subatomic particles, and everything in between) work, and how to make things work for our benefit. Reason is employed for explanatory and instrumental purposes.<sup>13</sup> Answering “How?” as we seek to achieve our goals is important. So is answering “What?” as we stand in wonder before the world.<sup>14</sup> But perhaps the most characteristic question for humans is neither “How?” nor “What?” but “To what end?” To what end do we seek to advance knowledge and invent new technologies? To what end do we work from dawn to dusk, whatever our jobs are?

Centered on research and vocational training, universities are about cognition and instrumental rationality only, not about moral norms and meanings. They teach students how to achieve whatever ends they themselves or others set for them, but not how to evaluate and choose wisely among possible ends. Experts in means, they then remain amateurs in ends. With cognitive and instrumental prowess, they blindly follow their “preferences,” bereft of reflexive standards or norms with which to evaluate them; they seek to satisfy their desires without having explored what is genuinely desirable and why.

In Plato’s dialogue *Georgias*, Callicles, an advocate of the natural rights of the strong against the weak, derides Socrates for doing philosophy. In response, Socrates tells him: “There is no nobler

enquiry, Callicles, than that which you censure me for making,—“What ought the character of a man to be, and what his pursuits.”<sup>15</sup> But even Callicles, a man of action out to satisfy his appetites, concedes that the youth who neglects philosophy is an “inferior man” and “will never aspire to anything great or noble.”<sup>16</sup> Callicles’ judgment may have been too harsh, but not by much. When universities give up teaching and reflecting on the meaning of life, they fail their students because they withhold from them the noblest of all enquiries.

Individual students are, however, not the only ones who lose when universities devolve into research institutes and vocational schools; the public loses as well. Kronman believes that the failure of universities to engage the problem of life’s meaning contributes to the rise of fundamentalism. Science and technology, though making our lives easier and longer, leave us empty and with a deep yearning. Left alone with our desires and ignorant of the purposes of human life, we become “leaky vessels,” to use the image from Socrates’ polemic against Callicles.<sup>17</sup> That emptiness, argues Kronman, is “the nursery bed and a cause of upwelling of religious feeling, of the surge of fundamentalist belief” (EE, 229). He suggests that the humanities, with secular humanism as its guiding ideology, can counter the spread of religion and fundamentalism. That’s the public benefit of the humanities.

Kronman fears fundamentalism and proposes to fight it with secular humanism. I, on the other hand, think that secular humanism contributes to, rather than fills, the void in human souls, and that the fear of fundamentalism is often exaggerated. Religious extremism combined with political exclusivism is a problem, but so are secularist forms of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Strong religious convictions are not; they only become a public problem when people with diverse religious convictions and secular humanists cannot

engage each other in a meaningful way because they have never mastered the art of conversation about alternative accounts of what makes life worth living and what values should guide it.

In a globalized world, people of diverse and deeply held convictions live side by side under the same political roof. Major issues that rend states asunder—about the nature of democracy, the right to proselytize, the rights of women and gays, abortion and euthanasia, the distribution of goods, climate change, etc.—are largely about what constitutes the life worth living and the values that articulate it. But we have lost the ability to deliberate about them. Among other things, the loss of this deliberative capacity has turned what ought to be public debates about alternative visions of the good life into shouting matches about unreflective personal preferences! If universities fail to take up the great conversation about these issues—a great conversation that, in an age of globalization, should not be limited to the Western religious tradition—they will fail to provide an indispensable public service, the one they are in a unique position to provide, namely, of teaching the art of reasoned conversation about what concerns us the most.

There is one more loss, a strange loss, one might think. If universities give up on the meaning of life, it is not only that they will fail reflexively to illuminate and help steer the desires and preferences of individuals and societies. Universities themselves will—seemingly paradoxically—become servants of these reflexively opaque desires and preferences. “Reason,” wrote Hume famously in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, “is, and ought only to be the slave of passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”<sup>18</sup> Something analogous to what Hume, one of the progenitors of the tradition of absence of rational reflection on ends, said of reason can be said of universities today.

If universities give up on serious reflection about the life worth living, they will become slaves of human passions, whether these are the passions of chauvinism and nationalism of whole collectives or the passions of narcissism and greed in individuals.<sup>19</sup> Just imagine: Oxford and Yale, Harvard and Cambridge, citadels of reason, now turned into tools of inchoate desires and knee-jerk preferences!

## V

Universities are heirs of the morally serious Socrates, but when it comes to the exploration of the life worth living, they have fallen below the level of the appetites satisfying Callicles! Universities are also heirs of the Christian faith’s search for understanding, but they have abandoned the pursuit of a central question that animates the faith and its search, namely “What is the life worth living”?

One way to think about the Christian faith—and the same is true of all major world religions—is that it is an account of the self, social relations, and the good in the context of an overarching interpretation of life. This way of putting the main concern of the Christian faith has the advantage of explaining the centrality of the question of the meaning of life and why the Christian faith might be a contributor to restoring the exploration of this question to the humanities.

Kronman wants no such help, whether it be from the Christian faith or from any other religion. The humanities should save us from religion; religion cannot help save the humanities. He gives two reasons: “First, no religion can be pluralist in the deep and final sense that secular humanism is,” and, “second, every religion at some point demands a ‘sacrifice of the intellect’” (EE, 198). Let’s examine briefly these two claims. Kronman claims that “no religion can accept the proposition that there are

[true but] incommensurably different answers to the question of life's meaning, among which no rank order can be fixed" (EE, 198). That's true with regard to the rock bottom convictions about the meaning of life, which for the Christian faith is instantiated in the dual command to love God and neighbor or in the call to "follow Jesus." But within the framework of these rock bottom convictions, there may well be incommensurable answers as to how to go about leading a meaningful life—such as the life of contemplation and the life of action, both modalities of love of God and neighbor or of following Jesus, but incompatible as dominant life orientations. It's no different, I would argue, when it comes to secular humanism given that it must operate with a normative account of human nature and that it cannot afford relativism (which Kronman explicitly rejects but which his formulation seems to court). Plurality of religious forms of life within a single religion is, I would contend, a match to the legitimate diversity within secular humanism. Just think of the varieties of Catholic "religious" and "lay" orders! Equally importantly, even if Kronman were right and secular humanism were pluralistic in a way religions cannot be, why would such pluralism "in the deep and final sense" be an undisputed good and the condition for contribution to the humanities? Would not an account of the humanities that excludes religious accounts of a meaningful life from the grand conversation be exclusivist

The answer to the last two questions depends on what we do with Kronman's second contention, namely that religions always entail a "sacrifice of intellect." Here, too, the categorical difference between secular humanism and the Christian or other faiths is not obvious. First, the decision in favor of rationalism is inescapably a moral rather than a strictly rational (in a narrower sense) decision.<sup>20</sup> Second, as Nicholas Wolterstorff has argued in his Taylor lectures, thinking out of a particular faith tradi-

tion has a legitimate place at a university, provided universities understand themselves as pluralistic rather than as exclusively secular institutions.<sup>21</sup>

## VI

Even if we reject Kronman's two critiques of religion's role in the humanities, there are other obstacles to the Christian faith's contribution to restoring the question of the meaning of life to the humanities. The obstacles are internal to the contemporary Western expressions of the Christian faith itself as well as to reflection about it.

Early in his book, Kronman stated, not without chagrin, that churches "now enjoy a near monopoly" on "the institutionally organized provision of instruction in the meaning of life" (EE, 47). He need not worry, alas. In the West at least, the Christian faith is undergoing a subtle transformation: instead of sketching a life worth living and offering an orientation for life's pursuits, it often serves merely to energize and mend people as they pursue their preferences formulated without reference to the faith they embrace. Faith then degenerates to a "performance enhancing drug" and "religious Band-Aid,"<sup>22</sup> or, in the words of Christian Smith, God functions as a combination cosmic therapist and divine butler.<sup>23</sup> A faith that has itself abandoned serious engagement with the question of what kind of life is worth living can hardly nudge universities to return to this question.

One might think that theological schools would offer an antidote to such a bastardization of faith. Yet for the most part they don't. The reasons for this are many, but the primary one is that theological schools find themselves in a predicament similar to that of the humanities themselves. This is particularly true of divinity schools at our major research universities.

First, the research ideal with its emphasis on advancing knowledge and the

consequent need for increased specialization is exerting an almost irresistible pull. Now, for professors at theological schools, motivation for "advancing knowledge" does not come merely from outside—from having internalized the values of the research ideal while pursuing advanced degrees, from the expectations of the guild, or from the pressures of the tenure system; it comes also from the faith's own internal demand for understanding, and therefore from the

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need for knowledge about its origins, development, and the plausibility of its claims. But the external pressures of the research ideal have reversed the order of priorities. The main focus is no longer on the character of a life worth living, but on specialized knowledge whose relation to reflection about a life worth living has become either non-existent or obscured.<sup>24</sup> Reflecting on the life worth living requires viewing life as a whole and that in turn requires viewing the Christian faith as a whole. The research ideal is undermining both endeavors.<sup>25</sup> Second, what I have called "the imperialism of preferences" has left its mark on divinity schools, not just on the humanities. There is a creeping sense that we ought to assume that all comprehensive accounts of life, particularly all religions, are roughly equally true and

equally effective as paths to the divine. Indeed, since we are prone illegitimately to transfer to ideas what are legitimate egalitarian sensibilities when applied to persons, there is a presumption that something is wrong with those who don't make such an assumption. Which one of the accounts of the life worth living floating around in the marketplace of "spiritualities" we choose is a matter of mere "preference," a matter of what we are "into" today and what we might no longer be into tomorrow. As a consequence, rigorous debates about alternative accounts of the life worth living that are internal to the Christian faith as well as those embodied in other religions have almost disappeared from divinity schools.

The stated purpose of the Yale Divinity School, the institution in which I teach, is to "foster knowledge and love of God." From the perspective of interest in the life worth living, this mission statement is as good as it gets for a theological institution of higher learning. But as those of us who teach there seek to pursue that purpose, the "research ideal" and the "imperialism of preferences" are tripping us up. Many of us are hard pressed to explain how it is that what we do as scholars and teachers relates to that purpose. Maybe that's why we also find it difficult to explain to those "down town"—read: "the rest of the university"—just what it is that we do up on the "God-hill" a mile and a half to the north.

Not long after 9/11, I had extensive conversations regarding theology, religious studies, and divinity schools with Larry Summers, then the president of Harvard University. In the course of these conversations he told me: "You know, Miroslav, if Harvard were being founded today, it would have no divinity school." As so often was the case, Larry Summers' proverbial bluntness had the virtue of focusing the discussion. Ever since those conversations the question of what divinity schools and theology are good for in universities has stayed

with me. As a member of the search committee for the dean of Yale Divinity School, I've asked that question of every candidate we interviewed. Given the dominance of the research ideal in the university and the imperialism of preferences in the wider culture, this is a critical question for divinity schools.

It would not have helped my case against Summers much had I responded that, in a globalized world of resurgent and politically assertive religions, we need to understand religions and their relation to their environments. This is true, but there is no need for divinity schools in order to pursue that kind of study of religion. If knowledge of religion is the goal, we can dispense even with religious studies departments; indeed, an argument can be made that one studies religions and their role in contemporary societies best in the context of a variety of other departments, such as sociology, philosophy, psychology, biology, etc.

I took a different tack with Summers. My argument was that the primary function of divinity schools is to engage constructively with religious traditions, to reflect on the account of the self, social relations, and the good inscribed in a given religion and to relate it to the challenges of living in today's world. Professors at a Christian divinity school (such as at Yale) or professors of Christian studies at a multi-faith divinity school (such as at Harvard), should understand their work as a contribution to a sustained critical reflection about the life worth living as inscribed in the core convictions of the Christian faith. If this were to happen, their endeavors could feed into, and stimulate reflection on, the same issue in the humanities and thus contribute to the central educational mission of the university—teaching students not just to understand the world and achieve their goals in it, but, perhaps even more importantly, to make wise judgments about what those goals should be and how to pursue them in intellectually and morally responsible ways.

## VII

The Christian faith can help universities build robust humanities programs in which the question of the life worth living figures prominently. This may in fact be the most important contribution that the Christian faith has to make to the flourishing of universities, just as participating vigorously in the public debate on the life worth living might be the most important contribution to public life more broadly.<sup>26</sup> Whether the Christian faith will in fact make this contribution depends on at least two conditions.

First, universities have to come to see themselves as pluralistic rather than secular institutions—secular here in the sense of being committed to secular humanism. They ought to be committed to the rigorous use of reason, not to a particular world-view. Correspondingly, Christians at the universities must see the Christian faith as one of many legitimate perspectives at the university, all of which are important not just to the university's mission but to the integrity of reflection about the Christian faith itself.<sup>27</sup>

Second, academic theologians (and more broadly, those who reflect actively on faith, such as historians and philosophers) must resist letting the research ideal dominate the scope of their intellectual engagement and they must reject the notion that the accounts of a life worth living can be properly treated as mere unconsidered "preferences." Mindful that at the heart of the Christian faith is an account of self, social relations, and the good, they should channel most of their energies into giving an account of a meaningful life and explicating how such a life looks in the context of multiple and ever new challenges to living in the contemporary world. 

1 A paper presented at the conference on “Christianity and the Flourishing of Universities” at Oxford, May 24-25. I am grateful to Kathryn Tanner for reading an early draft and commenting on it as well as to Christopher Corbin for assistance in research and editing.

2 See also Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

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

4 Nussbaum's book *Not for Profit* is a manifesto in favor of the humanities. She highlights the need for educating students for critical argument and sympathy, not for reasoned judgments about appropriate human ends, Kronman's primary emphasis in *Education's End*.

5 See the classic formulation of this ideal in Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *The Vocation Lectures*, eds. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingston (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004), 1-31.

6 Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies II: Hegel and Marx* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 243.

7 For a very different reading of effects of “diversity” and of “multiculturalism” on humanities, see Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, 123.

8 Terry Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35.

9 On this see Miroslav Volf, “Hunger for Infinity: Christian Faith and the Dynamics of Economic Progress,” in Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 151-178, especially 178.

10 Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 118, 128. I owe this point and this reference to my colleague Kathryn Tanner.

11 Peter Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest of Faith in an Age of Credulity* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 34 as quoted by Hans Joas, *Do We Need Religion: On the Experience of Self-Transcendence*, trans. Alex Skinner (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 23.

12 Joas, *Do We Need Religion*, 29.

13 See the critique of instrumental reason in Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London: Continuum, 2004), especially the chapter on “Means and Ends” (3-39).

14 On wonder as the origin of philosophy see Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d3, and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 2.982b,12-13.

15 Plato, *Georgias* 487.

16 Plato, *Georgias* 485.

17 In Hades, such “leaky” persons are the most miserable of all the souls; in they “pour water into a vessel which is full of holes out of a colander which is similarly perforated” (Plato, *Georgias*, 493).

18 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 415.

19 So also Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, 141-144. She cites the example of Gujarat as a warning about how “a band of docile engineers can be welded into a murderous force to enact the most horrendously racist and anti-democratic policies.”

20 See Karl Popper, *The Open Society II*, 232.

21 Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Place of Religion in a Secular University” (Taylor Lectures, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, 2001). For a pluralistic account of the university, characterized by “systematically unprincipled interdisciplinary exchanges among academics who bring to the discussion of issues of contemporary moment (what initially at least seems to be) irreducibly different concerns and angles on the phenomenon of human life” and with a mission to “serve society as whole through the formation of a citizenry educated to make good decisions about the character of their lives together,” see Kathryn Tanner, “Theology and Cultural Contest in the University,” in *Religious Studies, Theology, and the University: Conflicting Maps, Changing Terrain*, eds. Linell E. Cady and Delwin Brown (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 205.

22 Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 15, 24-29.

23 See Christian Smith with Melinda Lindquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2005, 118-171. See also Christian Smith with Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

24 Even in the sixties and seventies, the pressure of the research ideal was so great that one of the greatest Catholic thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Karl Rahner, who himself has contributed a great deal to the advance of knowledge in many scholarly articles, felt the need to justify his “dilettante” effort at

formulating a brief contemporary account of the Christian faith as a whole (see “Some Clarifying Remarks About My Own Work,” *Theological Investigations*, trans. Margaret Kohl [New York: Crossroad, 1981], 17:243-48). In the Introduction to his *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Rahner noted that his attempt in that book “to make the whole of Christianity thematic to some extent and to show its legitimacy can be labeled ‘pre-scientific’” (Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, transl. William V. Dych [New York: The Seabury Press, 1978], xii). Those engaged in “scientific” theological work dismiss such attempts as intellectually inferior. In response, Rahner first affirmed the importance of specialized “scientific” research, and then directed two questions to the critics: (1) “But anyone who does this [calls into question the legitimacy of such ‘pre-scientific’ intellectual engagement with faith] must be asked whether anybody today can reflect upon the totality of his existence in any other way than this ‘pre-scientific’ way” (xii)—Rahner’s assumption being that such reflection is not only legitimate but necessary. (2) “We also would have to ask him whether such ‘pre-scientific’ reflection does not demand so much precision and so much strenuous thinking that it may take its place confidently alongside of the many individual scientific disciplines” (xiii).

25 Have scholars in theology who devote themselves to pure research offset the loss by equal or greater gains? I very much doubt it. Take the *merely* historical study of biblical texts, an endeavor very much in line with the research ideal. The gain in actual historical knowledge has been questionable—think of the lessons from the search for the historical Jesus!—while there is a real danger of turning such study, as I have put it elsewhere, “into a self-referential study of inconsequential cultural artifacts from the distant past of a then insignificant corner of the world” (Volf, *Captive to the Word of God*, 11). This judgment may seem too harsh. But consider how Karl Barth, one of the greatest of 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians, begins the Preface to the first edition of his commentary on Romans—likely the most influential 20<sup>th</sup> century commentary on any book of the Bible: “Paul, as a child of his age, addressed his contemporaries. It is, however, far more important that, as Prophet and Apostle of the Kingdom of God, he veritably speaks to all men of every age. The differences between then and now, there and here, no doubt require careful investigation and consideration. But the purpose of such investigation can only be to demonstrate that these differences are, in fact, purely trivial” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C.

Hoskyns [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968], 1). It is the triviality of differences across times and spaces that the studies of ancient texts guided by the research ideal are unable to embrace; results of such studies are often to illuminate a text that they've locked up in the glass display case of the past. The consequence is a certain triviality of such studies of biblical texts themselves.

26 For the later point, see Volf, *A Public Faith*, 55-74.

27 See Tanner, "Theology and Cultural Contest."