

## THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

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AMERICAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES ARE tremendously successful institutions. Commonly touted as the best in the world, they attract students from all over the globe and many more applicants from the United States than they can enroll. They receive billions in “investments”—gifts and grants from individuals, companies, and governments—and are credited with holding the key to technological progress and economic growth. They have established a near monopoly on access to prestigious and lucrative careers. The men who struggled to build these institutions must be resting in their graves with self-congratulatory grins. Or are they?

In this essay, I focus not on the wonderful accomplishments of the university, but rather on one of its discontents: its uncertainty and apprehension regarding moral questions. The builders of the modern university expected that the research conducted within it would solve moral problems—it would provide authoritative instruction on how to live and how to shape a more perfect society. But within a generation, it became clear that this expectation would not be easily fulfilled. Indeed, many of the faculty housed in these new universities were ready to wash their hands of moral concerns. The university faced a crisis: Did it serve to advance morality? And if so, how? The success of the

university in producing knowledge and training skilled professionals has compensated for and masked the moral crisis. But nonetheless, the problem of morality continues to plague American higher education. Universities have been unable either to fully incorporate morality or to comfortably abandon a moral mission. This is the unresolved legacy of the creation of the modern research university.

In order to understand this legacy better, I will look at two periods in the history of the university: first, the early twentieth century when morality first became marginalized, and second, campus activism in the 1960s. Student activism of the 1960s is not typically associated with morality. Students, such as those at Berkeley who launched the “filthy speech movement,” certainly mocked conventional morality. Nonetheless, I will argue that campus activism, at least in its early years, was an attempt to revive the moral purpose of the university. Finally, I will discuss implications of this history for the contemporary university—what we as scholars will have to do if we want to restore moral concerns to the university.

### *Origins of the Problem*

The men who created the modern research university in the late nineteenth century believed in science; they believed it would unlock secrets of nature and provide the foundation for unprecedented material progress. And they believed that knowledge gained through scientific inquiry would lead to the improvement of self and society. Their optimism rested on the view that science was a particularly successful form of inquiry because it was open—scientists were free to question received knowledge—and it was evolutionary—scientific knowledge improved as scientists tested currently accepted beliefs, refining or rejecting them when necessary. They associated the superiority of science with its “objectivity,” but they did not define “objective” as “value-free.” Rather they used “objective” to mean “tested through empirical application.” They believed that as scientific theories were tested, some would be discarded and replaced with better ideas. In their view, the ability of science to come up with better and better theories set it apart from other forms of knowledge.

They often compared science to theology and philosophy, which seemed for centuries to be repeating the same endless disputes over basic issues. Scientific theories, in contrast, were tested and either improved or rejected. Proponents of this view of science, however, could not explain how scientific methods insured that new theories improved upon the old. In the absence of other measures of progress, they assumed that scientific progress could be identified by agreement; scientists studying the same problem would eventually come to the same solution. William James explained that the “only safeguard” for the fallibility of science is “in the final *consensus* of our farther knowledge about the thing in question, later views correcting earlier ones until at last the harmony of a consistent system is reached.”<sup>1</sup> Science was distinguished from less reliable forms of knowledge because it moved consistently forward—beyond controversy to agreement. Designating consensus as the mark of success, I will argue, was a fateful move—a move that would push moral concerns out of legitimate scientific discourse.

In the late nineteenth century, American intellectuals commonly believed that science could be used to modernize religion. They hoped that a new scientific form of religion would serve as the basis for moral education in the modern university. For a variety of reasons—which I do not have the space to enumerate here—efforts to enshrine a scientific form of religion at the center of the university failed. Leaders of the universities did not, however, conclude that without religion the university needed to abandon its moral mission. On the contrary, they viewed science itself as a potent source of moral guidance and believed that scientific inquiry encouraged good personal habits, consistent with those promoted by liberal Christianity. They conceived of the progress of scientific knowledge in utopian terms. Scientists confidently expected to produce grand unifying theories that would explain everything from the simplest physical process to the complexities of advanced human civilizations. They assumed that scientific knowledge would

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<sup>1</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) 191.

easily translate into guides for action and spoke of the scientific method as a key that would open the door of unlimited personal and social progress.

Intellectuals assumed that the biological and social sciences, in particular, would provide answers to moral problems. These disciplines addressed the nature of life and human society and therefore touched on the central moral question: What is the best way to live? Biologists and social scientists believed their research would help answer this question. Ethically-minded scientists thought biology contained lessons for personal behavior:

It is a very significant fact that the rules of conduct for the best development of men, discovered first by the experience of the human race, and afterward formulated as religious precepts, have now been established as laws of biology

wrote University of Chicago botanist, John Coulter.<sup>2</sup> Educators embraced the notion that biology encouraged clean living and good habits and looked to biology as a form of moral training. They pointed out that many moral issues traditionally addressed by religion, such as sexual relations, could be studied by biologists. Biology rather than the Bible would provide the authority for the ten commandments.

Scientists also maintained that biological research assisted social ethics, as well as personal morality. It would help address contemporary social problems, such as inadequate housing and work conditions. By sponsoring biological research and instruction, universities served the larger community: These convictions drew many academic scientists into reform movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Academic scientists presented temperance, sexual hygiene, public health reforms, and eugenics as some of the potential moral benefits from biological research.

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<sup>2</sup> John Coulter, "Christianity and Science," J. M. Coulter Papers (Manuscript Collection, University of Chicago Archives) 8-9.

Social scientists made even stronger claims for the moral relevance of their disciplines. The social sciences had strong institutional ties to the political and social reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The social sciences grew rapidly in the new university in large part because they promised to provide moral guidance and social service. Most social scientists were involved in contemporary social or political movements either as activists, advisors, or publicists. For example, Herbert Baxter Adams of Johns Hopkins helped form the Workingmen's Institute and the Baltimore settlement house, Lawrence House. He also became involved in Baltimore politics, supporting municipal reform. E. R. A. Seligman of Columbia was active in the Society for Ethical Culture and the University Settlement and Greenwich House and served as an adviser on a number of city, state, and federal commissions. Charles Merriam of the University of Chicago served as a Chicago city alderman and ran unsuccessfully for the mayoral position. He and many of his colleagues in the social sciences were active in Chicago political and social movements. Like biologists active in eugenics and hygiene reforms, social scientists involved in campaigns to address problems in municipal government, labor conditions, urban housing, rural schooling, immigration policies, race relations, and a myriad of other issues saw their activities as a natural component of their duties as scientists.

The assumption that science had moral value dominated the discourse about scientific inquiry in the late nineteenth century. As a result of these views, university officials in the early twentieth century looked to the biological and social sciences to provide modern moral education. In the 1910s and 1920s, university educators tried to increase the influence of science by developing "general" science courses. Universities increasingly required or strongly encouraged students to take these new introductory courses in the biological and social sciences. Several universities introduced requirements in evolutionary biology, and many more created freshman surveys in the social sciences. These courses reflected the belief that the university could best fulfill its duty to society and students through research and instruction in the social sciences. Clayton C. Hall argued that

those universities will best serve the public interests in the immediate future which are first and best in historical investigation and in the study of the science of law and of government in its application to the vital questions affecting the well-being of human society.<sup>3</sup>

The promotion of the study of the social sciences became, according to this view, a moral mission.

But the plans of university educators to use the biological and social sciences as the source of modern moral education and the intellectual developments in biological and social science disciplines moved at cross-purposes. In the early twentieth century, scientists became uncomfortable with utopian visions of science and began to make more limited claims for their subjects. Both biologists and social scientists were concerned that their disciplines had not made more “progress.” They found that their fields were marked by seemingly endless disagreements about basic theories. The “consensus” that was supposed to indicate intellectual progress was not emerging. Younger scientists blamed the disagreements on their elders’ predilection for grand theories. They, therefore, embraced specialization and eschewed efforts to unify all knowledge. They maintained that their disciplines would yield useful, “practical” information. But the meaning of the phrase “practical” was flattened out to include material and vocational utility, but not moral value.

These changes were first evident in the biological sciences, where younger biologists pursued experimental research agendas and began to purge larger philosophical issues from their professional work. Younger biologists became impatient with their predecessors’ theorizing about different modes of evolution and the distinction between living and inanimate matter. They believed that these larger problems could not be addressed without more knowledge of specific biological processes. They designed more carefully controlled methods of experimentation

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<sup>3</sup> Clayton C. Hall, “Statesmanship and the Universities,” *Forum* 48 (1912): 712.

and developed more specialized research agendas. By 1910, experimentation dominated American biology.

Similar changes followed in the social sciences, when, beginning in the 1910s, a young group of scholars advanced a more narrow notion of science with particular vigor. Social scientists, who advocated methodological changes that would eliminate morality from their disciplines, used disciplinary disputes as proof of the inadequacies of current practices. For example, Frank Fetter maintained that disagreements among economists indicated that economics was not yet a science: the

diversity of opinion in the fundamentals among leading exponents of the subject argues strongly that economics is still a philosophy—a general attitude of mind and system of opinion—rather than a positive science.<sup>4</sup>

These social scientists used consensus as evidence of the scientific status of research. Nine years later, Wesley Clair Mitchell presented the “slackening of doctrinal controversy” among economists as proof that the discipline was becoming scientific: “I think that we debate broad issues less, because increasing concern with factual observation is breeding in us a more scientific and a less dialectical temper.”<sup>5</sup> Younger social scientists argued that adopting more rigorous scientific methods would end disciplinary discord and that consensus could serve as proof of the superiority of their methods.

This circular reasoning encouraged scholars to look for ways to eliminate disagreement. Like biologists, these social scientists emphasized the importance of carefully controlled research and the collection of empirical data. They advocated the use of statistics and other research

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Albert Fetter, “The Teaching of Economics,” *College Teaching: Studies in Methods of Teaching in College*, ed. Paul Klapper (Yonkers-on-Hudson, NY: World Book, 1920) 238.

<sup>5</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Economics,” *A Quarter Century of Learning, 1904-1929* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931) 51.

techniques, such as case studies and surveys, to standardize and increase the reliability of their work. And they thought that eliminating broad philosophical questions from their professional discourse would help end longstanding disputes within their disciplines.

In particular, many of the younger generation of scholars thought that eradicating ethical concerns was the key to achieving intellectual consensus. This was a logical conclusion. In the early twentieth century, moral questions were sharply contested. The growth of cities and the rise of large corporations created new problems for which old maxims of right and wrong did not easily fit. The increasing diversity of the population undermined cultural assumptions about proper behavior. Changing family structures opened new questions about gender roles and sexuality. Given this context, it is not surprising that social scientists blamed morality for the lack of progress of their disciplines and insisted that ethical neutrality was an essential condition of scientific research.

In justifying the sanction against morality, social scientists argued that moral judgments were subjective while knowledge was objective. This turned morality into a matter of personal preference. The subjective nature of morality, they argued, would color scientists' interpretation of facts. "Nothing," maintained A. Gordon Dewey, "is more liable to lead astray than the injection of moral considerations into an essentially non-moral, factual investigation."<sup>6</sup> This implied that "objective" knowledge could not really inform moral positions. If "what ought to be" should not be confused with "what is," then perhaps "what is" might have no bearing on "what ought to be."

Biological and social scientists hoped that stricter standards of research would produce more credible knowledge than their predecessors had achieved with a broad conception of scientific inquiry. In making this move, scientists implicitly accepted that knowledge could not guide

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<sup>6</sup> A. Gordon Dewey, "On Methods in the Study of Politics, I," *Political Science Quarterly* 38 (1923): 638.

action. And while scientists of the teens and twenties would not perhaps have assented to a sharp division between knowledge and action, they were abdicating the responsibility for trying to understand how to connect empirical research and moral judgments. When it became clear that this relation would not be transparent and indisputable, they simply said that it was beyond their purview as researchers.

### *Evading the Problem*

The failure of science to fulfill the moral mission intended for it should have created a major debate within the university. Academics did not confront the question of whether university education should have a moral dimension, and if so, how it could be fulfilled. Nor did they examine the epistemological claim that science, in order to be objective, had to be value-free. And, finally, they did not explore how, if at all, empirical research could be connected to moral judgments. Instead university leaders allowed the institution to drift on the question of morality. They refused to declare that morality was beyond the confines of the university. But they also failed to seek ways to keep the True and the Good united. In order to fulfill the mission of moral guidance, university educators settled on two sources, neither completely adequate: the humanities and student-life.

Some scholars in the humanities and arts were eager to fill the void left by the failure of both scientific-based and religious-based moral education. They defined the humanities as the conveyor of traditional values and art as the expression of spiritual truths. They maintained that the humanities and arts, rather than the sciences, could provide the unity and moral guidance that had been lost in the university reforms of the late nineteenth century. Foremost among these scholars was a group called the New Humanists, led by Irving Babbitt of Harvard. Babbitt presented the first major statement of the New Humanist position in his 1908 book, *Literature and the American College*. In this book, Babbitt decried the excesses of the university reforms instituted by Charles Eliot and other leaders of major universities. He was dismayed by the over-specialization of the curriculum, the random quality of students' course selections, the lack of seriousness and intellectual interest

among students, and the remoteness of the research-oriented faculty. Babbitt questioned the contemporary faith in the moral value of the social sciences. Scientific progress, Babbitt argued, was one of the sources of, not solutions to, the intellectual and moral disunity that marked the modern university.<sup>7</sup>

As scientists began to abandon their moral role, the humanists were there to push them out and claim the role for themselves. Before the humanities could adequately fulfill this role, the New Humanists thought that the study of literature, art, and philosophy would have to be radically reformed. They thought that these disciplines had been infected with the false spirit of science. They argued that literary scholars produced careful philological studies in the name of research but lost sight of the meaning of literature. Falsely valuing progress, literary scholars overlooked the superiority of classical literature and classical aesthetic and moral norms. The New Humanists wanted to reconstruct literary education so that students would become linked to a tradition of “great” Western literature. They saw literature and the arts as ways to cultivate standards of aesthetic and moral judgment.

Scholars in the humanities and arts recognized that there were professional advantages to taking up the mantle of moral education. Many faculty in the humanities felt that the model of specialized research was not well-suited to their disciplines. Also, they had difficulty gaining support for their research because they could not, as scientists could, claim that their research would eventually translate into practical knowledge that would aid society. They had to base their claims to service on their direct moral influence on students. As the guardians of values, humanists adopted a central, but increasingly problematic, function in higher education. The Good, then, became associated with the Beautiful, not the True.

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<sup>7</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908).

Although university administrators welcomed efforts to define the humanities as a source of moral education, they began to de-emphasize curricular forms of moral guidance, and looked instead to administrative changes and extra-curricular activities to solve the problem of undergraduate character development. Administrators continued to support an extracurricular role for religion, largely through the direct or indirect support of groups that served students of different faiths. No doubt, many students viewed morality in terms of the religious traditions with which they identified. In addition, universities made renewed efforts to enforce, with various degrees of seriousness and success, conventional expectations for personal morality. Sexual experimentation, drinking, smoking, and gambling were denounced. In order to enforce these norms, universities hired special administrators to handle “student life.” They tried to assert greater oversight over fraternities and sororities and other student activities.

The most important “moral reform” in the teens and twenties was the dormitory. In the late nineteenth century, university reformers saw dormitories as a drain on university funds and stopped requiring that students live at home or in college housing. As student populations grew in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, universities did not build new dormitories to house them. Students lived unsupervised in fraternities and boarding houses. In the teens and twenties, there was a renewed interest in building dormitories to house students and create a sense of community on campus. University administrators encouraged the building of dormitories as a means to help provide moral education for students. President Wilbur of Stanford wrote that

In America we have found that when students are housed together there is developed a strong cooperative sense of loyalty and enthusiasm called “college spirit” which has a profound effect upon the development of the character of the students and upon the welfare of the institution.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *President's Annual Report, 1920-21* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1921) 34-35.

The building of dormitories and the development of other extracurricular and administrative forms of moral guidance lessened the expectation that faculty should provide moral guidance and created an institutional separation between morality and knowledge.

The institutional separation simply mirrored the development in the curriculum. Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, educators tried various ways to keep moral and intellectual training united. But these efforts failed. Scientific subjects were increasingly viewed as irrelevant to morality, while non-factual subjects were increasingly seen as sources of moral guidance. Developments in philosophy in the 1920s and 1930s gave intellectual credence to the changes in higher education. Logical positivism drew a sharp distinction between statements of knowledge and value judgments. At the same time, philosophers began to adopt emotivist theories of ethics, that associated morality with non-cognitive sentiments and aesthetics.

Institutional patterns that emerged over the first three decades of the twentieth century were never completely satisfactory. Student-life, although covered in a cloak of rhetoric about character development, could not carry the weight of moral education. The realities of intercollegiate athletics and fraternities, which dominated extra-curricular life at many campuses, mocked the overblown claims of university administrators. Humanities faculty never fully united around the New Humanist agenda. Some remained wedded to specialized, technical models of research; others chose to divorce aesthetic values from moral ones. Finally, not all scientists accepted the separation of fact and value. In the social sciences, in particular, a persistent minority questioned the ideal of value neutrality and insisted that their research had implications for the "good life." As a consequence, tensions percolated beneath the surface of the university. Although higher education remained officially committed to the development of students' character, some within it ceased to take the moral mission seriously, and thought of universities as dedicated solely to intellectual and/or professional development. Others yearned for a more satisfactory expression of its moral commitments.

### *The Challenge of the 1960s*

Students forced the tensions surrounding morality out into the open in the 1960s. As the 1950s closed, there was a discernable unease among young adults, a yearning for a more profound and meaningful engagement with life. This manifested itself in a variety of ways, including intensified religious activities on campuses and challenges to conventional morality in the name of more authentic personal values. But the most prominent manifestation was greater political activism among both conservative and liberal students. Student activists did not view politics in the narrow sense of parties, elections, or even power. They understood politics in the classical sense—it was the quest for the good society, the good life. In trying to encourage political engagement among their peers, student activists were attempting to create a moral revival.

For reasons that have not been fully studied, activism on the left came to dominate the university during the 1960s. One reason may be that students on the left related their political interests to a critique of the university. They suggested that students needed an education that was more relevant to their personal and social concerns. Some faculty joined students and began to challenge the assumptions about research that had dominated since the association of objectivity with value neutrality in the teens and twenties. Student and faculty activists raised two different objections to scholarly practices based on the ideal of “objectivity”: first, the scholarship produced and taught in the university was stultifying and undermined moral engagement; and second, it was not really neutral, but rather served certain unstated ends. In addition, they challenged the moral position of the university as an institution.

In the early sixties, before they had an inkling of the upheaval to come, student activists fretted most about the apathy of their peers. The university, student activists charged, was in part responsible for the apathy of students. In the Port Huron Statement, Students for a Democratic Society argued that “apathy is not simply an attitude; it is a product of social institutions, and of the structure and organization of higher education itself.”<sup>9</sup> Students maintained that the nature of the intellectual life of the university discouraged students from asking important ques-

tions. Knowledge was presented as disconnected bits, and students were made to feel incapable of understanding the larger picture. They also claimed that the emphasis on objectivity and “distance” spurned action and taught students to ignore the implications of ideas. “The times seem to call for more, not less, passion; but the student is told to separate his values from his daily existence, to be ‘objective,’” complained two student activists from Oberlin.<sup>10</sup> Students, as a consequence, felt their studies were meaningless and had no relevance for their lives. In addition, student activists complained that the structure and values of the university encouraged thoughtless conformity. “An authoritarian college within a society that basically values money and power, conformity and success, established habits, and the status quo, does not develop independent people,” asserted Tom Hayden.<sup>11</sup> Hayden and his fellow activists believed the university inhibited the moral revival they sought, and as a consequence, they wanted a different kind of university.

One tactic student activists employed to transform the university was to create alternative universities—parallel institutions that offered the kind of education that activists wanted. In 1966 and 1967, students at hundreds of institutions across the nation founded “free universities” and “experimental colleges.” Created to “destroy the irrelevant university,” students designed their free universities to challenge academic practices that they thought promoted passivity among students. Although free universities varied from place to place, all of them rejected the model of political neutrality. Although most accepted courses presenting any ideological position, political courses were designed to engage students in a cause, not simply offer a dispassionate analysis of events. Free universities included courses on “organizing,” which involved direct involvement in community projects. The curriculum of the free

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<sup>9</sup> Reprinted in James Miller, *“Democracy is in the Streets”: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) 334.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell Cohen and Dennis Hale, eds., *The New Student Left: An Anthology* (1962; Boston: Beacon, 1966) xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Hayden, “Student Social Action: From Liberation to Community,” *The New Student Left*, 283.

university also aimed to break down what activists saw as false distinctions between the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. They offered courses that were supposed to be personally, as well as socially, relevant; courses in religion, meditation, and sexuality were common offerings.<sup>12</sup>

Prompted by student activists, faculty joined the critique of universities, shifting attention from the nature of classes to the type of research produced. Faculty activists charged that the values and structure of the university distorted the production of knowledge. They argued that the university espoused the values of objective and neutral scholarship—values that were both wrong and false. These ideals were wrong because, to the extent that they were achieved, they produced meaningless knowledge; they were false because the knowledge produced by the university was not objective and neutral, but in fact, served the interests of the elite. Activists in various fields frequently mocked the scholarship valued by the university. For example, Louis Kampf, in an article entitled, “The Scandal of Literary Scholarship,” maintained that most literary scholarship was characterized by an “oppressive lack of intelligence.” The minutiae and meaninglessness of scholarship was not simply deadening; it diverted people from deep questions—questions with moral implications.<sup>13</sup>

Faculty in the whole range of social science and humanities disciplines made similar points—research had become narrow, technical, and disconnected. Under the guise of objectivity, universities and disciplines came to favor a certain style of research, dispassionate and aloof. But this style did not guarantee “truth” and indeed, often prohibited important truths from being spoken. A group of women illustrated this point by writing an essay about their efforts to publish a critical review of the

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<sup>12</sup> James W. Brann, “San Francisco Students Run Own ‘College’,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 1 (21 December 1966): 1, 4-5; Free University of Pennsylvania brochure as quoted in Paul Lauter and Florence Howe, *Conspiracy of the Young* (New York: World, 1970) 105.

<sup>13</sup> Louis Kampf, “The Scandal of Literary Scholarship,” *The Dissenting Academy*, ed. Theodore Roszak (New York: Pantheon, 1967) 45; Sumner M. Rosen, “Keynes Without Gadflies,” *The Dissenting Academy*, 89.

historical scholarship on women. They quoted the reviewers' reports, several of which objected to the tone of the article. "The authors," one reviewer wrote, "are far too intemperate and hostile in their language for the pages of a scholarly journal." The women argued that this was irrelevant. They responded: "We are angry; we do not believe that that interferes with the scholarly value of our work. To be scholarly does not mean to be unemotional or to pretend to be uninvolved in the issues at stake." Scholars need to write about real issues that engage their emotions, or scholarship will continue to be arid and irrelevant.<sup>14</sup>

The critique of objectivity and neutrality went in another direction as well. Leftists argued that the scholarship produced in the university was not in fact objective and neutral but represented a specific ideology—an ideology that served the interests of the ruling class. This point, which was ubiquitous in leftist writing about the university and academic disciplines, took a number of forms. First, leftist critics pointed out how research encouraged people to simply accept what is and not question the status quo. The Psychology Liberation Movement, for example, argued that psychology professors discouraged radical social change by passing on to their students "an unquestioningly competitive and consumptive view of human nature."<sup>15</sup> Similar arguments were made about the way the social sciences presented social stability as normative. Second, critics highlighted the ways in which scholarship accepted and perpetuated the oppression of certain groups. Feminists, for example, found sexism in all disciplines:

Male supremacist myths about women are taught unchallenged. Psychology courses teach us that women have an intrinsic nature which is biologically determined. Sociology courses imply that the differences in roles are inevitable,

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<sup>14</sup> Rochelle Zeigler, Marcia Scott, Elizabeth Pleck, Persis Hunt, and Linda Gordon, "On Working Through Channels," *Newsletter of the Radical Historians' Caucus* 8 (n. d.): 4.

<sup>15</sup> Psychology Liberation Movement Program, draft (n. d.), New University Conference Papers (Wisconsin State Historical Society) 13.4.

never suggesting that perhaps a different social structure might result in different roles for women. History completely ignores, or else treats with condescension, both the fact of the oppression of women and their struggle for liberation. The humanities perpetuate the feminine mystique and ignore the pervasiveness of male chauvinism in art and literature.<sup>16</sup>

Similar examples of overt and covert racism could be identified in almost every field. Critics pointed out that almost all “establishment” analyses of race “attribute the miserable situation of black people to supposed biological or sociological inferiority rather than social oppression.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition, leftists argued that much university research was instrumental, designed to further certain policies. Since the government or corporate foundations funded most of this research, it not surprisingly served their ends, not the needs of the oppressed. The classic sixties example of instrumental research was military research. Leftist faculty frequently reminded their colleagues that political scientists advised the government on how to fight guerilla wars, and physicists helped design new bombs. This critique was particularly strong in the natural sciences, the recipients of most funds for research. Activists pointed out that scientists could not avoid this problem by hiding behind the banner of basic research.

Scholars outside the natural sciences also criticized how their own knowledge was used. Anthropologists pointed out that their work was used to further imperialism and exploit the peoples whom they studied. Radical psychologists decried the way that mental health professionals helped “manage” the urban poor. In general, activists argued that knowledge was used in oppressive ways, and most experts were

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<sup>16</sup> “Women’s Caucus Perspective,” *NUC Newsletter* 3.1 (13 August 1969): 7.

<sup>17</sup> “Racism...Perspective & Program,” *NUC Newsletter* 3.3 (15 September 1969): 9.

employed to maintain a social order that served the interests of a few. Activists did not want to abandon instrumental research, but they wanted the university to support research that would serve just rather than unjust causes.<sup>18</sup>

Activists did not simply attack the type of research produced in the university, they criticized the university itself. They viewed the university as a moral actor and found it wanting. Activists rejected the notion that as institutions, universities were independent and separate from society. They argued that the university was deeply engaged in society, but not in the ways that it should be. Focusing particularly on the relation of the university to the social and political causes that concerned them most—the war in Vietnam and racism—they charged that the university, while claiming neutrality, took clear political positions with its actions. It supported an immoral war, they argued, by conducting research for the military, by training officers for the military in ROTC programs, by allowing the military and military-related businesses to recruit on campus, and by reporting students' grades to draft boards. They argued it supported a racist society with its admission and hiring practices, its urban renewal projects, and its curriculum. Activists first tried to persuade the university to change its policies, and then tried to force it to by disrupting the university through demonstrations and other actions.

Activists in the 1960s were never able to bridge the two sides of their critique—that the university be more engaged in contemporary moral questions and that it disengage from aspects of society that they considered immoral. In order to make this connection, they would have had to address the thorny question of how to integrate moral judgments and empirical research. By the late 1960s, it was clear that no one was prepared to engage in this discussion. For a variety of reasons, student activists had increasingly moved away from the educational questions they had raised in the early sixties, focusing more of their

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<sup>18</sup> Len Radinsky and Mel Rothenberg, "AAA\$ 1970," NUC Newsletter 4.7 (20 December 1970): 14.

attention on the role of the university in society and more of their energy on forcing the university to change that role. They had increasingly come to see politics in terms of power, and frustrated by their own lack of power to direct, they sought to mobilize the power to block. The pressures created by student activists and by alumni, trustees, politicians, and others who wanted university administrators to end campus upheaval did not make the university a conducive climate in which to fruitfully explore complex epistemological questions.

### *The Legacy of the Past for the Present*

In the aftermath of the campus unrest, university leaders were only too happy to see the return of the apathetic student. Now, after several decades of relative calm, universities are once again beginning to discuss the issues raised by the student activists of the early 1960s. Why are students so apathetic? Why are they only concerned with career and wealth? What can universities do to encourage engagement with broader issues? In other words, the problem of the university's moral mission is once again bubbling into public discourse.

Universities have responded by supporting a number of programs, many of which involve students in social service of some kind. In some cases—in the form of “service learning”—these programs are integrated within the curriculum. But, on the whole, service learning remains on the margin of the curriculum and has not yet forced faculty to rethink the connection between knowledge and action. Generally these programs follow the division set in the early twentieth century—morality is associated with extra-curricular activities. The institutional structure reinforces the divide between the Good and the True.

While these programs are laudable, I do not think they will have much impact on the general patterns of university life that developed in the early twentieth century. The history of the university indicates that the problem of morality is an epistemological one. The upheaval of the 1960s has forced scholars to reconsider ideas about knowledge. Some of the developments in the humanities and the social sciences associated with postmodernism grew out of the debates and questions raised

by the movements of the 1960s. However, this scholarship has largely explored one part of the sixties' critique—elaborating on the hypocrisy and futility of claims of neutrality. There has been little work that explores the other side of the critique—how to engage scholarship in moral concerns.

Addressing this question involves returning to the problem faced by scientists in the early twentieth century: If we can't achieve consensus about moral issues, should we simply try to expunge morality from our research? There are two ways in which we might return to this question. On the one hand, we might look for different ways to achieve consensus. On the other hand, we might look for alternatives to consensus as a "marker" of "successful" inquiry. Either of these approaches would involve scholars in a reconsideration of the logic of empirical research. Indeed, it would force logic back into the center of academic life, as scholars in various disciplines would have to reconsider how they make and defend judgments.

Given the history, I doubt the first approach would be fruitful. I think that we have to accept that we are not going to agree about many moral concerns. So the problem remains: Is there value in applying the sorts of inquiry that the research university has so successfully fostered to questions that are not likely to yield a clear answer? Does empirical research have a role in clarifying, critiquing, bridging, and extending moral positions? Can intellectual inquiry move moral considerations beyond the subjective? Or will this simply corrupt research and engage the university in fruitless political battles? These are open questions, but ones I believe are essential to explore if we don't want to accept that the Good and the True are inevitably sundered.