

— Not for citation without permission —

"Civility and its Discontents: Public Discourse and the Humanities"

College of Humanities Dean's Forum
Ohio State University
Wednesday April 27, 2005

Pauline Yu
President, American Council of Learned Societies

Let me begin with a word of thanks to Associate Dean Debra Modellmog and all her hard-working colleagues for arranging this forum. I trust it will be civil; I know it's timely.

We're here to discuss civility, and to consider whether it is a necessity in the conduct of academic and scholarly affairs. The question is, of course, neither abstract nor hypothetical. We find ourselves at a moment when the most newsworthy happenings in academia are not discoveries, publications, or student achievements, but controversy, invective, and tumult. The mere whisper of the names "Ward Churchill" or "Larry Summers" alone can denote the moment.

The Ford Foundation has recently launched a program, "Difficult Dialogues," aimed to help, in the words of the letter signed by the Foundation's president and the leaders of fifteen colleges and universities, "the complex challenge of sustaining informed political and civil discourse." "Civility" has been frequently invoked in the very public and very heated controversies surrounding the Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures at Columbia University. The report of the Ad Hoc Grievance Committee appointed to investigate the alleged intimidation of students points to "the obligation for all of us to maintain a civil and tolerant learning environment," to "show respect for the rights of other held opinions differing from our own," and to assume as faculty "the responsibility to promote free and civil inquiry."¹

The issue of academic civility is thus not at all hypothetical. Nor is it new. On the shelves of my office at ACLS is a volume entitled *Confrontation and Learned Societies*, commissioned in the wake of the disruption of the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in 1968. The authors, eminent senior scholars all, seem astonished that "dissidents and activist have challenged many of the sacred traditions of the scholarly community...[including] the standard of civility and even rational discourse in relationships among scholars." The authors recognized that the ensuring confrontations have raised "fundamental questions about the role of scholarship and science in a society like ours which is in a state of transition or perhaps even crisis." They struggle to come to terms with the new world in which they find themselves. "Our deepest

¹ Ira Katznelson, Chair; Lisa Anderson; Farah Griffin; Jean E. Howard; and Mark Mazower, "Ad Hoc Grievance Committee Report," *Columbia News: The Homepage of the Public Affairs Office and Its Publication, The Record*, March 28, 2005, 2, 3, 4, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/news/05/03/ad_hoc_grievance_committee_report.html.

values,” they conclude “may not be expressed in answers to the big questions but rather in our tolerance, our ability to question our own first principles, and above all, our respect for civility.”²

The 1990s saw another spike in the concern about academic civility, extended to a wider concern about the coarsening of public life and especially of public discourse. Campus speech codes, developed as an attempt to safeguard the collective life of colleges and universities, themselves became flashpoints: a rigidified and punitive civility demanded, it was alleged, by political correctness. Opinion leaders worried aloud why, as Rodney King so concisely put it, “can’t we all just get along?” President Clinton’s second inaugural address, soon overshadowed by the Lewinsky scandal, called for “the politics of reconciliation.” A 1996 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* posed the question: “Whatever Happened to Civility in Academe?”³ A national “Forum on Civility” was formed by William Bennett and Sam Nunn. Political scientist Robert Putnam’s study of community action and social capital, *Bowling Alone*, seemed to warn of the serial social isolation of a nation of singletons rambling about the ruins of a once robust civil society. Law professor Stephen Carter’s volume, titled simply *Civility*, was a huge success in the trade press. Gertrude Himmelfarb announced that “We are in a culture war. And one of the first casualties of war is civility.”⁴ (Her comment calls to mind comedian George Carlin’s query: “How can you have a *civil* war?”) And in his first Inaugural Address in 2001, President Bush promised a “new commitment to live out our nation’s promise through civility, courage, compassion and character.”

So, how far have we come in the past forty years? Perhaps the 60s are still with us. One of the iconic images of that era was the photograph of armed men guarding Cornell’s Black Studies Center. That event was, we are told, the moment when Professor Allan Bloom, then a member of the Cornell faculty, resolved to combat what he saw as the forces seeking to slam closed the American mind. (Better, he concluded, to slam closed the gates of academe and shut out those questioning its reigning ideals.) How different, one might ask, are the credible threats of violence made in the wake of Hamilton College’s invitation to Ward Churchill?

Civility is thus not just an “academic” question. Indeed, the issue comes to the fore precisely because of social transformations within the university, external pressures on our institutions and on academic discourse, and because academic discourse matters to the larger society. Out there, we have ever more discourse, and, it seems, ever less civility. Talk shows have become shouting matches. Even Jon Stewart of the *Daily Show* felt compelled to draw a line last year, startling the hosts of CNN’s *Crossfire* by pleading with them to “stop harming America” with prefabricated incivility.

Crossfire, however, is already well behind the outrage curve. In the April 2005 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, David Foster Wallace provides an interesting and careful study of the structure and dynamics of talk radio that focuses on the LA station KFI, which promises its listeners

² John Voss and Paul L. Ward, eds., *Confrontation and Learned Societies*, (New York: New York University Press, 1970), viii, xi.

³ Courtney Leatherman, “Whatever Happened to Civility in Academe?,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 8, 1996, <http://chronicle.com/prm/che-data/articles.dir/art-42.dir/issue-26.dir/26a00101.htm>.

⁴ Quoted in Benjamin DeMott, “Seduced by Civility: Political Manners and the Crisis of Democratic Values,” *The Nation*, December 9, 1996, 14.

“More Stimulating Talk Radio” and provides its owner with extremely profitable infotainment. One of the station’s hosts, Phil Hendrie, he writes, practices what Wallace calls “a cruel and complicated kind of meta-talk radio” that works as follows:

What happens every night on this program is that Phil Hendrie brings on some wildly offensive guest—a man who’s leaving his wife because she’s had a mastectomy, a Little League coach who advocates corporal punishment of players, a retired colonel who claims that females’ only proper place in the military is as domestics and concubines for officers—and first-time or casual listeners call in and argue with the guests and (not surprisingly) get very angry and upset. Except the whole thing’s a put on. The guests are fake, their different voices done by Hendrie...and the show’s real entertainment is the callers, who don’t know it’s all a gag—Hendrie’s real audience, which is in on the joke, enjoys hearing these callers get more and more outraged and sputtery as the “guests” yank their chain.⁵

As Wallace notes, the format for this show, dependent as it is on a supply of gullible callers, suggests that it may soon outgrow one region and need to become a national phenomenon. Before it does, let us pause to consider its essential elements. Its object is outrage. Its method is fraud. It is not about the subject explicitly discussed—indeed, those subjects seem to be selected precisely because there is no authentic disagreement about them—but about the style and temperament of the discussants. The discussion is seemingly open, but really contains an in-group and an out-group: the regular listeners who are clued in and the wayward interlocutor.

This drama of invented, inverted invective may become a regular element of our civic discourse, but one could hardly call it civil discourse. But what is civil discourse in the academy, in the humanities? Why is it important that we “keep it civil?” As we consider these questions, I think we must keep in view the relationship of civil discourse to academic freedom and to civic discourse. Civility is important for many reasons, but most importantly, I think, because it partakes of and reinforces the same presuppositions that undergird academic freedom. In the brief time remaining to me, let me give an admittedly schematic sketch of the congruent points of these two practices and then circle back to our messy public square.

Civility

The concept of civility itself is, no surprise, contested territory. What is civility? My response to such a simple yet powerful question is “And now, let us Google.” Fittingly, the very first link that pops up is: “George Washington’s Rules of Civility.” At age 14, George Washington wrote down 110 “Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation.” Copied from a translated French text, some of these rules would meet with our approbation today:

Rule 13 offers helpful and, I would say, indisputable advice. Washington suggests we “Kill no vermin as fleas, lice, ticks, &c in the sight of others; if you see any filth or thick spittle, put your foot dexteriously upon it; if it be upon the cloths of your companions, put it off privately; and if

⁵ David Foster Wallace, “Host,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 295, No. 3, April 2005, <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200504>.

be upon your own cloths, return thanks to him who puts it off.”⁶ I, for one, will endeavor to follow this rule, but standing alone it suggests that civility is mostly a matter of manners and politeness.

If that were all, then identifying cases of incivility wouldn't be very difficult. The American Association of University Professors has a rich file of them. At one university two professors once got into an argument at a faculty meeting. One taunted the other with “Hit me,” and then stomped on the glasses of the other, who had removed them in order to fight. A male professor spit in the face of a female dean at another university. At yet another campus, a professor poured grease over the papers of a colleague, who retaliated by urinating on the first professor's work.⁷ But of course it's more complicated than that. Washington's 42nd rule gives us a hint of why many are discomfited by calls for civility, detecting behind such injunctions an implicit reinforcement of social status and the differences therein. “Let thy ceremonies in courtesy,” Washington advises, “be proper to the dignity of his place with whom thou converses, for it is absurd to act the same with a clown or a prince.”⁸

This perceived linkage between civility and social inequality provoked much of the discontent in the “miniboom” of civility talk in the last decade. Benjamin DeMott of Amherst College, for example, warned in *The Nation* that the civility trope was a strategy of the “leader-class” to mute “protest by Americans outside the ranks of the publicly articulate against the conduct of their presumed betters,” and that “[t]he ‘new incivility’ needs to be recognized, in short, for what it is: a flat-out, justified rejection of the leader-class claims to respect, a demand that leader-class types start looking hard at themselves.”⁹

DeMott argued that the new movement:

...tightly binds the old myths of classlessness to a new scam of civility.
...Sanitizing and miniaturizing the worst of the past and present this themelthe language of civility and incivility as a whole—sweeps away human meaning from slavery, the civil rights struggle, one episode after another of murderous cruelty and greed...In this cloud of abstraction nothing survives except pieties of the air headed: faith that no talk on earth is more exalted than talk about talk.¹⁰

While DeMott's focus was on broader civic discourse, the Berkeley anthropologist Laura Nader expressed a similar discontent in the context of the university. Writing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, she explains why she coined the term “coercive harmony” to describe when dissenters are “silenced for the sake of civility,” and we pay the cost of “trading justice for harmony.” “Academics,” she urges, “should not be party to establishing an ideology of

⁶ George Washington, *George Washington's Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*, (Boston: Applewood Books, 1988), 11.

⁷ Leatherman, “Whatever Happened to Civility in Academe?”

⁸ Washington, *George Washington's Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*, 17.

⁹ DeMott, “Seduced by Civility: Political Manners and the Crisis of Democratic Values,” 11, 12, 13.

¹⁰ DeMott, 18.

consensus on our increasingly corporatized campuses. Instead, we have a duty to investigate the dangers of coercive harmony, and to expose repression when it poses as consensus.”¹¹

These critiques bring into focus the pivotal question: Is one person’s civility another’s censorship? Do the injunctions of civility serve to stifle debate and inhibit new knowledge, or do they structure debate which can become the crucible of new knowledge? The answer, of course, is “yes,” they can do both. Victorian etiquette books outlined conversational strategies designed to avoid going into any controversy. Today, people may well “play the civility card,” as it were, in an attempt to rule out of court the evidence or arguments of opponents. It is just as certain, however, that a mutual commitment to civility is the very foundation of vigorous debate. Academic discourse is not mere sociability; its purpose is not just to exchange ideas, but to test them. As George Washington put it in his 58th rule of civility: “Let your conversation be without malice or envy, for it is a sign of a tractable...nature; and in all cases of passion admit reason to govern.”¹²

In 2002, reacting to campus tensions echoing conflicts in the Middle East, the president and provost of the University of Chicago, Don Michael Randel, issued a statement on that University’s stance regarding civil discourse and debate, debate being an essential element of civil discourse. As President Randel put it:

We are a community, and this entails a decent respect for one another and even a degree of trust. No set of rules or codes of behavior can ever fully capture everything that respect and trust require. Maintaining this community is hard work, and each of us must assume some personal responsibility for it. In a world of increasing tensions and heated differences, we will sometimes be accused of bias or even rank prejudice for tolerating a wide spectrum of views. But the response to views that one finds distasteful is not in the first instance to attempt to suppress them but instead to answer them with the force of argument.¹³

Specifying civility as the acknowledgement of and requirement for participation in a community of inquiry suggest how it ought to work. Civil discourse implies respect for our interlocutors as fellows in our own community. The respect we pay to our fellows’ arguments is their contestation. We respect our fellows’ arguments not just for their content but for how they may dis-content us, for the opportunity to contest them and the mutual belief that the contestation is a value. The practice of academic civil discourse, then, acknowledges and instantiates a community with a common purpose. And the existence of that community is the basic premise of academic freedom.

¹¹ Laura Nader, “Harmony Coerced is Freedom Denied,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Section: The Chronicle Review, p. B13, July 13, 2001, <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v47/i44/44b01301.htm>.

¹² Washington, *George Washington’s Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*, 20.

¹³ “Provost, President make clear University’s stance on civil discourse, debate,” *University of Chicago Chronicle*, Nov. 21, 2002, Vol. 22, No. 5, <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/021121/provost.shtml>.

Academic Freedom

If civility is contested terrain, then academic freedom is a burned-over, well-cratered battlefield. I was a dean too long and, therefore, involved with too many grievances and lawsuits to imagine that the application of its principles to specific cases is simple and straightforward. We would also deceive ourselves if we did not recognize the fragility and the vulnerability of the principle of academic freedom. Although its roots lie in the early nineteenth-century German university's affirmation of the dual freedoms—to teach and to learn—as a formal doctrine academic freedom is only a little more than a century old. The foundational statement on academic freedom, as you may know, is the 1915 “Report on Academic Freedom and Tenure” of the then fledgling American Association of University Professors. It reads in part:

The distinctive and important function [of professors]...is to deal at first hand, after prolonged and specialized technical training, with the sources of knowledge; and to impart the results of their own and of their fellow-specialists' investigations and reflection, both to students and the general public, without fear or favor. ...The proper fulfillment of the work of the professoriate requires that our universities shall be so free that no fair-minded person shall find any excuse for even a suspicion that the utterances of university teachers are shaped or restricted by the judgment, not of professional scholars, but of inexpert and possibly not wholly disinterested persons outside their ranks.¹⁴

Note that this statement does not delineate an ambit for academic freedom that is larger than the freedom of speech compassed by the First Amendment. Academic freedom doesn't grant professors the right to make libelous statements or to shout “Fire!” in a crowded theater, or protect them from sanctions should they choose to do so. What the statement does seek to secure is the specification of who can sit in judgment of the “utterances of university teachers”: that role is limited to the community of university teachers themselves. The freedom it provides is only a freedom from the judgment of the professor's ultimate employer: the administration, the trustees, and, ultimately, the public that supports the academic enterprise through either tax dollars or tax exemption.

Is academic freedom the defense of individual virtue? The seminal case of Edward A. Ross illustrates some of the problematics involved. Many of you probably know this history. Professor Ross helped found not just one, but two of the disciplines that are the building blocks of the university: sociology and economics. Although he had other opportunities, he succumbed to the blandishments of President David Starr Jordan to join the founding faculty of the new Leland Stanford Junior University in 1893. But when Ross became a pamphleteer in support of William Jennings Bryan's 1896 presidential bid, Jane Lathrop Stanford, the university's paymaster and sole trustee, demanded his dismissal. President Jordan was able to deflect her demands for four years, until Ross made an inflammatory speech to a San Francisco labor gathering. When Ross was, as a consequence, dismissed, a number of his Stanford colleagues resigned in solidarity with him and the ensuing tumult led to the formation of the American

¹⁴ American Association of University Professors, “The 1915 Report on Academic Freedom and Tenure,” as excerpted in Thomas Haskell, “Justifying the Rights of Academic Freedom,” in *The Future of Academic Freedom*, Louis Menand, ed., (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 58-9.

Association of University Professors and its formulation of the principles of academic freedom and tenure.¹⁵

To see this as the case of the progressive scholar versus the plutocratic meddler is correct in one respect. But it is also worth noting that Mrs. Stanford objected to Ross's speech in part because of its racism and what we could call its incivility. The *San Francisco Chronicle* had quoted Ross as telling the labor leaders that "should the worst come to the worst, it would be better if we were to turn our guns upon every vessel bringing ["Asiatics"] to our shores rather than permit them to land."¹⁶ Ross's views on black/white race relations were no more palatable: "The theory that races are virtually equal in capacity," he ranted, "leads to such monumental follies as lining the valleys of the South with the bones of half a million picked whites in order to improve the conditions of four million unpicked blacks." I present Ross's statements not as a charge against him—his views changed over his life-time and he even served a term as president of the American Civil Liberties Union. I do want to make the point that academic freedom is not the defense of one point of view, and in particular a politically correct one. Nor is it the defense of individual virtue. It is the defense of the collective judgment of the academic community, however flawed it may be at any point in time.

Some critics of today's university do not dispute the conclusion of academic freedom—that university scholars, the profession, should be free to express conclusions drawn from their studies—but want to modify its premise: that university scholars form an autonomous community of judgment. The deceptively-labeled "academic bill of rights" promoted by David Horowitz and under consideration in a number of state legislatures seeks, in the name of fairness and balance, to substitute the political appointment of faculty for academic selection. Some provisions proposed for the renewal of the Higher Education Support Act, HR 3077 in the last Congress, have similar intentions with regard to the vexed domain of international and area studies, especially Middle Eastern studies, which is, of course, the same field that has been the subject of controversy at Columbia University.

As most of you know, Columbia's president Lee C. Bollinger, his feet to the fire, has articulated the logic of academic freedom in no uncertain terms.¹⁷ He begins his recent Cardozo lecture sponsored by the New York Bar Association by noting that this is "a time of enormous stress for colleges and universities across the country...a time of contentious debate on campuses...[that] concern matters of national or global importance. Many are joined—even incited—by outside forces, from political pressure groups to the mainstream media to increasingly strident voices on the Web." (Indeed, an article in last week's *Chronicle of Higher Education* ["Facing Down the E-Maelstrom," April 29, 2005] describes the almost crippling effect of e-mail and blog interventions in other campus debates elsewhere.)

¹⁵ Michael R. Hill, "Ross, Edward Alsworth," *American National Biography*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), Vol. 18, 908.

¹⁶ Mary O. Furner, *Advocacy and Objectivity: A Crisis in the Professionalization of American Social Science, 1865-1905*, (University of Kentucky Press, 1975), 236.

¹⁷ Lee C. Bollinger, "President Bollinger Delivers Cardozo Lecture on Academic Freedom," *Columbia News: The Homepage of the Public Affairs Office and Its Publication, The Record*, www.columbia.edu/cu/news/05/03/cardozo_lecture.html.

But, Bollinger argues, “universities...must stand firm in insisting that, when there are lines to be drawn, we must and will be the ones to do it. Not outside actors, not pressure groups, not the media. Ours is and must remain a system of self-government.” That self-governance carries a corollary obligation: “There is review, it does have consequences, and it does consider content.”¹⁸

It is on the basis of that review—the peer review that we know so well—that scholars determine who’s admitted to their community of judgment. As Bollinger puts it: “The notion of a ‘balanced curriculum,’ in which students can, in effect, select and compensate for bias, sacrifices the essential norm of what we are supposed to be about in a university. It’s like saying of doctors in a hospital that there should be more Republicans, or more Democrats.”¹⁹

As I noted earlier, the principles of academic freedom do not provide the university scholar with speech-rights more extensive than those of any citizen in the public square. What it does provide the college and university scholar, and what the average citizen rarely has, is protection against an employer’s negative judgment of speech made in the context of employment. At Stanford in 1900, that employer could be easily portrayed (and parodied) as the bejeweled and remote “Dowager of Palo Alto.” In 2005, we are more aware that trustees, regents, and university administrations are, in essence, agents for the wider public that supports our institutions either directly through tax dollars, donations, and—most painfully for many—tuition payments, or indirectly through acceptance of the tax-exemptions and other measures securing the financial sustainability of higher education. What does the public gain in this deal? What is its interest in the intellectual autonomy of professors? Where is the public value?

The case set out by the AAUP in 1915 runs like this. Universities exist to advance knowledge. Scholars have hard-won, specialized knowledge. Only the “community of the competent,” one’s fellow scholars, can judge if the new knowledge promoted by one of its members has validity, that is, that it is more accurate than earlier knowledge. Such advances will bring practical benefits to the public that has conceded intellectual autonomy to the community of the competent, the profession.

Although arguments can be waged about whether the search for accuracy, validity, and truth should be presumed as academic freedom’s justification and goal, I think that it’s best not to lose sight of the more important point. As Bollinger reminds us, “There is far more at work within a university than simply the search for truth.” There is, he writes:

A significant additional function...of nurturing a very distinctive intellectual character. ...Of all the qualities of mind valued in the academic community I would say the most valued is that of having the imaginative range and the mental courage to take in, to explore, the full complexity of the subject. To set aside one's pre-existing beliefs, to hold simultaneously in one's mind multiple angles of seeing things, to actually allow yourself seemingly to believe another view as you

¹⁸ Bollinger.

¹⁹ Bollinger.

consider it—these are the kinds of intellectual qualities that...suffuse the academic atmosphere at its best.²⁰

Here President Bollinger is echoing John Cardinal Newman, who saw in the university “[t]he power of viewing many things as once as a whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence.”²¹ Bollinger draws, however, a connection between the intellectual culture nurtured in the university and the “particular intellectual and emotional attributes [that] are needed to make a successful democracy,” which include “the intellectual flexibility of the give-and-take of perpetual conflict over multiple desires and beliefs that characterize life in a democratic system of government.” That is, knowing “[w]hen to share and embrace other views, when to insist on your own; when to compromise and when to resist.”²²

Civic Discourse

Civility, then, is a precondition not just of academic freedom but of civic discourse itself. Here the value of the university as a community that embraces, at least in principle, the practice of intellectual wholeness and the ability to think beyond the interests and boundaries of the self is especially compelling. The forces propelling us in other directions are all too clear. It’s far too easy for us to customize our cultural consumption to fit with and reinforce—and never to challenge—our intellectual commitments and political views. The proliferation and ideological segmentation of the news media accelerates each day. Technologies exist to refine our ideological preferences almost infinitely, as the common public square shrinks to the vanishing point.

Recall that LA talk-radio show I mentioned earlier, where commercial forces empowered by technology can create a simulacrum of a public discussion that is really the private exercise of already established views. Now, the university, by contrast, is a community exercise and testing ground of shared ambitions and standards. Civility is the working acknowledgement of that community; academic freedom is its charter as a community. If we demand an arena of academic freedom from the pressures of the wider society, then we must enact the community of judgment, a civil community, that is the premise of academic freedom.

We can hope, finally, that our own civil discourse provides a model for the wider civic discourse. A comment made last week during the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s consideration of the nomination of John Bolton to be U.S. ambassador to the United Nations brings to the fore the fragile state of our public square. The committee was moving toward what was expected to be a lock-step party-line vote on the confirmation of the nominee. Democrats asked for further hearings, arguing vehemently that, among other disqualifications, the nominee can be very uncivil when disagreed with. But the Republican committee chair seemed determined to call a vote when Republican Senator George Voinovich stated that he had heard what the Democrats had said and was himself not prepared to vote on the nomination. Senator Voinovich thus tipped

²⁰ Bollinger.

²¹ John Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of a University*, (1853, 1858; New York: Doubleday and Co., 1962), 158. Quoted in Edward W. Said, “Identity, Authority, and Freedom,” in Menand, *The Future of Academic Freedom*.

²² Bollinger, “President Bollinger Delivers Cardozo Lecture on Academic Freedom.”

the balance, and the committee adjourned to allow more investigation and hearings. The remarkable comment I want to call to your attention came from the astonished Senator Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island: "I don't know if I've ever seen, in a setting like this, a senator changing his mind as a result of what other senators said." Wouldn't you have thought that it was a basic function of the members of the "world's greatest deliberative body" to debate and reason together, even to the point of changing their minds? Not exactly, it would appear, and as someone to whom I told this story commented, almost never.

Nonetheless, the modeling of civil discourse—debate that is both genuine and civil—that does not foreclose but rather enables contention, is, I think, one aspect of the public value of academic freedom. At the same time, we in the academy must not stand aloof from the wider civic discourse. Speaking at an ACLS Annual Meeting, NYU historian Thomas Bender stated that:

To the extent that we follow a pattern of withdrawal from the public culture, we become vulnerable to those simple questions that often enrage us: *What do you do? What good is it?* We err if we respond that "it's none of your business" or that "you would not understand," which amounts to the same thing. These are fair questions, and if we cannot answer them for our neighbors in everyday language, we should be concerned.²³

What we do, in very great part, is debate our naturally quite different views on the subjects to which we have dedicated our professional lives. For scholars in the humanities, that work concerns the most intimate elements of human experience: thoughts, ideals, emotions, creativity. It is in the humanities that the self can imagine itself as the other. The very power of these subjects should bring passion to our work and to our discussions. Reason may not always govern our passions, but malice will surely corrode them, in the academy and in the public.

²³ Thomas Bender, "Locality and Worldliness," in *The Transformation of Humanistic Studies in the Twenty-first Century: Opportunities and Perils*, ACLS Occasional Paper, No. 40, 1997, <http://www.acls.org/op40ben.htm#Bender>.