Ambition for the Modest

Few scenes in literature have become more trite than the one in Victor Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris* in which the archdeacon brandishes a copy of a newfangled printed book against the figure of the cathedral outlined against the sky and exclaims, “Ceci tuera cela!” The printed book has not yet slain the cathedral or the spirits that lie within, and indeed the most abundantly overprinted and over read printed book of this decade is devoted to lively doings in Paris churches and the like.

Hugo’s image persists. In 1994, a memorable conference held at the University of San Marino on “The Future of the Book” concluded with our host, Umberto Eco, brandishing a laptop computer in one hand, a paperback book in the other, and quoting the archdeacon with a question mark: “Ceci tuera cela?” Our conclusion that day and the abundant evidence since suggest that the answer is, again, “Non!” But there can be no denying that the book and the digital data store are drawn to each other fiercely and irresistibly, and each sees its future weirdly and permanently entwined with the other.

For the talk from which this paper is drawn, I had meant to re-enact the primal scene of technological change by brandishing my laptop in one hand and a copy of the most exciting new work of scholarship I have read this year in the other. The laptop is considerably more advanced than Eco’s and now holds all five million words of Augustine’s works in Latin, plus a raft of Cicero and Ovid and Vergil and the like, slew of Rilke and Nietzsche, all of *The Divine Comedy*, all of Scott-Moncrief’s Proust and four volumes of the French, and a fair amount of what may be described as inadequately provenanced copies of the works of a well-known and now deceased author (who would undoubtedly be furious to see these unauthorized copies on the fan website to which he is subjected), not to mention dozens if not hundreds of scholarly articles downloaded from JSTOR and Project Muse.

The book in my other hand in this imaginary tableau is an impressive one: Chris Wickham is the new Chichele Professor of Medieval History at Oxford, whose *Framing the Early Middle Ages* is a work that transforms its subject permanently, bringing old and new evidence together with discipline and judgment, pointing clearly towards new and strong lines of interpretation without becoming a thesis-hammering work of argumentation. The learning, the intelligence, and the restraint of the book assure it a central place in scholarly debate for many decades to come. It would be the perfect counterpoise to my laptop, a vivid physical reminder that the humanistic professions continue to produce powerful and important work that makes the old new, the familiar unfamiliar and revealing.

But the exigencies of modern life prevented me from my juxtaposition, because Wickham’s book is 900 pages long – pages I turned this winter with the eagerness I brought to my first reading of *The

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1 This is a slightly revised version of the text originally presented.
Hound of the Baskervilles in 1959 – and too bulky to fit in my carry-on luggage. I could imagine having a digital representation of it, but for all its urgent contemporaneity, it was still conceived as a book for print, not a database or a website. That intellectual nature of book-ishness is deeply planted in our culture and will persist in many forms, even when those forms more and more often include digital representations. In the humanities, at least, the future of work that is not merely, as the saying goes, “born digital,” but “thought digital” still lies almost entirely before us.²

The belabored point of my juxtaposition of work and media is to frame a response to the ACLS-facilitated report on “cyberinfrastructure” whose release was scheduled for a few weeks after our meeting. That document lays out an agenda, indeed, for necessary next steps (and completion of first steps already taken) to shape the future working conditions and achievements of scholars. My expectation is that it will meet an audience ready to respond to it and take in a concerted way those steps for which we have not yet, as a profession, had a good road map. Progress of this kind is a necessary but far from sufficient condition for assuring the health and future of the humanistic studies.

This is a good moment, therefore, for taking success in those efforts a little bit for granted, in order to think our way into some considerations of what the humanities have been, are, and may become in a future age when we no longer speak of cyberinfrastructure at the ACLS any more than we now speak there of electrical infrastructure or highway infrastructure. The task has an urgency about it. We know enough now already of the environment of digitally-enabled communication to realize that our privileges are at risk.

I say “digitally-enabled communication” because it is important to realize that even much of what we see that is not obviously done on or with a computer has been transformed in the last decade by the digital revolutions. The editing and production of video materials, however delivered, is easier and cheaper than ever, the quality of high-definition video stunningly better than ever (and therefore our eyes will be drawn to it for even more hours of the day), and the superabundance of channels of distribution – let’s see, shall I watch cable TV tonight, or see what Netflix has delivered, or click on a video-on-demand link on my computer? – all depend on the digital matrix from which these objects spring. Print media, the websites of familiar print media, and the endless resources of digital libraries that I print out for myself all depend themselves in turn on digital tools of preparation and management. No piece of newly printed material that you can hold in your hands did not have some digital life before it was committed to paper.

That new environment challenges our privileged place to speak. The pulpit of Hugo’s archdeacon lost much, but not all, of its hold on public attention (and some clergy of course found and find new pulpits to reach large audiences), and now in turn our own classrooms can feel the charisma of place leaking out of them. Fifty years ago, classicists like Moses Hadas, Gilbert Highet, and Whitney Oates were radio personalities on the fine stations and networks in New York and their classrooms still places where the voice of authority spoke uncontested. Today I cannot pretend to speak as the voice of authority uncontested in a space where the very smart student in the second row with her laptop is ready to throw one misspoken word back at me in a trice – and I am ready to be delighted by her intelligence and enterprise. Nothing will change that, emphatically not the Canute-like insistence of some faculty that students be deprived of the use of functional information appliances in the sacred classroom space – for nothing will chase people from the sacred space faster than to disempower them when they are there.

² The new Digital Innovation Fellowships administered by ACLS, the first of which were awarded this spring, will sow seeds for work of a different sort.
In the welter of voices that pummel us from the cablesphere, the blogosphere, and the wikisphere, the recession of the humanities academic from a position of authority continues apace. A few of us – but not many of us in fact – emerge in the new guise of “public intellectuals,” a role all the more problematic in that it must be shared with people who have none of our justifiable claims to the authority of knowing that comes from practicing one’s trade in a community of inquiry and collegiality.3

And we see around us the signs of the fading of our reputation, even our disrepute. The Jefferson Lecture on the Humanities this year cannot be excused for the lamentable, indeed culpable obscurantism and flat out untruth that he larded into his remarks. The authorities on the development of human cognition, consciousness, and speech – I think of people like Daniel Dennett and Steven Pinker – had to be startled to hear that the Lecturer averred that evolution had come to an end eleven thousand years ago with the acquisition of human powers of speech and that culture had now decisively triumphed over nature. What is worst about this pathetic display, however, is that there are many, even well-wishers of ours, who will take this embarrassing spectacle as evidence for the deterioration of our own standards and disciplines.

The words of a recent Nobel Prize winner, responding to an interviewer, are equally sobering:

I think these universities have passed their peak. The very idea of the university may be finished. . . . I feel that these places ought to be wrapped up and people should buy their qualifications at the Post Office.

Not including scientific qualifications? – interjected the interviewer.

No, those must remain. But the Humanities - they seem to me to be worthless disciplines.4

I must make this point unmistakably clear: There is no point in arguing with such statements. Practicing humanists know they are untrue and can assert that eloquently, even prove the point to our own satisfaction in the blink of a parakeet’s eye, but that means nothing if those who say such things or hear them with assent are unmoved.5 And we are not without responsibility for the rise of such attitudes, and certainly share responsibility if they persist in spite of us.

How then shall we act? My goal is not to preach resistance, defense, or defiance even at the price of decay, nor even reinvigoration. I rather suggest we should ask afresh the question what it would take for the humanities to succeed not only a little beyond what we fear might happen but far beyond what we dream could happen.

The leitmotif of my suggestions is the old line of Terence:

homo sum: nihil humanum a me alienum puto.

I am human: there’s nothing human that’s alien to me.6

3 Some very good books for general readers by distinguished ancient historians sell far fewer copies than the quite bad books of Thomas Cahill, for example. Such disparity lies partly in the willingness of the non-scholar to tell a story so simple that no scholar could regard it as usefully true.

4 V.S. Naipaul.

5 A quick Google search would find the passage just quoted and identify the speaker; to name him here might encourage dismissive explanation that I think in fact inappropriate for the reasons stated in my text.

6 My translation is not a modern prettification, for “homo” in Latin is the word that English forgot to acquire, a gender-undifferentiated word for “human being,” as opposed to both “vir” (man) and “femina” (woman). It is used, for example,
In that spirit, this is a moment for renewed commitment to inclusiveness and to ambition. If we carve out a quiet little niche for ourselves, we can easily succeed, and find it growing quieter and smaller with each passing year. If what we do has the value we know it has, then we should expect it to flourish greatly and work to that end.

The domain of our ambition can reasonably be divided among questions of discipline, questions of substance, and questions of method. I shall address a few of them, by way of exemplifying a style of thought and strategy.

In matters of discipline, first, we can and should reposition ourselves in the organon of the arts and sciences. We owe ourselves at last the opportunity for intelligent rebellion against the shackles that C.P. Snow threw over our heads with his famous lecture on “The Two Cultures.” For many years, I had an inkling of what dissatisfied me about Snow, and when F.R. Leavis or Roger Kimball flailed away at him, I knew they were missing the point entirely, indeed catastrophically. I was then gladly instructed by Karl Popper, in an essay called “A pluralist approach to the philosophy of history.” Snow’s error, and a pernicious one, was in believing himself and then enabling those outside the natural sciences to believe, that there really does exist a fundamental difference in modes of knowing between scientists and what he called “literary intellectuals” and we might call humanists. To believe that requires us to believe in a fundamental and, I am quite sure, false dichotomy between the world of nature and the world of humankind – something I might be tempted to call, and in calling it both praise a venerable elder of our tribe and affirm his reading of the formative culture of the early nineteenth century and its lasting influence today, a natural supernaturalism. To observe the distinctiveness, within the order of nature, of the cultural products of human beings is one thing, but to extrapolate from it the notion of a different and artificial order of being that requires different modes of knowing and authority is to hearken back to a long period of digression in medieval and modern Christian thought.

The late French Jesuit Henri de Lubac, whose scholarship on the early church earned him papal censure early in life and a cardinal’s hat late, transformed the historical study of theology in 1946 with publication of his book, *Surnaturel: études historiques*, in which he showed beyond doubt that the notion of a supernatural order, something separate and divided from the natural, was a late medieval invention at best and not an ancient or integral part of Christian thought. Religious thinkers have absorbed this lesson with difficulty, when they have absorbed it at all, but it is curious the extent to which our public and private rhetoric of the humanities seem to have missed it entirely, continuing to proclaim a watered down version of non-ecclesiastical spirituality even when all divinity has been evacuated from it.

That “exceptionalism of the humanities” saps our intellectual integrity and undermines our authority in the wider society more than any other single fact. In asserting our abstinence from the habits and modes of inquiry of the critical intellect as they have evolved and been fought over – even at the cost of life itself – in the last centuries, we sacrifice more than I think most of us ever suspect. As long as...
we assert or assume that we are immune from the rigors of quantification, of falsification, and of a reliable and predictable peer review among scholars of all biases, we surrender any reasonable expectation of being heard with respect by those outside our cloisters.\(^9\)

One way forward is to remind ourselves of the origins of the “liberal arts,” an institution whose modern instantiations have little or nothing to do with those origins, as is often the case with intellectual institutions. The trivium and quadrivium of late antiquity took root as disciplines of the mind to give it mastery of both word and number, discourse and reckoning, to enable both tools to free the mind of slavish acceptance of the apparent disorderliness of the perceived world and to help it see the underlying orderliness and *ratio* of words and things. How often are humanists directly involved in defining, much less providing, the courses that fill new-found quantitative skills requirements for undergraduates? Not, I think, often enough for a profession that uses words like “probably” and “certainly” and makes assertions about such classes as “the nineteenth-century novel” without having read, or even seen, the vast majority of books that category comprises.

To shake off the great set of blinders that lets us think ourselves outside the domain of the natural sciences would be a great achievement and should be a task of our time for our profession, but we blinker ourselves in other equally culpable ways. To the false dichotomy between science and culture I would add the one that runs in many ways even deeper in western societies, between the world of culture and the world of enterprise and trade. Without commerce, we would still live in the ancients’ version of the golden age – lying about naked under the trees, feeding on nuts and berries. But the same Romans who sang persuasively about that golden age were the ones who had rigidly enforced in their own aristocratic society a distinction between the true nobles – the senators who made money the old fashioned ways, that is by inheriting it or by stealing it – and the second order worthies of their society, the *equites* or knights, the mere businessmen. That haughty disdain not only for engaging in trade but even for understanding anything of its workings led eventually to the immoral moralism that prohibited lending money at interest, than which no religious decree more likely to lead to the miserable poverty of the great majority humankind has been imagined.

In the academy we know, “business” appears as an object of study infrequently, except in the gated communities of our business schools. Business ethics is, we all agree, a subject of great urgency, and therefore to be taught in business schools by individuals whose standing (that is, whose compensation) there is not very high. (One effect of our interest in business ethics is to persuade businessmen that ethical thought is a way for outsiders to exercise control over them – a control they reasonably distrust.) Economic history may be imagined and sometimes studied and taught, though it is rather in abeyance at the moment and seldom reaches the more profound level of history of business itself. Departments of philosophy and religion can be entirely innocent of such concerns, as are often departments of foreign languages and literatures – for note the common critical and institutional assumption that the natural purpose of learning a foreign language is to read the literature, not to do business with real people who speak that language. Departments of English in recent times have paid a bit more attention to the subject, as when critics excavate the financial records and dealings of the fathers and brothers in Jane Austen, but the business dealings of literary men themselves are regularly ignored.\(^{10}\) (When was the last time you read a biography of a modern literary figure of no inherited

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\(^9\) We cannot objectively measure how far the exceptionalism of the humanities has been fed by the architecture of our campuses, often literally monastic in form, and by the curious insistence on adhering to medieval costume for our public rituals. We should at any rate recognize that these are modern choices, not a natural and unmediated measure of continuity with a venerable past.

\(^{10}\) The exceptions in this domain are real, but still exceptions; see, for example, Lisa Jardine’s splendid *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (1996) or William E. Wallace, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo: The Genius as Entrepreneur*
wealth that told you how much money he or she made by writing and selling books and lecturing on
them? I call no examples to mind, though I have hardly sought them thoroughly. But how much did
the Montreux Palace cost each year? How much did Vladimir Nabokov make for the translations of
his Russian works, and how much more than he would have made if he had left the task to others?
How much was left when Nabokov and his widow, Vera, passed away? And how much more does
that estate make each year? Are these questions irrelevant to the study of literature?11)

A calm and rational study of the history of wealth and poverty and their manifestations in the artistic
artifacts and the normative thought of cultures would have many benefits, not least that of opening
minds to us of many who now return our own disdain – too often ideologically expressed – for the
world of filthy lucre with a disdain of their own.

To the humanities of science and the humanities of enterprise, I suggest that we have finally to renew
our commitment to the humanities of a global society and to the historical record.12 We are as a tribe
reasonably adept at insisting, against the tendencies of the world outside our walls, on the value and
importance of cultures beyond American borders and of history before the range of living memory.
But if we look again more closely at the courses we teach and the faculty staffing that we deploy, I am
sorry to say that we are still far too ready to acquiesce in our national particularism, exceptionalism,
parochialism, and presentism. I am wont to boast, for example, of Georgetown’s history department,
that it has more scholars focused on non-U.S. than U.S. history, and that is still, alas, unusual. But if I
deployed my historians as a man from Mars, curious to know our history, would do, we would be
much stronger still in Asian, African, and Latin American subjects, and much stronger in ancient and
medieval subjects than we can hope to be now. Lynne Brindley, the visionary and effective CEO of
the British Library, has just thrust that institution into the future with a new collecting strategy that will
emphasize at far greater levels than ever before materials from and about China and India. One can
only say: about time, and indeed well past time. Many universities require today a few courses,
perhaps even a language, that take students beyond their native borders. Does any require that every
major be genuinely global in its reach? Does any American university teach American history fairly,
frankly – and from the outside? Why not? We have edged towards a broader institutional view of the
world, but there is still a chasm between where we are and where we should be.13

The consequences of the misprisions I have sketched here are many and baleful:

First, we are seen to be the creators and managers of a space for the survival and flourishing of
ideology of every stripe, the intellectual equivalent of kudzu. We are usually credited with preferring
leftist ideology to rightist, as though that distinction mattered when what is at stake is the sacrifice of
intellectual independence and integrity. The practices that let themselves be read this way – and that
too often are what they seem to be – are not only deleterious in themselves, but they legitimize and
encourage relativism, obscurantism, and a belief in truth by majority vote. Many humanists will admit,

(1994 art historians find out most easily that they are historians of a trade as well as an art). I much admire a recent article
(12 May 2006) by William St. Clair in TLS on the political economy of publishing in the UK before and after the year
1800. The milk and water Marxism of some literary humanists earns no more respect outside our cloisters than does the
milk and water Freudianism of others, and deservedly so.

11 Bryan Boyd’s marvelous biography shies away from all such questions, occasionally reporting Vladimir Nabokov’s
salary at Wellesley or Cornell, but offering no useful insight into the finances of the successful writer.

12 Anthony Appiah’s Cosmopolitanism (2006) has reinforced my understanding of the ways in which multiplicity and
diversity can and indeed must coincide with commitment and principle.

13 History and literature show the U.S.-centric curriculum most clearly, while other fields distinctly emphasize European
cultural production (notably art history and music, but also to some extent philosophy and religious studies), while still
underlaying the history, culture, and challenges of the rest of the world’s population.
when pressed, to having peeked at the list of 101 Worst Professors in a recent book by David Horowitz. What evades observation too often is the way in which Horowitz embodies the very relativism he deplores, with his bizarre notion that university faculties should, \textit{a priori}, represent in a “balanced” way the political views of the broader society. I cannot understand that as anything but a belief in truth by majority vote, a belief no responsible academic can share.

Let me put this more pointedly. If you would tell me that an active acceptance of the current state of research and practice in evolutionary theory is a mark of a “liberal” perspective and a rejection of it\textsuperscript{14} is “conservative,” then I have simply to say back that exactly 100\% of academics must and should be “liberal” on those terms, plain and simple. Period, full stop, and no room for argument.\textsuperscript{15}

Not only do our misprisions throw us into intellectual league with our worst enemies, but they separate us from our friends. Our colleagues whose annual assembly is not the ACLS but the American Association for the Advancement of Science often do not know what to make of us, while our colleagues in some of our professional schools and in particular our business schools are often made to feel, by our various snobbisms, like poor relations at our tables – except that they make a lot more money than we do and not infrequently feel smug about that. We need those allies, not least because \textit{every} sector of the academy today suffers from incomprehension and funding challenges from the marketplaces in which they operate. This talk was first given a few hundred yards from the spot where Ben Franklin famously declared that “We must hang together, gentlemen . . . else, we shall most assuredly hang separately.” \textit{De nobis fabula narratur}.\textsuperscript{16}

But finally, the worst effect of our failures to shape and propel our profession is that the flag that we should fly above others is seen to falter, the one proclaiming the power of inquiry, skepticism, and collegiality to demolish error and advance understanding. If “terrorism” represents a fundamental and intolerable denial of the very conditions of existence of civilized society, failure to assert and live that power of the intellect in our universities renders invalid our claim to the respect and resources of the society we educate, counsel, and lead. (I believe that shaky claim explains the marginalization of our voices in debates over the “war on terror.”) We must, I believe, be ambitious in this regard, because any failure of ambition is a failure to achieve the one mission that justifies our existence.

So here we are: increasingly marginalized and losing market share in a downwardly mobile profession.\textsuperscript{17} I have outlined the main directions of ambition that we need to pursue. Note that I do not spend time, for example, insisting that we need to work harder teaching our students to write standard English. First, it is obvious that we must do that; but it is also clear that they will succeed best when we not only work at that task but engage \textit{them} with greater enthusiasm and passion in the

\textsuperscript{14} “Not my field,” as we say, and I acknowledge the possibility and the importance of reasoned scientific dissent, even insurgency, leading to revision and improvement of the current state of the theory; but I do not see that this is in question anywhere today, while unenlightened rejectionism is deplorably common.

\textsuperscript{15} When I spoke these words at the ACLS/AAU convocation, there was widespread applause, to my dismay. I did not mean to give aid and comfort to those who think “liberalism” and “conservativism” are antipathetic to each other and in so doing feed the self-interest of politicians who dare not become statesmen.

\textsuperscript{16} Horace, Satire 1.1.69-70, “mutato nomine de te / fabula narrator”: “just change the name: it’s a story about you.”

\textsuperscript{17} The opening pages of the AAU “Reinvigorating the Humanities” report has a snapshot of the data that suggest our plight, but could be made more sobering if the timelines on some of the graphs showing numbers of degrees and majors could be extended back 40 years to show the secular declines. Of particular importance at these meetings of the ACLS was a program session devoted to the project for “Making the Humanities Count” – an initiative led out of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to provide accurate and useful numbers by which we can measure our needs, our ambitions, and our successes.
larger missions of our tribe. Our ambition and our success is what can make our students want to write as well as we do, and that is half, or perhaps two-thirds, the battle.

There are real questions of method and tactics to be addressed, and I will fall short of addressing them, because they are best handled by field officers in the trenches, and this is not a talk about Georgetown and what we do in our trenches to fight these battles. Two tactical tasks above all others need to be taken up and mastered. First, the task for libraries beyond the age of Google, mass digitization of texts, and the sudden switch from an economy of scarcity of information to an economy of abundance of information. I have spent much time in the last two decades in the company of research librarians and have every confidence in their ability to think one step ahead of the competition and define a vital and effective role for themselves. When I worry about them, it is because I worry about myself: that is, myself as provost, and other provosts, presidents, and boards, who need to empower their librarians, support them tactically, and invest in them strategically. Those investments are still among the most important deployments of capital that we make as universities.

The task for the professors themselves is less well-defined but fundamental. How do we, on the one hand, remain true to our core tasks of inquiry and discovery while at the same time standing forth as representatives of the principles that underlie our scholarship to an audience beyond our traditional ones? There are credible voices whose books make it into the chain stores, whose blogs are read with attention (and deserve to be), and perhaps even, once in a great while, whose faces appear on television, if only to be flattered by talk show hosts or sound-bitten for a program on the History Channel whose theme and production values counteract the scholarly ethos and credentials of the talking heads. There are small victories to be won in those ways, and those battles must be fought. But we must not lose sight of the aims of the war.

The mission of our campaign must be diversity, inclusion, and upward mobility— for the reinforcement of the privileges of elites is an effort not worth the candle. And it must be the pursuit of truth— truth hedged around with contingency and uncertainty, but withal truth, that is, the sum of assertions for which there is evidence and that have proved so far insusceptible of disproof.

We know we have not won that war, because we live in a society in which it is widely accepted that diversity is at best a silly aspiration and at worst an irresponsible one; and in which it is widely accepted that credulous and irresponsible opinion is a functional substitute for truth. We are thought to agree with those views. Our concerns are thought to be marginal; the skills we impart thought to be irrelevant and unnecessary.

The implicit thrust of my argument has been that the humanities are imperiled by failures of imagination and self-awareness on the part of disciplines that have more to offer than even they surmise. But argument of this sort can become part of a broader river of discourse which changes course only slowly if at all. To bring these considerations to a more tactically effective point, I want to engage in a little historical experiment: a history of the future, as its practitioners call it.

Imagine for a moment that at a meeting of the Americas Council of Learned Societies (now expanded to embrace all the learned societies of the western hemisphere) in the year 2026, held in the “hot city” of that decade, the burgeoning cultural capital of the west, Havana, some of us and many of our successors find themselves awash in good feeling, celebrating the dramatic rise to intellectual and cultural ascendancy of the humanistic disciplines. Let us dare to think that we could at that date be hearing of booming enrollments, strong funding, and a demand for new Ph.D.’s outrunning our poor
powers to supply them.\textsuperscript{18} If some brave soul should stand up on that occasion to outline the history of the twenty years that pass between now and then, what would she have to say in order to make that revolution intelligible?

Some of that history would have to be quite beyond our immediate control. The one revolution – and not an entirely unlikely one – that would have to intervene globally would be the realization that the discovery and propagation of new, renewable energy sources will mean not the collapse of the old petro-based economy, but rather an economic renaissance in the mature economies, a boom in the emerging economies, and even economic hope and growth in the most beleaguered economies of the planet. I will press a little further, for purposes of this fantasy, and ask you to imagine that even the petro-economies of Africa and Asia find a new lease on life and a culture of political openness. I say again, a fantasy, but the purpose is to help us find some directions.

So what would we have done to make the most of the opportunities of a newly prosperous and peaceful planet?

First, we would have taken heed of leaders like Don Randel and their weariness with the disciplinary taxonomies imposed by the nineteenth-century German university and reshaped our faculties and our curricula to reflect the true history of humankind and the real environment in which we live and will live. No university will dare to be ethno- or nation-centric in its distribution of faculty positions studying the history or culture. If anything, a bias in favor of relatively remote and emerging societies – African, Asian, South American – will be seen as an important contribution to preparing students and creating knowledge that will serve a global community and not only propagate the economy and culture of northwestern Europe and north America. We will, as well, have found disciplinary constructions that can link our expertise institutionally to the social and natural sciences through common concentration on understanding the history and future of the large themes that preoccupy human concern: security, energy, environment, health. (There will be universities where \textit{those} four themes become the names of departments or even schools, academic units that then clamor for the guidance and conceptual formation that humanists can offer as facilitators, integrators, and analysts.) The hallmark of our success will be that humanists are engaged in \textit{every} department and \textit{every} school of the most successful academic institutions, and are hotly competed for.

Second, the institutions we inhabit will have found new and successful ways to make the value of academic learning and analysis palpable and available to the individuals, corporations, institutions, and governmental agencies and organs of every nation. We will have recognized the fundamental similarity in structure and competence of the great university and the international consulting firm, and we will have seized our due and proper share of their market. Every industry and every enterprise will have recognized that the disciplines of inquiry, skepticism, and collegiality make us uniquely qualified to offer guidance and advice based on our ability to remain focused on the strategic, long-term, macro-scale while rooting those concerns in unhurried attention to detail. We will, especially, have found our niche in working in emerging market regions of the world to help other societies shape academic institutions that genuinely meet the needs and lift the ambitions of those societies – and we will, in return, have used our own engagement with those cultures and societies a source of renewed strength.

\textsuperscript{18} Lest I be thought fanciful, this was indeed the urgent issue reported by B.J. Whiting, Delegate to the ACLS of the Medieval Academy of America, in 1953 (\textit{Speculum} 28[1953] 633-34), representing the alarm of the Council at the thought that a national academic faculty of 50,000 would have to grow to 90,000 by the year 1965 in order to keep up with the demographic demand. This news was reported as staggering. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports (http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco066.htm#emply) that “Postsecondary teachers held nearly 1.6 million jobs in 2004,” at least a quarter million of them undeniably humanistic.
to our core activities at home. As the People’s Republic of China set out to build hundreds of new universities, it will have found that American and other “first world” partner institutions were more valuable as mentors and guides than as competitors looking to open new campuses and draw revenue from over the horizons of their ordinary sphere of activity.

Third, but also first of all, the quality of the scholarship that we will have produced will earn the unforced admiration of the most rigorous of professionals and, at a distance of the educated general public as well. We will have utilized the new tools of scholarship and communication that our age has provided to build stronger collaborations among scholars, to develop more robust and reliable collections of books, artifacts, and indeed databases on which to draw for our work with less dependency on the particular place and space in which a given scholar happens to work, and we will have guaranteed the quality of our work by developing mechanisms of peer review and post-publication review that are far more consistent, rigorous, and predictable than anything we know today.

Is that history of the future unrealizable? I do not believe that it is, but I also believe that those who think so should be challenged to say exactly why and to say exactly what else we then must do to assure the survival and prosperity of our tribe. We must have no patience with strategies that assume we might barely preserve most of what we now have or that imagine a slow managed decline or a retreat to monastic purity and poverty. Nor should we blame others for our challenges and confine ourselves to marketing what we already are and seeking funding without taking the time to make what we offer more worthy of funding. We do what we do because it is worth doing and because it is important and because it is needed. And if that is so, we should expect success, plan for it, and be clear-eyed and energetic in achieving it – and then expect the support of our fellow citizens.

Each generation is challenged to connect our core commitment to memory, to inquiry, and to understanding with the concerns of all of the leaders of society, everywhere. But each generation faces that challenge in a slightly different form and must respond in appropriately different ways. In the end, we must expect and act to seize afresh the attention and respect of the elders of our tribe and the ambitions and dreams of the young. For we are assured of no lasting place on this earth and must earn again afresh every day. That task is more urgent than ever, and will not abate in our lifetimes.