

Reshaping the Baton: The Enduring Relevance of Intellectual History

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What follows is my Inaugural Professorial Lecture delivered at the University of Otago on 21 April 2015. The lecture was introduced by Professor Harlene Hayne, the Vice-Chancellor of the University, followed by an biographical account of the speaker by Professor Tony Ballantyne, the then Head of the Department of History and Art History. Professor Ballantyne also offered concluding remarks after my Lecture.

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Just a moment ago Professor Ballantyne kindly outlined my academic career thus far. After hearing that, you might wonder why I have been working on disparate topics. When I was still a postgraduate student at the University of Sheffield, a number of people used to ask me: why on earth do you study a dead monk? Now the boot is on the other foot: since I have been known as a medievalist for nearly two decades, when some realize that I also work on Japanese topics, they ask: why do you study Japanese history? So, I think some justification is due.

In this lecture I propose to offer a personal reflection on how and why I came to study intellectual history, especially the history of political thought in both Western Europe and Japan. But obviously I do not wish my talk to be too personal or trivial and to be of interest to anyone but myself. Rather, through a personal reflection I would like to address an issue of contemporary relevance in the academy at least in the Anglophone world: that is, the so-called crisis of humanities. Of course I shall not make any audacious claim that I have a solution to the crisis. My ambition is far more modest in that, through a reflection of the trajectory of my academic formation, I hope to highlight some points that, I think, are worth considering in relation to the contemporary problems surrounding humanities. I am thus only aiming to provide food for thought from the viewpoint of an intellectual historian for those who care about the future of research and teaching in humanities.

I. Exploring Two Traditions of Political Thought

Let me begin by sketching what I have been doing in my research in intellectual history. My work has revolved around two pillars: one is the history of political thought in medieval Europe, and the other is the history of political thought in modern Japan. I began my academic career with research in the political thought of William of Ockham, the fourteenth-century Franciscan theologian. My study highlighted Ockham’s theory of heresy and his program of dissent from heretical popes.¹ Ockham was originally a theologian and logician at Oxford, who did not write anything about politics. However when he was asked by his superior to examine papal bulls, which condemned the Franciscan ideal of evangelical poverty, he realized that the contemporary pope had fallen into heresy. Withdrawn from papal obedience, Ockham was excommunicated. Exiled in Munich, he produced a general theory of heresy, and envisaged a program of legitimate dissent from the heretical pope. On that basis, he wrote anti-papal polemical works to warn contemporary Christians of the danger of papal heresy. Thus I offered a new interpretation of Ockham as a political thinker, who attempted to rescue the autonomy and freedom of individuals from unjust political power such as that of a heretical pope (see Figure 1).

My more recent work is a historical narrative of medieval European political thought for a Japanese audience. The book entitled *The Birth of European Political Thought* examines the historical process whereby “political thought” emerged in medieval Christendom (see Figure 2).² Historians of political thought, who work

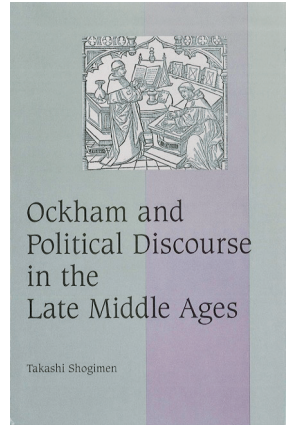


Figure 1



Figure 2

1 Takashi Shogimen. *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
 2 Shōgimen Takashi 将基面貴巳. *Yōroppa seiji shisō no tanjō* ヨーロッパ政治思想の誕生. Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2013.

on the modern period, often argued that there was no such thing as “political thought” in the Middle Ages, because in medieval Europe there was nothing comparable to the modern state. Typically medieval political thought took the form of ecclesiology, the theory of church government. Supposing that “political thought” is necessarily secular, one would struggle to find any intellectually significant attempt to theorize politics in the medieval world.³

Meanwhile, it was precisely in the Middle Ages that a unified culture emerged in the geographical region, which we today call Europe. Generations of medieval historians from Henri Pirenne and Christopher Dawson to Jacques Le Goff and Robert Bartlett have firmly established that the ancient Roman Empire was not Europe.⁴ Europe as a cultural unit was born in the Middle Ages. In my book, I tried to answer the question: what kind of political thinking emerged in the time when a unified culture appeared in the geographical area that is today called Europe? I responded to this question by tracing two types of discursive traditions: one is the emergence and development of ecclesiological discourses on power. That is, it was theological and legal scholarship in the medieval Church that generated sophisticated theories of power. The other tradition I highlighted is the rise of the theory about civil community under the influence not only of Aristotle and Cicero but also of the ancient Roman medical scientist Galen. The metaphor of the body politic, which was prevalent in the Middle Ages, constituted the interface between medical understanding of the human body and the political understanding of the civil community. New theories of the political community in the Middle Ages were modeled on the new physiological understanding of the human body.

In this argument, methodologically, I have been developing a new approach to intellectual history by deploying the cognitive linguistic theory of metaphor. Metaphor is not just figurative language; it constitutes our construal of one conceptual domain in

3 A classic account of the difficulties associated with the study of medieval political thought is J. H. Burns, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c.350–c.1450*, ed. Burns. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 1–8.

4 Henri Pirenne. *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, trans. Bernard Miall. London: Allen and Unwin, 1939; Christopher Dawson. *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1946; Jacques Le Goff. *The Birth of Europe*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005; Robert Bartlett. *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

light of another.⁵ The metaphor of the body politic therefore represents the understanding of the structure and functions of political community in light of those of the human body. What follows from this is that the metaphor of the body politic helps us hypothesize that political thinkers in the past deployed medical knowledge in order to conceptualise the political community in the likeness of the human body. So I have been exploring a new method whereby metaphor constitutes a clue for reconstructing an intellectual context, in my case, the medical context of political theorizing.⁶

I would like to touch upon the second pillar of my work briefly, that is, the study of the history of Japanese political thought. Much of my research has revolved around political ideas in wartime Japan, in the 1930s and 40s. I have especially focused on the life and work of Tadao Yanaihara, an economist and a Christian thinker. A professor of colonial policy at the Imperial University of Tokyo, he wrote extensively to criticize contemporary Japanese colonial policy in Taiwan, Manchuria, and the South Pacific, and also to attack the chauvinistic nationalism and militarism of contemporary government. I have examined his discussions of pacifism and patriotism in contemporary intellectual and political contexts.⁷ Also my recent book in Japanese offered a micro-historical analysis of the event, where in 1937 Yanaihara was forced to resign from the University due

5 The literature on the cognitive linguistic theory of metaphor is enormous. The most influential account is unquestionably George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphor We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

6 See especially Takashi Shogimen, “Medicine and the Body Politic in Marsilius of Padua’s *Defensor pacis*,” in *A Companion to Marsilius of Padua*, ed. Cary J. Nederman and Gerson Moreno-Riaño. Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp. 71–115; Shogimen (co-authored with Cary J. Nederman), “The Best Medicine? Medical Education, Practice and Metaphor in John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* and *Metalogicon*,” *Viator* 42 (2011), pp. 55–74; Shogimen, “Treating the Body Politic: The Medical Metaphor of Political Rule in Late Medieval Europe and Tokugawa Japan,” *The Review of Politics* 70 (2008): Special Issue on Comparative Political Theory, pp. 77–104; Shogimen, “‘Head or Heart?’ Revisited: Physiology and Political Thought in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *History of Political Thought* 28 (2007), pp. 208–229.

7 Takashi Shogimen. “‘Another’ Patriotism in Early Shōwa Japan (1930–1945).” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71 (2010), pp. 139–60. Reprinted in *Critical Readings on Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), vol. 3; Shogimen. “The Legacies of Uchimura Kanzō’s Patriotism: Tsukamoto Toraji and Yanaihara Tadao.” In *Living for Jesus and Japan: The Social and Theological Thought of Uchimura Kanzō*, ed. Shibuya Hiroshi and Chiba Shin. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013, pp. 93–112; Shōgimen Takashi 将基面貴己. “Yanaihara Tadao to ‘heiwa kokka’ no risō” 矢内原忠雄と「平和国家」の理想. *Shisō* 思想, vol. 938 (June 2002), pp. 27–47.

to his controversial—that is, pacifist—extramural speech.⁸ The suppression of his speech did not come only from the government; media and his colleagues at the university contributed to the expulsion of the liberal academic. Thus the suppression of freedom of speech is a complex phenomenon, and university autonomy is indeed very difficult to defend when the state and society are going mad.

II. Two Questions, Two Teachers

So my work crosses geographical, cultural and temporal boundaries. Crossing boundaries however is quite natural to me. It is because I do not think that boundaries are given. They are artificial and fictional. Disciplinary boundaries in particular result merely from utilitarian arrangements for the division of labor. New questions have given birth to new disciplines, and existing disciplines are constantly changing in response to changing questions. So although it is customary to identify ourselves as historians, political scientists, literary scholars and so forth, our own enquiries should not be dictated primarily by the needs of the discipline; rather it should be driven by questions because the discipline is the result, not the origin, of knowledge, which is generated in response to questions.

As for me, enquiring into the history of European and Japanese political thought is consciously dictated by two generic questions: one concerns the cultural specificity of political thinking. I am exploring the cultural characteristics of political theorizing with special reference to Western Europe and Japan. What is distinctively European about European political thought? And what is characteristically Japanese about Japanese political ideas? One cannot appreciate an intellectual tradition's distinctiveness unless one compares it with another. Hence, an exploration into the cultural specificity of European political thinking requires comparison. In my case, this has been the Japanese tradition.

The other question that dictates my enquiries concerns the dissenting tradition. Political theory is, in one respect, a theoretical pursuit of political ideals. Political theorists conceptualize their normative theories through critical engagement with a wide range of political visions such as liberalism, republicanism, communitarianism, feminism, socialism, and so forth. By contrast, I am more interested in how political thinkers theorized

8 Shōgimen Takashi 将基面貴巳. *Genron yokuatsu: Yanaihara jiken no kōzu* 言論抑圧: 矢内原事件の構図. Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2014. See also Shogimen, "Censorship, Academic Factionalism, and University Autonomy in Wartime Japan: The Yanaihara Incident Reconsidered," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 40:1 (2014), pp. 57–85.

unjust, tyrannical, or “diseased” government and how and why they legitimized dissent from it. Ockham was a dissenter in fourteenth-century Europe, while Yanaihara was a dissenter in twentieth-century Japan. The contexts in which the two men operated were entirely different, yet they both wrestled with the question of legitimate dissent from unjust power.

So how did I come to focus on these questions? In retrospect, I do not think I did so in my postgraduate years. I was immersed in the British tradition of intellectual history during most of the 1990s, and I owe a great deal to the academic training at the University of Sheffield in terms of research skills and methodology. However, in terms of my academic mindset and questions, I cannot help thinking that I am ultimately a son of Japanese scholarship. My fundamental attitude to academic enquiry was shaped profoundly by my undergraduate education at Keio University in Tokyo. I am delighted to be able to talk, with sincere gratitude, about two teachers at Keio University: Professor Seiichi Sumi and the late Professor Katsumi Nakamura. Professor Sumi was Professor of the History of Political Thought and one of the few specialists in medieval political thought in Japan; he advised me to continue studying for postgraduate degrees, and to choose medieval political thought as my specialized area. Professor Nakamura was Professor of Economic History, and his research field was the history of early modern English economic and social thought. And I can say gratefully that I am indebted to them for my two key research questions: Professor Sumi inspired me to investigate the cultural specificity of political thinking, and Professor Nakamura cultivated my interest in the dissenting tradition.

What is common to both professors and is deeply inspiring to me about their teaching is that they lectured on their specialized areas with frequent references to modern Japan. Their historical discussions on European intellectual history were often connected with their critical observations on modern Japanese politics, economy and society. That is not to say, to be sure, that they turned the classroom into a place for political campaigning. They never commented on any specific policy issues. Rather they often highlighted long-term, structural *problems* with politics, society and the economy in modern Japan. Professor Sumi often discussed the fragility of Japanese democracy in light of modern European political ideas, while Professor Nakamura lectured on the origin of modern capitalism, and discerned what the German sociologist Max Weber called “pariah capitalism,” that is, the pursuit of wealth by anti-social and unethical means, in the practice

of contemporary Japanese capitalism. Notice that they taught me in the late 1980s. This was the time when Japanese economic power was at its zenith. Some commentators even argued seriously that the twenty-first century would belong to Japan. The two professors, by contrast, criticized the contemporary practice of Japanese democracy and capitalism and reflected anxiously on their future. Their lectures demonstrated that historical insights could lead to foresight into the political economy of their own time.

You might wonder, however, about the present-tensed tendency of such undergraduate lectures on intellectual history. Indeed, historicism requires historians to restrict their enquiry into the past without reference to the present.⁹ The lectures by the two professors I am talking about clearly manifested a tension between the historicist scrutiny of past ideas and the philosophical concerns with the present. But their presentist impulse did not originate in an anachronistic desire to see the past through the prism of the present. Rather the two professors' concerns with the present manifested their ambition to shed new light on the present from the perspective excavated from the past. They re-presented past ideas, which may be alien to us moderns, in order to gain alternative perspectives onto the present.

Viewed from another perspective, their lectures did not merely communicate knowledge. Their concerns with the present suggest that their scholarly engagement did not constitute merely the production and communication of historical knowledge but was intended to serve a purpose beyond the pursuit of new knowledge.

To clarify my point, let me give you an example. One of the key lessons they taught is that while it is crucially important to be well versed in existing scholarship in the field, one should not delve into research simply because a certain topic presents itself as a gap in current research, or because a certain set of archival materials has not been examined previously. A gap in scholarship does not necessarily mean that it is worth filling. The fact that a set of archival materials has remained unexamined does not *ipso facto* mean that it is worth exploring. The key question here is: is it worth knowing? Indeed, some topics may not have been explored because they are not significant enough. The choice of research topics and questions is inseparable from some kind of value judgment.

9 "Historicism" is notorious for the multiplicity of its meaning. A useful overview of the concept is Robert D'Amico, "Historicism," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker. Oxford: Blackwell, 2009, pp. 243–52.

We can certainly think of a variety of standards by which to make value judgments on the choice of research topic, but I just would like to single out one issue. Some of you might wonder how the two professors I am talking about thought of value-neutrality in their scholarly enquiries. Like many Japanese social scientists of their generation, they were Weberian. They both embraced and enshrined Max Weber's idea of *Wertfreiheit*, "value-free" academic enquiry. Indeed when they examined their object of historical enquiry in their monographs and research papers, they did so dispassionately to observe value-neutrality. However, studying historical objects dispassionately in the Weberian, "value-free" fashion, they underscored, does not necessarily mean that researchers should not make any value judgments at all. Professor Nakamura conveyed this idea by an interesting metaphor: he said, one must learn how to read what is written *before* the front cover of a monograph. Obviously nothing is written physically *before* the front cover because there is nothing. What Professor Nakamura meant was that one should be able to read what value judgment motivated the author to write the book, even if the author does not make that motivation explicit in the book—that is the tacit assumption on which the study is predicated.

What I would like to underline here is that the two professors, I think, did not teach their academic disciplines merely as intellectual exercise. They tried to show that there are existential dimensions to research in historical scholarship. Asking certain questions in historical enquiries should not derive from mere "interest" or "love of knowledge." Historical research ought to be anchored in the researcher's fundamental outlook on human life *in our own times*. That outlook is a *sine qua non* because historical studies are, unlike natural sciences, inseparable from the questions of human conditions and values.

In the case of the two professors I have been talking about, their research into European intellectual tradition was clearly motivated by the disastrous experience of modern Japan, which culminated in 1945. From the middle of the nineteenth century, Japan transformed itself in a very short period of time into a modern nation state. The reception of Western institutions, customs and technologies was a top priority for Japanese government and society, but the rapid Westernization and modernization also led to the rise of chauvinistic nationalism and aggressive militarism among other things. The two professors experienced the demise of militarist Japan in their youth, so they desired to understand what went wrong with the modernization of Japan. Their research in European intellectual history was thus closely rooted in their life experience.

But they approached European intellectual tradition differently. Professor Sumi explored the cultural specificity of European political thinking because he desired to understand European culture in contrast with something “European” that became an alter ego of modern Japan. Professor Nakamura turned to excavate the dissenting tradition, which counters patrimonialism in modern Japan. Despite their differing approaches, however, they shared a common concern: their scholarly research was motivated by the question of the demise of modern Japan in 1945, which underpinned their cautious hope for new ideals in postwar Japan. Their research into the European historical world was integral to their engagement with the world in which they lived. I find it fascinating that academic research, which is deeply motivated by personal experience, is not reduced to a pursuit of the strictly personal, which, frankly, no one else cares about, but is, instead, tied to a moral and civic commitment to illuminate the problems of their day. However, precisely because their academic work was ultimately rooted in *personal* experience and conviction, what ultimately motivated them to study was only implied in lectures, and was certainly not mentioned explicitly in their books—that was indeed written *before the front cover*.¹⁰

III. The Growing Threat to Humanities—and the University

Meditating on lessons the two teachers taught me, I would like to single out three points that may be worth pondering for the present and future of research and teaching in humanities from the viewpoint of an intellectual historian. First, I think that the lifeline for humanities consists in our ability to show to the public how and why our research really matters today. But obviously this cannot be achieved by claiming merely that our work is “cool” or “interesting.” The ultimate outlook to human life that underpins research,

10 Allan Megill is one of the very few historians who acknowledge this point explicitly: “Since the historical account is necessarily written from a present perspective, *it is always concerned with the meaning of historical reality for people now and in the future—even if, on an explicit level, it denies that it has any such concern.* To the extent that the concern with present meaning comes to the fore, the historian becomes not simply a historian but a social and intellectual critic as well. Here, too, the historical account may well cease to be primarily a narrative of past events and existents (my emphasis)” (Megill. *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 97–98). See also J. H. Hexter’s remarks: “History thrives in measure as the experience of each historian differs from that of his fellows. It is indeed the wide and varied range of experience covered by all the days of all historians that makes the rewriting of history—not in each generation but for each historian—at once necessary and inevitable” (Hexter. “The Historian and His Day.” In *Reappraisals in History*. London: Longman, 1961, pp. 1–13, at p. 13).

I think, determines to a considerable extent how and to what extent our research sheds new light on human conditions and values that are *meaningful in the present*. Often, however, our research is influenced and dictated by mundane needs such as performance evaluation of various kinds. Thus research productivity can even become an objective in itself, which might make us blind to the ultimate purpose for which we engage in research. Reflecting on what our research means not only to ourselves but also to people around us, and why we study what we have been studying, perhaps helps us not only to be relevant but also to remain sane.

Second, reflecting on the legacy of my two teachers reminds me of the importance of lectures in the undergraduate program. Small classes with lots of hands-on exercises might be more efficient in communicating knowledge accurately. However, most knowledge becomes out of date quickly. Indeed, I can hardly recall anything about courses from my undergraduate days that only communicated knowledge. Undergraduate teaching, I think, should be more than infusing knowledge. Cardinal Newman famously claimed when asked about the end of university education that: “knowledge is capable of being its own end.”¹¹ This assertion, however, may require qualification in our time of hyper-specialization where more and more is known about less and less. Both teachers and students are facing a tsunami of ever increasing specialized knowledge. In such an environment, it is crucial for a teacher to help students not merely gain important knowledge but also to understand the problems that the knowledge presents in the present. And in lectures, a teacher should lay out systematically not only knowledge that students should know, but also the meaning and significance of the knowledge in the context where the teacher and students are situated. In such lectures, students will learn not only facts and theories but also questions that are worth asking. And through such lectures, teachers not only communicate knowledge but also inspire.

Third, it is important to acknowledge our own standpoint in the communication of our research. There is no such thing as a global standpoint; we are necessarily situated somewhere in the globe and we are also in the present, not in the past or in the future. My two teachers lived and worked in Japan mainly in the second half of the twentieth century as Japanese citizens. They taught Japanese students predominantly, and wrote for the Japanese audience. Hence they asked questions that are tied to the historical destiny of

11 John Henry Newman. *The Idea of a University*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, p. 78.

modern Japan. But they are not the contexts in which I live my academic life. At a certain point in the past, I made a decision to live my life in the Anglophone world, and that decision eventually took me to this country. As a result, a vast majority of my students are Pakeha New Zealanders. My work in English is read by academics and students in the relevant fields in the West and elsewhere, while my work in Japanese is read by the academic and informed lay audience in Japan. Clearly, as an author and teacher, I am situated in multiple contexts that my teachers did not know. Therefore, although I inherited fundamental questions from the two teachers, I should not answer *their* questions in *their* ways. The questions must be digested fully to be entirely *mine* and must be answered in *my* own way, if I take to heart their lesson that academic research in historical enquiries should be ultimately rooted in some sort of existential motivations.

My challenge is therefore threefold: First, I write works in English for the audience in the West in response to my first question, that is, the cultural specificity of political thinking. This way, I seek to understand the cultural distinctiveness of the tradition of political thinking in Western Europe and Japan, thereby modestly contributing to historical self-understanding of readers in the West and Japan, although ultimately it is rooted in my personal desire for historical, cultural and political self-understanding as an individual who was born and bred in modern Japan.

Second, I write works in Japanese for the audience in Japan in response to my second question, that is, dissent from unjust rule. This way I aspire to disseminate knowledge and understanding of the dissenting tradition, which is, in my view, relatively weak in Japan. But that is not the only reason why I single out the dissenting tradition. Dissent is a form of resistance to injustice. Resistance to injustice, whether it be of earthly powers, a majority of society, or even the divinity, is an undercurrent of European culture, which was crystalized long before Europe emerged—in *Antigone* of Sophocles, one of the three Ancient Greek tragedians. Hence, my second question is in fact a key leading me to the first.

And third and finally, as a teacher at this institution, I hope to continue teaching European history, especially medieval intellectual traditions and political ideas, in order to serve the pedagogical purpose for students who, in my view, ought to learn about the European pursuit of ideals and values such as the authority of individual conscience: a main theme I aim to explore through enquiries into my two fundamental questions.

One might ask how “useful” it is to teach and learn such things as the pursuit of the authority of individual conscience in European history, especially in connection with

employability and business-related skills of students. My response would be as follows: I do not think that history teaching is merely about infusing knowledge and skills. History serves a variety of other purposes. The great English historian, R.H. Tawney, wrote:

What is certain is that ... issues which were thought to have been buried by the discretion of centuries have shown in our day that they were not dead, but sleeping. To examine the forms which they have assumed and the phases through which they have passed, even in the narrow field of a single country and a limited time, is not mere antiquarianism. It is to summon the living, not to invoke a corpse, and to see from a new angle the problems of our own age, by widening the experience brought to their consideration.¹²

Studying history is thinking about issues which men and women of past generations wrestled with in contexts different from our own. And the same issues emerge repeatedly to the surface of human history in different forms and contexts. The question of the authority of individual conscience was indeed addressed and examined again and again in European intellectual history.

But remember: the authority of individual conscience was discussed especially when it came under threat. In the European past, it was attacked by religious authority and political power. Today, it is subject to the threat of economic power. One such symptom is that the discourse prevalent today in the universities and in societies around the world subjugates the university's research and teaching to economic values, and judges academic disciplines in light of economic benefit and efficiency.

The modern world has witnessed what Weber once called "the unceasing struggle of deities." As long as a variety of values such as political, economic, intellectual, religious and aesthetic ones remain mutually in tension, human life in a society maintains a healthy, if precarious, balance. In our world of global capitalism, however, economic values, such as profit and efficiency, penetrate and dominate every aspect of human life.

12 R.H. Tawney. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. London: Peter Smith, 1926, p. 5. In this connection, Constantin Fasolt kindly drew to my attention Thomas Macaulay's famous dictum: "It is now time for us to pay a decent, a rational, a manly reverence to our ancestors, not by superstitiously adhering to what they, in other circumstances, did, but by doing what they, in our circumstances, would have done" (Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Speech on Parliamentary Reform [2 March 1831]," in *University of Chicago Readings in Western Civilization*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986–87, p. 47).

The encroachment of economic values and language is now witnessed in academia as well. But obviously the university is primarily not a business corporation that pursues and enshrines profit. The purpose of the university is the intellectual pursuit of knowledge and, for that end, we, university academics, value academic freedom. Academic work as the pursuit of intellectual rationality requires freedom of research and teaching. I shall not delve into the conceptual intricacies of academic freedom, suffice to say it is largely accepted that academic freedom is a necessary condition for the intellectual pursuit of knowledge, which serves the public good of a society and ultimately of humankind. But the public good that academic freedom serves is often construed today as being merely economic. As a result, it is increasingly prevalent to evaluate academic research and teaching, in terms of economic sustainability and profit. This argument in turn puts a question mark on the legitimacy of academic disciplines that have little impact on the national economy. It is highly problematic that this view subjugates academic research and teaching to economic values, because the legitimacy and *raison d'être* of academic disciplines should be judged primarily on academic grounds, and ought to be free from the sway of economic or political power. That is, in an important respect, what academic freedom is about.¹³ Attack on humanities on the basis of economic uselessness is indeed a threat to academic freedom.

Seen in this light, the so-called “crisis of humanities” is not a problem for humanities alone. It is symptomatic of a crisis for the university as a whole, if academic freedom genuinely remains the supreme value that we collectively uphold. American academics are acutely conscious that academic freedom has been under fire since the time of the Bush administration. Legal philosopher Robert Post, literary theorist Stanley Fish, historian Joan W Scott, and philosopher Judith Butler, among others, have been engaging in vigorous debate on academic freedom in recent years.¹⁴ New Zealand is rather unique in that authoritative answers to the questions regarding aspects of academic freedom are provided legally in the Education Act of 1989.¹⁵ However, the fact that the idea of

13 It is surprisingly rare that this has been pointed out. See for instance Judith Butler, “Academic Norms, Contemporary Challenges: A Reply to Robert Post on Academic Freedom,” in *Academic Freedom after September 11*, ed. Beshara Doumani. New York: Zone Books, 2006, p. 140.

14 See for instance Akeel Bilgrami and Jonathan R. Cole, eds., *Who's Afraid of Academic Freedom?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

15 On academic freedom in New Zealand, see *Troubled Times: Academic Freedom in New Zealand*, ed. Rob Crozier. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2000.

academic freedom is legally written down obviously does not dispel all potential threats. Furthermore, the history of academic freedom suggests that it is often very difficult to defend it. And the defence of academic freedom is the onus with which humanities scholars ought to bear, precisely because it is typically humanities scholarship which has questioned and reshaped human conditions and values including academic freedom. Humanities researchers are facing a challenge. The first step towards overcoming the problem of our day, I think, is to ensure that we do not lose sight of the ultimate purpose of our individual academic enquiries. That is, to ask ourselves what is written before the front cover of *our own* monographs.