We Scholars
Changing the Culture of the University

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The Scholar as Exile

The Virtues of Alienation

In arguing that the modern university is built upon alienation and aggression, I do not mean to suggest that this situation is altogether new, or even that it is entirely bad. Scholars who preserve and celebrate the traditions of their culture may be able to display a high degree of social integration, but to the extent that they are called on to improve existing society, they will be more effective in doing so if their outlook is skeptical, detached, dissatisfied with the status quo. "Tradition in itself is a fine thing if it satisfies the soul," as the philosopher and poet Judah Halevi remarked in 1145, "but the perturbed soul prefers research" (The Kuzari, 248).

In this sense, the university is a home for perturbed souls, a place where they can work through their sense of unease with society as they find it, constructing alternative visions of society as it has been or as it could be. Personalities of many sorts exist in academia, of course, even including a few pure examples of the extremes typically found in popular representations of academic life, the jet-setting entrepreneurs and the absent-minded antiquarians, drier than the fossils they study. Even the stereotype of the professor as fossil, common in the early decades of the century, reflects an awareness of the scholar as not truly congruent with society at large. To take a description by Virginia Woolf of a group of Oxbridge professors: "Many were in cap and gown; some had tufts of fur on their shoulders; others were wheeled in bath-chairs; others, though not past middle age, seemed creased and crushed into shapes so singular that one was reminded of those giant crabs and crayfish who heave with difficulty across the sand of an aquarium. As I leaned against the wall the University seemed a sanctuary in which are preserved rare types which would soon be obsolete if left to fight for existence on the pavement of the Strand" (A Room of One's Own, 8).

When the American universities began to address social concerns in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the passive detachment of the fossil began to be superseded by the more aggressive alienation of the social activist. While social scientists worked to mitigate the problems of poverty and rapid urbanization, humanists strove to raise the cultural and moral standards of the mass of the population, now for the first time becoming visible to the eye of higher education.

A good example of the scholar working to transform society is Charles Eliot Norton, a leading cultural critic of the 1870s and 1880s, friend of Emerson, Carlyle, and Ruskin, historian of art, architecture, and literature, social reformer, and prophet of culture in a wilderness of vulgarity and materialism. Significantly, Norton never took an academic degree beyond the B.A., and after his graduation from Harvard in 1846 he went into business. Over the ensuing decade he wrote articles for several prominent journals, championing reform in housing and public education. From 1857 through 1868 he worked full-time in journalism, first as a founding contributor of the Atlantic Monthly, then as coeditor of the North American Review and a principal founder of The Nation in 1865. The publisher of this last journal described its objectives in an interesting progression from economics and politics to popular education and the dissemination of high culture:

To champion the equal opportunity of the "laboring class at the South," and follow the social progress of the Negro
To provide information on Southern business (capital and labor)
To discuss legal and economic issues with less bias than the daily press
To stress the importance of popular education in the United States
To spread “true democratic principles in society and government”
To offer “sound and impartial” literary and art criticism
(Quoted in Vanderbilt, Charles Eliot Norton, 97–98)

It is notable that in 1865 neither Norton nor most of his contemporaries yet saw any particular need for a link to the colleges or universities, which would soon become prime locales for the “sound and impartial” study of such questions as the social sciences were born and the humanities shifted their focus from antiquity to modernity. But a decade later, in 1874, Norton himself made the shift from professional journalism to academia, becoming a professor of fine arts at Harvard, where he remained for the rest of his career.

From this new institutional base, he published both scholarly books and a continuous stream of wide-ranging essays in cultural criticism for the public journals. His essays typically show a mordant view of contemporary American life, and during his Harvard years his writing takes on an increasingly dark and disillusioned tone. In “The Intellectual Life of America,” for example, published in 1888, Norton begins by noting the country’s unprecedented material progress and democratization during the century, but he emphasizes the negative consequences of these improvements. In Norton’s view, the rise of mass culture had brought material benefits to many at the cost of spiritual impoverishment to all. Long before the invention of MTV and of the public opinion poll, he wrote that

the prevailing conditions tend to diminish that variety of experience and of thought, that difference in tradition and conviction, that collision of ideas of varied origin, which are requisite to progress in high civilization . . . In such a society, public opinion exercises a tyrannical authority. Suspicious of independence and originality, it establishes a despotism of custom, encourages moral timidity, and promotes an essentially servile habit of mind. One of the marked and most disastrous features of a society in which such conditions prevail, is that the great body of its members are unconscious of the fact of their mental servitude, and take delight in the despotism in which they have a

share, even while it deprives them of the privileges and rights of moral and mental independence. (320)

Norton stresses that these problems are not merely academic: “The lack of intellectual elevation and of moral discrimination is a source of national weakness. The prevalence of vulgarity is a national disgrace” (321–322). Bitterly opposed to the materialism, the jingoism, and what he saw as the general mindlessness of his culture, Norton is emblematic of the new idea of the scholar as exile. As Gerald Graff puts it, “it was Norton above all who established the pattern of the professor as a kind of internal émigré from American culture” (Proffressing Literature, 83–84).

When he left his journalistic posts, Norton declined invitations to pursue a literal exile and settle in Italy or England; instead, Harvard became his place of refuge, at once a bastion of disinterested thought and a pulpit from which he could continue to exhort America to reform. His article on the (lack of) intellectual life in America is explicit that the colleges and universities should be the engines of intellectual advancement and of social regeneration:

Much may be hoped from the dissatisfaction with the barrenness that now prevails in the fields of the higher intellectual life, from the sense of the lack of interest, and from the absence of large original sources of pleasure, refreshment, and invigoration of the spirit. And the more this dissatisfaction is felt, the more clear should be the recognition that the most direct remedy lies in the wider diffusion of the higher education—that education by which the powers of thought are developed, and the moral energies strengthened and rightly directed. (323)

In sum, as he rather grimly concludes, “if our civilization is to be prevented from degenerating into a glittering barbarism of immeasurable vulgarity and essential feebleness . . . it is by the support, the increase, the steady improvement of the institutions devoted to the highest education of youth” (324).

For Charles Eliot Norton, then, the university was both an oasis of reason amid the glittering desert of American culture and also the institution best able to transform society. As the shape of his career
indicates, the university was beginning to take on the role earlier
dominated by the reformist press, and before that by the Church.
Norton's own father was a prominent Unitarian minister and writer,
whose work set the tone for his son's future career. Already at the
age of ten, during a serious childhood illness, Norton was said to
have declared that "I wish I could live, so that I could edit Father's
works" (Vanderbilt, 7), and his own adult writings are secular sermons
addressed to a broad public congregation. Far from an expression
of solipsism or misanthropic withdrawal, Norton's alienation
was the basis of his commitment to the thoroughgoing reformation
of his society. "The love of home and country," Santayana later wrote,
"was profound in Norton, and the cause of his melancholy . . . That
which seemed paramount in Norton, his fastidious retrospective
nostalgia, was in reality secondary. Fundamental still was his fidelity
to the conscience of his ancestors" (Persons and Places, 400–401).

Alienation, then, can be a valuable component of academic life.
Aggression, too, and particularly aggression directed against other
scholars, has always had an important role to play in scholarly de-
bate. A very clear expression of this fact can be found as early as
Augustine's On Christian Doctrine, completed in A.D. 428. In the third
book of this work, Augustine discusses a treatise on the interpreta-
tion of scripture by an earlier theologian named Tyconius. Augustine
agrees with Tyconius on various points, but finds him dangerously
inclined to accept the Pelagian view (or heresy) that human beings
freely choose whether to believe in God. In Augustine's view, faith
itself is beyond mortal power and must be a gift from God, and he
finds that Tyconius has not fully perceived this in his study of the
Bible. What is interesting is the explanation Augustine gives for this
failure: "Tyconius labors well but not at length in the solution of this
problem . . . he was not familiar with that heresy which has grown
up in our times and has exercised many of us so that we have de-
defended against its attacks . . . This heresy has rendered us much more
vigilant and diligent so that we attend to those things in the sacred
Scriptures which were overlooked by Tyconius, who, being without
an enemy, was less attentive" (107–108).

In the millennium and a half since Augustine wrote these words,
Scholar as Exile form of damming with faint praise—a subtler but scarcely less lasting
form of damnation than the old kind, as the unfortunate heretic,
smubbed at conferences and turned down for grants, gradually dis-
covers. What remains constant, as Augustine presciently observed,
is the scholarly value of having an enemy, and not just any enemy but
someone very like yourself in every respect except for a pigheaded
insistence on misconstruing the plain meaning of the Epistle to the
Ephesians and all that it implies. As Augustine notes, Tyconius
lacked the sounding-board of an opposed interpreter and therefore
felt no need to develop fully his ideas on faith and works, never even
attending to Paul's crucial formulation in Ephesians 6:23. The result,
we may be sure, was a treatise on faith and grace that, however well
intentioned, was regrettably superficial and would not have got Ty-
conius tenure at any major American university.

Valuable as alienation and aggression can be, however, they rapidly
lose their value if they are not genuinely responsive both to the requi-
sites of productive intellectual debate and to the realities of the sur-
rrounding social world. Charles Eliot Norton was at his best during
the first fifteen years after he assumed the professorship at Harvard:
his essays of the later 1870s and the 1880s show an admirable balance
of moral passion and shrewd analysis, deeper than the somewhat
easy optimism of his earlier days as crusading journalist but also
more effective than the essays of his later years, in which Norton's
"fastidious retrospective nostalgia" often takes the upper hand. Per-
haps by then he had reacted too strongly against the dashing of his
early hopes for dramatic reform in housing, in labor practices, and
in education; suffused with an around melancholy, Norton's late
essays are sweeping in their condemnation of modernity. Writing
near retirement in the mid-1890s, Norton fears that even the uni-
versity can no longer serve as a catalyst for change, for it is failing to
differentiate itself and its citizens from the society around it: "The
hoodlum of the street corner and the rough loafer of the village find
their mates among the students of our colleges. The difference be-
tween them is only one of circumstance and of degree" (Some As-
pects of Civilization in America," 645). As evidence of campus hooli-
ganism, Norton attacks intercollegiate sports, which he excoriates
as riddled with abuses. Not only does widespread unsportsmanlike
conduct betray the higher ethical ideals that should prevail within academia; perhaps worse still, Norton is uncomfortably aware that these games may constitute the chief impact of the university upon public life at large: "These evils in the field of sport are all the more dangerous because of the profit which the newspaper press finds in fostering the unhealthy popular excitement concerning these public games. The excessive space devoted to highly colored and extravagant reports of them, totally out of proportion to their real importance, is one of the marked indications of the prevalence of conditions unfavorable to civilization" (646).

This argument is depressingly relevant even today, and yet Norton's sudden and exclusive focus on sports hardly does justice to the rapidly changing scene of higher education in the 1890s. The problem is both intellectual and rhetorical: his discussions are rather foreshortened, and their tone must have cost him the sympathy of readers not already converted to his views. Augustine really was surrounded by forces unfavorable to civilization as he knew it—the Visigoths, barbarians and proud of it, who had sacked Rome in 410; the Vandals who besieged Augustine's own city of Hippo as he lay dying in 430—whereas the "glittering barbarism" of Norton's day included genuine social and cultural progress, closely tied to the spread of modern technology and the new leisure culture.

Norton's students increasingly regarded him as a lovable holdover from some distant past. In a commemorative essay written shortly after Norton's death, Henry James expressed a profound debt to his old teacher, but at the same time he ambiguously credited him with living "among pictures and books, drawings and medals, memories and relics and anecdotes, things of a remote but charming reference . . . a stopgap against one's own coveted renewal of the more direct experience" ("An American Art-Scholar," 415). To the day of his death in 1908, Norton refused to introduce electricity, or even gas lights, into his Cambridge house, preferring to use—less glittering?—oil lamps and candles. Alienation is good if it gives an independent purchase for looking at the world and at one's subject; it is counterproductive when it becomes an excuse for an outright retreat from modern life. Similarly, aggression is useful when it stimulates lively debate; uncontrolled, it has the opposite effect, and discussion degenerates into polemics.

Norton can represent both the best impulses and the lurking dangers in the scholarship of the end of the century, as the modern university was taking shape. "Norton came to personify Scholarship itself, both at Harvard and in the rest of the academic world," according to Kermit Vanderbilt (183), and he personified scholarship not only as a writer but also as a personality. The scholars who followed him continued to build universities in exile, and certain personality types proved to thrive particularly well in this environment. At odds with society at large, more and more scholars became ever more comfortable with the values of isolated work, drawing inspiration from a few like-minded souls and effectively ignoring almost everyone else.

As it has evolved within the university, then, academic work has gradually taken on a certain personal coloring as well as a variety of institutional manifestations, and in a real sense the intellectual structure of academic work has followed from the scholarly personality of the faculty. The more scholars came to see themselves as isolated or even self-exiled, the more logical it became to view the Ph.D., with its culminating years of solitary research, as the necessary pre-condition for university and even college employment. These years of training continued to shape scholars' ongoing work and their expectations when hiring and tenuring the next generation, thereby reinforcing not only the importance of the Ph.D. degree but, equally, a certain set of assumptions about what that degree should entail.

I am not positing any absolute or one-to-one correlation between a scholar's personality and the writing that scholar will produce, but there is a general family resemblance. At some middle range, in between one's private self and one's public teaching and writing, there exists what could be called one's scholarly personality, a guiding cast of mind that is partly a predilection for certain issues and approaches, but equally a fondness for a certain mode of work. Just as the typical literature department weeds out or retrans the young person who comes in with an interest in film, so too, however social they may be in general, apprentice scholars learn to select out from their overall personality those qualities that create a successful scholarly personality. Modern scholarship has taken on a markedly introverted cast, at least in terms of its mode of production. However wide the audience reached (or, more often, fantasized), the work is built out of solitude.
Even if they are the best of friends and the most devoted of parents, prospective scholars will most likely succeed in academia if they can construct a highly individualistic scholarly self; those who refuse or who fail to do so are more likely to turn to other careers, being eased out—or simply losing interest or momentum—at one or another stage during the dozen or more years that will elapse between the start of graduate school and the achievement of tenure.

The evolution of the collective personality of departments can be thought of in Darwinian terms as a small-group version of natural selection. It is not that intellectual sociability is consciously discouraged; indeed, if an explicit policy were ever voiced it would probably produce a counterreaction and actually reduce the power of the unexpressed paradigm. Some irremediably sociable people will always survive in the system, of course; but on average, those who crave solitude will do better than their more intellectually sociable classmates in surmounting the solitary hurdles of Ph.D. orals and dissertation, and thereafter in amassing substantial individual publications in the early years of teaching.

Over time a modest average advantage in natural selection can give a group a dominant position, and its self-image can come to seem the portrait of the true scholar, rather than one option among others. Culture, as Michel Foucault would say, has become nature in the eyes of the dominant group—even when, as in some contemporary fast-track humanities and social science departments, the dominant group is composed largely of Foucauldians who pride themselves on seeing through the myths of their culture. Under these circumstances scholars and administrators begin to make a point of leaving each other alone, an approach that comes to be seen purely positively as rising above petty personal concerns, and collegiality ceases to be a significant factor in hiring. Thus we find Henry Rosovsky making a double argument for the superiority of American universities over British ones—really, when it comes down to it, of Harvard over Oxford. On the institutional level, he emphasizes the virtues of the American love of market competition: whereas Oxford has no rivals, even Harvard must compete in the market and struggle to maintain its prestige. After quoting a British scholar who disparages American entrepreneurialism and celebrates the fact that Oxford’s freedom from competition breeds “self-composure and dignity,” Rosovsky comments that “excessive calm can lead to the wrong kind of mental freedom; some would call it sleep” (The University, 227–228).

Closely tied to this praise of conflict among institutions is an argument about the relative unimportance of personal compatibility within American departments: by contrast to British universities, Rosovsky says, we put little emphasis on whether potential recruits are “clubbable” (202). In hiring discussions at Harvard, “one set of questions is in nearly all instances pointedly omitted: Is the candidate a nice person? Will he or she be a pleasant and cooperative colleague? To introduce such considerations would almost certainly be considered bad form” (201). As Rosovsky’s interesting choice of the Briticism “bad form” suggests, our departments have not so much abandoned British values as adapted them: ours are clubs of the unclubbable, societies of the unsocialable. In rejecting the British model Rosovsky lumps together two very different considerations: the largely irrelevant question of whether the candidate is “a nice person,” and the separate issue of whether this person will be a cooperative colleague, which ought to be a much more pertinent matter.

Once a need for sustained intellectual exchange has been reduced to a somnolent clubbability, the way is clear for the opposite scholarly personality type of aggressive individualism to reign freely, all under the banner of a quite sincere belief that we don’t care about personality at all. Ironically too, the myth of unclubbability allows a very real clubbishness to persist without question, in cases in which a department has taken on a dominant political cast, methodological orientation, or gender composition. The faculty may not make an explicit point of reproducing their present image, and yet types who wouldn’t fit in are somehow just not invited in to begin with, and are less likely to be asked to stay if they do appear on the scene.

The most widely observed results of the shift toward the norm of the scholar as isolated individual have been the steady erosion of concern for teaching and the increasing rewards given to superstars who avoid every kind of departmental work like the plague. This is only a secondary problem, though, as the firmament can only hold a small number of superstars at any given time, and the great majority of scholars do actually spend most or all of the school year on campus. A less visible but much more pervasive problem stemming from the ideal of scholarly isolation has been the attendant valuing of cer-
tain kinds of scholarship, and certain kinds of scholarly interaction generally, to the detriment of others.

One might, of course, make the argument that this choice is actually desirable. Just because universities exist at a tangent to society at large, their faculties are likely to be atypical in a variety of ways, and if individual work is actually better in kind than collaborative work, then our exceptional emphasis on isolation would be fully justified. So natural has the present emphasis come to seem, though, that this case is usually not argued at all; it is simply taken for granted, either tacitly assumed or else asserted as a truism. Thus Martin Anderson tells us that “one of the most jealously guarded prerogatives of any writer is authorship—sole authorship. Thinking and writing is a solitary vocation,” and from this unchallenged premise he concludes that scientific papers by several authors are usually mere scams by which ambitious professors can multiply their publication credits (Impostors in the Temple, 110–112). Even Jaroslav Pelikan, who emphasizes ideals of civility and community, works within an essentially solitary model of scholarship. Although he anticipates “a rapid increase in the amount of collaborative research” in the coming years, Pelikan gives greater weight to “the need to respect and to cultivate creative solitude.” Therefore, he says, “it will always be necessary in the university for us to counsel those students who think that they would like to become scholars to find out early for themselves whether they can bear to be alone as much as a scholar must be alone; for many find that they cannot, and it is just as well for them to learn this fact about themselves, and the earlier the better” (The Idea of the University, 63–65). The reason that it is just as well for Pelikan’s less solitary students to learn this is that if they do not weed themselves out at an early stage, the weeding will be done for them later on.

How Pleasant the Loneliness Can Be

A vivid illustration of the formation of a scholarly personality can be found in a recent memoir, In the Company of Scholars, by Julius Getman. As his title suggests, Getman emphasizes both the personal and the intellectual stakes in life among “the company of scholars” at Indiana, Yale, and Texas during his thirty years as a professor of law. At the same time, Getman’s book is no hymn to the status quo, but rather an account of disillusionment:

I thought that universities provided an opportunity for caring relations, a sense of community, an atmosphere in which ideas were shared and refined, an egalitarian ethic, and a style of life that would permit time for family, friends, and self-expression. The reality, as I discovered, was quite different. The academic world is hierarchical and competitive; achievement is generally ephemeral and difficult to measure. Much that is done in the name of scholarship or teaching makes little contribution because it is removed from reality and the concerns of humanity. Rather than feeling an automatic sense of community, I have often felt alienated. In particular, the desire for success and status has often conflicted with other goals of meaning, community, study, and reflection. (ix)

Getman writes from his sense of loss: the scholarly community he hoped for is riven by hierarchies, elitism, and the scramble for status. His account is thoughtful and reflective, and he doesn’t spare himself in seeking to account for what is wrong with academic life. His discussion is particularly germane as he emphasizes the idea of community, writing on this issue from considerable personal and professional knowledge. He has also maintained a positive sense of intellectual life outside the confines of university campuses. Coming from a working-class background, as a student he had felt uncomfortable with the patrician Bostonian mode in which legal education was cast in the Harvard of his student days. His continuing sense that the academic world is not the be-all and end-all of education is underscored at the very start of his book, which he dedicates to his parents, pointedly praising his mother for teaching him “that pleasure in ideas, intelligence, curiosity about people, love of music, art, and literature do not require formal education” (v). Getman went on to specialize in labor law, and he has written extensively on issues involved in union organizing, while also actively advising both unions and universities, as counsel and as mediator. Who better to envision alternatives to the present system, ways in which alienated academic groups might work to build community in their midst?
What is striking here is the degree to which, for all his distress at
the absence of scholarly community, Getman himself has internal-
ized the norms of scholarly isolation. His account of his intellectual
development shows clearly that he made the transition from student
to scholar precisely by learning to love loneliness, a love that had
by no means been prominent in his personality before. Gregarious
by nature and uninterested in library research, Getman had a mixed
record as a student at Harvard Law School. With some difficulty he
secured an initial teaching position at Indiana University, where he
was soon immersed in the challenges and difficulties of teaching. Yet
teaching would not suffice to gain him a permanent place on the
faculty, and so Getman forced himself to produce a technical piece
of labor law analysis for a law review. To his surprise, a mentor urged
him to rewrite his draft and make it clearer and more personal. The
piece was well received, and for the first time Getman began to think
of himself as a potential scholar.

He began a second article, and his work on it became an experience
of conversion. This process was partly intellectual, a matter of finding
a congenial way to approach issues; it was also, and essentially, social
and psychological. I quote his account at some length, in order to
show the way in which these aspects are intertwined:

I began work on the article in the spring of 1965. Each afternoon
after teaching class, I would go to my cubicle in the faculty li-
brary and work for two or three hours. To my surprise, I enjoyed
the combination of intellectual effort and social isolation that
it required. I stopped attending coffee hour, gave up billiards,
and cut down on my socializing.

Many evenings I went back to the library after dinner. A col-
league, Val Nolan, and I were generally the only two there. We
spoke rarely, sometimes working at adjoining cubicles for hours
without a word being said. But I was conscious of a mutually
understood scholarly link between us. This was my first realiza-
tion of how individual an enterprise scholarly writing generally
is, and how pleasant the loneliness can be, particularly when
one simultaneously feels a part of a community of scholars . . .
As a student I hated homework and was well known for being
gregarious. I was an unlikely bet to enjoy scholarship. But in
working on my second article, I once spent almost three hours
rewriting a single paragraph. As I tore up my latest effort and
gazed at the blank yellow pad with anticipation, I discovered
that I was enjoying myself. (46)

Scholars rarely talk so personally, and so genuinely, about the experi-
ence of becoming a scholar. This passage typifies what is best about
Getman's book—his dedication to scholarship, his interest in show-
ing the interaction of intellectual and psychological factors, and also
his ability to look back with some irony on his youthful self. Here
at last is a scholar who can speak against the triviality and self-
seekingness of much scholarship—of many scholars—and yet also
emphasize the pleasure of creative scholarship; "this sense of plea-
sure," he tells us, "has continued throughout my career" (46). I can
hope for nothing better for each of my students than that they, too,
should experience the excitement that can come from long hours of
disciplined study and thought.

Yet I also hope for something more for my students. Are the
pleasures of loneliness the only real pleasures of scholarship? As
necessary as solitude may be, is it always and everywhere sufficient?
Unfortunate consequences can follow if we elevate one basic
component of scholarly work to an unnatural status as the very essence
of scholarship. I cannot escape the feeling that the alienation and
lack of community that Getman elsewhere so eloquently decries are
themselves intimately bound up with the pleasures of loneliness
he celebrates here.

Readers familiar with conversion narratives will notice that Get-
man's account shows some similarities to the accounts of religious
converts, even to the point that he gives up strong drink (coffee) and
questionable idle pursuits like billiards. Illumination ("a scholarly
vision," 48) comes after long hours of interior striving in the desert-
ed law library, separated from family and from all friends except
for a fellow initiate—with whom, more disciplined than Papageo
in Sarastro's dungeon, Getman exchanges no words for hours at a
time.

This is not to say that creative scholarship should require equally
long hours in the pool hall, but the coffee hour may well be another matter. Getman elsewhere paints a lively picture of the faculty lounge, where the coffee was served, as the prime meeting place where faculty members would exchange and test ideas. When he later went to Yale, what he most missed was the greater sense of community to be found both in the faculty lounge and on campus in Bloomington. In contrast to “the social and intellectual isolation of elite institutions generally and of Ivy League schools in particular . . . midwestern and southwestern college campuses offer the possibility of different groups coming together socially, politically, and educationally; in short, community. This experience of community is far different from the great coastal and Ivy League universities, where separation and mutual resentment are the rule” (228–229).

Getman criticizes “coastal” isolation and lack of community, and yet his conversion narrative shows him accepting these very values, while still at Indiana, as the foundation of his own work. It is hardly surprising that even as he praises the idea of people’s coming together in a common intellectual enterprise, he must regret that “such experiences are rare and tend to be ephemeral. The majority of academics with whom I have spoken mentioned alienation and disappointment at the absence of community feeling. Several said that relations with colleagues and administrators are the worst feature of academic life” (266).

Getman’s emphasis on the isolation of true scholarship is the more surprising given that he himself actually wrote a book with another scholar. He found the collaboration deeply satisfying, at once agreeable and intellectually stimulating: “I enjoyed the partnership with Steve, the endless conversations about research design, the pleasure of editing each other’s writing, and the sense of mutual dedication to the study. I enjoyed the junior-partner relationship that developed with our student interviewers, the reshuffling of interviews, and the fun of eating meals together in some motel late in the evening, after all the interviews were completed, while we laughed and swapped stories about what we had learned” (60).

Getman in fact holds deeply divided views about the value of scholarly interaction. On the one hand, he prefers the general sense of community to be found in the nation’s heartland, but on the other hand, he says he is glad to have begun his career at Indiana rather than at Yale because his colleagues left him alone at Indiana. Speaking of his early years, he writes,

Those who began at that time in any but the most prestigious schools had a great advantage over young scholars today. We could choose topics on the basis of interest and find our own scholarly voice without much pressure from senior faculty.

It is all different today. Expectations are much higher. Young faculty fresh from graduate schools, clerkships, or fellowships are expected to develop sophisticated research agendas before they ever meet a class. At any school that claims to be a scholarly institution, colloquia, works-in-progress seminars, research leaves, mentors among the senior faculty, and periodic reviews of scholarly progress will be present . . . I approve of little in the current system other than research leaves, and I am even ambivalent about them because they remove young faculty prematurely from the classroom. (47)

Once we have forsown colloquia, mentoring, sharing of work in progress, even the coffee hour and the billiard game, how could we have any intellectual community left?

Even so, we know what Getman means. The superficial discussion of work in progress that no one has read beforehand, the awkward colloquium at which questions are perfunctory or devoted to one-upmanship, the mentoring when the mentor’s goal is to clone new disciples—give us the law library, or even Sarastro’s dungeon, anytime! Yet has not Getman taken the worst-case scenarios as the norm? Or let us even concede that the norm of personal interaction in departments is pretty poor—that, after all, is one reason why I have felt it important to write this book. As long as genuine intellectual sociability is discouraged at almost every turn, coffee hours and colloquia alike will continue all too often to degenerate into yet more chances for X to one-up Y or—less offensively but just as regrettablably—for people simply to talk past one another, the discussion ending before anyone has actually learned anything, with everyone rushing off to something else just when a real conversation is beginning.

The pervasiveness of this sort of scene and its essential unhealthiness help to explain why even a Julius Getman, never happier than
when talking ideas through with his students and friends, would hold to the Sarastro's Dungeon model of scholarly community. Having your colleagues working silently at neighboring desks may actually be preferable to having them talk to you, if they resemble the more aggressive individuals Getman encountered at Indiana: the coffee-hour virtuoso who specializes in puncturing every argument while writing nothing himself; the assistant professors who spend their time heaping contempt on the older generation of scholars, the better to mask their own anxiety as to whether they will have anything worthwhile to say.

These sorts of behavior vitiate the common intellectual life of departments, and they harm even those who practice them. The coffee-hour virtuoso in Getman's account spoke brilliantly for years of the treatise he was going to write on law and physics, intending to show how judges could benefit by adopting scientific methods. Finally he went on leave to Princeton to complete the book; "he came back full of stories about life at Princeton but without a manuscript, and he stopped talking about the great work he was planning to write" (53). Getman assesses this colleague's failure sympathetically but also rigorously:

His mind didn't naturally turn to questions of physics and law. He was led to law and science by his ambition ... Truly original scholarship is frightening enough, lonely enough, and difficult enough to make intellectual enjoyment crucial for its successful completion ... Unfortunately, he did not really believe that what he could do well and enjoyed was worthy of his scholarly focus ... This doomed him to be the type of academic who scattered his best ideas and deepest visions into the coffee cups of the faculty lounge. I have encountered this personality type at every school at which I have taught. (54)

Perhaps Getman is right that this colleague should have retreated to more modest projects, ones he could actually have managed on his own. Yet I can't help feeling that an alternative has been silently elided here: that his colleague could have countered the loneliness of scholarship by making it less lonely. He could have found a physicist to work with, or a philosopher of science, and they could have seen what might have resulted from a series of discussions. Maybe not a book; perhaps one or two suggestive articles would have sufficed, but something genuinely interesting might have emerged. Getman's colleague was intelligent enough, and principled enough, not to press on to write something superficial—as his book would probably have been, given his lack of grounding in physics; but to judge from Getman's account, he wasted years of his life working alone on a project that could better have been undertaken in collaboration.

Even apart from the question of outright collaboration, Getman's memoir shows how strongly the forces of alienation and aggression tend to discourage a close and engaged attention to other people's work, particularly if the other people differ from you in important ways. We are increasingly attuned to the voices of several groups who have traditionally been underrepresented in academia, but we give little thought to the most pervasive of differences within all departments: age. When Getman began his career at Indiana, left alone by the senior faculty, the younger members of the faculty quickly formed their own scholarly community. I can still picture a group of us, all in our early thirties, sitting around a coffee table, laughing contemptuously while my young colleague Alan Schwartz read aloud from the lead article in the Harvard Law Review ... In our laughter was the unstated commitment that we would approach scholarship differently from our teachers and seniors, that we would deal more honorably and respectfully with the underlying reality on which legal doctrine must be based ... We were, unfortunately, as arrogant as those we mocked, dismissing, without any real basis, styles of scholarship and modes of discourse we thought of as old-fashioned. (268)

This sort of scholarly community, if it deserves the name, is essentially defensive in nature, a bonding process by which an insecure subgroup tries to gain a sense of self-worth at the price of learning from divergent views. The scene Getman paints would have taken place some thirty years ago, but the process of winnowing by age has only accelerated since then. At a recent Modern Language Association convention, my friend Tobin Siebers described his discomfiture
that afternoon at a meeting of a committee arranging panels for the next year's convention. The planners were all in their thirties and forties, and Tobin observed that whenever someone proposed the name of a scholar over the age of fifty, the consensus would be that that person's views were already well known, and it would be better to get someone younger with fresher ideas. Directly after this meeting, Tobin met a friend at the bar of the hotel where the convention was taking place; at the booth just behind them, several graduate students were speaking in identical terms of the forty-something speakers they had just heard at the current convention.

We seem almost to have returned to the premature burnout of many artists at the fin de siècle, parodically typified by Max Beerbohm, who published his collected Works in 1896 at the age of twenty-four. In his preface he declared that he was retiring from literary production, leaving the field to "younger men, with months of activity before them" ("Diminuendo," 66). As in the case of dreary colloquia, this pattern feeds on itself. The more earnestly the younger generation tries to establish itself by pushing older generations aside, the more inclined their students feel to try a little of the same thing themselves. Further, the more tightly each group encircles its wagons around a few like-minded (and like-aged) look-alikes, the more probable it is that their work will indeed begin to sound repetitive at an early date. Alienation breeds a defensive aggressiveness; this aggression in turn magnifies the alienation, and the whole unhappy cycle begins again.

A Community of One

Academic aggression is not always anxious and defensive. At the extreme, we find individuals who are aggressive on principle, fully at home in their alienation and wishing there were even more aggression around than there is at present. Martin Anderson, for example, several times resorts to enthusiastic military metaphors to describe intellectual activity: "The top guns of today's professional intellectuals are the columnists and editorial writers for our leading newspapers . . . ! Like F-15 fighter pilots, they swoop and dive and strafe ideas on important issues several times a week" (18–19). Any issues that have survived all this strafing can be mopped up by book-length treatments: "And if the columnists . . . are the F-15 fighter planes of the professional intellectual world, then the writers and editors of the big book publishing houses are the B-52 bombers" (20). Anderson urges academics to emulate these for-profit writers, as if there weren't already enough polemics, and polemicists, flying about in academia.

Anderson’s use of these metaphors cannot really be described as an argument as such, as if he felt a need to counter some other view of intellectual life; his formulations are significant because they show the sort of ideal he can take as a given, not even requiring demonstration but simply needing more adherents to live up to it. Writers on academia rarely use such heavily freighted language as Anderson’s, and yet the image of the intellectual as a solo flier comports well with the views of scholarship we have seen in Rosovsky, Pelikan, and Getman.

If Anderson differs from them in wishing to see even more aggressive individualism than now exists, there are reasons why it currently might seem salutary not just to assume but actually to emphasize the solitude of scholarly work. In light of the rise of special-interest groups within academia, the aggressive individual can come to seem a needed counterbalance to the aggressive group, whether that group is constituted on the basis of a narrow identity politics or on some more purely intellectual basis for the construction of an in-group with an us-versus-them mentality. This problem was first raised by writers outside academia, whose polemics were not always grounded in any very nuanced sense of contemporary scholarship, but we have more recently begun to see thoughtful discussions by scholars within academia. Julius Getman, for example, has a long and telling chapter, "The Struggle for Change" (130–208), in which he highlights the oversimplifications indulged by both left and right during sharp curricular controversies in Texas in 1990.

A particularly intriguing response to this problem is a 1992 book by David Bromwich, Politics by Other Means: Higher Education and Group Thinking. In tones of measured sorrow, Bromwich attacks all those both on the left and on the right who substitute group-think for individual analysis. According to Bromwich, indeed, Reagantite conservatives and tenured radicals have more in common than they would like to suppose, and their real enemy is not the other camp
but the independent individual: "the caring groups are really hard as nails; they want to destroy us, each of us, and always for the sake of all" (23). As he has followed these controversies, Bromwich has found that the arguments from both sides have only increased his sense of the need for self-reliant critical thinking. Quoting an assertion by Emerson that "imitation is suicide," he describes this as "a sentiment that used to strike me as exaggerated" (23).

Like the other writers I have been discussing, Bromwich holds to the ideal of the scholar as lone worker in the dark library of the soul, but unlike the others, Bromwich does not take this ideal for granted. He sees it as under siege and in need of defense. As a result, he gives an unusually clear picture of scholarly ideals that are normally simply assumed without much discussion. The essence of scholarship, for Bromwich, is the free and skeptical play of the individual mind in dialogue with other scholars and, more particularly, with great minds of the past. In opposition to true scholarship stand the productions of conformist groups, whether conservative or liberal. Whatever the politics of such a group, Bromwich tells us in his opening paragraph, "The results are always the same. Concrets and dogmas of conformity, some of them cruel, all of them timid, cling to the group when they cannot survive in a less settled company" (ix). Genuine education is a highly individual matter, whereas group thinking is largely an attempt to carry forward politics by other, less legitimate means.

In developing this theme, Bromwich gives particularly full expression to the pronounced individualism characteristic of the modern university, contrasting its virtues with the vices of special-interest intellectual politics. He presents these alternatives in stark terms, and he consistently disputes the idea that there can be a middle road between them. The group-thinkers must be combatted and vanquished, conservatives and radicals alike. "Both cultures are deeply sick, and it would be a good thing to rid ourselves of both" (xi). The tenor of Bromwich's argument can be seen in the epigraph with which his book begins, from Simone Weil: "The intelligence is defeated as soon as the expression of one's thoughts is preceded, explicitly or implicitly, by the little word 'we'" (xviii). Note the absolutes in Weil's formulation: the intelligence is not merely harmed (much less enriched) by an identification with others, it is defeated; this defeat does not occur gradually but "as soon as" the mind begins from a group identity; this "we" need not even be emphasized but needs only hover implicitly behind the thoughts expressed.

Bromwich develops this point of view in a variety of ways, beginning with a highly individualistic reading of Emerson, emphasizing passages in which Emerson calls for the individual to hold out not just against narrow special-interest groups but against society itself. We should, Emerson says, maintain a "good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else tomorrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another" (quoted on 22). The quotations from Emerson alternate between a rejection of the dogmas of society as a whole and a refusal of the claims of subgroups within society ("If I know your sect I anticipate your argument," 22); one senses that Emerson does not finally distinguish too closely between these levels of society.

Even Bromwich describes these quotations as exhibiting "an extreme of indifference to public opinion, to the need for common action, or even for occasional collaboration with other persons. But as a counter-statement to the communitarian pieties of our day, it is a good extreme" (23). Clearly, Bromwich himself does not entirely subscribe to the extreme views he advances from Weil and Emerson; after all, there is, in Weil's terms, a "we" implied by Bromwich's very choice to begin his argument by quoting Weil herself, and then Emerson soon thereafter. He is constructing a lineage, a company, of antidogmatic intellectuals, and he wishes to stimulate a common resistance of like-minded contemporary scholars against the bad sort of like-mindedness he opposes. Bromwich does not see a contradiction in this, for he understands tradition itself in highly individualistic terms. As he tells us in his preface, his book is to be "a defense of tradition as a social and personal fact—but personal first and last and most" (xiv). His readers, then, should not after all be overcome with Emerson's "shame" at taking their own opinion from another, but should feel strengthened in their resolve to conceive of tradition itself as based in individual rather than group identity, and of knowledge above all as "self-knowledge" (xiv).

I raise this point not to suggest that Bromwich is caught in an unwitting contradiction, but rather to open the question of what kind
of community can be admitted by so resolute and principled an individualist. In Bromwich's book, at first it may seem as though no viable idea of community can be affirmed at all, if one sees small groups and society as a whole primarily as carriers of received ideas and simplistic solutions. Here and there, however, glimpses emerge of the ways in which Bromwich's (anti-)community of scholars ought to work. Above all, a scholar should maintain dialogue with writers of past eras. The solitude of the dialogue is reinforced, for Bromwich, by the fact that he finds few people in other disciplines who seem to be interested in many of his favorite texts, even when those texts nominally come under their purview. He asserts that entire fields, like history and philosophy, have abandoned their roots in classic earlier historians and philosophers (107), so that "departments of literature alone are now entrusted with the teaching of humane letters" (187). Finding no meaningful dialogue among these disciplinary communities, Bromwich must discuss a thinker like Hume largely through an extended personal close reading. He does, however, occasionally leave his own readings through direct use of an individual modern scholar's work for which he feels an affinity, and conversely he also benefits from give-and-take with an unfriendly critic of his earlier writing. Thus, in a long footnote he expresses his gratitude to a harsh critic "for correcting my ignorance," and then goes on calmly to strengthen his argument in light of the information his critic has brought forward (242-243).

What Bromwich admits is a kind of minimum of community, whose essence is to be found in the uncoerced and intermittent coming together of two individuals in conversation. Actually, one hardly even needs the second individual, at least in person; Bromwich several times indicates that the most productive conversations are with earlier writers. At heart an intellectual community is a community of one, oxymoronic though that phrase may sound: "Every community of art is a community of one that wants to be two [not more]. Its only criterion of truth is 'I see it that way, too.' Its only obligation is fixed by elective affinity" (226-227). This community will achieve its fullest form when it extends to include a second person, who may be a contemporary or a future reader, but in the meanwhile it already exists as "a community of one."

Recalling the scene of conversion in the Indiana University law library, we can say that we have now reached the point at which Julius Getman might give Val Nolan an offprint of his article. Bromwich's terms would probably even allow for somewhat more interaction, permitting Tamino and Papageno to share their thoughts during the research phase in Sarastro's dungeon—as Sarastro in fact allows them to do to a modest extent, even though he had made them promise not to. Still, Bromwich continues to bar the way outside the dungeon and into the banquet hall where the initiates join the company of Sarastro's brotherhood. Bromwich's scholarly community in its ideal form is the mirror image of the Christian community presented by Mozart in Masonic form, as the Church's minimum is Bromwich's maximum: whereas Jesus promises to be present "whenever two or three are gathered together," for Bromwich the room is already getting pretty crowded by then.

With Bromwich we finally have someone who does not merely assume but tries to prove that solitary intellectual work is inherently better than the ideals of "common action" and "collaboration with other persons," which he clearly feels usually degenerate into "communitarian pieties" (23). He eloquently evokes his community of one that wants to be two and I would not want to suggest that his is an unworkable ideal. On the contrary: this is how Bromwich himself has found a way to thrive within the company of scholars, and I detail his depiction just because he gives passionate expression to a mode of work and of interaction that has worked for many. What I do wish to dispute is the suggestion that this is the only viable mode of work, and that the only alternative must be some Orwellian group-think.

In one striking passage, Bromwich himself testifies to the desirability of collaborative work across disciplines, but in the very process of elaborating on the idea he slides directly back into a reiteration of the virtues of solitude. He is talking about the need to reconnect kinds of texts that have been made prisoner by separate disciplines:

For example, it should be possible to read Leviathan and Paradise Lost in the same class, just as they were once read by the same culture, without having to be taught by a scholar who makes up in hand-to-mouth fashion a whole history of poetry or of political theory... the difficulties themselves suggest a
shared belief that books talk to each other in subtler ways than the existing map of disciplines can reflect. Everyone hears scraps of this conversation, but it is hard to find the teacher, in a single body anyway, who can keep up with what books of such different sorts are saying. (128)

Bromwich responds to this problem as forthrightly as one could wish; rather than counselling us, as Getman might, to stick to the narrower topics a single person can master, Bromwich suggests that the solution "may lie rather in creating a permanent place for collaborative teaching in the humanities." Further, this is no mere utopian dream: "There exists now at many institutions, though in an unorganized way, a community that might some day give a vivid character to teaching and research along these lines" (128), and he gives as examples the sustained reading of thinkers like Hume now occasionally to be found in English departments, and the presence of moral philosophy in departments of politics and in law schools.

The three paragraphs Bromwich devotes to this theme are admirable, yet the migration of books across departmental lines is far from a full collaboration, as at present it is mostly a matter of an individual reaching across the hall for some books from another department's bookcase—or its wastebasket, if we can really believe that Hume is no longer taught in philosophy departments. What would it take to proceed to genuine collaboration? Given Bromwich's overall emphasis on the individual, it is perhaps not surprising that he does not develop this idea further. Still, what happens instead is striking: the idea of collaboration itself calls forth one of his most heartfelt testimonies to solitary reading and thought. In the paragraph following his mention of the migration of texts across departmental lines, he considers parallel possibilities for conversations across time:

It can be a liberating discovery to feel that there are thoughts one has in common with people who lived, worked, acted, and suffered a long time in the past. Indeed, many of the strongest feelings of solidarity for a thinking person are likely to be of this kind.... There are, that is to say, kinds of discovery foreign to one's contemporaries, knowledge that neither a sect nor a school professes, which one can feel called upon to bring to light alone. And the only way will sometimes be through a personal reading of the past. Dependence and group-narcissism are the paralysis of genuine scholarship; but scholars, like citizens, to whom that seems a healthy state of things will always invoke the argument of growing solitude. (129–130)

Bromwich then urges us to follow Nietzsche and John Stuart Mill alike in accepting solitude as preferable to conformity to the conventions of "the herd." If we do so, our solitude will be warmed by the books around us: "Traditions... offer, in fact, a kind of solitude, and a kind of company" (130).

The movement of this passage is the same that we have earlier seen in Jaroslav Pelikan: a sincere assertion of the need for collaborative work somehow leads immediately not to a discussion of how this might be carried on but instead precisely to a warm evocation of the virtues of solitude. My goal is not to deny those virtues but to loosen their lock hold on scholarly work. It should not need to be the case that minds as thoughtful as Pelikan's and Bromwich's should suddenly short-circuit when the idea of collaborative work presents itself. It should be possible to see more kinds of scholarly work, and more productive scholarly interactions, than are now commonly found.

Twenty years ago Lionel Trilling concluded Sincerity and Authenticity—delivered, fittingly, as the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard—by criticizing the contemporary love of alienation for its own sake:

many among us find it gratifying to entertain the thought that alienation is to be overcome only by the completeness of alienation, and that alienation completed is not a deprivation or deficiency but a potency. Perhaps exactly because the thought is assented to so readily, so without what used to be called seriousness, it might seem that no expression of disaffection from the social existence was ever so desperate as this eagerness to say that authenticity of personal being is achieved through an ultimate isolateness and through the power that this is presumed to bring. (171)
Trilling is here opposing the efforts of R. D. Laing and Michel Foucault to see certain forms of madness as expressions of health, as resistance to the coercive homogenizing force of modern society. In Trilling’s view, echoing Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents, society at large cannot afford to indulge untrammeled individualism; for better or for worse, a sane society requires people to adapt to one another’s needs and concerns. To apply Trilling’s argument here, it ought to be possible to strike a better balance than to face a choice between a breathless postmodern communal pietism and an archaic late-Romantic individualism.

I have no wish to claim that the scholarly norms I have been describing always and everywhere carry the day, although they certainly pervade the published debates. No doubt there are campuses on which genuine community exists, and I know of a few fields in which scholars are more concerned to work together than to upstage each other; but I believe that such campuses and such fields are the exception rather than the norm. My reading in the literature on the university has reinforced this belief. The sociologists and administrators who wax eloquent on “the scholarly community” tend to become distressingly vague as they do so, while their more specific colleagues usually portray an environment dominated by a highly aggressive individualism. Hazard Adams, a professor with ample administrative experience at both the departmental and the university level, is not untypical in making a virtue of such aggression, although he is unusual in his frankness, and also in his zeal in carrying out his own views. He begins his book The Academic Tribes by asserting, “My position can be described as Heraclitean. It was Heraclitus who said Homer was mistaken when he prayed for the disappearance of strife from the universe. He did not know he was praying for its destruction” (15). As his imagery makes clear, Adams regards our contemporary academic culture as the very nature of things. But more than this: he sets his personal experiences against the entire body of literature on academic administration, which he rules out of court without even having read it: “I have read as little scholarship in the fields of educational and organizational theory as is conceivable, given my academic experience... I proceed with a skepticism about them that I hope only gradually sinks into ill temper” (ix). Adams’ presentation is witty and often trenchant, and yet his observations would benefit from being set within the larger contexts that the literature can provide. It should not be necessary to uphold the integrity of one’s individual experience at the cost of refusing on principle to read the scholarship on one’s own subject.

All too often, scholars quietly do what Adams and Bromwich do openly, ignoring or dismissing entire fields and approaches that would seem relevant if only they weren’t either intellectually bankrupt or ideologically suspect. In this way, an extreme individualism may come to resemble the exaggerated collectivism it believes itself to oppose. Is the wholesale denigration of Dead White Males really different in kind from a refusal to see anything of value in the works of Live French Theorists? When fidelity to one’s own perspective produces a desire to brick up whole corridors in the library, we may need to become as wary of individual-think as of the group-think whose press has been so poor in recent years.

The sociologists who discuss behavioral patterns among academics speak quite directly about the unusual—or even deviant—nature of the contemporary academic personality. Thus, Michael Cohen and James March describe academic modes of decisionmaking as “pathological”; but this is not a criticism, for they simply see such pathologies as the norms of an abnormal world: “measured against a conventional normative model of rational choice, the garbage can process does seem pathological, but such standards are not really appropriate since the process occurs precisely when the preconditions of more ‘normal’ rational models are not met” (Leadership and Ambiguity, 91).

Seeking an analogy to campus patterns of interaction, another sociologist refers matter-of-factly to prisons: “There are strong pressures in a prison that promote the formation of militant interest groups. On the inside the sharp cleavages between the prisoners and their captors make conflict the normal state of affairs. Powerful groups form on every side to fight for privileges and favors. On the outside there are strong sentiments about the prison and numerous community groups try to influence its operation” (Baldridge, Power and Conflict in the University, 17).

If Foucault had made the prison analogy just quoted, we might be inclined to see the passage as satiric overstatement, but Victor Baldridge is little given to satire and stays close to his data. Similarly Karl Weick, in a brief summary of the dominant academic culture:
"Prevailing themes within this culture include academic freedom, the lonely inquirer, anomie as a necessary cost of doing business, intrinsic motivation as the highest good, heterogeneity as strength, originality as virtue, team research as enemy, creativity favored over synthesis and replication, and the necessity for great men rather than great groups" ("Contradictions in a Community of Scholars," 28). Clearly, there are positive elements in this list; what is less clear is the necessary connection of all the listed items. Perhaps we need no longer insist that heterogeneity and originality can be achieved only through loneliness, anomie, and hostility to team research.

To return to the historical frame outlined in the first chapter, we may say that the contemporary scholarly personality is an elaborated holdover from the new professional personality created by the rising professions at the turn of the century. As Thomas Haskell, the great historian of professionalism, puts it:

Most of all, a truly persuasive professional community would have to draw upon all the emotional energies of its members . . . The rigorous demands of such a community on its individual members would be evident in its native genre, the monograph, with its burden of footnotes calculated to demonstrate wide acquaintance with fellow-workers, to leave a trail for followers, to acknowledge debts, declare loyalties, display alliances, cover flanks, condemn errors, harass deviants, and otherwise to restrain idiosyncrasy and invigorate community life. What would be classed as obsessive name-dropping and paranoid defensiveness in a natural community is normal in the communications of professional inquirers. (The Emergence of Professional Social Science, 236)

Haskell is describing professional norms as formulated a hundred years ago, but in many respects professional life in society at large has moved beyond those norms since then. People work more closely together in law firms, for example, or in architectural firms, than they now do in many university departments. The norms of alienation and aggression still enshrined in the university are the products not of nature but of cultural choices, and archaic ones at that. This culture can be changed if necessary—if, as I believe, more and more topics would benefit from sustained discussion among people with different expertise and perspectives, while relatively fewer topics are still best worked through by single scholars meditating on their favorite authors. We should not remain content with a state of affairs that leads sociologists to compare universities as a matter of course to prisons and mental asylums; we will do better to improve relations with our soulmates—or cellmates—in our own institutions.