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KNOWLEDGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: REVISITING THE SNOW/LEAVIS CONTROVERSY

Abstract

The paper is a response to an important observation Professor Darko Suvin made in 1999, namely, that stances must ultimately depend on circumstances, and in particular to his warning that the circumstances marking the turn of the century demand a revision of our assumptions of what the knowledge that truly matters is. Now, as the circumstances shaping our social and political existence deteriorate, the concern about the diminishing role of humanist education, as opposed to scientific or specialized training is voiced with increasing urgency and apprehension. Part of the changing paradigm within cultural and literary studies is the will to re-assess the position of F. R. Leavis. Thus Leavis's response to C.P. Snow's *Two Cultures*, for several decades merely an object lesson in bad academic manners, is now being revisited as an integral part of his life-long 'mental fight' for the conception of humanist studies as the irreplaceable source of criteria that would counter the general tendency of what he called the technologico-Benthamite culture to misuse science in ways that cheapen, impoverish and dehumanize life. The Leavis/Snow controversy, as well as the contemporary debate concerning the humanities, I will argue in the concluding part of my paper, can be read as the latest version of the

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paradigm clash dramatically transposed in the stories of two archetypal knowers – Faust and Prospero.

Key words: F. R. Leavis, C. P. Snow, the humanities, literature, science, knowledge, university

Rather than an application of this or that newly hatched theory in an analysis of this or that particular literary or cultural phenomenon – the tacitly agreed upon academic convention concerning conferences and symposiums – my contribution consists of doubts and dilemmas that have accumulated in the years I have spent trying, not as successfully as I might have wished, to combine the widely undisputed rules governing the academic profession and my own feeling about the kind of knowledge that the study of literature provides, and that could or should be exchanged to the benefit of the students and wider reading public. I thought I knew, and I still think I know, the answer, but the gulf separating my view of the matter from the one implied in the bulk of scholarly pursuits and their published results worldwide has so deepened, that I have felt for some time that this question – what do we, university teachers, live for, what, ultimately, do we live by? – might well be the only important issue still left to arise in a conference. It is, of course, a paraphrase of F. R. Leavis’s “What for – what ultimately for? What, ultimately, do men live by?” (Leavis 1972, 56) – his central formulation concerning the teleological questions he believed literature has the power to initiate. A natural association, for as a student and teacher of English literature I was brought up on the principles of Leavis’s criticism, introduced to the literary section of the English Department in Niš in 1976, and passionately upheld to the last, by the late Professor Vida Marković. All Leavisites in those times, we were committed to the belief that the quality of the mind shaped by intense personal engagement with the questions that great literature inspires would ultimately make a difference in the moral condition of the wider community. (It may now sound as a naïve belief, but not if one assumes that the only meaningful way to pursue whatever happens to be one’s vocation is to assign to it an absolute value.) That is how I watched with incomprehension as Leavis’s chief principles were denounced and repudiated, rashly, maliciously, stupidly, as it seemed to me, by one new school of criticism after another, without, however, fundamentally changing my own, increasingly precarious, position. Now it is with considerable satisfaction that I hear, have heard for the last ten

years, Leavis's name invoked with ever greater urgency, and see his long forgotten controversy with C. P. Snow brought back to the general public's attention.

The Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow, F. R. Leavis's famous (or rather infamous) reply to Lord Snow's 1959 Rede Lecture published as *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, was reprinted in 2013, with an introduction by Stephen Collini.¹ A short while before this new edition of what, for decades, has been a byword for academic excess, in an anticipatory *Guardian* review of the book, Collini points out that in more than 50 years since its first appearance circumstances have changed, requiring a serious reconsideration of what once appeared as the pamphlet's flaws and a better appreciation of its merits. Collini is not alone in his urge to correct the adverse judgment of the part Leavis played in the controversy, nor, as I have already noted, of his entire contribution to English studies. Leavis's unflinching, combative commitment to the crucial social significance of literary and humanist disciplines is now, in the conditions that only can be described as a pervasive crisis of the university, emerging with a new relevance, while his ferocious reply to C. P. Snow, even for his former critics, has acquired the status of the classic of cultural criticism Leavis confidently predicted.

For the sake of those who may not be familiar with the Snow/Leavis debate, I will very briefly restate the chief arguments of both sides. In his Rede Lecture, Lord Snow proposed that we live within two antagonistic cultures, one the result of scientific discovery and technological invention, the other, which he also called "traditional", the less palpable domain conjured by literary intellectuals. Having begun his career as a research scientist at Cambridge – a short-lived affair whose end seems to have been brought about by his less than outstanding abilities – he undertook to write novels (which, incidentally, his gentlest critics said were "almost completely unreadable") (see Kimball 1994), Snow felt qualified to pronounce authoritatively on both. His verdict was in favor of scientists, who, he claimed in a famous phrase, had the future in their bones. Capable as they were of raising the standards of material living, scientists provided social hope. Thus, in Snow's opinion, they had an answer to the inherent

¹ Delivered at Downing College as Richmond Lecture and first published in 1962, Leavis's reply to Snow was reprinted in his 1972 *Nor Shall My Sword: Discourses on Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope*. The whole book, in fact, is an eloquent elaboration of the argument presented in *The Two Cultures?*

tragedy of human condition: we live alone, or more poignantly, we die alone, but in the meantime there was to be more of everything – “more jam”, as he confidently predicted – to consume. Literary intellectuals, on the other hand, were “natural Luddites”. Having nothing more substantial to contribute than railing and whining at the price of technological progress, they were merely an obstacle to this hopeful course.

Leavis was outraged – not so much by what C. P. Snow said, as by the fact that it earned him immediately the status of a sage and pundit. On the strength of his Rede Lecture, Snow, who had never before participated in the government, was offered a position in the Ministry of Technology by Harold Wilson, and the published version of his talk found itself in students’ reading lists on both sides of the Atlantic. Utterly insignificant intellectually, Leavis claimed in his reply, Snow deserved attention because he was a portent. “His significance lies precisely in what his unmerited elevation tells us about the society which accorded him such standing,” Stephen Collini explains, (Collini, 2013) and goes on to justify Leavis’s shock tactics: to effectively combat this lazy habit of automatically accepting only what is already familiar, there was no other way but to transgress all the limits of academic politesse. Urged by the momentousness of his task, Leavis disregarded all academic good manners, and in his Richmond Lecture proceeded to demolish Lord Snow’s every single pretense to distinction: he exposed both the vulgarity of Snow’s style, and the portentous ignorance it conveyed – of history, of civilization, of the human significance of the Industrial Revolution, and, most of all, of art (“As a novelist”, Leavis charges relentlessly at the very opening of his lecture, “he does not exist, nor has a glimmer of what creative literature is, or why it matters”.) With equal vehemence, he denounced Snow’s ignorance of science. (“Of qualities that one might set to the credit of a scientific training“, or indeed “of an intellectual discipline of any kind,” he proceeds mercilessly, “there is no evidence”, either in Snow’s fiction or his lecture.) (Leavis, 1972: 47). Leavis’s scorching ironies misfired, though. The well-bred friends of Lord Charles joined together to defend their minion, and the literary community were practically unanimous in condemning the lecture – too personal, too destructive, too rude, too Leavis! (Collini 2013). In the following decades it became an object of fashionable derision, along with what was called Leavisite literary criticism, which was subsequently ousted from the universities world-wide – with what, I believe, were dire consequences for literary criticism, the university and the world.

To understand Leavis's position, it is necessary to see that it was not science itself that he attacked in his lecture, nor even the idea of economic prosperity. Rather than "more jam tomorrow" (the phrase Snow liked well enough to repeat several times, whose callous utilitarian connotation revolted Leavis), he turned against the moral blindness underlying the failure on the part of C. P. Snow and his admiring public to distinguish between wealth and well-being. Rather than economic prosperity in itself (surely one of the priorities in the world nowadays, when half of humanity go hungry!), he thundered against the axiomatic status accorded to the idea that economic prosperity – in the already prosperous Western countries?! – was the exclusive and overriding goal of all social action and policy. For how else, one may wonder, was "jam" to be justly distributed, or indeed the impulse to use scientific discovery for unbridled destruction held in check, if not through an exercise of moral intelligence, the human faculty whose sole provenance in the university were the humanities, and literary studies in particular? It was this property of literature – at least the kind that constituted Leavis's Great Tradition – and of the arts to heighten awareness and expose false teleologies that constituted the great rationale of Leavis's contention that there can be only *one* culture, and that it depended for its moral coherence and sanity on the role the humanities were allowed to play within the university. Having their own centre in literary studies, the humanities were to hold a central place in the university, which then might become an irreplaceable source of the criteria that would counter the tendency of the technologico-Benthamite culture to misuse science in ways that cheapen, impoverish, dehumanize and destroy life².

Life, indeed, was the absolutely crucial term, the key criterion of value, aesthetic and ethical at once, in the critical vocabulary Leavis developed

² Compare the conclusion to a 1994 re-assessment of the Leavis/Snow controversy:

We live at a moment when "the results of science" confront us daily with the most extreme moral challenges, from... prospects of genetic engineering to the more amorphous challenges generated by our society's assumption that *every* problem facing mankind is susceptible to technological intervention and control. In this situation, the temptation to reduce culture to a reservoir of titillating pastimes is all but irresistible... We are everywhere encouraged to think of ourselves as complicated machines for consuming sensations — the more, and more exotic, the better. Culture is no longer an invitation to confront our humanity but a series of opportunities to impoverish it through diversion. We are, as Eliot put it in *Four Quartets*, "distracted from distraction by distraction." C. P. Snow represents the smiling, jovial face of this predicament. Critics like Arnold and Leavis offer us the beginnings of an alternative. Many people objected to the virulence of Leavis's attack on Snow. But given the din of competing voices, it is a wonder that he was heard at all. (Kimball 1994)

to analyse and evaluate both literature and culture. For Leavis, as for Blake, 'Life' was a necessary word, indicating in Blake's mythic universe the ability of the imaginative Los to welcome the novel and the unknown, and hence the necessary opposite to the limited Urizen's rational impulse to chart, classify, master and close the vital game. (Leavis, 1972: 14-15) Refusing theoretical abstraction, like Blake, Leavis too preferred to define his central critical term by example, pointing the way life declared itself in the language of the authors from Shakespeare and Blake, to George Eliot and Lawrence, as a verbal embodiment of a reverent, imaginative openness before untried experiential possibilities.

In the literary theories that came to replace Leavis's, his key concepts, including life, awareness, perception, responsibility, maturity, were denounced as vague, and his entire ethical approach dismissed as unsufficiently theorised or worse, secretly reactionary³. Science and technology which, unchecked by any humane consideration, had in the meantime come to dominate the realm of social decision and action, began to condition the structure of university studies, where the humanities soon acquired the status of poor relations compared to the massively favored exact sciences, and finally penetrated literary studies themselves, where the ideal of objective, value-free, neutral, 'scientific' analysis of texts or the laws generating their meanings, became, and for some practitioners remained, the order of the day⁴. But if scientific analysis, such as narratology, in its relentless Urizenic pursuit of abstractions, saw its ultimate goal to be the reduction of complex human experiences embodied in literary fiction to algebraic formulae, its sequel, the anti-scientific, poststructuralist literary theory also betrayed its initial promise by exhausting its whole purpose in the spectacular deconstruction of the last scrap of meaning literary texts might communicate. For while this new Theory repudiated scientific objectivity, it was also eager to demolish any philosophical foundation indispensable to consistent interpretation — of literature, the self, or

³ Those who refused to join the almost unanimous adverse judgment of Leavis's criticism were few. One of them was Philip French. In his *Three Honest Men*, he brought together F.R. Leavis, E. Wilson and L. Trilling, as teachers, critics and men of unique integrity and supreme dedication, representing a genuinely democratic tradition in literary criticism, the loss of whose prestige at the time of Leavis's death in 1978 he found surprising and deplorable.

⁴ Indeed, as I have had the opportunity to witness in my own Department, often to the extent that any ethical perspective immediately signals a failure of methodology, an absence of scientific rigor, and is irritating.

the world. If the structuralists before them merely ignored teleological questions, the ‘why’ and ‘what for’ of literature, the poststructural analysts subverted or discredited them, thus also refusing to envisage literature as a moral or social force. Promptly, as was the case with Lord Snow’s confident reflection on material prosperity as the exclusive goal of science and purpose of knowledge, now the new Pyrrhonist doubt about the legitimacy of any knowledge and meaningfulness of any goals was accepted by a dazzled academic readership as a liberating insight. Yet, the crucial effect of this deconstructive move, precluding, as it did, the articulation of alternatives, ethical, social, historical, was to (re)produce patterns of thought that, for all their anarchy, were in deep complicity with the post-Cold War globally oppressive political and economic processes. Thus, whether rigorously scientific, or spectacularly playful, both these major trends of literary and cultural theory failed to generate an effective resistance to the enemy that besieged the academia from without, the neoliberal, market-oriented conception of education: the managerial mentality that has since penetrated the universities has turned the potential centers of opposing consciousness Leavis had hoped for, producing thoughtful citizens capable of intervening in social decision making, into fund-raisers, spawning technically trained, docile profit-makers.

As the crisis deepens, alarm signals are flashed: among those who remember F. R. Leavis in their warning messages, I want to glance at two for a further elaboration of the way the seriousness and responsibility of Leavis’s vision were bound up with the quality of his own language. Thus, describing our contemporary plight in Apocalyptic terms, Fred Inglis, a cultural historian, notes in his 2011 re-evaluation of Leavis’s work “Words As Weapons” that while the old order is breaking down, economically, environmentally, meaningfully, the language in which the disaster is addressed, in the political debate, media, and in university departments alike, is the quantifying managerialist language in which it is impossible to tell the truth. Leavis, he reminds us, forged his own idiosyncratic language of truth-telling: a special idiom inspired by exemplary writers, in which “responsibility is to be found in the poise of language balanced between the rendered reality of the experience and the sincerity with which it is properly felt and judged”. No mere polemicist, Leavis deployed it to give solid life to his own solidly grasped moral and political allegiances, from which, like other great moral critics of British civilization and its awful failings – J. S. Mill, Ruskin, Morris, or Leavis’s admirer E. M. Thompson

– he refused to depart despite his growing isolation: “Year after year, unafraid of reptetiveness, undaunted by the wholly English device on the part of the noble Lords, who stood in as figureheads for Benthamism – which was to murmur in pained, well bread incomprehension at Leavis’s vehemence – he kept up his solitary fustilade, untill tired out, he died in deep depression.” Now in the circumstances of social and spiritual death-in-life, Inglis concludes, it will prove to be the responsibility of teachers of the humanities and like-minded allies in social science, to rediscover a language capable of speaking of matters of life and death, whether in lectures, books, seminars and conferences: “The language to hand is Leavis’s, and we had better learn to speak it, before it is too late.” (Inglis 2011).

Stephan Collini brings up the question of language too: first, as already mentioned, in the argument justifying *The Two Cultures*’ infamous manner of address, but then also within a more general framework of viable cultural criticism. In both these senses, Leavis was up against the rhetoric of hackneyed abstractions. To have responded to Snow’s lecture in a cautious scholarly manner of partial disagreement instead of exposing it relentlessly as “a document for the study of clichés” would not have received the necessary attention, and perhaps would even have confirmed Snow’s reputation of a sage. In such cases, Collini argues, it is the whole mechanism by which celebrity is transmuted into authority (Collini, 2013) that needs to be exposed: not one or another particular view, but the poverty of the mind, the systematic limitations of the perspective underlying such “habit of unawareness” –and the astringent criticism required for the task is the mode that gives offence, which is the risk the cultural critic has to take if he is to alert his audience to their errors of judgment. The language required for the articulation of the critic’s positives is a greater problem. If the options sustaining the ideological status quo are couched in clichés, abstract phrases repeated so many times that they have acquired the status of self-evident truth – what Leavis called currency values, like verbal coins rubbed smooth by being constantly circulated in a particular social world – one must not resort to still other abstractions in order to convey a sense of radically new possibilities, and yet to be recognized as saying something new at all, this is precisely what one is forced to do. The system seems to be closed, but as this renewed interest in Leavis indicates, not completely, or not permanently. For what has now, amidst the cliché-saturated clamour of social discourse (‘democracy’, ‘human rights’, ‘tolerance’, ‘war on terrorism’, ‘threat to peace’, ‘nationalism’, ‘mondialization’), become clear is that

effective dissent is a matter less of abstract definitions of new aims and more of saving the public language from a ritual murder practised upon it daily. This is the provenance of literary criticism of the kind Leavis and his followers practised before it was declared elitist and unscientific. Authentic cultural criticism depends primarily on the critic's ability, cultivated in his intimate contact with literature, to attend scrupulously, patiently, with alert sense of fine ethical discrimination, to the changing sense of words, as they are made to migrate promiscuously from one context, one frame of reference, to another: and by the very syntax, rhythm, pace of his own speech, to compel the readers to do so and thus alert them, before they can quickly and effortlessly swallow their daily ration of numbing banalities or mystifications, to the radical alterity of his own proposed vision.

This combination of literary understanding, linguistic competence, and cultural analysis Collini proposes to call "slow criticism". It is, he suggests, the only efficient cure for the impotence of the present day public chatter, including prestigious critical literary and cultural discourse: to replace their fast, smooth, but superficial idiom, we need "slow" criticism, that which "by its indirection and arrest, causes readers to lose their habitually confident footing and stumble into more probing and effective thinking". For what other weapon does a critic have at his disposal in a battle against "such formidable social forces, the fashion-driven chatter of so much journalism, over-abstraction of so many official documents, the meaningless hype of almost all advertising and marketing, the coercive tendentiousness of all that worldly wise, at-the-end-of-the-day pronouncing", but "a closer attentiveness to the ways words mean and mislead, express truth and obstruct communication, stir the imagination, and anaesthetize the mind?" Leavis, with his angry spoken tempo, may not strike one as an obvious recruit for "slow criticism", but in fact his syntax, abounding in pauses, imbedded afterthoughts, painstaking search for the accurate nuance of meaning, a straining against the limits of blandly self-contained propositions which soon congeal into clichés, is the only language that can disturb us into awareness. (Collini, 2013).

While it confirms the contemporary relevance of Leavis, Collini's slow criticism, I feel, is an unlikely strategy to be embraced within the university. In fact, the hope that the crisis of the university is a reversible process, and that a larger social recovery might start within its precincts in some conceivable future, has become untenable to most serious analysts. Terry Eagleton, a Marxist literary critic, is an example. The additional reason why

I choose to dwell briefly on his views, more radical and less optimistic than those of the previous authors, is that Eagleton used to be one of Leavis's most eloquent (and, I believe, misguided) critics: his main objection derived from a fundamental, but, as I see it, rigidly understood, Marxist principle that the world must be changed and not only interpreted. As a bourgeois liberal, Leavis, according to Eagleton, never seriously entertained the possibility of a revolutionary change that would lead to a more equitable society than the capitalist one, his ambition being limited to ensuring the spiritual survival of the educated elite. While supporting the bourgeois in his privilege, the English studies, for critics such as Leavis, could be relied on, as once was religion, to check the potentially revolutionary impulses of the oppressed working classes: by throwing them a few patriotic novels, they were to be detained from throwing up barricades. (Eagleton, 1983: 22-30) Some years later, while visiting our English Department at the University in Niš, and in response to my question, Eagleton was pleased to inform me that the Leavis/Snow controversy was a long forgotten affair in the British academia, and dismissed the matter with a condescending shrug. I will not argue with this surprisingly unfair distortion of Leavis's significance, except to note that in 1998, browsing through the autumn issue of *the European English Messenger*, I came across Eagleton's reevaluation of Leavis's work, defending the latter's notions of universal moral values and essential human nature – a target of Eagleton's own former criticisms, and still an anathema to contemporary constructivists – as sound thinking, not at all incompatible with the Marxist theory of eventual human emancipation. In two of his recent texts, "The Death of the Intellectual" (2008) and "Death of the University" (2010), although without mentioning Leavis's name, Eagleton responds to the contemporary condition of British higher education and the general fate of knowledge in a language that is immediately identifiable as Leavisite:

What we have witnessed in our time is the death of universities as centers of critique. The humanities, introduced in the 18th century "to foster the kind of values for which a philistine world had precious little time", and "launch a critique of conventional wisdom", are now completely isolated from other disciplines, financially slashed, and disappearing. Since Margaret Thatcher, the role of academia has been to service the status quo, not challenge it in the name of justice, tradition, imagination, human

welfare, the free play of the mind or alternative visions of the future. (Eagleton, 2010)

This is why there are remarkably few intellectuals hanging round universities. For, like Darko Suvin before him, Eagleton reminds the reader that the intellectual is not the same as the academic. Unless they are in the humanities, where they collaborate in the cults of postmodern incomprehensibility, “academics”, Eagleton specifies, “spend their lives researching such momentous questions as the vaginal system of fleas”. Intellectuals have the rather more arduous job of bringing ideas to bear on society as a whole: the intellectual is the one who understands the forces shaping the world (a world in which, according to WFP hunger statistics, 3.1 million children under five die every year of starvation) and wants to explain it to those who do not. In the university, which is now similar to transnational corporations, he cannot do so: there potential intellectuals become mere academics – “a largely disaffected labor force confronting a finance-obsessed managerial elite.” (Eagleton 2008) Or they leave to embrace the precarious existence of free-lance intellectual trouble-makers⁵.

To illustrate these options, I need to make a short digression. Aurora Morales, a writer and activist of combined Puerto Rican and Jewish origin, comes to mind immediately as one such independent, or rather “certified organic” intellectual, as she refers to herself in the eponymous essay from her 1998 collection *Medicine Stories: History Culture and the Politics of Integrity*. The organic food metaphor she chose to convey her sense of what an intellectual, as opposed to postmodern academic, is derives from her rural background and the habit of eating home-produced food: unrefined, unpackaged, full of complex nutrients that get left out when the process of production is too tightly controlled. By analogy, she felt that the ideas she carried with her have been grown on the soil and by the methods familiar to her; unlike imported knowledge, in shiny packages, with empty calories and artificial, hers is open to life, the earth still clinging to it. To keep it meaningful and vital, she refused to trim it to satisfy the requirements of academic presentability. To make it marketable, she felt it had to be refined,

⁵ For a recent commentary about the neoliberal war on higher education see (Schwalbe 2015). A cogent analysis of conservatizing forces operating against universities as centers of critical thought, his “The Twilight of the Professors” also refers usefully to publications such as Russell’s Jacoby’s *The Last Intellectuals* (1997), and Frank Donoghue’s *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (2008).

abstracted beyond all recognition, all fiber taken out of it, boiled down until all vitality was oxidized away. The refusal did not happen at once though: although she had always felt awkward in conference halls, suspecting that the doors were too narrow and that vital parts of her would have to be left behind before she could enter the lecture room, she nevertheless lingered for a while. Repelled by the humiliating impenetrability of the language in which postmodern academic thinking came wrapped, she nevertheless thought for a time that it was the question of her own lack of training, and that the slick new arrangement of words just needed to be acquired. But finally, instead of complying and learning how to arrange the published opinions of other people in a logical sequence, restating one or another school of thought on the topic, she kept to her own homegrown wisdom. She found her validation outside the conference rooms, in the tradition growing out of shared experience: in real situations in the everyday lives of men and women suffering the same oppression, or poems that arose out of the same phenomenon of truth-telling from personal knowledge. (Morales 1988: 67-74) Relying entirely on that personal knowledge – “lived experience”, as Leavis would have called it – for a direction in her life and work, Morales has joined numerous resistance movements in her own crusade against all kinds of political discrimination in a highly stratified, militarized, corporate world.

In a telling contrast to Morales’ intellectual and moral integrity, Martha Nussbaum, Professor of law and ethics in the University of Chicago’s philosophy department, and a widely recognized authority on moral philosophy, exemplifies how academics prosper by compromising with the corporate world. Hypocrisy is, in fact, what most offends in her *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Published in 2010, it is a work of an academic posturing as an intellectual. The title itself, conjuring as it does the Leavis/Snow controversy, would make us expect Nussbaum to defend an updated version of the former’s position. Indeed in the first part of her book, Nussbaum seems to be doing just that: her concern is with education, specifically with the precarious state of the arts and the humanities worldwide. With the rush to economic profitability in the global market, the humanities and the arts are being cut away as useless frills; the values they promote, such as imagination, creativity, rigorous critical thought, compassion, sympathy, those that are crucial to preserving a healthy democratic society, are losing ground everywhere, as nations prefer to pursue short-term profit by the cultivation of the useful

and highly applied skills suited to profit making (Nussbaum, 141-142). She even implies that the humanities are not merely neglected but positively *feared*: they foster the “freedom of the mind, [which] is dangerous, if what is wanted is a group of technically trained, obedient workers to carry out the plans of elites who are aiming at foreign investment and technological development” (Nussbaum 2010: 21). In short, for the greater part of her book, Nussbaum’s premise seems to be that democracy and economic growth are incompatible and require special kinds of education, developing mutually exclusive sets of skills. What might arouse certain doubts, however, is the way she exploits the term democracy for its “currency value” – failing, that is, to make a necessary distinction between its merely nominal use and its real meaning. Resorting to this cliché, instead of questioning it – is the democracy she is so anxious to preserve real to begin with? – Nussbaum can already be seen as a secret defender of the system she is apparently criticising. The sudden turn in her argument confirms these doubts. In a kind of abrupt *cogito interruptus*, Nussbaum begins to contradict herself, asserting that the humanist disciplines she hitherto represented as crucial to responsible citizenship, but antagonistic to growth-oriented economy, must be preserved precisely because they are essential to economic prosperity too: imagination, creativity and critical thinking (compassion and sympathy are conveniently omitted) are what makes for flexible, open minds, and these are indispensable not only to democracy but also to innovation in business. (112)

This is true, but as Jane Newbury points out in the conclusion to her critical review of the book, it does not mean that the two can sit comfortably side by side. Indeed scientific innovation in the pursuit of economic growth has led to some of the most shocking atrocities, and these also demanded setting aside some of the qualities cultivated through literature and the arts – qualities that Nussbaum herself as a moral philosopher regards highly – such as “the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person”. Thus, Newbury sums up, “while education in the humanities may prepare the students for either democracy or growth, this book does not convincingly convey how it can prepare them *for both*”. (Newbury 2011). Newbury’s final judgment of Nussbaum’s argument is that it is flawed. Mine is harsher. In view of the fact she herself registered, namely, that Nussbaum could have pursued her “education-for-democracy” line of thinking – by suggesting more equitable economic possibilities, measures, approaches, those compatible with the genuinely democratic assumption

that human beings are much more than means to profitable ends – but did not, I can only dismiss her whole argument as deliberately deceptive, of the kind one has learnt to expect from a liberal bourgeois academic, traditionally pleading for human rights and freedom of thought, as long as it does not affect the capitalist profit-oriented economy. Nussbaum has also contributed to this tradition in her other published work⁶; it is the tradition to which C. P. Snow's pronouncements, though far cruder, on the utilitarian merits of scientific as opposed to humanist education, also belong, but to which F. R. Leavis – who subjected to his thoughtful, 'slow' critical scrutiny the consequences not only of crassly profit-oriented education, but of the entire project of mass culture, rashly taken for a triumph of democracy – was an uncompromising enemy.

By way of conclusion, I would like to place the Leavis/Snow controversy in an even wider context, or rather to see it as having its analogy in the tradition of philosophical thought. For if it is a contention about the kind of knowledge that matters, I seem to re-discover a comparable dilemma in a reference, made in an interview by our eminent philosopher Mihajlo Marković, to two chief orientations in the history of modern philosophy. He admits that, in terms of the theoretical foundation of science, the greatest improvement has been the achievement of what might summarily be called positivism, the orientation that has its beginning in Russell's and Moor's neo-realism, goes through the phase of logical empiricism in the period from the 20's to the 30's, when it thrives as the most influential school of thought, to finally become, under the name of "analytical philosophy", "the philosophical instrument of mature bourgeois society: neutral, uncritical, safe, focussed exclusively on the acquisition of pure knowledge".

Incomparably more inspiring, in Mihajlović's opinion, but also more uncomfortable for any ruling system, and hence receiving meager material support, is critical philosophy: it had its origin in Marx, and developed through the work of his gifted followers, like Gramsci and Lukacs, the Frankfurt and Budapest Schools, Lucien Goldman and the philosophical community called *Praxis*. This orientation has re-endorsed critical thinking, the humanist tradition and the forgotten reflexion on virtues and values. It revived and renewed the ancient idea of "theory", which blends knowledge and morality, science and ethics. It is this school of philosophy that can only

⁶ For a reference to her specious argument in favour of cosmopolitanism, see (Petrović 2008: 423-434.)

help humankind reach the necessary critical self-awareness and discover the way out of current contradictions.

Elaborating his point further, Marković adds that

it would be fatal for humankind if philosophy were to be reduced to “scientism” and deprived itself of critical thinking. Nowadays the dangers of ethically neutral thinking have become obvious, the one which only recognizes the rationality of the means (“instrumental rationality”) and refuses to judge the “rationality of the ends”, because this is allegedly not the business of science or philosophy, but professional politics. (Miletić 2002: 454-5)

Finally, I believe it correct to see the Leavis/Snow controversy, reflected as it is in the mutually opposing schools of contemporary philosophy, as also a more recent episode in the much longer historical tension between two conceptions of knowledge originating at the very beginning of the modern era, when science first disentangled itself from the swaddling clothes of holistic magic practiced by Florentine humanists, and became the crass utilitarian power/knowledge of Bacon and Machiavelli. The first to respond critically were, as always, artists: what kind of knowledge do men ultimately live by? The answers were dramatized in Faust and Prospero, two archetypal knowers. Both magicians, they practiced their magic for entirely different purposes: Marlowe’s Faust, the prototype of hubristic, Machiavellian scientist, lost his soul to the devil – not to demonstrate Marlowe’s medieval superstition against *curiositas*, but to warn that the world in which knowledge is misused for illegitimate power is a soulless world, hell being a proper metaphor for its imminent fate. The contemporary connection has been made repeatedly, but the most pertinent one in this context is John Adams’s opera *Doctor Atomic*: Marlowe’s Faust, gorging himself on the vision of infinite power and wealth he will obtain by constructing “even stranger machines of war”, becomes in Adams’s opera the historical Oppenheimer, insisting on the use of the atomic bomb as an ultimate uncontestable demonstration of his country’s power to destroy life. Prospero’s skill is a means to a wholly beneficial end: like Bruno, and Ficino, who practiced their magic as a way of enhancing their creative potentials and for poetic inspiration, Prospero too is an artist, claiming for his magic no other power in the world than that which Shakespeare exercised in his Globe – which was, of course, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the

time his form and pressure. Its ultimate purpose is the self-knowledge that can restore to the erring individual and deluded nations alike their own estranged souls, and thus renew life: as happens at the end of *The Tempest*, when, as Gonzalo sums it up, “all of us [found]ourselves/When no man was his own” (Vi.).

The consequences of banishing this kind of knowledge from the university for the 21st century students have been articulated recently by a Canadian postgraduate in a living, urgent idiom that tunes in remarkably with the voices of Leavis, Morales, Marković and Shakespeare, which I have so far endeavored to recreate. His summary may serve as an apt conclusion of my own argument:

Once universities are sanitized of all pertinent issue of justice, the human heart begins to ossify. We become saturated with abstraction, aimlessly navigating through a sea of incoherent standardized test scores and rigid curricula, curricula that does not conform to our innate yearnings for existential knowledge and relevance. And when this process takes root, moral paralysis prevails (Shaw, 2013).

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