

The Academy and its Aftermath: Internet Meme  
Culture and the Subsumption of Liberal Arts  
Education

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# Preface

In Harvard's Langdell North Hall that iconic portrait of Rosa Parks hangs. That prophetic gaze is surrounded by that of other notable Harvard alumnus, their portraits impressive, stimulating the better natures of ourselves.

This is the type of place where great thinkers are created, it seems.

Every Wednesday from one to three, undergraduates, law students, and Harvard affiliates file in for *Ethical Reasoning 20: Conduct of Life in Western and Eastern Philosophy*. The main attraction is Professor Unger and Professor Puett, two giants in their fields – their work and discourse complement so well together, I can think of few partnerships that proved so edifying and apolitical. I was in luck this particular semester because I was taking classes taught by dynamic duos – there were operating systems by Professor Kohler and Professor Mickens, and inference by Professor Blitzstein and Professor Murphy. Two professors are indeed better than one, just as two parents to one. Three would be even more ideal, as Confucius would say.

Unger's fiery bravado and Puett's nuanced polysyndetons bring out the full contrast of human eloquence, played out in philosophical layers. Considering the class is titled "Conduct of Life According to Eastern and Western Philosophy," it's tempting to characterize Unger as the "West" and Puett as the "East." Instead, as the conversations unravel onto themselves, one begins to see that the two thinkers share congruent notes on many of the most pressing problems of the human condition, vis-a-vis the "Western" and the "Eastern" approach.

Certain examined truths are timeless, it seems.

As I made my way towards the very front of the room, I walk past the Facebooks, the Gmails, and the Twitters that occupy the screens of those who come in this warm Wednesday afternoon. As class begins, no context switch occurs – the cold screens continue to flash the Facebooks, the Gmails, and the Twitters, and Unger's earnest assertions ("Courage is enabling virtue without which all virtues are left sterile!") seems to lose its effect – the student to my right furtively tags her friend under a meme. As the professors open up the

room to questions, a deadly silence penetrates the musty air. A few actively answer, but those in the back stare intently on those screens. Why exactly should we care about great thinkers and timeless truths? The crickety clicks of fingers to keyboard is enough to keep us all occupied, it seems.

“God is dead,” proclaimed the great Nietzsche. Is so too the liberal arts education?

# 1 The Liberal Arts Tradition

The liberal arts tradition is perceived to be the gold standard of Western higher education, for plenty of good reason. A bulwark of advancing human thought since classical antiquity, the liberal arts tradition has served to educate and enlighten individuals in discovering certain fundamental truths.

## 1.1 A Gold Standard of Western Education

During the time of the Greeks, a liberal arts education would consist of the core three fields of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, known as the trivium. Meanwhile, arithmetic, geometry, music theory, and astronomy form the quadrivium, the secondary fields that comprise a well-rounded liberal arts education [15]. The Latin translation, *liberalis*, translates approximately to “worthy of a free person,” and speaks to the idea of individuals taking part in civic life, becoming good citizens, and living a virtuous life.

In the United States, the liberal arts education has taken on more nuanced meaning through the years. A school that practices the liberal arts curriculum in the United States is often perceived as a hallmark of an “elite education.” Colleges such as Harvard and the rest of the Ivy Leagues have cultivated a reputation that extends beyond just the content and form of education they present to students. Rather, the sustained liberal arts tradition within these universities have reflected class overtones – liberal arts education through much of the history of the United States have often served as a proxy for an expensive and sophisticated

upbringing, a symbol exchanged between members of the upper-class to prove that one indeed is part of the upper-class [1].

This oft-perceived equivalence between liberal arts and upper-class have characterized the university culture much in the United States, as opposed to the European counterpart [2]. The liberal arts culture in the United States has thus served as a bedrock of social customs and tradition, both of which comprise sustained longevity. The theme of longevity is also a theme consistent with that of a liberal arts education because the liberal arts seeks to study timeless truths isolated from the rapid changes in the modern world and to use these timeless truths to guide the progression of events in the modern world.

Being said, the rather isolated nature of the liberal arts education from immediate societal repercussions does not merit liberal art's caricature as "tone-deaf" in popular culture but rather deserves a distinction of the liberal arts acting as a great stabilizer and social fabric that governs much of the United States. This stabilizing force is most apparent in the Academy, the universities and institutions of higher learning that have been around prior to the conception of the United States itself.

## 1.2 The Academy

If the liberal arts can be described as the verb for advancing knowledge and ideas, then the Academy can best be described as the noun that houses this advancement of knowledge and ideas.

The role of the liberal arts and the Academy is two-fold – together, they stand at the vanguard of all intellectual and cultural developments, and together, they formalize these developments, thereby becoming the ultimate arbiter over the legitimacy of certain ideas and movements in human history.

Such a great responsibility characterizing the liberal arts culture is appropriate for the Academy since the Academy often attracts and selects the most gifted and intelligent thinkers of each generation [13]. The culture of the Academy is also one that is isolated from that of

pure capitalism governing much of society. This separation of wealth and knowledge in the Academy has ultimately preserved the inherent integrity and reputation of the Academy just as how the separation of powers in the three branches of government preserved the stable structure and integrity of the United States.

Moreover, the separation between knowledge and money has never been made more clear for the professors and gatekeepers of the Academy. The long and tedious path to tenure offers few monetary compensation, particularly in traditional humanities and sciences of the liberal arts institution [4]. Current gatekeepers and devotees of the Academy have been tried and tested, as the path to tenure has effectively winnowed out the individuals who have lessened conviction in their research field of interest and the individuals who have a greater desire to make money.

The Academy, through the trials of history, has ultimately accomplished its goal of promoting the liberal arts tradition, especially in the context of capitalism, defined most appropriately as an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit. While members of the Academy often complain of capitalism and financial pressures that affect these institutions of higher learning, history has demonstrated that capitalism is fundamentally compatible with the liberal arts tradition. In particular, capitalism has complemented efforts in scientific discoveries in the 20th century, as consumer and military interest in mechanized production and innovative chemical and physical resources funnelled into more research funding and grants for the theoretical sciences of biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics [12].

In contrast to the European model of the liberal arts curriculum, the Academy of the United States has also emphasized engineering sciences to be a major focus of the liberal arts curriculum, as developments in the post-World-War eras sparked much interest in a generation of students who studied mathematics and physics [3]. These developments would later lead the explosion of computer science, applied mathematics, statistics, and engineering sciences in the 21st century, as the world becomes increasingly connected and the era of

big data and information overflow alters the dynamics of the individual lifestyle and social landscape to foster more human-computer interaction [14].

However, while the Academy has historically succeeded in championing original ideas and has led major intellectual and cultural developments, the same could not be said of the Academy today, where the liberal arts culture is no longer occupying a dominant sphere in society. Moreover, since the introduction of engineering sciences, students have generally transitioned from the traditional liberal arts (humanities, social sciences, and sciences) into the engineering sciences with a particular expanded interest in computer science [13]. Important to note is that the engineering sciences are not to explain for the decline of the liberal arts and the Academy, but rather present themselves as an alternative to the decline of the liberal arts in the changing social and cultural landscapes of the 21st century. If the current liberal arts curriculum in the Academy can still accomplish the goals of educating visionaries and independent thinkers as effectively as it did in the past, then there wouldn't be a need for students to switch to the engineering sciences.

Ultimately, the dynamics between the Academy and the rest of society can be attributed to a complex web of factors, but in this paper, I will define the Internet Meme Culture that has popularized among the current generation of university students. Ultimately, the Meme Culture and its predecessors have led to the deterioration of certain liberal arts values in the Academy.

## **2 The Birth of Meme Culture**

In 1976, Richard Dawkins published “The Selfish Gene,” explaining how cultural information spreads. In “The Selfish Gene,” Dawkins coined the word meme as we know it today, which is a unit of cultural idea propagated online.

According to Dawkins, a meme acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas, symbols, or practices, that can be transmitted from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures,

rituals, or other imitable phenomena with a mimicked theme [11]. As noted by many evolutionary biologists and psychologists, memes have become the cultural analogues to genes, because both self-replicate, mutate, and respond to selective pressures [5].

## **2.1 Social Media and Meme Replication**

The advent of social media on the Internet has contributed much to the rise of the meme culture, enabling mass self-replication, mutation, and the response of these “units of cultural ideas” on a large scale. As of Alexa’s rankings in January 2019, Facebook is ranked the third most popular site, Twitter ranked 11th, and Reddit ranked 18th [8]. It’s also worth noting that YouTube, a video-sharing platform, is ranked second [8]. The way these social media outlets are formatted for short and immediate sensory spread of ideas has become a great incubator for memes. Twitter limits its users to write up to 280 characters in a single post, while Facebook’s Newsfeed contains baked-in stock images and GIFs ready to be deployed at moment’s whim.

These social media platforms, having been designed for short messages, images, and clips, ultimately exist as breeding grounds for memes because both social media and memes optimize for simplicity in order reach a broad audience consisting of widespread communication and information exchange. Just as how viruses contain genes hosted inside hosts, so too do memes contain ideas hosted on social media platforms. Their gravitation towards simplicity has ultimately enabled memes to gain the widespread recognition it has today.

Simplicity has always been a corollary of evolutionary biology. The shorter the gene, the quicker the transmission. Likewise, the simpler the meme, the quicker it’s seen.

## **2.2 When Meme Becomes Culture**

Dawkins wrote that evolution depended not on the particular chemical basis of genetics, but only on the existence of a self-replicating unit of transmission. This self-replicating unit of transmission is typified in a particular image and phrase that ultimately becomes planted



in the minds of all human beings. When enough human beings are exposed to this idea to assume an air of familiarity, the idea then becomes a culture.

Dawkins hypothesized that one could view many cultural entities as replicators, and he has listed fashion and learned skills as such examples. Wigs in the 17th century, for example, were fashionable because people wearing wigs replicated other people wearing wigs. Meanwhile, learned skills like knitting were popular during that era as well because everybody had to replicate the well-dressed nature of everybody around them. Today, such learned skills like software engineering are popular because everybody needs to replicate the ability to interact with computers because almost everybody spends a plurality of their waking hours on a phone, tablet, or laptop [7].

Like so, memes replicate through humans, who have, by nature of biological evolution, have evolved as efficient replicators of information and behavior. While humans do not always remember and copy the memes they see perfectly, they exert a considerable aggregate amount of time and energy thinking about memes, engaging in a process of commenting, tagging, modifying, and creating new memes. Such a process diminishes the individual's ability to formulate original and individual ideas because they are left thinking about framing a particular event with the usual ironic overtones characterizing that particular meme. By continually spreading memes, the human being becomes nothing more than a host whose mind has become a replication of a meme. In biological analogues, the mind's cognitive has become infected by a virus, that virus being the meme.

Under this influence of the meme culture, the individual cannot attempt to engage in non-conformity and self-invention, which has always existed as the ultimate question in this project of how to best conduct life according to Western and Eastern philosophy

### 3 On the Nature of Meme Culture

The meme culture has been propagated by social media platforms and the inherent evolutionary social tendencies of human beings to replicate the ideas of others. Just as how evolutionary biology converges on certain optimized, stable states, so too has meme culture converged on certain cultural topics and content types.

To give an idea of the convergent Meme Culture, I have curated a list of the top five most popular memes of all time, according to *The Most Popular Memes of All Time* [9]. The actual memes are listed once more at the end of this paper in order of most popular to least popular. The themes covered by these memes all contribute to a larger development of Postmodernism, discussed in the next section.

#### 3.1 Irrational Rage

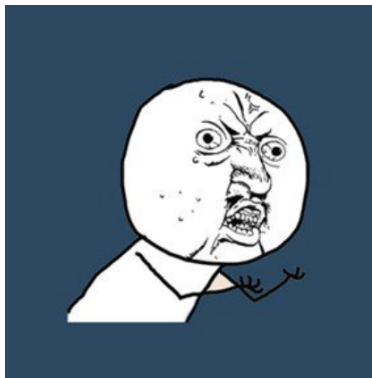


Figure 1: Y U Know Meme

According to the internet sources, the Y U No meme began as Y U No Guy, eventually evolving into simply Y U No, the phrase being generally followed by some often ridiculous suggestion. The face was taken from a Japanese cartoon and placed on a pink wallpaper, with the initial captions reading “I TXT U ... Y U NO TXTBAK?!” This meme has been ranked as the most popular meme of all time according to Meme Generator, morphing into hundreds of different forms with a similar theme of irrational rage.

With arms held out and fingers spread in a plaintive, almost begging gesture, The Y U No figure stands with looks pained beyond normalcy. This is a common trope in memes, in that people use memes to express rage over the lack of communication or the little problems that arise in life. Such memes have resulted in great difficulties for human beings to try to reason calmly and thoughtfully with each other on the Internet.

### 3.2 Self-Debasement and Self-Deprecation



Figure 2: Bad Luck Brian Meme

Many memes on the Internet focus on the theme of self-deprecation and the inadequacy of the human condition, and this meme is one of the most popular in conveying this theme.

The Bad Luck Brian meme is used to picture an awkward situation, in which bad luck strikes, represented by this boy who has acne, an awkward jaw posture, and an outdated sweater. He looks like a very earnest and well-intentioned boy, which makes the meme popular in conveying the inevitable ill-fated nature of our own lives. Such memes have resulted in a generally cynical attitude towards life and the events that unfold in our everyday lives.

### 3.3 Sarcasm

The Willy Wonka Meme represents the entrenched sarcasm that memes express. This is meme is taken from *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, produced in 1971. In it,



Figure 3: Willy Wonka Meme

the subtle sarcasm, most notably seen in Willy Wonka's eyes and Cheshire-Cat-like grin is intended to rebuke earnest statements made by others. Such memes like these have made it almost impossible for people to express their honest opinions online and live lives genuinely without sarcastic judgment from others.

### 3.4 Irony and Boredom



Figure 4: The Most Interesting Man in the World Meme

This meme is taken from the Dos Equis Beer commercials, featuring a live actor playing the role of The Most Interesting Man in the World. The man represented here boasts of his extreme levels of interestingness.

The meme has since taken on ironic meaning, where the interesting is really meant to mask the obvious boredom characterizing one's life. For example, the parodies that spring

up as a result of this commercial include the Least Interesting Man in the World and the Most Interesting Warcraft Player in the World. This meme has made it common for people to accept boredom as a norm and to use memes ironically.

### 3.5 Confusion and Apathy



Figure 5: Futurama Fry Meme

This meme is taken from Futurama, where Fry, the character displayed here, looks confused. This phrase generally accompanying this image goes as follows: “Not sure if (insert thing)”, with the bottom line then reading “or just (other thing)”.

The main form of the meme seems to be with the text “Not sure if trolling or just stupid.” A general sense of apathy surrounds this meme in that people who use this meme generally don’t care about which of the options is really the truthful option. This meme has therefore made it easier for people to perceive the inherent absurdities of the world, while simultaneously encouraging apathetic behavior, where people lose a sense of agency to resolve certain absurdities of the world.

## 4 Postmodernism

### 4.1 Thriving Cynicism

To understand contemporary meme culture, one must understand the postmodernist culture that has developed prior to the influx of memes and meme culture. Postmodernism is generally defined by an attitude of skepticism, irony, or rejection toward the meta-narratives and ideologies of modernism, often calling into question various assumptions of Enlightenment rationality [10].

Postmodernism is not to be confused with modernism in that while both modernism and Postmodernism reject traditional forms of art and culture, modernism at least still retains basic assumptions such as the idea that society is progressing towards a better future and that human beings are powerful individuals with great creativity and ability, capable of changing their environment through the tools of experimentation, science, and technology. Postmodernism does not assume any of these qualities of society and the human condition – it looks at the world for all its flaws and accepts these flaws without offering any solution or progression [6].

### 4.2 Relationships to Meme Culture

The meme culture operates out of these Postmodernist beliefs. By reading the use-cases of each of the memes under section 3, one can gain an understanding of the entrenched skepticism, irony, and rejection rooted in the messages of these memes. None of these memes offers a solution or a better vision for the future, a characteristic that is distinctively Postmodern.

Postmodernism has thrived as a cultural development in the current 21st century because the 21st century is a time of great propagation of information, the cultural equivalent of the Carboniferous explosion. The carboniferous explosion is an age marked by an explosion of terrestrial plant life, and likewise, the 21st century is an age marked by an explosion

of access to knowledge. In the age of computers, globalization, and digitalism, people are disseminating ideas faster than ever through the Internet. Naturally, with such an influx of information and ideas, people must exhaust through the baggage of bad ideas that have occurred throughout human history stemming from the Christian-Romantic tradition before coming across some jewels of information that are truly transformative and inspiring.

Looking through so much information and bad ideas leaves people more and more jaded. Postmodernism channels people's collective general jaded state with more cynicism. Every idea will have something wrong with it, even if such badness is trivial, as the general cynical sentiment goes in Postmodernism.

Moreover, the philosophy of Postmodernism is self-sustaining – one will never run out of ideas to lambast. We can lambast opinions of opinions of opinions of opinions of opinions, and so this meta of lambasting can perpetuate until the last syllable of recorded time. Postmodernism in this day and age has endless ammunition, ample topics to criticize, and thus, the liberal arts tradition cannot hold out on its own, subsuming and incorporating the forces of Postmodernism.

## **5 Postmodernism Subsumes the Liberal Arts**

Postmodernism's entrenched cynicism towards all ideas naturally translates to cynicism towards all academic disciplines, and so it is this cynicism deeply cutting the very mission and ideal of the liberal arts education. As stated before, the goal of the liberal arts education is to free the individual by encouraging the individual to explore the very best of what humanity has created so that the individual can pursue larger, nobler goals that will live on past the individual's own lifespan. Postmodernism has nothing else to say but to point out the futility, impossibility, and faults with such an education.

## 5.1 The “Isms” of Postmodernism

The very nature of cynicism is dangerous because it sparks a defeatist attitude among students, wearing away the intellectual curiosity that is necessary for great discoveries in the Academy and in society. Such a cynical attitude has coincided with the rise of many “isms” within academic disciplines, such as Marxism, feminism, and fascism. The branching of many “isms” in Postmodernism have one general consensus – disparage the current system from a particular perspective and interpretation. Moreover, each of these “isms” offers no particular solution but an extreme solution that fits the perspectives and definitions of one school of thought.

These isms are rather dangerous and limited because they only emphasize one particular perspective of the human condition. If one were to declare oneself a Marxist, one can only view the world for all its capitalistic flaws, criticizing the very “excesses of society” as Marx himself would see fit, harping on “commodity fetishism” brought about by the bourgeois. For all the harping, nothing is achieved. We look to Stalin and Mao and realize the limitations of adhering to strict dogmas and ideologies. Any ideological movement when pursued with narrow-minded intentions is dangerous.

The very nature of the liberal arts education is one that is entrenched in eclecticism, a certain openness in accommodating the viewpoints, perspectives, and solutions from all parts of life, and it is this interdisciplinary approach that merits much of the great discoveries that have been a byproduct of the liberal arts tradition. Compared to the “isms,” the liberal arts tradition is more desirable for its emphasis on the universal and the timeless – what is the human resolve, after all, other than overcoming limitations by supporting each other by doing good work? However, by virtue of it being the historical “gold standard,” the liberal arts stands as the target of all new postmodernist “isms,” and it fights a difficult war along all fronts. The danger lies in that if the liberal arts tradition becomes completely subsumed, there will be no good alternative tradition that can take on the deep responsibilities effectively that the liberal arts and the Academy have taken on in the history of human civilization.



## 5.2 Truth

Postmodernism's inability to accommodate objective truth and its fixation on the lack of objective truth is an inherently defeatist, anti-intellectual attitude because the truth is really the only thing worth studying at the end. Postmodernism is an affront to the very liberal arts beliefs of objective truth, timeless truth, as espoused by the Greeks.

Without a conviction in the truth, we cannot attempt to engage in any deep and serious study that ultimately advances human knowledge. Nobody can afford to go to University to study the humanities seriously because nobody can truly understand the world for all its faults and beauty by only siphoning themselves with the vocabulary of Marxism, fascism, sexism, racism, and a particular "ism" stemming from Postmodernism.

Postmodernism, as we practice it today, is an affirmation of our inability to know total truth, dangerous in that it subdues our desire to seek and know the total truth.

The Academy, having the obligation and responsibility to document discoveries and further the possibilities of the human experience, should not concern itself with the trivialities of the superficial, which is anything that distracts from the search for truth. However, in the current landscape, the Academy has caved in to the demands of a Postmodern world, and the students that frequent the grounds of the liberal arts Academy have only affirmed the deep presence of Postmodernism by actively participating in meme culture. The ambivalence to truth is perhaps the greatest damage Postmodernism has afflicted on the liberal arts tradition.

## 6 The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Arts Education

In the aftermath of Postmodernism and Meme Culture, the Academy has evolved to become a big social club such that the goals of the Academy are not about examining timeless truths but rather about building skill-sets for the workforce. Due to the lacking of a liberal arts standard to uphold in the humanities and social sciences, students have been turning to the

engineering sciences where a standard of truth can be better defined and pursued.

For those who do not turn to the engineering sciences, they are left to deal with the aftermath of the Academy, this decline and fall of the liberal arts education.

## **6.1 The Arbiters of Excellence**

The Academy's position in society has always been its ability to define the standards of excellence that govern its students, who then go on and impress these standards of excellence within society. Under this model, the university retains its power on society by the standard of excellence instilled on its students.

At the very least, this ability to define standards of excellence uniquely positions the University as an institution that is independent and free, one of the very few institutions that do not acquiesce to the capitalism framework impressed on by society. Losing a standard of excellence in the age of Postmodernism and Meme Culture compromises the very integrity and leverage of the Academy.

In the wake of the decline of the liberal arts tradition in the Academy, two institutions have risen to take on the mantle of power that defines excellence – the graduate schools of engineering and the corporations.

Today, Harvard's campus rings of recruiters. If there's any indication of the discrepancy between the power of the liberal arts and the power of the corporations, one can look no further at the students flocking to networking events and socials, leaving the classroom barren. Only a select few still come to these halls to learn, typing away at their computers, contracting an attention span that can best be described as distracted. The goals of the students have been displaced – academic excellence in the liberal arts tradition has rung hollow.

In turn, the graduate schools of engineering have taken on the responsibility to rekindle a safe haven for higher learning, providing a standard of excellence that partially fills the void of a declining liberal arts tradition. It is a partial void because while it moves society

forward technologically, it can never quite move society culturally. Postmodernism will still be Postmodernism with or without the Internet. Even if better technology was created, people will still continue to converge culturally in the current landscape we see, one of sharing memes with the same Postmodernist themes. Technology on its own cannot change human tastes and human values.

The state of the current academy is but a dampened representation of the current state of human affairs. If the students of the Academy have already started to abandon liberal arts in order to scramble for a job, what's not to say that the status quo, deprived of the luxuries of the Academy, are experiencing an even more desperate attempt to conduct lives of purpose in this Postmodern world?

## **6.2 Disconnect with Humanity**

The decline of the liberal arts tradition is ultimately the failure to connect with humanity. The Academy's disconnect with the working population and the Academy's inability to understand the plight of the American working class is a corollary to the weakening commitment to civic life established in the liberal arts tradition.

The very definition of the Academy has changed. Rather than serving as a bastion of liberal arts education, the Academy now acts as resume rubber-stamps, a place where prestige floods the area but emptiness walls the innards. People tout their status of being a college graduate, but few truly have something to show for it.

This realization is frightening for many people, who took out loans and the best years of their lives to pay for this certain emptiness. They adopt some variant of Stockholm syndrome and glorify their college years, and then look down on those who did not go to college as an inferior breed.

There has been a rising sentiment among college students after having attended liberal arts institutions to look down on those who are working hard to pay the bills, the people who have deferred the opportunity to attend college during this juncture of their life. Not

having gone to college is frowned upon, but what really is so special about this degree that individuals emblazon on their screens?

Connections, one might say. But what connection is there other than the *human connection*, the overarching connection that unifies all of us rather than an exclusive few?

The connections that the Academy claims to bestow upon its students (a rather cheap substitute for the liberal arts tradition) is not a connection at all but a division between those who have gone to college and those who have not gone to college. This type of division is the type that has translated directly into the problems we see today.

Those who have graduated from a college degree dictate and enforce the division between college and non-college. Those graduated with a college degree take arms against working-man, throwing slurs like racism and sexism, casting away the humanity of the working-man in the delusion that they are serving some greater humanity other than the one they've been seeing this entire time.

This alienation between the Academy and the working population has ultimately made the working class grow distrustful of the Academy, for good reason. Out of spite it seems, the working class has turned to right-wing populism, not because it is the best solution but because the alternative civic life that extends the liberal arts tradition simply is not there.

## **Tomorrow, Tomorrow, and Tomorrow**

As the last class concludes, Unger remarks humorously to Puett, “And so here we are, discussing the most pressing problems of our time, in a hall that is somewhat fit for a discussion like ours.”

The irony was not lost on me, but was this really irony, or had I been too disaffected by the Meme Culture to even recognize a display of raw, true human emotion? To be human is to be vulnerable, and here I was, seeing two Professors laughing together like schoolboys.

Perhaps it is too premature and sensationalist of me to write off the decay of the liberal

arts education as if it were an empirical fact, as many of my predecessors have done so in the past. The statistician in me asks, is this decay measurable? What is a good confidence interval for the years left until the liberal arts truly dies?

For all the statistics, computational models, and math I've learned, in the end, I admit I do not know other than the fact that I am a Romantic at heart. Such a statement would never fly by in today's world of machine learning, big data, and data science, but I look upon these walls with nothing but a feeling, an impression that something magical still lives on in these halls as they did three hundred eighty-three years ago.

As I walked out of Langdell North and towards Maxwell Dworkin, a pre-frosh approached me. I can't decide, he told me.

"Is it true that Harvard is now known as the Stanford of the East?"

I could have given him an obvious answer, but the question conveyed the certainty that the liberal arts holds no place in an education where engineered systems and artificial intelligence took center stage. To acknowledge this is to acknowledge all our lives as poor players who strut and fret an hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

Let me show you something, I said, the hearty laughter of Puett and Unger still in my ear. Together we walked over to Dexter Gate. Peering above through the cracked stone and muted etches and the sun in our eyes, we could but catch a glimmer:

*Enter to grow in wisdom.*

*Depart to serve better thy country and thy kind.*

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