

John Woolley and Charles Badham: in Defence of the Soul of Culture

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In recent years there has been in Australia, as elsewhere, an interesting battle regarding the meaning and significance of culture¹. This battle has taken many forms but the basic division has been most succinctly expressed by Alain Finkielkraut:

In effect the term 'culture' now has two meanings. The first asserts the pre-eminence of the life of thought; the second denies this: from everyday gestures to the great creations of the human spirit, is not everything cultural? Why should we give pride of place to the latter rather than the former, to the life of thought rather than the art of knitting, or the chewing of betel nuts, or the ancestral custom of dunking one's buttered toast in the morning cup of coffee?²

Against the background of this conflict there has developed another dispute revolving around the question of humanism as opposed to anti-humanism and the proper place of the university in the contemporary world. During the course of the last century an association has grown up linking humanism, culture and the university. In recent times this association has perhaps become more of an article of faith and a rhetorical tool than a reasonably argued position, but it remains the case that many people continue to view the university as the prime carrier of the values exemplified by the ideals of humanism and culture.

This association of humanism, culture and the university has recently come under attack from both the left and the right. John Carroll's recent onslaught on humanism as an ideal that has led western culture down the road of nihilism is matched by his

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pessimistic view of the humanistic university³. From the left Ian Hunter has mounted an anti-humanist critique of the humanist conception of the university based on Foucault and a reading of European history that emphasizes the disciplinary and regulative nature of the state⁴.

To an extent this resurgence of anti-humanism is directed against that decadent offspring of humanism—Romanticism. But like the earlier anti-humanist T. E. Hulme they recognize that behind the extravagances of Romanticism there stands humanism as the original source of the problem. For anti-humanists, the humanist ideal is soft and flabby and in need of being corrected by something tougher and more substantial. Against the decadence of humanism Carroll pits the ideas of the Law and the Sacred as sources of authority for human culture. Fearful of the excesses of private judgement, Ian Hunter has emphasized the need for bureaucratic regulation of the ethical. From their differing political positions both Carroll and Hunter find similar things to condemn in humanism: free will, private judgement, its lack of an objective authority and its belief that individuals are capable of drawing on their internal spiritual resources in determining the choices they make.

Moreover both Carroll and Hunter have made the university a focus of their attacks, as the primary humanist institution in the modern world. Both believe that the autonomous liberal humanist university founded on the ideal of culture has failed. Carroll would replace it with an institution that would use its authority to teach 'the Law'; Hunter would happily accept the idea that the university should become an arm of the state devoted to producing those sorts of people that the state deems desirable. These critiques cannot be countered simply by invoking the traditional ideal of the university; to quote Newman back to Hunter or Carroll is simply to engage in a dialogue of the deaf. Instead I believe that it is necessary to re-consider and re-think the whole question of the culture–humanism–university association to see the extent to which it can still be defended.

Any consideration of the relationship between the university and culture/humanism cannot proceed without a proper appreciation of the history of that relationship. Ian Hunter made a fairly

successful attack on the pretensions of the contemporary university by arguing that historically universities have been neither particularly liberal nor concerned with 'sweetness and light'. One of Hunter's collaborators in his *Accounting for the Humanities* volume, Bruce Smith, attempted to extend this analysis to Australia by applying it to the nineteenth century university and, in particular, the University of Sydney. Smith argues that despite the rhetoric of its founders and early supporters, the objectives of the University of Sydney have always been social and 'governmental' rather than cultural and intellectual. In particular Smith singles out the two objectives summed up in the title 'Crime and the Classics': the 'ethical formation of a self-disciplined governor' (83) and the creation of a universal primary education system 'to combat criminality' (89). Smith sums up his case succinctly:

The Australian university was formed ... to both train an elite in the moral and political skills necessary for effective government, and to co-ordinate and lead efforts to educate the population away from criminality and towards order and virtue.⁵

This somewhat functional view of the origins of the University of Sydney is far removed from the traditional self-understanding that the University developed of both its origins and its continuing place in the world. This is a self-understanding conceived in social, cultural and ultimately spiritual terms. It has been summed up most recently by Dorothy Green:

Anderson, Charles Badham, John Woolley, all in their different ways perceived the university as charged with the fostering of a public spirit. In an era of blind individualism they asserted that love of God was inseparable from love of one's neighbour, or to put it in religious terms, they asserted the unity of the mystical body of Christ daily recrucified.⁶

In a way the two positions are not necessarily at odds with each other; both emphasize the desire to attain virtue or the good and both believe that the university has a public role to play in pursuit of that virtue. Where they differ is regarding the way in which the university is to work towards this goal. For the anti-humanist the university is a functional part of the state apparatus using bureaucratic and behavioural techniques to mould, form and train its members

so that they can become functional members of the social order. For the humanist, and this should be understood to include those religious individuals who believe in the transforming power of the spirit within, the techniques and discipline of university training lead to the awakening of that spirit as the foundation of individual autonomy. The conflict is really over the status of the individual and his or her capacity to act as a free responsible and spiritual entity. Even at its best anti-humanism is unable to place much trust in such an individual, without at least a long programme of ethical formation. As such it effectively denies a spiritual dimension to human beings.

This paper argues that to deny or ignore that dimension is to create a picture of the university and its origins that is both distorted and excessively narrow. While the first two Principals of the University of Sydney, John Woolley and Charles Badham, were aware of the role of the university in both citizen formation and the creation of intellectual discipline, these concerns were tempered by a proper understanding of human beings as spiritual creatures. This is not surprising as both men were products of the Oxford of the 1830s, of that Oxford that has been described as 'a metaphysical reality; a platonic vision where holiness and learning met in eternal dialectic'⁷ and as an institution that produced men who had acquired 'a fastidiousness in exposition and in setting the limit of one's enquiry ... a striving for definition or settling the meaning of one's words'⁸. Woolley had mixed mainly in liberal Anglican circles; his friend Arthur Stanley was both a disciple of Thomas Arnold and a friend of Benjamin Jowett. Ken Cable has called Woolley an Australian F. D. Maurice⁹. In his sympathies and outlook Woolley reminds me of that twentieth-century Australian cleric, E. H. Burgmann, who also combined a spiritual Platonism with a concern for social justice. Badham had links with the Oxford movement though in Australia he was described as a cleric who had become a sceptic¹⁰. Moreover Badham devoted his scholarly life to the study of Plato and the platonic influence remained with him.

For both Woolley and Badham the university ideal involved the creation of both a more rational and a more spiritual world. In many ways Smith is doing no more than repeating the old Australian error of treating genuinely religious people as if they were advocates

of a secular rationalism, an error committed by George Nadel in his analysis of Woolley and Tim Rowse in discussing Burgmann¹¹. If allowed to stand it is an error that leads to a distorted picture of the nature of culture and its relationship to the university. Nevertheless this does not mean that there was not a rigorous and disciplined aspect to the ideal of the university and culture. Sir Samuel Griffith, for example, recalled Woolley primarily as an advocate of the Greek ideal of *spoudaios*, of being earnest and thorough¹². The role of the university was to teach those disciplines that 'conduce to mental vigour and selfrelying thought'¹³. Charles Badham equally desired to produce graduates marked by their capacity for clear logical thought. The road to this goal lay through textual emendation, and the mental exertion that the analysis of grammar and language called forth. Badham believed that the university man trained in these techniques would possess a clear consciousness, 'full of reverence, refinement and clear-headedness ... by the very conditions of his discipline temperate in opinion, temperate in measures, temperate in demeanour'¹⁴.

The role of the university most certainly had a 'disciplinary' aspect in Smith's and Hunter's sense. Equally both Woolley and Badham envisaged that university men would play a central role in the life of their society because of the benefits that their education had bestowed on them. Woolley believed that the university would produce statesmen whose 'practice of life may be regulated by fixed and eternal principles'¹⁵. His student, Samuel Griffith, in paying tribute to his former teacher, argued that democracy 'desires to be led by its best men' and that graduates should endeavour 'by their conduct in life' to convince the public that a university education had made them 'fitter men for conducting the affairs of the country'¹⁶. Badham thought that the university would produce a class of men possessing a 'trained and true intellect' who would determine the standards of culture in the community and become the measure of it. They would diffuse the 'blessings of civilisation around them'¹⁷. For both Woolley and Badham the university man had a role to play that was closer to exemplary citizen than member of the ruling class. Their comments indicate the desire of the university to influence the world around it rather than the reality of that influence.

Moreover the foundation of that desire rested on more than just the mechanical effects of disciplinary training. The rigorous disciplinary training they advocated had a goal, a goal that was informed by a vision of the true, the good and the beautiful. Education would provide the path whereby the university man could enter into the higher truths and an awareness of the eternal and the immutable. Through the constant exercise of discursive reason it is finally possible to go beyond the mechanics of logic and enter into the realm of intuitive reason. Both Woolley and Badham believed that it was the desire for a higher, more spiritual knowledge that guided individuals in their use of discursive reason. In a passage on Dante, Badham expressed it this way:

As to the influence of his love for Beatrice he owed the exaltation of his religious convictions, so to Virgil he owed the power of learned observation and wise dealing with human life and character. Indeed, Virgil was to him the type of human learning and trained understanding; and, therefore, as Beatrice was the power which superintended and commanded his whole journey, Virgil was the watchful and edifying companion of his footsteps.¹⁸

University men required a 'trained understanding' but it was useless unless exercised and guided by 'reason'—to use Coleridge's terminology. Badham also believed that poetry was a major civilising instrument. The beautiful could rescue humanity from the vulgar adoration of wealth and power. Absolute beauty, beauty 'in and for itself, and capable of holding the soul in beatific contemplation and never-ending rapture' is the inspiration guiding humanity's sense of morality and harmony. For Badham it is beauty that prevents philosophy from becoming 'barren and self-bewildering logic' and turns its attention to 'moral and practical enquiries'¹⁹.

Woolley also adhered to a dualistic conception of knowledge in which Humanity was spurred on by a desire to attain intuitive reason, or *nous*, a state in which things are known 'in their undivided essence'²⁰, and attempted to achieve this goal through the exercise of discursive reason or *logos*. Woolley, however, following Sir William Hamilton's doctrine that the Absolute is unknowable, was sceptical as to whether human beings could attain more than an intimation of this perfect form of knowledge.

Nevertheless he also provided a model of learning in which the desire for wholeness and harmony guides the individual as he engages in the task of analysis, of logical and empirical investigation. After analysis comes the moment when the jump is made to synthesis or an intuitive appreciation of the wholeness of things. At this stage:

the shapeless mass seems suddenly to assume a form of exquisite proportion ... we understand and feel the symmetry in ourselves; our whole soul is absorbed in an awful but delicious sense of sympathy.²¹

Woolley, however, did not believe that synthesis led to the apprehension of absolute truth. Such remained beyond the reach of the fallible and limited human mind. Rather one entered into the outer chambers of truth where one could feel its presence and be guided by it. *Nous* was important not because it was an achievable goal but because, like Beatrice, it was the ideal power that guided the individual on his quest through life. This theme of the ideal as an unrealisable, eternal spiritual pattern was also developed by a successor of Woolley's and Badham's, Mungo MacCallum in his analysis of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*²².

Woolley's belief in the ideal as a guiding force also affected his picture of human moral development. He argued that human moral development goes through three stages. During the first stage people look inwards desiring to draw others into the sphere of their own self-consciousness. If human beings are to develop properly they must move beyond this stage or they remained trapped within their own selfishness. Looking outwards they become more aware of others and the need to work for the general good, as they expand the range of their benevolence to the welfare of the country and to the good of the whole of humanity. In so doing they become increasingly more conscious of others and less conscious of themselves. This process of movement from individual to universal has a positive psychological effect on the person pursuing it as they are rewarded by receiving 'ever new and increasing sources of interest and happiness'²³. Finally the individual arrives at an appreciation of the unity of humanity considered in all its diverse forms.

The process described by Woolley in which the human character expands from the narrowness of its particular desires to a sympathy with all humanity is almost identical with what later liberals would call the growth of 'Personality'. For men such as Francis Anderson, Ernest Burgmann and Frederic Eggleston a liberal society depended on the capacity of its members to develop their wider social sympathies, view the world in a disinterested and universal fashion, and will the good. In other words for such liberals, as for Woolley, the point of discipline and analysis was to provide individuals with the spiritual power that enabled them to pursue the good instead of being disciplined and coerced into such a pursuit. Hence Woolley spoke of the dawn of the age of the Holy Spirit when God would come back to earth 'in His own pure Majesty', of an age in which God will be freely obeyed as the true cause of the individual's spiritual life²⁴.

Personality has long been a target for anti-humanism because it seems to place an almost utopian hope in the capacity of individuals to develop their moral sense and exercise freewill in a positive fashion. It does not recognize the essentially limited nature of human beings nor their need for authority to guide them. Instead it places its faith in the ability of the ideal to stimulate individuals to make a choice and expand their sympathy outwards towards humanity. Both Badham and Woolley looked to some sort of higher spiritual ideal as such a guide. Badham looked to the university, its studies and its 'devotion to the higher principles and faculties in man' as the chief agent preserving civilisation in the colony. In a fairly well known passage he advocated culture, 'the thought of our permanent humanity and of the ineffaceable identity between the soul of the past and the soul of the present', as the ideal to guide the colonists and save them from the superficiality and charlatanism of the modern age²⁵. It is worth noting that in his discussion of culture Badham does indeed talk of the need for authority and self-control but it is clear that his idea of culture includes some sort of spiritual principle as well.

John Woolley also sought a spiritual ideal that would counter the debilitating effects of modern civilisation and its tendency towards superficiality. His ideal was equally to be a source of authority to guide the individual soul. But for Woolley the

achievement of what he termed being 'objectified' into society would mean the replacement of external ties founded on wealth and rank by ones based on spiritual affinity, and the attainment of humanity's highest and most perfect state—love. He argued that this desire to achieve the ideal is a primary motivation of human action:

He is haunted by a continual craving for a higher and higher state, which flits before his imagination like a vision from heaven; the hope of which redeems the soul from corruption.²⁶

Just as Badham looked to beauty as that which transforms human activity and leads it towards the ideal so Woolley gave a special place to the poet as the mediator between the mundane world and the divine, 'a specially commissioned interpreter between God and man'. Woolley remained convinced that human beings could never receive more than an intimation of the divine but needed the hope that it provided to bear the burdens and trials of this world. The poet's role was to provide the bridge between this world and the higher spiritual one that was the source of the ideal, even if he 'does not so much gaze up into Heaven as trace the likeness of Heaven upon Earth'.²⁷ Without such an ideal the disciplinary training and the ideals of citizenship count for nothing.

I have over-emphasized the similarities of John Woolley and Charles Badham. Woolley was a much more spiritual and tormented figure than Badham, with much greater warmth and humanity. Nevertheless there are common threads in their ideas, as one would expect given their backgrounds. I believe that I have demonstrated that their ideal of the university, the one which animated the University of Sydney for the first thirty years of its existence and beyond, cannot be reduced to the caricature of 'crime and the classics'. It simply does not make sense without the addition of the spiritual dimension and the ideal. Alongside an emphasis on disciplinary rigour and exemplary citizenship there stood the idea of the individual as a spiritual personality.

As we have seen from Woolley's idealisation of the poet there was also that other bete noir of anti-humanism hovering in the wings—Romanticism. Just as there are links connecting the rational spiritual ideals of Woolley and Badham with later figures such as Francis Anderson so there is also a Romantic tradition associated

with the university. In this connection one can point to Henry Kendall's links with the university, to Christopher Brennan and his student Randolph Hughes. One finds Romanticism when the desire to attain the spiritual ideal, and the recognition that the ideal will always remain beyond human reach, overwhelms and submerges the citizenship and this-worldly elements of the idea of the university.

The argument from history against humanism simply does not stand up to scrutiny. It distorts because it is only a partial account that cannot take seriously that human beings have ideals that cannot be reduced to a secular and functionalist understanding. The humanist ideal of the university was a reality and, for many, remains a reality. Even when John Anderson savaged Romanticism in the name of Classicism, the first step on the road to anti-humanism, he retained an ideal of the university that was recognisably humanist even if it lacked the earlier spiritual dimension.

Of course all of this does not mean that the current anti-humanist attacks are without force. There are genuine weaknesses in the humanist ideal, and it does appear to place a great emphasis on the capacity of fallible human beings to be educated into recognising and pursuing the good. It places faith in high ideals that too often on closer inspection dissolve into vague hopes and longings. Anti-humanism should be viewed as an ethical reaction against the perceived weaknesses of humanism, an attempt to inject an element of realism and intellectual toughness into what is seen as a soft, self-indulgent and even nihilistic outlook. But when one then examines anti-humanism closely one also discovers much that is repugnant and open to question. The picture of human nature presented by Ian Hunter, of *Homo Bureaucraticus*, is of a narrow, functional individual whose actions are determined by the nature of the institutional structure in which he or she is placed. Personally I have more sympathy for the Carroll variety of anti-humanism but Carroll provides a harsh Calvinist vision of human beings at the mercy of their destiny.

My argument is that humanism and anti-humanism are tied together as if in a dance in which the weaknesses and deficiencies of the one continually provokes the emergence of the other. They attempt to correct each other's faults without ever really solving

the underlying problem which is the inability of any human ideal to attain universal validity. As such the recent anti-humanist attack on the university needs to be taken seriously but should not be considered as a total alternative package. It should be seen as a stimulus that encourages us to re-evaluate intelligently the humanist ideal, to consider what it has meant in the past and what it continues to mean today. At the same time we need to guard against the tendency of one set of ideas or beliefs to move to excess, as exemplified by the attempt of Hunter and Smith to capture the past and use it for their own purposes. There is a tendency in human affairs for one partial set of dogmas merely to be replaced by another set and it will be a sad day when universities become enslaved to the enthusiasms of the passing moment.

Notes

1. The analysis of the writings of John Woolley and Charles Badham in this paper is based on my article 'The Theology and Philosophy of John Woolley', *Journal of Religious History* 12, No 4 (1983): 418-432, and the relevant sections of my forthcoming book *Cultural Liberalism in Australia*, Cambridge.
2. Alain Finkielkraut, *The Undoing of Thoughts*, trans. Dennis O'Keefe, London, 1988, p.6.
3. John Carroll, *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture*, London, 1993, and 'The Post-Humanist University: Three Theses', *Salisbury Review* 7, No 2 (1988): 20-25.
4. Ian Hunter 'Personality as a Vocation: the Political Rationality of the Humanities', in Ian Hunter et al, *Accounting for the Humanities: the Language of culture and the logic of government*, Brisbane: Institute for Cultural Policy Studies (1991): 7-66; 'Accounting for the Humanities', *Meanjin* 3 (1992): 438-448; 'The Humanities Without Humanism', *Meanjin* 3 (1992): 479-490; 'Auditing the Critique Department: on the Humanist Understanding of Bureaucracy', *Melbourne Studies in Education* (1992): 15-34.
6. Bruce Smith, 'Crime and the Classics: the Humanities and Government in the Nineteenth Century Australian University', in Hunter et al, pp.83, 89, 92.
6. Dorothy Green, 'Training Our Leaders: the University and Society', *Age Monthly Review* Dec-Jan (1987-1988): 23.
7. Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion*, Cambridge, 1976, p.97.
8. David Newsome, *Two Classes of Men*, London, 1974, p.63.
9. Personal communication to author.
10. R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement*, London, 1892, p.79; A. B. Piddington, *Worshipful Masters*, Sydney, 1929, pp.101-120.
11. George Nadel, *Australia's Colonial Culture*, Melbourne, 1957; Tim Rowse, *Liberalism and Australian National Culture*, Melbourne, 1978, pp.157-159.

12. Samuel Griffith, 'Speech', *Record of the Jubilee Celebrations of the University of Sydney*, Sydney, 1902, p.26.
13. John Woolley, *Lectures Delivered in Australia*, London, 1862, p.17.
14. Charles Badham, *Speeches and Lectures*, Sydney, 1890, p.58.
15. Woolley, *Lectures*, p.22.
16. Griffith, p.28.
17. Badham, p.46.
18. Badham, p.130.
19. Badham, pp.44–45.
20. John Woolley, *An Introduction to Logic*, London, 1840, p.5.
21. Woolley, *Lectures*, p.41.
22. Mungo MacCallum, *Tennyson's Idylls of the King and the Arthurian Story from the XVIth Century*, Glasgow, 1894, pp.323ff.
23. John Woolley, *A Sermon on Behalf of the Northern Missions*, Sydney 1853, p.16.
24. Woolley, *Lectures*, p.76.
25. Badham, pp.1, 107.
26. Woolley, *Lectures*, p.171.
27. Woolley, *Lectures*, p.375.

Woolley, Wordsworth and Romanticism

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Melleuish writes of the humanism that lies behind Woolley's Romantic conception of wholeness and harmony, and of his equally Romantic sense of self-knowledge leading to 'an appreciation of the unity of humanity in all its diverse forms'. He notes that for Woolley, the poet was a mediator between God and man who 'trace[s] the likeness of Heaven upon Earth'. Melleuish suggests that Woolley's views in his *Lectures* derive from the Oxford of the 1830s. That is no doubt so; but there may have been a nearer influence upon his views of education, humanity, and the place of the poet.

Woolley's language, as quoted, bears a Wordsworthian stamp. Before moving to the University of Sydney, from 1844 to 1849 the younger Woolley had been the first headmaster of Rossall School

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