

# The History of Knowledge: Darkness in the Academy

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*As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being. Carl Jung*

*Knowledge does not always prevail or even endure. When the Empire fell, the Justinian Code was replaced by Canon Law. The augustness of knowledge was transformed into heresy and mankind's curiosity was virtually extinguished. The age became dark. In the 11th century, people began to study rediscovered Greek and Roman texts. The darkness of the age had begun to lift but the lifting took seven hundred years and was never completed. Today, nothing ensures the light's endurance despite our pious accolades to learning and science. But anti-intellectualism never died; it continued to live in the dark alcoves of the religious institutions of the Middle Ages. That darkness came to America when its first universities were established. These universities were established as fundamentalist vocational training institutions. They were not established to further knowledge. They are madrassas, Sunday Schools, one and all. Now even this conservative educational system is under attack by ideological fundamentalists. Professors throughout the Western world, stock up on lanterns. The darkness is returning!*

During the Golden Age of Greece, Athens was populated by enough curious people to cause Aristotle to write, "all men by nature desire to know." He was wrong, of course, but his compatriots certainly had an intellectual bent. Athens experienced a period during which the Parthenon was built and the city became the artistic, cultural, intellectual, and commercial center of what was then known as the civilized world. Among its inhabitants were Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides, Menander, Sophocles, the sculptor Praxiteles, the orator Demosthenes, Herodotus, Thucydides, and others. A love of learning was prevalent. The Socratic method, consisting of asking questions until the essence of a subject is found by eliminating the hypotheses that lead to contradictions, was developed, and mathematics was expanded by Pythagoras, Euclid, Archimedes, and scholars such as Hipparchus, Apollonius, and Ptolemy. Learning was august, but it was eventually debased. War to further commerce was the enemy and it won. Knowledge does not always prevail or even endure.

Rome, by contrast, was never populated by enough curious people to earn it a reputation for its intelligentsia. The Romans were a plundering people. They took what they wanted by killing, if necessary. Rome had made Papal Christianity the state religion and when the Empire fell, the Justinian Code was replaced by Canon Law. The augustness of knowledge was transformed into heresy and mankind's curiosity was virtually extinguished. The age became dark.

In the 11th century, individuals from across Europe began to study the rediscovered Justinian Code. Soon, the study of Roman law and other rediscovered subjects spread, and

Papal Christianity came into conflict with itself. The election of two claimants to the papacy created a schism: The split led to the establishment of new centers of learning and a decline in the authority of the Church. Learning began to reassert its place and eventually both the Renaissance and the Enlightenment emerged along with an interest in humanism. The darkness of the age had begun to lift but the lifting took seven hundred years and was never completed. Today, nothing ensures the light's endurance despite our pious accolades to learning and science.

The darkness that enveloped the Dark Ages in Europe emanated from the monasteries, abbeys, and Scholastic universities of the Middle Ages. It consisted of the ideology that was thought to be the divinely inspired truth describing all things in the universe which itself was known as Creation. It tolerated no dissent which brought about heresy trials, executions, and the Holy Inquisition. Almost everything that would be considered learned today was suppressed. And even when the Church's influence declined and heresy trials and the Inquisition ceased to exist, vestiges of the darkness were kept secure in other institutional ways. The love of learning that emerged in Classical Greece never regained its augustness. Anti-intellectualism never died; it continued to live in the dark alcoves of the religious institutions of the Middle Ages. That darkness came to America.

Two hundred years before the Age of Reason, Massachusetts was a religiously conservative Puritan colony that repeatedly deported, cast out, and even executed people who disagreed with ideological Puritan doctrine. Although never formally affiliated with a church, Harvard college was established in 1636 by the Massachusetts legislature primarily to train Congregationalist and Unitarian clergy. The Puritans and Harvard College at that time can only be described as Christian fundamentalist. The college offered a classic academic curriculum altered to be consistent with Puritan ideology. This curriculum emulated that of Cambridge University, which itself was founded as a papal university. In short, Harvard was the Liberty University of the day, a Bible school, and its function was distinctly religious. It was not established as a place of universal learning. Harvard's curriculum and students did become secular in the 18th and 19th centuries when it emerged as the central cultural establishment among Bostonian elites. Following the Civil War, the college and its affiliated professional schools were transformed into a centralized research university, but its professional schools then as now were vocationally oriented. The university's goal was and is to teach people to operate in an ideologically biased market economy as is shown by its history, influence, and wealth. It has the largest financial endowment of any academic institution in the world, and eight U.S. presidents have been graduates. Harvard is also the *alma mater* of at least sixty billionaires. It is America's Cathedral of the Moneyed Elite, and it promotes establishment ideologies rather than universal learning. It began America's addiction to schools of business administration, having founded the first one in 1908, twelve years before it established its College of Education. Only in the late 19th Century was the favored position of Christianity eliminated from the curriculum by replacing it with another ideology—Transcendentalist Unitarianism. Harvard is an institution where belief has always trumped knowledge.

But it's not that way anymore, is it? Unfortunately it is. Consider this view of how economics is taught at Harvard:

[students](#) at Harvard recently walked-out of Greg Mankiw's Ec 10 Principles class because of alleged ideological bias in his presentation. . . . Steven Margolis, also at Harvard, staged a "teach-in" about the Mankiw walk-out. . . . Margolis . . . discussed his attempt to offer an

alternative Ec principles course at Harvard, which was rejected by the economics faculty—then accepted only as an alternative studies course. Students at Harvard, like students at many other schools, are not allowed to learn about alternatives to the neoclassical model and get credits toward the major!

This is Harvard, the brightest light in America's Educational Pantheon, often criticized by conservatives as too liberal!

But it's not just Harvard. Yale was founded in 1701 to train ministers and lay leaders for Connecticut. Ten Congregationalist ministers, all of whom were alumni of Harvard, established the school. When a rift formed at Harvard between Increase Mather and the rest of the Harvard clergy whom Mather viewed as "increasingly liberal, ecclesiastically lax, and overly broad in Church polity," he praised the success of Yale in the hope that it would maintain the Puritan religious orthodoxy in a way that Harvard had not. Just another Liberty university.

And then, Leland Stanford, the founder of Stanford, visited Harvard's president, Charles Eliot, and asked how much it would cost to duplicate Harvard in California. Stanford became the Harvard of the West, just another conservative, fundamentalist university.

Its founding came in 1885 in an endowing grant which made several specific stipulations:

"The Trustees ... shall have the power and it shall be their duty:

To establish and maintain at such University an educational system, which will, if followed, fit the graduate for some useful pursuit. . . .

To prohibit sectarian instruction, but to have taught in the University the immortality of the soul, the existence of an all-wise and benevolent Creator, and that obedience to His laws is the highest duty of man. . . .

When Senator Stanford died in 1893, Jane Stanford took over. After Edward Alsworth Ross became recognized as a founding father of American sociology; she fired him for radicalism and racism. She also directed that the students be taught that everyone born on earth has a soul, and that on its development depends much in life here and everything in "Life Eternal." And she forbade students from sketching nude models in live drawing classes. So Stanford, too, embodied strong fundamentalist characteristics.

These universities were established as fundamentalist vocational training institutions by ignorant people. They were not established to further knowledge. They are madrassas, Sunday schools, one and all.

So Liberty universities are as American as Johnny Appleseed, and they apparently are self-reproducing. They exist throughout the United States, some openly, and some, like Harvard, Yale, and Stanford, covertly.

Vocational training in the American educational scheme was furthered by the founding after the Civil War of our land-grant colleges., and a number of institutions have been founded, like the London School of Economics, to openly promote market based Capitalism. For instance, Hillsdale College, which was founded in 1844, two hundred years after Harvard, describes itself as "grateful to God for the inestimable blessings resulting from the prevalence of civil and religious liberty and intelligent piety in the land, and believing that

the diffusion of sound learning is essential to the perpetuity of these blessings.” “The College considers itself a trustee of modern man’s intellectual and spiritual inheritance from the Judeo-Christian faith and Greco-Roman culture, a heritage finding its clearest expression in the American experiment of self-government under law.” Hillsdale College is a major player in the history and development of American conservatism. Prominent conservative theorist Russell Kirk had a substantial career there, and the college houses and displays the personal library of Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises. Corporations have also donated huge sums to colleges and universities to promote orthodox, classical Capitalism: BB&T, for instance, the nation’s 10th largest financial holding company, has pledged to give \$1.5 million over 10 years to the University of Georgia’s Terry College of Business “to expand teaching and research into the foundations of capitalism and free market economics.”

All of this seems to be contradicted by America’s addiction to “science and technology.” But America has no devotion to science and the proof is obvious. Evolution is dismissed because it conflicts with Biblical accounts of creation. Climate and environmental science are dismissed because they conflict with free market Capitalism. Not only are the sciences dismissed, the scientists engaged in them are reviled. What Americans are devoted to is the catalog of consumer products that engineers create out of scientific discoveries they had no hand in. The President says we need to “train” more scientists and mathematicians, but look at who the people are that Americans most admire—Bill Gates, the late Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg! Neither is a mathematician, nor a scientist, nor even a college graduate. Our respect for science is as shallow as a dried up pond, and all we do is wallow in its mud. If Americans had a genuine respect for science, they would have a respect for scientific method which rejects ideas that can’t be confirmed empirically. Americans, on the other hand, insist on continually implementing ideas that not only cannot be verified empirically, they can be shown not to work at all. List all of the practices carried on by Americans that do not work and have never worked. No culture with a respect for science would function this way.

When the President says we must “train” more scientists and mathematicians, does he mean we should educate more architects, whose profession requires knowing a lot of science and mathematics? I doubt it! What about anthropologists? Well no. It has been [reported](#) that Florida’s Governor, Rick Scott, slammed anthropology majors as being unprepared for productive careers. Not the kind of science the establishment approves of! Well, how about astronomers or paleontologists? What industry wants just “scientists”? And I doubt that any corporation is seeking a batch of theoretical mathematicians.

I’m certain you get the point.

But as though all of this were not bad enough, even this conservative educational system is under attack by [ideological fundamentalists](#):

After three days of turbulent meetings, the Texas Board of Education . . . approved a social studies curriculum that will put a conservative stamp on history and economics textbooks, stressing the superiority of American capitalism, questioning the Founding Fathers’ commitment to a purely secular government and presenting Republican political philosophies in a more positive light. The vote was 10 to 5 along party lines, with all the Republicans on the board voting for it.

That Texan politicians should do this is perhaps no surprise. But not a single professor, not a single dean, not a single chancellor/president, not a single professorial organization stood

up and objected. Why were all of the dedicated scholars in America's system of higher education mute and invisible? What can one say about their commitment to knowledge? Even worse, the authors of these textbooks were more than willing to write them over to please these Texans. How's that for intellectual integrity? Just how dark is the darkness in the academy?

There's [more](#):

Gov. Bobby Jindal recently signed a new law that sets up the largest voucher program of any state in the country. It is part of a series of "reforms" that Jindal says will expand school choice . . . and critics say is the broadest state assault on public education in the country.

Again America's professorial community and their administrations are nowhere to be found. What are they thinking? Have they tried to imagine what their classrooms will be like when their students have all been indoctrinated with fundamentalist ideology? What will these professors be able to teach? Which subjects that conflict with fundamentalist ideology will be proscribed? What kind of speech will be considered politically incorrect? In Europe, people can be imprisoned for denying that the official Zionist account of the Holocaust is true. Will teachers of evolution become criminals if they deny that the Biblical account of Creation is true or if marriage doesn't consist of a union of one man and one woman? Why not? Churchmen did it to Galileo. Ask yourself how many German university professors bore the consequences of Nazi ideology, those professors who couldn't support Arian superiority?

Think it won't happen here? It's happening already.

For decades now, our public school teachers have been under attacks disguised as attempts to render them accountable. The department of education assumes that standardized test scores can reliably and validly be used to determine teacher-quality. Most researchers say the tests can't. They say that using test scores in this way is a negative consequence of the No Child Left Behind act. And for decades, the college and university community has been silent as their graduates have been vilified. But [now](#),

The Education Department just tried — and failed — to persuade a group of negotiators to agree to regulations that would rate colleges of education in large part on how K-12 students being taught by their graduates perform on standardized tests. . . . When it became clear that some of the negotiators weren't going to go along with the basic outlines of the department's plan, department officials ended the negotiations over a conference call.

But don't think that is the end of the effort.

Now we can expect Obama administration officials to issue regulations doing what they want — without congressional approval, or, for that matter, without having persuaded a group of negotiators they had selected themselves that what they want to do makes educational sense.

Of course, it was inevitable! If student scores on standardized tests can be used to determine the ability of their teachers, why can't the scores be used to determine the quality of their teacher's professors?

First the professors in teacher's colleges, then the professors in business colleges, then the professors in technical schools, and on and on. Backwardness never turns its head.

Professors throughout the Western world, stock up on lanterns. The darkness is coming!

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