



# OF UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR COLLAPSE

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Briefly, I would like to discuss Allan Bloom's anticipations, from his excellent essay on the collapse of the university. But first, let me give you [an excerpt from it](#):

*Democracy, or the egalitarian regime, must (...) perforce have utility as its primary motive: it is founded on the rule of all, and the vital desires and the fear of death are shared by all – as opposed to the desires for glory and pure knowledge which are rare. This devotion to utility is particularly true of modern democracies, the theory of which was precisely to encourage the self, regarding passions as a sure means to political consensus. Disinterested love of the truth is particularly threatened in democracy... In modern democracies the universities have... attempted to provide a basis for the cultivation of the theoretical life which finds only thin soil elsewhere in the society. The university, to the extent it represented the theoretical life, is more a memory than a reality... One need only look at academic philosophy and the social sciences to see how irrelevant the tradition has become to them. They suppose they have found new methods in the light of which the older teachings appear primitive.*

In the 1960s, universities all over the world experienced protests directed against traditional forms of education. The state, accused of authoritarianism and of hindering intellectual freedoms, had completely surrendered the system of higher education. It had, literally, abandoned the University and fled. For some time, the University belonged to no one. Yet, this situation couldn't last long, because an abandoned object, especially when it presents a significant value, quickly finds a new owner and is taken over. Thus, the University fell into the hands of business and administration, that have provided it with a new purpose: utility.

This hostile take-over of the University by the market was accompanied by a bureaucratization of academic life, its – so to speak – “Americanization;” for the American model assumes that scholars are a bit like children, who don't know what managing a corporation means, are not aware that teaching is business as good as any other, or even better than others, especially when you consider that everyone has to finish one school or another. In this way, at European universities, where administration used to play a rather marginal role, “America” had been discovered. The University could finally begin to lay down golden eggs. In April 1968, almost 2000 German professors protested against this sort of “Americanization” of the University, as well as against the increasing role of students' bodies and academicians with lower degrees. With no results. Decisions had been made and the battle for the University was lost. Let's see, what this change really meant.

The change meant an alteration of a definition of the University, as well as of the institution itself, which aimed at transforming it into a corporation. Anyone, who has difficulty with composing a senseless syllabus, who struggles with filling out an 11th evaluation questionnaire this year, who opposes blackmail by troglodyte students understands this perfectly. An "Americanization" of the contemporary University is about subduing it to the administration and allowing a corporate system to shape academic structures.

Ernst H. Kantorowicz in his brilliant and humorous [essay](#) about how pre-Nazi, German universities functioned proved that limiting the University's freedom, a bureaucratization of even the simplest tasks, such as, grading a student, is just a prelude to totalitarian solutions on a much broader scale. That is why we have to move out from the University, at least for a while, and go beyond the stiff institutional framework. I can do at the University, whatever it expects me to do. I will fill out forms, give reports, apply for grants, write in English and Chinese (No, I won't write in Chinese!) – but I will go elsewhere to think. I am not offended. I simply accept the rule, according to which I receive my paycheck for different things, than thinking. This is the new deal, which I accept, since it has been forced upon me.

Well, I have been doing this for more than a decade now anyway. With my colleagues I run a foundation, which publishes important, though usually unprofitable books. We organize conferences, give scholarships to young academicians. We move philosophy to the opera-house and into media. We show that thinking is sexy. And you don't need big money to do that. Big money is necessary in sciences.

The thing is that the humanities, broadly taken, is no science. It is a craft, which allows the building up of national culture. Elements of graph theory, or research on non-linear optics – this is science, and it would be good to combine it somehow with new technologies, because it is here, on the free market, where it can display its efficiency. It is different with culture. It seems too fragile to be able to hold its place in the free market, without the help of the state.

I could suggest here a number of solutions, which would support such aims of the University, for example, freeing the humanities from the obligation of parametrization, which is used to measure progress in natural sciences. Yet, instead, I will formulate a more general postulate: let's return the University to the state. Let's make it an element of the system of state institutions responsible for culture and national heritage.

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*The [featured image](#) shows, "Lorenzo Tornabuoni Presented by Grammar to Prudentia and the other Liberal Arts," by Sandro Botticelli, painted ca. 1483–1486.*

