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We must never forget that genuine schools [of thought] are sociological realities. They have their structures—relations between leaders and followers—their flags, their battle cries, their moods, their all-too-human interests. Their antagonisms come within the general sociology of group antagonisms and of party warfare. Victory and conquest, defeat and loss of ground, are in themselves values for such schools and part of their very existence.

—*Joseph Schumpeter*, History of Economic Analysis

Ideally, we would like peace, harmony, and agreement. Or if that is unrealistic, and too boring, we would like disputes to be carried out in a friendly manner. Ideals aside, acrimony is ideal material for sociological comparison. Acrimoniousness of disputes, and the viciousness of conflict more generally, are just the sort of variations whose conditions become visible from sufficiently overarching sociological distance. One might question whether it is valid or desirable to pull out intellectuals for special consideration, as one trend of late-twentieth-century thought has been to expose intellectuals, to bring their motives and practices down to the mundane level of the rest of the social world; but my intent here is to sketch the wavering etiquette of intellectual conflict. My justification is sim-

Common Knowledge 8:1

ply that intellectuals are distinctive, not in every respect but certainly in the one under consideration: they have a different way of carrying out conflicts than do street gangs, ethnic movements, or states, and we need a distinctive theory to deal with that difference. To say so is certainly not motivated by a desire to idealize intellectuals; the determination that intellectual conflicts are distinctive has arisen from the research itself.

How the Intellectual World Works

Let me begin by summarizing briefly a sociological theory of intellectual life, based on a comparative study of philosophers throughout Western and Asian history.[1] Among the findings reached is that the number of notable positions or factions in a thriving field of intellectual activity—whether in ancient Greece or India, medieval Islam or modern America—is quite limited. Whenever there is creative activity, there are rivals; the so-called great thinkers appear, at minimum, in pairs of contemporaries, and more typically there are three or more recognizably differing positions—but rarely as many, it would appear, as six. This is so regular a state of affairs globally that I have generalized it as a "law of small numbers." When only one position dominates the intellectual world, it is a time not of creativity but of stagnation, the reign of an orthodoxy from the past that is no longer creative. We see the same pattern in terms of intellectual networks, the chains of eminent teachers and pupils that channel the development of schools of thought across generations. Few such chains can sustain themselves from one generation to the next; but when the number of positions rises, I have found that, historically, some of the positions are squeezed out. They become superfluous, distractions in an attention space that can only accommodate a small number of positions at one time; thus they fail to recruit disciples in the following generation, and the lineage dies out. The limited field of attention is one source of intellectual acrimony.

The material bases of intellectual life, of course, affect the creation and dominance of ideas, but the evidence is that they do so only indirectly. The formulation of Marx and Engels, that class ideologies dominate according to who controls the means of intellectual production, has been widely adopted; thus it is common to speak of ideas reflecting bourgeois interests, for example, or reflecting an ethos of Protestants, or of males or females. But what makes ideas important among intellectuals is not what is already widely believed in larger communities, but what is new and distinctive in their own field of argument and the way in which it engages and transforms the ongoing lineages of rival positions that

1. Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

make up their own social world. Thus the material conditions that most powerfully affect intellectual life are those bases that allow specialists to devote themselves to carrying on their rival storehouses of past ideas and creating new ones.

Hence another historical generalization: the episodes when new philosophies, new theories and worldviews, are created are times when the material bases shift. These are times when new educational systems appear; when new religious movements arise, or old religious institutions decline and are replaced; when new forms of support arise in the form of courtly patronage or autonomous research academies; or when careers become supported by markets for publishing. These shifts in the material bases of intellectual production open new ways that intellectuals can make a living, and thus places where their networks can form; such shifts also destroy old bases, or upstage them, and squeeze out the networks that made their careers in them. There are rising and falling material bases of intellectual life, and consequently of the lineages that are supported by them—this is not simply a matter of rising material bases making one intellectual position dominant, while others fall. The time when the modern research university was established, the so-called Humboldtian revolution in Germany at the turn of the nineteenth century, was the time of ascendency of the Idealist philosophers, who led the university reform. Their philosophies of an unfolding world made up of ideas, ideas that manifest a spirit of freedom, provided an ideological counterpart to the revolution of the professors, who were claiming academic posts on the basis of careers in innovative research. But the Idealists came in a cluster, and split along the lines of rival positions: those of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Hegel, and others, with their schools of followers. A new material base reshapes positions in the attention space, which is in turn structured by the law of small numbers. The new school of thinkers that exploits the career opportunities of an expanding material base soon splits into rival positions, because it has more slots in the attention space to fill.

If strongly based positions split, the opposite also holds: weakly based positions, those that are losing material support, cluster together for mutual support, amalgamating into a synthetic position. The last generations of a fading intellectual community often undergo one last flaring up of philosophical brilliance, as old rivalries are transcended in a synthesis gathering together the threads into a defensive position against the alien thinkers of the new intellectual base. Among many examples is medieval India when the Buddhist monastic universities lost their economic and political supports, and the centers of intellectual life shifted to the new Hindu religious orders. The last gasps of Buddhism include the synthetic sophistication of Dharmakirti—one of the peaks of world philosophy, all too little known in the West—while the victorious Hindus split and subsplit into a range of new philosophical camps. There is creativity both on the way up and on the way down, but in differing modes: strong positions split, weak positions

unite—providing us another clue to the level of acrimoniousness in intellectual life.

The intellectual world is, sociologically, an attention space, a locus of intellectual action. This is to put the point generically; everything that we call a field, a discipline, a specialty, is its own attention space. Thus there can be a number of different fields of rivalry in parallel—when their borders are crossed, a special kind of rivalry occurs because the local division of attention into a supportable number of contenders is upset, complicating the struggle for attention. The intellectual world is based on conflicts in a very deep sense. What gives attention, what makes someone's work recognized as important, is that it formulates topics to argue about, or makes contributions to settling well-known puzzles. In a live field of intellectual action, the settling of some questions always gives rise to new questions, and this is how the intellectual community goes about keeping up a focus of attention. Those who simply settle questions take a back seat to those who open up ways of doing further intellectual work. Among philosophers, great eminence comes from crystallizing new standards of argument, raising the hurdles that the community must clear.

Many, perhaps most, intellectuals would object to this way of describing what we do—it is the search for truth that we are dedicated to, they would say, and indeed our intuition has generally been that truth is one, and disagreements are unsatisfactory conditions to be overcome. Nevertheless, what we see historically is this repeated pattern of division among rival positions and lineages; and it has been out of these networks of contention that the exalted concept of truth has arisen. Truth as something to which one dedicates one's life, as something rising above material interests, even above friendship, was an ideal formulated in these contentious struggles over attention space. One need only think of Plato's transcendent realm of truth, formulated in a contest of schools at Athens, or of Aristotle's dictum in breaking from his teacher: "Plato is a great friend, but truth a greater one." The notion of truth is a constitutive ideal of the intellectual community, symbolically expressing what its members aim for and what distinguishes them from nonintellectuals, those who put other interests first. Even those intellectuals who adopt a skeptical stance (including late-twentieth-century versions) wish to be taken seriously: they may not use the terminology of truth, but their practical employment of speech acts is equivalent to it.

I do not deny the importance of having a concept of truth, either on epistemological or on sociological grounds. It remains the case that intellectual communities have been divided into rival positions from their very beginnings, and continue to be thus structured today. (I leave aside here the complicated question of to what extent the natural sciences in recent centuries have arrived at consensus, and what social organization of their community has been involved in producing it.) But in philosophy, the social sciences, and humanities, the law of small

numbers continues to be important. The fact that we remain committed to some version of the quest for truth, even as it recedes into the future, gives a poignant quality to intellectual life. Neither intellectual contention, nor the ideal of truth, is going to go away so long as intellectual creativity occurs; both are constitutive of the intellectual world. Intellectual conflict is deeply constitutive because opposition among rival positions shapes the content of those positions. Thus when one position in a field of intellectual rivals changes, the rest of the field changes as well, as old lines of argument are superseded by new ones. We see this in repeated reorganization of the line-up of schools in the ancient Greek world, and in many other instances on up through the present. We are still living in the shadow of the realignment of argumentative factions in the early twentieth century when the older factions of Neo-Kantians, Idealists, evolutionists, and vitalists gave way to new rivalries among phenomenologists, logical positivists, and ordinary-language philosophers. To stay in the forefront of intellectual action, one must be attuned to where the lines of opposition are shifting; one formulates not simply one's own position, but one's position as distinct from positions that too much resemble it, and also one's position as a rallying point in opposition to those of prominent rivals.

In the 1930s, the existentialist phenomenologists and the logical positivists were perfect foils, each exemplifying just the kind of philosophy that the other took to be most meaningless and most reprehensible as a mode of thinking or of living. To make a creative contribution—which is to say, to make a move that puts one at the center of developments and debates—one needs good network contacts early in one's career. This means not merely good contacts with those eminent in the action of the previous generation (although that is the typical pattern as well) but also contact with opponents, either directly or through short network chains; one needs a rapid and sophisticated sense of where arguments are opening up. Thus it is only superficially surprising that Carnap and Heidegger emerge from the same network of teachers—they share the neo-Kantian Rickert—or that both the Vienna Circle militants and the phenomenological movement, which Heidegger radicalized into what came to be called existentialism, connect backward through teachers of teachers to upheavals in the foundations of mathematics at the end of the nineteenth century.

The intellectual world is a moving center of arguments. The older topics become transformed and the intellectual tools of the previous generation are sharpened into techniques that the new generation can use to raise yet further lines of dispute; but this is typically accomplished as if breaking away from old mistakes, overcoming old crudities of thinking, opening up new paths to truths, claiming at last to settle long-standing questions. Often the leaders of break-away movements are recognizable as those who organize groups and journals with manifestos declaring what the new school of thought is creating and what or

whom it is demolishing. Vertical conflict across time, breaking from the past while implicitly building it up—both by sharpening its techniques and using it as a foil—sets the stage for horizontal conflict, as new movements—rival ways of moving toward the future—arrive in clusters.

Intellectual action is collective action, depending both on networks from the past and on contemporary dimensions of rivalry that ensure there are plenty of new things about which to argue. The action is collectively constituted, but only a few individuals get to be at the very center of attention: the outstanding names that become touchstones for loyalists and whose fame is further propagated by being targets for opposing camps. Out of the school of Husserl's followers, it was Heidegger who reaped the most fame, but Nikolai Hartmann had been a contender in the early 1920s, when both had the reputation of rising young men (both had junior positions at Marburg), and Max Scheler's star was temporarily high in the sky while his work was being criticized by the more technical phenomenologists as merely a superficial exposition of their own arguments. Selecting these names ignores the larger ranks of the phenomenological movement, people who shared in the enthusiasm but failed to capture more than local reputations or, further down, to do any significant work at all.

In the intellectual world, Robert Merton noted, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer—to which I would add: but not without struggle. Success in the intellectual world is not merely a matter of coming from the camp of the previously successful generation. The students of successful teachers do not necessarily inherit the same resources, go on to do important work, and receive the same honors for it, while their rivals start in obscurity and stay in obscurity. Famous teachers have many pupils and hence much of the early struggle is among those who start with the same endowments. New intellectual positions must be forged against one another to make themselves distinctive, and these positions get attention to the extent that there are slots available in the attention space. Those who start along a successful pathway may become energized; typically they become prodigious workers, absorbed in the available lines of thought with confidence that their ideas are important. It is because such individuals are deeply ensconced in networks with the action unfolding around them that they have a quick intuitive sense of what is important to do. Once they have acquired the momentum of success, once they have experienced the emotional resonances of finding a niche in the attention space (which dramatically focuses the lines of conflict onto their own position), they are energized to continue making the intellectual moves that lead to the center of attention. Conversely, those who fail to capture attention become demoralized and lose energy; their work becomes less important to them, and they fade from the competition. Intellectual heroes, the "geniuses" celebrated by remote admirers, are made, not born—

some young potential geniuses starting from favorable spots in intellectual networks are energized while others fade, and still other new contenders are too far from the sites of action to keep up with those moves that are capturing the limited attention space. Intellectual success consists in making the arguments that put oneself in the midst of the several dimensions of conflict that structure intellectual attention space.

Intellectual conflict, then, is not only normal, but constitutive of how new ideas are shaped. Given this baseline, what determines the level of acrimoniousness? When is intellectual conflict carried out coolly and neutrally, when in a friendly atmosphere, and when is it most hostile?

Career Rivals

One consequence of the law of small numbers is that some persons near the center of intellectual action are squeezed out of the attention space. They start with good network contacts; they may have very good ideas that they formulate from the possible combinations of ideas and lines of opposition available in the intellectual community at the time. But there are often more good ideas generated in this way than slots in the attention space. These persons who are ignored and disappointed often manifest the kind of acrimony that we may call the bitterness of the supernumeraries.

An example is Schopenhauer. At the tail end of the Idealist generation and younger than its other luminaries, Schopenhauer failed abysmally to capture attention when he lectured at the University of Berlin in 1820, at just the time when Hegel was coming to be defined as the culminating philosopher of the Idealist movement. Schopenhauer was not unrealistic in his great expectations. He had, like Hegel, been a pupil of Fichte's and had been well sponsored in the original Idealist circle around Goethe at Weimar/Jena—while Hegel was a late bloomer, a youthful friend of the other Idealists (who were already published to acclaim in the 1790s), but whose own writings only came to be known in the late eighteen-teens. Schopenhauer was defeated by the law of small numbers; all the slots were taken up by the variety of Idealist positions, and his own distinctiveness was not visible. His philosophy of the will as thing-in-itself was taken as just another variant on Fichte. Schopenhauer's famously acerbic personality was molded in this period of frustration—the notorious incident in which he incurred a law-suit by throwing his landlady down the stairs happened at the moment of his bitterest attacks on Hegel, whose lectures were popular while his own were ignored. Schopenhauer was lucky insofar as he lived long enough, into a subsequent intellectual generation, to be discovered. In the 1850s and 1860s, when a reaction had set in against Hegel and against Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, new slots (as it were) had opened in the attention space and Schopenhauer got

one of them, along with a lineage of prominent followers including Wagner and Nietzsche, who assured long-term interest in Schopenhauer's work.

The vituperativeness of Marx's writing style emerged in a similar way. Marx was part of the movement of Young Hegelians of the early 1840s, participating at its center in the Berlin coffeehouse circle known as *Die Freien*. His scornful polemics were aimed first at his compatriots, especially in 1846 in *The German Ideology*, where he savages Feuerbach, Bauer, Stirner, and others who had beat him to the punch in publishing their own systematic statements. Marx, like Schopenhauer, wrote in obscurity for a long time; his fame came only after the 1871 Paris Commune. During his years of laboring in the shadows, Marx reserved his strongest condemnation for Bakunin, Weitling, and others prominent in the revolutionary movement—precisely those who, to use my shorthand, occupied the slot in the attention space that Marx had organized his intellectual project to fill.

Most thinkers who are squeezed out in this way are not so lucky: their reputations never rise above those of secondary figures, perhaps with a scattering of followers in peripheral regions; they become thinkers known to scholarly specialists but never part of those canonized in the standard reading lists. Secondary figures, I would suggest, are the most likely to be bitter. Their ideas are sophisticated and important; the field could just as well have been built upon them, in its way forward, than on someone else's formulation. It is this realistic sense of one's merit by the standards of one's own field that makes for the kind of bitterness that is specific to intellectuals. But this is not the only kind of acrimony that arises from career rivalries. Secondary figures, after all, are rare enough—much more common are minor thinkers, who receive only slight amounts of long-term attention in the history books, or who enjoy only local reputations. Still larger numbers are of those who are not mentioned in the history books at all, those whose papers and books have few readers, whose serious students are relatively few and modest in achievement. And beyond these, who manage to have an intellectual career at all, are those who aspire to an intellectual life, study or work at it for a while, then drop out into something else. Intellectual communities are pyramids, with most of the attention focused at a few peaks, and with a long base whose bottom (to continue the metaphor) is lost in the darkness of the earth. There can be career-niche rivals at various levels of the pyramid.

The life of each aspiring intellectual passes through a career turning point. Many of us start with dreams of glory, emulating the intellectual heroes whose books we first read or whose ideas and personalities were held out to us as exemplars when we were young. Sooner or later, one settles into a particular level of the intellectual attention space: one progresses into the heart of the networks where the action has gone on in the generation of one's teachers and where the new lines of action are unfolding; or one finds oneself on the periphery, where

one can read and perhaps teach to others ideas that have already become central elsewhere. The individual must decide, whether consciously and explicitly or only by drift, and possibly through a considerable cloud of illusions, whether it is worth striving to contend for one of the limited number of highly visible positions. If this becomes implausible, another realistic choice, short of dropping out entirely, is to become a follower of the occupant of one of the prominent positions. There is the opportunity to become a specialist, applying some prominent theory to a subject matter honed narrowly enough that one achieves at least some aspect of uniqueness. Or one can become a commentator, an expositor; instead of striving to rival Foucault, one becomes a Foucault scholar. Often one can find considerable eminence as a commentator, especially if one is a pioneer in importing ideas from a foreign country or from one discipline into another.

Intellectual acrimony is most likely in that period when one's young career is just becoming a middle-aged career, and one has not yet quite realized that one is being squeezed by the limited attention space. This is the time for the sharpest attacks on those who are currently eminent, and on the gullibility of their followers—attacks conducted in the most objective terms: it is truth that suffers from the incoherence of my opponents, and only incidentally myself as possessor of a superior path to truth. But taking a sociological view, the attacker should not be convicted of insincerity. To be a serious participant in the intellectual world is to be committed to making a contribution to true knowledge, and the more committed one is, the more difficult it is to distinguish between the merit of the ideas one believes in and the recognition that one believes is owed to oneself. As a rule of thumb, the degree of disappointed ambition determines the level of acrimony. Those who have aimed the highest, and who hold to that aim the longest, are the most acrimonious in attacking their successful rivals. Those who hold out the longest in the face of the lack of recognition, keeping faith with their own idea of themselves, are those who are most likely to be negative about the successful. We all know the carper, the type of intellectual who disagrees with everyone, who never has anything good to say about anyone's newly published work. Most likely the carper is someone who once had a promising start, the object of much praise during youth, but who never could make it even at the top of some specialty and hangs doggedly on the periphery of the intellectual world. The hypothesis could be tested by biographical comparisons, although we rarely undertake biographies of the unsuccessful.

Acrimony of a different sort happens when the young intellectual first begins to publish the work that is to give him or her an independent reputation. Here we find the acrimony of the young against the older generation, the attack on one's teachers. This break occurs most sharply in those thinkers who have come from a lineage of distinguished teachers, for the danger of being unoriginal is greatest when one is under the spell of an impressive teacher. To continue

someone else's ideas is to have no chance of independent recognition. Breaks with one's teachers are structurally most necessary at the higher levels of the intellectual world. This is not simply a psychological process, a universal Oedipal pattern of killing the father. The process varies, most notably with the degree of career ambition; and ambition is in turn structurally given, at the moments when the field is shifting and an array of new positions are opening up and superseding the old structure of rivalries. There is little Oedipal rebellion at the periphery of the field, little explicit and vehement breaking with obscure teachers; it is the important teachers who have the greatest magnetism, the greatest centrality in the attention space, and thus it is their pupils who have the most to gain in breaking away, and who must carry out the greatest transfer of emotional energy from their teachers to themselves. It is a typical pattern, in intellectual networks, for the major figures of each new generation to be pupils of the major figures of the previous generation, but what such pupils get from their teachers cannot be simply their ideas. What pupils learn that enables their own future eminence is the stance of being at the center of intellectual action; they appropriate and carry on the emotional energy, the ambitiousness, of their teachers. Once the break is successfully made, later in a career, the polemic subsides. One thinks, for instance, of Engels as an elder statesman, recounting the history of Idealism and generously giving credit to the Idealists for opening a pathway to his and Marx's success. And many pupils of important teachers do not break away at all; there is no Oedipal break for those who recognize early that their own career pathway is to be followers, appliers of big ideas to particular specialties, or to be commentators on and propagators of the message of the schools in which they were trained.

In some curious cases, there is no need for a break, because the teacher dies and the pupil can step into the curatorial role of propagating and developing the great thinker's ideas as if they were his or her own. In the 1930s, the young sociologist Herbert Blumer was teaching assistant to George Herbert Mead in the University of Chicago philosophy department. Mead died in the midst of a course of lectures and Blumer carried on for him; thereafter Blumer took up the standard for Mead's ideas, gave them the label of "symbolic interactionism," and polemicized against rival theoretical schools, in the process of which Blumer made Mead's ideas into a research program for the next generation of sociologists. Blumer became a creative force in the world of sociological theories, but he hid the fact under the cover of Mead's intellectual identity. This sort of thing could happen because the elder thinker was not well known except in a coterie of local disciples, and his death made it possible for a devoted follower to become eminent without rivalry for their position in attention space. Physical death is sometimes the prerequisite to intellectual resurrection.

A final subtype of career rivalry is accompanied by a much more limited

form of acrimony, the priority dispute. These disputes over who should get credit for having first discovered and published an idea have been widely studied. Priority disputes can occur only in those fields in which there is a great deal of consensus on the criteria for a significant contribution, fields in which reputations—rather than having to wait for later generations to sort out whose ideas are worth remembering—are quickly established. Priority disputes are thus found in the natural sciences and in mathematics, at least since the time of the "scientific revolution." These are fields that I would characterize as "rapid-discovery science": their networks quickly settle the issue of the last round of controversy and get on to building the next round of discoveries upon it. Priority disputes do not much occur in philosophy, the humanities, and social sciences. Such disputes are a very focused and specific form of acrimony, corresponding to the highly focused and specialized organization of some fields of intellectual work; where the fields are not so minutely focused, acrimony must be more generalized. We all have our bêtes noires, the writers whom we cannot stand, from whom we have nothing to learn: these are on the whole persons occupying the same niche in attention space, at the level of our own specialty, perhaps using a different terminology, a somewhat different mix of arguments and evidence, but aiming at a topic so close that their success diminishes our own. There is an indirect use of priority accusations that figures in this kind of generalized contentiousness. One often hears a third-person accusation, in which someone denigrates a rival by declaring that what he or she has to say is merely a repetition of what has already been said by X. This accusation is one of the techniques of the carper; an indirect result is that the carper does finally acknowledge the value of someone else's work, if only by using it to put down the person immediately at hand. Insofar as the intellectual world is built on conflict, on struggle over a limited attention space, this roundabout agreement is more than incidental: consensus happens precisely as contenders need to call on allies to effectively attack their rivals, thus turning a potentially infinite amount of disagreement into a limited amount of division among well-known schools of thought.

At times, priority claims are raised in a fashion that can sound untoward to disengaged observers. In my own field, sociology, there was, during the 1970s, a good deal of acrimony around the newly prominent movement of ethnomethodologists (followers of Harold Garfinkel). They declared that existing sociology was merely a gloss on naive conceptions of social order, and that these must be superseded by phenomenological methods that study the process of constructing our sense of taken-for-granted reality in everyday life. The bitterest conflicts took place, not between ethnomethodologists and the most positivistic schools, but between Garfinkel's followers and their nearest predecessors, the symbolic interactionists. On the latter's side, one often heard, against the claims of ethnomethodologists, that their arguments about social reality were ridicu-

lously extreme—yet strangely, furthermore, that the symbolic interactionists already owned this topic. In other words: your position is absurd; and also we said it first.

Border-Crossing Acrimony

Collective hostilities, like the individual hostilities we have examined so far, seem governed by the limited number of prominent positions in the intellectual attention space. One way to reduce conflict, and to open up career possibilities, is to divide, into separate attention spaces, different specialties, each of which provides its own field of competition, regulated by its own application of the law of small numbers. Thus arises the possibility of another form of conflict: the institutionalized hostility between the inhabitants of a particular field and those who intrude across its border. We see this kind of conflict in hostile reviews of books written by outsiders, as well as in referees' reports on manuscripts submitted for publication in the journals belonging to a particular specialty, on applications for research funds, and the like. Part of the practical skill of successful academics is to label their projects with just the right markers and to steer their work toward gate-keepers who see things as they themselves do, from the viewpoint of a shared specialty.[2]

From the insider's viewpoint, the outsider misses just those questions that are significant, the lines of opposition that are of concern to those active inside the local attention space; outsiders are not focused on the same puzzles, and thus their work appears at best uninteresting or out of focus. This lack of fit is often seen as a lack of scholarly skill on the part of the outsiders, a failure to have undergone the appropriate apprenticeship, to "get their hands dirty" in the archives, at the lab bench, or in fieldwork. There actually are such failures, and plenty of blunders in amateur efforts. But insiders are generally ill-positioned to distinguish such failures from work in their field that is of interest in a frame of analysis developed in another field. To name an example near to my own heart, work in the sociology of philosophy is not the same as work done in the substantive controversies of philosophy or in the historiography of philosophy. Reviewers drawn from the native population—the philosophers and historians of philosophy—naturally enough tend to overplay the privileged status of their own viewpoint. But indeed, there is no single vantage point; we each have our own dignity to uphold.

More generally, what sociologists or economists or anthropologists see as fruitful material in historiography, or in the practices of scientists or lawyers, may

2. Another source of hostile reviews, especially of books, is reviewers who are too close, i.e., rivals over the same niche in attention space. Between one kind of danger and another, the scholar has many pitfalls to negotiate in making a prominent career, and these account for much of the strain and emotional bitterness of intellectual life.

not be perceptible at all to those inside, and may be regarded as a hostile intrusion, an unwarranted reduction of their own ontological context to an alien one. The late-twentieth-century movement of literary theory and its cognates, imported into the humanities from an amalgam of semiotics, phenomenological philosophy, and the social sciences, was experienced as an invasion by prior inhabitants of terrain that they took to be defined as the study of substantively valuable and therefore classic works of literature and the arts. Hostility was exacerbated by the victorious crowing of the border-crossers and their scorn for what they proclaimed an unsophisticated and tradition-bound way of studying a reputational canon. No doubt this characterization of the established literati gave them a twinge of growing old, since what had become offensively traditional in the last third of the twentieth century had arrived as the rebellious movement of New Criticism in the middle third of the century.

The extent to which intruders try to be respectful of the fields they are intruding upon, or alternatively the extent to which they arrive as arrogant imperialists, depends upon the relative success of these intellectual movements on their home grounds and upon the pecking order of disciplines. Consider some current examples. The enthusiasm for well-funded developments in genetics and biology has spilled over into a cross-disciplinary movement of evolutionary biologists. Its strongest effects have been in psychology departments, where traditional versions of psychological research have been displaced or made precarious; evolutionary biology has intruded as well upon the topics of the social sciences (crime, gender roles, intelligence testing) in ways that have brought considerable hostility. In another part of the theater, economics has been riding high since the last decades of the twentieth century, both from the expansion of job opportunities for its graduates, as compared to those in other social science fields, and from the wave of political popularity of free-market economics. The success of economics as a field has added impetus to a movement of "rational choice" or "public choice" theories, applying neoclassical economics to standing topics in political science and elsewhere. Strands of conflict are often tangled; the atmosphere is worsened when political differences are perceived to overlay these border-crossing disputes. But one thing at a time (for now, we must defer consideration of the political dimension).

We cannot decide the substantive merits of the positions of intruders and the defenders of borders before the event. By their fruits ye shall know them, and it is future practitioners and historians of our fields who alone will be in a position to observe how these movements have played themselves out. The past shows that new developments, especially in the academic world since the research university was established around 1800, have often come from border crossings. This phenomenon is especially apparent in the natural sciences, where movements of physicists brought about biochemistry, and where the combinations of

laboratory techniques from different disciplines have repeatedly given rise to new substantive areas. Elsewhere, cross-border colonization has brought developments such as an experimental psychology separate from philosophy departments, and both the logicist and phenomenological movements in the early twentieth century, as physicists and mathematicians overflowed into philosophy. More abstractly, we can agree that one way in which intellectuals can find new materials to work upon and new things to say—and thus to make new careers with new centers of attention—is to recombine various strands of ideas and techniques from previous lineages of the intellectual world; and if these provoke new lines of conflict, so much the better for the excitement of intellectual action.

But to make this claim is not to take the position that the border-crossers are always right, that they are the inevitable wave of the future. The history of philosophy shows that the construction of new lines of intellectual action does not automatically eliminate the older lines; and intellectual "traditionalists," conservatives in the sense that they extol the merits of older lines of thinking, have often become innovators on the rebound as they have dug more deeply into their traditional stance to fend off threats. The history of China, Japan, and India is especially rich in examples of the innovativeness of philosophical conservatives pushed to the wall. But let me note a recent example from the heart of the natural sciences: the aggressive new movement of molecular biologists led by James Watson, after its famous success in modeling DNA, loudly declared traditional field biologists outdated. But Watson's attempt to reform the Harvard department along these lines provoked those very traditionalists to mount a counter-synthesis in the form of the new subdiscipline of ecology.[3] In the same way, intrusions of rational-choice economics or evolutionary psychology into the older terrains of the social sciences are not fated to carry everything before them; they also motivate explicit moves to show how established modes of social science can do the job of explanation better. One token of this phenomenon is the movement of "economic sociology," which counterattacks on economists' terrain with the methods of network analysis. Here again, we see the general pattern of intellectual fields, generating creativity by focusing lines of opposition.

Intellectual Fortresses

Another important form of intellectual hostility is based not on new movements and intrusions, but upon long-standing, institutionalized rivalries. For several

3. Edward O. Wilson, *Naturalist* (New York: Warner, 1994). For a general statement and a case study of the innovations that occur by means of "role purification" when a discipline unites to throw intruders out, see Martin Kusch, *Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosphical Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1995). Kusch presents a brilliant analysis of the social bases of disputes among schools of psychology during the field's early generations in Germany in *Psychological Knowledge: A Social History and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1999).

centuries in Hellenistic Greece, intellectual action simplified down to four main schools: the Platonic Academy, the Aristotelians, Stoics, and Epicureans. Lineages were firmly established in organizations that owned property and kept up both a flow of funding and well-recognized slots in the attention space. These schools sustained a traditional set of disputes, which led to some refinements but not to abandonment of the basic positions. This episode in the history of philosophy supports a generalization: materially well-supported positions do not give up their basic framework of thought, and are capable of riding out any level of criticism by their enemies. Jibes between the Hellenistic schools were part of their identities.

A similar dynamic operated in the period of medieval India when the Hindu schools were institutionalized in the "six darshanas" (orthodox philosophies or viewpoints); these then kept up a stable set of alliances and splits among themselves. As long as the material bases were strong, intellectual criticisms by rivals led to responses that radicalized their differences, rather than to acceptance of the validity of what the opponent was urging. A conceptual scheme, as W. V. Quine observed, has many points at which it can be adjusted without giving up its overall framework. Hence the collapse of a position comes, not from institutionalized lines of rivalry, but from a transformation of the entire attention space, in which entire sets of oppositions are squeezed out.

In late medieval Christendom, after many creative developments, scholastic philosophy became divided among Thomists, Scotists, and nominalists; each came to control its own universities as strongholds, where the opposing positions were excluded from the curriculum and the professorial chairs. Acute lines of mutual criticism were not taken to heart and did not disturb the balance of power. These lines shifted only with the rumbling upheaval in the material bases for intellectual life. Positions outside the universities for thinkers drawing upon court patronage, and the new networks for circulating intellectual news, provided the home grounds, first for the humanists and then for the movement that eventually became known as the scientific revolution—these displaced the older scholastic rivalries and gave them, individually and en masse, the reputation of being archaic. It was then that the name of Duns Scotus, the "subtle doctor" (whose merits were to be rediscovered centuries later by Heidegger), was transformed into a term of denigration: *dunce*.

Such periods of institutionalized rivalry occupy a medium level on the scale of acrimony; their mutual abuse is conventional rather than heated, unlike relations among new and old movements at times when an entire material base is displaced. Observing the confrontation of intellectual fortresses is analytically useful, because it sets up a contrast with situations in which intellectual acrimony is notably low: that is to say, periods when there is plenty of intellectual action and therefore disagreement, but name-calling and nastiness are relatively absent.

Across the history of philosophy, the periods of greatest innovation have been times when several rival intellectual networks have intersected at one or a few great centers of discussion. A classic example for the West is Athens at the time of Socrates. In the generations just previous, the philosophical networks were dispersed around various parts of Ionia and the Greek colonies of Italy (Magna Graecia), but in this period they came together (driven to a considerable extent by geopolitical developments) in one city. It was this confluence of networks that made it possible for an individual to acquire the stance of sophisticated encounter with many different viewpoints, and to rise to a metalevel of abstraction about the nature of intellectual objects; in short, these were the structural conditions that made it possible for someone to become "Socrates."

The point I want to emphasize is that debate in the newly self-conscious intellectual community in Athens was carried out under emerging conceptions of politeness; this quality is the charm that many generations of readers have been struck by in the Platonic dialogues. The new politeness was not simply the Greek cultural ethos, even of that time, but a particular mode of social organization among intellectuals, for it contrasted strongly with the surrounding ethos of city-state politics, which was often quite vituperative as well as violent.[4] Even the sophists, teachers of rhetoric and the art of argumentation, were not mere polemicists. For all their flaunted disagreements, the sophists become increasingly conscious of rules and standards of debate, and indeed the propensity of the sophists to show that they could argue on either side of a question was part of an increasing sophistication and cosmopolitanism, invoking the implicit ideal that true intellectuals can rise above being tied to partisan stances.

The golden moments of other world traditions of philosophy have similar patterns. Ancient Chinese philosophy crystallized in the fourth century B.C.E., when several courts of warring states employed scholars as ministers and diplomats, and brought together teachers from many schools to debate, notably at Wei and at the famous Chi-hsia Academy at Ch'i. In these centers of shifting membership, major thinkers like Chuang Tzu (the first important proto-Taoist) and Hui Shih (a pioneer of abstract conceptual logic of the "school of names") debated, and sharpened their positions upon each other, but also associated as friends. This gentility among the Chinese intellectual elite is not a cultural trait, in the sense of a constant quality at all historical periods; there is plenty of petty hostility and indeed violent contentiousness to be found among Chinese schools in other periods, especially during that between the third and tenth centuries C.E., when Taoists, Confucians, and Buddhists were organized into intellectual fortresses. When the structural pattern appears again—the intersection of rival

4. In this respect, the position of G. E. R. Lloyd seems overstated, i.e., that Greek standards of intellectual argument arose from democratic debate in the city-states. See Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

networks at a few metropoles of lively intellectual action—the civility reappears. Another great episode of Chinese philosophy, too little known in the West, occurred in the eleventh century C.E. Here the action emerged from building a large-scale examination system for government officials; at the same time, various factions of scholars contended over a succession of government ministries introducing, and sometimes (in the name of tradition) renouncing, major economic reforms. Here arose vigorous intellectual struggles among a small number of rival factions, including the Neo-Confucians (an example of the innovativeness of self-styled conservatives); the conservative Confucian poets led by Su Shih; and the radical reformers, led by Wang An-shih (a name as important in Chinese history as Richelieu, Cromwell, or Bismarck in European history). Despite strong intellectual and political differences, Wang An-Shih and Su Shih were privately friends, who received each other in retirement to paint and write poetry together.

In sum, the gracious, polite ways of debating, those that separate personal relations from intellectual disagreements, have tended, historically, to arise in cosmopolitan centers, where alliances are fluid and connections multiple. Entrenched loyalists, hurling traditional epithets against traditional enemies, originate in the self-enclosed networks of isolated citadels.

Material Base Shifts

The seismic shifts of intellectual life, when one material base is displaced by another, are usually accompanied by a tidal wave of denigration of the products of the old system. But all is not quite what it seems. The generation of Descartes claimed to sweep the slate clean of the scholastic philosophies and start anew: for all that, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and the other new stars drew surreptitiously upon a judicious selection of techniques and concepts of their banished predecessors. In the twentieth century, when American and British universities had finally adopted as their model the German-style research university, professional thinkers touted their new analytic tools and looked down upon the thought of the previous century as mere preaching and journalism. Inhabitants of different modes of intellectual production live in different worlds; and when one life-practice struggles for dominance over the other, an impersonal acrimony tends to color all relationships.

Similar generic denigration goes on when two different modes of intellectual production confront one another on roughly equal terms: in the period since World War II, "continental" thought has appeared, from the viewpoint of anglophone analytic philosophers, to be mere literary flash. In fact, continental philosophy is grounded in a distinctive organization of intellectual action—the blending of the elites of publishing, theater, and the academic world, all centered

on Paris, where reputations are made before a high-culture audience of aspirants in each of these contexts.[5] Moreover, the critical mass of intellectuals assembled from all these career paths is large enough to be a force capable on occasion of dramatic political action, and this fact of life adds an engagé tone of political resonance to French thought. Thus it is the envy of more institutionally isolated American academics but also the butt of accusations about the faddishness and dogmatism characteristic of social movements.

After one mode of production displaces another, all is not sweetness and light within the victorious camp; they have a full attention space to divide up. The leaders of an intellectual movement associated with the new material base may have started out as a close-knit group of comrades at arms. I have mentioned the generation of German Idealists, whose success in seizing the attention space was followed immediately by splits: the old revolutionary Schelling ended upholding a conservative religious idealism against the dominance of his schoolmate Hegel. The Sartre circle of existentialists, which swept into the center of French intellectual life at the end of the Second World War, soon broke into acrimonious conflicts among Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Camus; ostensibly these were conducted on political grounds, but their structural basis was the opportunity, and need, to differentiate themselves if they were to have independent reputations and to produce new things to say. This is not a distinctively Western kind of intellectual contentiousness: we find comparable splits in the successive victorious camps of Buddhist and Hindu India, as well as among the Neo-Confucian philosophers in Sung dynasty China, even though the originating group consisted of two brothers, their uncle, and a family neighbor.

The solidarity of the battle line is generally followed by an upsurge of contentiousness among allies, and this makes for some retrospective romanticization of the days when the allies were united in the face of a common enemy—the war is portrayed as a honeymoon when compared to the peace. On the losing side, the contrary is surprisingly the case. The old situation of material supports upheld an array of rival positions, with their long-standing arguments and institutionalized scorn for each other's weaknesses. The effect of being pushed onto the defensive by a new kind of intellectual movement is typically to bring about one last efflorescence of ideas in the form of a grand synthesis. Buddhist syntheses of previously rival schools were achieved, as I have mentioned, at the time when their monastic universities were undercut by the renewed organization of Hindu schools. In late Greco-Roman antiquity, when the Christian Church was acquiring substantial political support in imperial politics and building its own network of educational institutions, the long-standing rival pagan schools came

5. On the structure of this intellectual world in the mid-to-late twentieth century, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988). On its shaping at the end of the nineteenth century, see Jean-Louis Fabiani, *Les philosophes de la République* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1988).

together in a grand synthesis, notably in the system of Plotinus. In Europe in the early seventeenth century, when the scholastics were being shown the door by Bacon, Descartes, Gassendi, and the rest of the new thinkers, the last great scholastic system was produced by Francisco Suarez. Though Thomists and Scotists had been bitter rivals for centuries, Suarez incorporated both into an ontology that set new standards for sophistication. Nor did this work languish in a backwater of Spanish conservatism; Descartes himself carried Suarez's *Disputationes metaphysicae* on his travels, and Leibniz drew upon it for various refinements of ontology.

I see two morals in such stories. The factional conflicts of intellectual life are not permanent: driven into opposition by favorable opportunities for dividing an attention space, intellectual camps may be brought into friendship during a period when there is a premium on alliance against an alien mode of intellectual life. And even then, there are deeper currents of continuity beneath the stormy weather fronts—the changes of intellectual bases—and a good deal of clandestine borrowing from one's enemies.

Political and Religious Entanglements

The most severe intellectual acrimony occurs where the arguments on intellectual terrain are entangled with positions in larger political and especially political/religious struggles. It is fashionable to say that the cultural world is political. But saying so does not capture the difference between, on the one hand, politics as a struggle to gain control of the coercive apparatus of the state and, on the other hand, the distinctive kind of politics practiced by those struggling for an attention space among networks that build up their own abstract and rarefied topics and techniques of argument. The difference is felt in the dimension of cultural production where producers look to each other for their standards and judgments of success, vis-à-vis the dimension where producers appeal to the taste of lay audiences—Pierre Bourdieu refers to this distinction as one of "autonomy" versus "heteronomy."[6] Internal versus lay orientation is no sharp dichotomy, but rather, a continuum along which intellectual life has varied historically. At one extreme, however, where cultural production is dictated entirely according to lay standards, the intellectual community per se is dead; these are stagnant times in abstract disciplines like philosophy and in all the more theoretical sciences and theoretical fields of scholarship. But self-reflexive intellectual networks spring up whenever there is opportunity for cultural specialists to argue among themselves—and there are periods when lines of struggle are between those extolling the right of intellectuals to go their own way (often under some banner such as

6. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

philosophy's independence from theology) and those (often the leaders of church politics or of the state) who regard such innovativeness as frivolity or heresy. Max Weber regarded this line as a perennial location of dispute inside religions.

It is part of the tradition of intellectuals in the West to point to the martyr-heroes who sacrificed themselves for "truth," our rallying cry: Socrates forced to take hemlock, Galileo placed under arrest, Bruno burned by the Inquisition. We reduce these cases to a conflict between insiders and outsiders, between the intellectual world and the politicians of church or state. But in fact, many such instances are better understood as conflicts among rival groups of intellectuals, some of whom have exclusive alliances in a religious/political camp—that is, they use these camps as their material bases. Such instances are not necessarily symmetrical, and some may be closer to being "pure intellectuals" while others are closer to the heteronomous end of the continuum. Important French intellectual factions in the era of Descartes and Pascal, for example, built upon the schools and sanctuaries of Jesuits and Jansenists, rival Catholic movements that did not hesitate to call on state power to exclude each other from university posts or even to deny entry into a country. Cardinal Bellarmine, who led in the condemnation of Galileo, was no know-nothing, but rather a Jesuit thinker not many links removed in the network from both Suarez and Descartes; as a church politician, Bellarmine's policy was maneuvering alliances inside and outside the intellectual camps, and keeping the most controversial aspects of Galileo's position from causing trouble. The danger of those times was part of the structural conditions for creative upheaval: where intellectual bases were entwined with religious organization, and the struggle of churches was a part of violent campaigns that rearranged state power, the conditions were present both for massive intellectual realignments—a pattern of creativity already discussed—and for shifting intellectual/religious entanglements that could get one burned at the stake.

The entanglement of intellectual life with religious politics appears to bring the acrimoniousness of disputes to a peak. Politics has force as its ultimate weapon, and its coalitions, however democratic, are formed to gain control of that means of organized compulsion, the state. The intellectual world operates on a different terrain, where an argument carried only by force is not considered an argument at all. In this light, it seems strange to cluster religion with politics, since religions have on their own no coercive means of generating the moral solidarity and symbolic commitment that they pursue. But religious organizations differ from intellectual communities in that the aim is not argument and ongoing formulation of new positions, but rather the preservation and propagation of doctrines and practices expressive of ultimate commitments. Intellectuals are intrinsically divided by their factions, whereas religions generally attempt and claim to express communal inclusiveness. Most importantly for our purposes, the symbolic and emotional techniques of religions can be intensely

mobilizing for large groups of people; thus religions make ready allies of political factions, and the strongest religions have commanded and legitimated organized force. The worst atrocities are all too often carried out under religious auspices.[7] Yet religions are not always at each other's throats: sometimes religiously based intellectuals discuss and argue rather harmoniously across religious lines. What makes the difference? Compare briefly two sets of cases. In medieval China, there were periods when Taoists, Confucians, and Buddhists met for debates sponsored by the imperial or regional courts. Losers of these debates (as declared by the ruler) were defrocked, and their temple properties confiscated; the winners were given state patronage and made the officially established religion. Yet in later dynasties there were friendly relations, as between Zen monks and Neo-Confucian scholars, and syncretist movements sometimes extolled the "unity of the three doctrines," the notion that the three were saying the same thing in different terms.

In the Islamic world, there have been periods both of intellectual civility and of violent conflicts. Among the latter was the episode of the so-called Inquisition during the years 827–847 at Baghdad, when the caliph attempted to elevate the philosophical theology of the Mu'tazilites—a sect of rationalistic thinkers—into official doctrine, and tried to enforce it on the teachers of *hadith* (traditions about Mohammed transmitted from his companions through lineages of specialists). The leader of one of the Baghdad *hadith* schools, Ibn Hanbal, courageously stood up to imprisonment, ill-treatment, and threats of death, until the caliphate finally gave in. This concession ushered in a period of reversal of fortunes, as the practitioners of rationalistic theology (*kalam*) were increasingly vilified by the schools of *hadith*, as well as by theological/philosophical movements that took their stance against Mu'tazilite doctrines. By the eleventh century, even moderate practitioners of *kalam* like Al-Qushayri and Ibn 'Aqil were being attacked by mobs and driven from teaching in Baghdad. But contrast the situation in Spain during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. A lively creativity embraced a variety of intellectual factions, including both religious rationalists, who were constructing versions of Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian systems and traditionalist mystics. Similar factions were found among both Muslims and Jews: Jewish philosophers often wrote in Arabic, and indeed the networks crossed religious lines. The great cosmopolitan thinkers Moses Maimonides and Averroës (Ibn Rushd) came from the same network of thinkers at Cordoba. The situation of intersectarian interchange was not to last: sharp divisions among Jewish and Muslim thinkers developed in following centuries, and their networks as well as the contents of their ideas moved far apart. These episodes of religious tolerance,

7. Jack Goody, "Bitter Icons," *New Left Review* 7 (January–February 2001): 5–15.

and of interreligious participation in a common intellectual field, gave way to forced conversion and persecution.

What makes the difference? The high-hostility cases are ones in which the intellectual factions have their own self-sufficient material bases; plus the alliance with political factions raises the stakes by the application of force. We see this combination in the hostile instances in China and in Islam (and others from elsewhere could be cited). Taoists, Buddhists, and Confucians all had their own temples and their own sources of membership and economic support; each could live without the others. In ninth-century Baghdad, *hadith* schools, with their control over careers in jurisprudence, were relatively impervious to threats from the Mu'tazilite intellectuals relying on court patronage. These were, then, fortresses of the kind that underpin long-standing intellectual camps; the more secure and isolated the fortress, the more a fortress mentality develops against outsiders. What escalated these intellectual rivalries into violence was the intrusion of politics. Here was a lethal mix of intellectual and political animosities. For to settle intellectual disputes by coercion is to intrude nonintellectual means into the heart of the intellectual community: the constitutive goal and activity of this community of debaters—to become the center of action purely by moves made within the space of intellectual attention—is thus undermined. The intrusion of politics as a means of determining intellectual victors and losers is dangerous to intellectuals themselves, and not only on the side of those who get coerced. Political intrusion draws down the hostility not only of rival political forces but also of the core intellectual networks. Thus the Hanbalities, the followers of the stalwart conservative Ibn Hanbal, emerged from the "Inquisition" with not only religious but also intellectual prestige. Coercion is a bad intellectual tactic, whether it favors the side of self-professed rationalists and progressives or the side of self-conscious conservatives. In view of their aftermaths, Ibn Hanbal is the structural equivalent of Galileo.

We may reach the same conclusion from the other end of the comparison. Relative harmony and tolerance among intellectuals across religious and other factions occur where no faction has a strong, autonomous material base; instead, they rely on the same base and thus are thrown together into a common community—political coercion is not a weapon in their arsenals. Islamic Spain presented a situation in which intellectual life was based upon a network of small courts, where both Muslim and Jewish scholars served as court officials (a particularly cosmopolitan group were the medical doctors: the profession of Maimonides and Averroës, among other leading thinkers). These small states were often at war, but the complexities of geopolitics made for frequent shifting of alliances, which indeed sometimes even cut across to the Christian kingdoms; scholars were sent as diplomats, and their careers typically shifted from one court to another. Thus, although the courts comprised the material base, they were the

opposite of factional fortresses, for it was the network of scholars as a whole, circulating among the various courts, that was the focus of the community. And over time, the sense of intellectual excitement must have been building up as new initiatives in theology, philosophy, and science were launched—in literature too, even across linguistic lines (these were the times when courtly love poetry passed over from Muslim poets to the troubadours).[8] The sense of intellectual action yielded a magnetism, and we can envision the members of this network, for some golden years at least, feeling that it was more their home than any particular religion or political party could be. Intellectuals were involved in politics, but in a practical way rather than with ideological fervor. Politics was not calling the shots.

A comparable situation existed in those periods in China when the religious camps were not rivals for political favor—the center of political action was elsewhere. In part, the intellectual harmony came about because of the enforced depoliticization of Buddhism and Taoism in the later dynasties. Confiscation of the wealth of the big monasteries in the late T'ang dynasty (ninth century), the shift toward small monasteries and shrines serving the lower classes, and the concomitant shift of intellectual base to the government examination system and the schools that prepared candidates for it: all these, by the Sung dynasty and thereafter, settled intellectual life, for the first time in a thousand years, firmly under Confucian dominance. Confucian philosophers were free to borrow surreptitiously from Buddhist positions of the past; and fringe Confucians, out of government favor, carried on quasi-Buddhist meditation techniques and maintained relations with monks of the declining Zen sect. The harmony of the three doctrines was an alliance of the weak and the depoliticized.

Is there a contemporary application? In those parts of the world where religious politics is a matter of open warfare, conditions for a pessimistic prognosis are obvious. Independent resource bases for Muslim and Jewish intellectuals in the Middle East allow conflicts among intellectuals to go on vociferously without the mitigating influence of participating in a common sphere of intellectual life. Yet the same factions, meeting at universities in America or Britain, are brought into the normal civility of academic life, with its networks of committees, conferences, department business, and professional associations: the shrillness of discourse descends to the normal and for the most part restricted levels of acrimony whose sources I have been outlining here. This situation illustrates, if nothing else, that the conditions for intellectual acrimony are found in mutable structures, and not in deep-rooted cultural differences.

8. Ibid.

Envoi

As intellectuals, we make our careers in networks. What we produce is shaped by our predecessors who provide the topics and techniques of thinking, and—if we are lucky—by webs of successors who continue and transform our ideas. We are shaped too by maneuvering around rivals with whom we divide up a limited field of attention. Usually this process goes on tacitly. We would be better off if we were more explicit about our dependence on a network cycling through widely if unevenly shared bodies of ideas and argumentative techniques; more explicit, too, in recognizing that the few individuals who become the rallying points of intellectual movements are focal points in flows of ideas that wash in many directions around networks made up of large numbers of us. Less egotism, both individual and collective, and more awareness of how we all constitute each other: this could be a path toward lowering intellectual acrimony in the future.