

## Are we Heading towards a Premature Death of Human Sciences? A Critical Enquiry into Intellectual History (1945 - Present)

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### Abstract

*This paper probes into the 'epistemological violence' [1]—brought about by the ruptures in the disciplinary paradigms in the aftermath of 1945—that consistently put into question the epistemic basis, social significance and economic viability of Humanities in particular and, liberal education in general. Knowledge has long become the most thriving industry in the post-industrial professional society. Consequently, modern university has fully gravitated towards approximating private corporations. Privatisation of higher education has reduced knowledge into its saleability making such epistemological branches as History, Philosophy, Literature, Fine Arts, Music, to name a few, nearly redundant. Departments of Natural Sciences are undergoing an existential crisis, as well. On the contrary, the xenophobic nation-states' paranoia for national security that seems to be pacified only by manufacturing nuclear weaponry and genocidal ammunitions, ironically finds consensual legitimisation by the 'scientific temper' of the milieu. An ideology of development embedded in this 'scientific temper' resolutely elevates 'modern' science (modern technologies being its public face) as sacrosanct, thereby, the most legitimate 'justificatory principle' [2] of the state. On the flipside, this kind of systematic 'scientisation' of social psyche tends to construct a consensus against the importance of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Basic Sciences as legitimate academic disciplines in higher education. Such social conditioning, in the name of development, aids predominantly to supplant the pre-modern paradigms of knowledge with a reified, professional, value-free, instrumentalist, and utilitarian one. As a result, critical knowledge derived from an intellectual enquiry becomes subjugated to uncritical emulation and dependency yielding to the production of homogenous skilled workers for the corporate [3]. In view of the above, this paper questions the moral imperative of university education. Is there an 'outside' or an 'alternative' to knowledge capitalism and technocratic control over systems of higher education?*

**Keywords:** *Human Sciences; knowledge capitalism, epistemological violence, scientisation, technocracy.*

### 1. Introduction

International politics began to be redefined by new power relations in the aftermath of the Second World War with the emergence of the US as the new military superpower and the new domineering cultural imperialist force in the global economic arena. This phase is further marked by the burgeoning of private corporations and their increasing control over systems of higher education. Liberalisation and professionalization of universities consequently preconditioned hierarchies among 'systems of knowledge' by projecting certain disciplines as essential and certain others as superfluous. Reconstitution of university paradigms to this extent, wherein pursuit of knowledge as disinterested critical enquiry had been reduced to its saleability, turned out an unforeseen affront to the practitioners of Human Sciences (Natural Sciences-Humanities-Social Sciences). At this stage, the Human Science scholars encountered a twofold crisis: (a) to justify their praxis to the institute administration, and, by dint of that, to the State and the society at large; (b) to justify their rationale to themselves and form a legitimate consensus for their own conviction. The late 1960s and 70s witnessed immense discontents piling up against the way university structure became bureaucratized in the name of democratisation and the existing knowledge paradigms were reconstituted according to the demands of the private organisations [4]. This paper argues that at the heart of this constitutional reconfiguration of the university, are the following socio-economic determinants which are directly responsible for the declining prestige of the Human Sciences in the academia of the twenty-first century: (a) a post-War xenophobia around national security; (b) an ideology of development propelled by the capitalist worldview that envisages modernity-as-a-scientific-project predicated upon technocratic-totalitarianism; (c) the social construction of science as sacrosanct that further legitimises violence around the myth of 'scientific objectivity'; (d) credentialisation of professions wherein the pre-modern paradigms of knowledge become redundant.



In view of the above, what follows is a critique of the banking model of education [5] that has transformed the university from embodying critical thinking and intellectual freedom to that of servility and—what Nietzsche reckoned (1872) to be—‘pecuniary gain’ [6]. In the process, the author probes into how welfare bureaucracies function through a ‘professional, political, and financial monopoly over the social imagination’ [7] and, questions what could be the possible alternatives outside the ‘epistemological violence’ [8] unleashed by the technocratic control over critical enquiry and unexpurgated knowledge.

#### 1.2.a

The world-wide xenophobia around national security drew its immunity from America’s antagonism with the communist ideologies that eventually manifested in the repression of intellectual freedom in the production and dissemination of knowledge since 1945. The private universities soon became non-coersive state apparatus to reproduce the capitalist, counter-revolutionary ideologies of the US imperialism. Research endeavours were under strict political surveillance of the state and financial monopoly of the WTO, IMF and the World Bank [9]. The paranoia around national security was to a large extent responsible for the unabated augmentation of modern science wherein the role of modern technology became insurmountable to the extent that the pervasive, vivisectionist nature of modern science appeared ‘normal’ and intractable to the ordinary citizens who ironically perceived theatrical science for spectacular development. Statistics shows that eighty percent of all scientific research was devoted to the war industry, thereby aimed at large scale violence [10]. The fact that modern scientists are mostly dedicated to military research and development testifies the crisis in the fields of Pure Sciences that are cognitively distinct from the former both in theory and praxis. This further makes the natural scientists a rare species since their intellectual pursuits enjoy neither state endorsements nor political clearance unlike that of the nuclear scientists.

#### 1.2.b

This further hinges onto—what Nandy would argue—the modern nation-states’ commitment to the development of science and the science of development [11]. The modern discourse around ‘development’ could be traced back to the former US President Truman’s historical speech of 1945. However, US President Kennedy’s 1962 speech appeared more instrumental in officially announcing the advocacy of science to be one of the primary national goals in his regime. The nineteenth-century European leap into modernity based on the ideal of human liberation through scientific revolution institutionalised the first condition of imperialism i.e. colonisation—the ‘rational’ West’s encounter with the ‘savage’ superstitions of the Third World. However, by the late twentieth century, science had already become the responsibility of the state and a substitute for conventional politics. Subsequently, all forms of technology came to be seen as an ‘undifferentiated mass of knowledge’ [12] how-much-ever lamentable, anti-life and ecocidal their applications might be. Predicated solely upon the Baconian view of a homocentric world, the nexus of science-development-progress continued to thrive on the predatory treatment of nature and on the capitalist logic of profit maximisation through the pervasive acts of pillage or, to borrow from Visvanathan, ‘triage’—an idea, mediating between that of vivisection and progress, rooted in the nature of modern science [13]. This is also intrinsic to the modernisation of suffering wherein modernity is interpreted in the metaphor of a scientific project that is preconditioned upon the banality of technocratic totalitarianism.

#### 1.2.c

Such politicisation of science invariably falls back on the social construction of the image of science as omnipotent and sacrosanct. This has been systematically attained by the ‘scientisation’ [14] of social psyche by dint of which the ordinary citizens would be enamoured by the momentous spectacular achievements i.e. the ‘use value’ of science—and would never doubt its ‘end value’—the large scale destruction, desertification, deforestation, and overall genocidal and ecocidal character of it [15]. The social construction of science—wherein scientific progress becomes coterminous with the developmental agendas of the welfare bureaucracy—thus, earns consensual legitimisation of violence from the civilians because they begin to associate ‘grace’ and ‘supremacy’ with what they perceive to be an ‘objective pursuit of knowledge’ meant for the welfare of the civil society. This scientifically moulded mind, therefore, becomes ready to justify all kinds of violence inflicted by the essentially reductionist modern science in the name of development, without ever questioning its purported claim to ‘universalism’. Moreover, the political domination of science in a scientifically inclined milieu ironically forms a consensus against the social importance of Humanities and Natural Sciences as legitimate epistemological domains in higher academics. This mode of cognition that readily discards

anything that impedes the augmentation of the technocratic science, as unscientific, hence, superfluous, is detrimental to the understanding of the lethal dialectics that operate at the heart of the capitalist logic behind the state's advocacy of 'science as a genre of violence' [16].

#### 1.2.d

The fact that modern science operates as a disembodied knowledge shrouded in the secrecy and reticence of the laboratory, operates as a defence against any kind of assessment by non-scientists. Its claim to universalism built around its self-image of ineffability, abstraction and omniscience works as a strategic device to remove itself from history. Abstraction involves zero experience, thereby, historicity is eliminated [17] as opposed to the seventeenth-century sciences. This further hinges onto the larger politics of credentialisation of professions and professionalisation of talents. The industry-institute interface intensified this in the post-War period. Once professionalism promised to open career to talent, one could no longer inherit his/her occupational status as would be possible in the pre-modern societies that sustained on subsistence economy. Moreover, this was a way to monopolise the production of knowledge producers, as well, because only professionals could train future professionals who would perform target-specific tasks. [18]. Moreover, academic professionalism intensified institutionalisation of disciplines, as well as, the condition of disciplinarity. How did it affect Human Sciences and liberal education? Under this scenario, almost every liberal arts field had to turn into non-liberal as they had to comply with the corporate logic and the momentum of professionalisation. The onus now shifted from value-laden critical knowledge to reified, teleological, vocational knowledge. As a result, departments of Sociology, for example, would refurbish into Social Work; Political Science would give way to Law and Political Administration; Economics would renovate itself to offer courses in Accounting; even pure Mathematics would shade into Applied Mathematics and Biology into Medicines [19]. The focus evidently shifted to knowledge that paid off well in the marketplace since higher education and research became subservient to the corporate standards.

### 1.3. Conclusion

This is where the non-expert becomes a non-person and the pre-modern paradigms of knowledge of the 'defeated'-non-professional-societies are discarded into obsolescence. This very 'epistemological violence' permeates Human Sciences too, making the practitioners search for new justifications in order to survive as legitimate pedagogic disciplines in the ongoing technocratic-corporate-capitalist regime. Considering this it is rightful to ask: How does the university address this essentially disruptive, homocentric, anti-civilisational, predatory ideology that the society has growingly internalised and become unconscious of?

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