Belfiore, Eleonora, and Anna Upchurch, eds., *Humanities in the Twenty-first Century: Beyond Utility and Markets* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). 256pp. $27.00

As Elenora Belfiore notes in her introduction essay to *Humanities in the Twenty-first Century: Beyond Utility and Markets*, discourse on the value of the humanities can in general be neatly split along two opposing, yet "tightly linked" (35) and causative, discourses: the humanities are either dying and fundamentally "useless" (cause); or they are in need of defence through ever-more-inflated claims for their social impact and importance (effect). In this volume Belfiore and Anna Upchurch have amassed a body of (often both) informed and illustrious commentators to steer the middle course in these waters, intending to "engage with the current debate on the value, impact, and utility (or lack thereof) of the humanities […] thus trying to make a positive contribution to live ethical, practical, and scholarly challenges" (4). The methodology through which the editors propose to achieve their bold statement of purpose lies in a framed presentation of divergent voices, some militant and polemic, others more elegiac, but always with the ultimate aim of "agenda-setting", to have a "practical" purpose (5). Such statements underlie the entire rhetoric of *Humanities in the Twenty-first Century* and expose, of course, the very core difficulty of writing about the humanities, markets and non-utilitarian higher education; how to do so today, even in the descriptivist mode to which Belfiore and Upchurch aspire, without producing a work that is functional, political and pragmatic, even as it decries each and every one of those traits in the object

of its defence?[1] This is important for, as David Loosely notes in this volume, with reference to Jan Parker, "humanities methodologies are especially sensitive to the way that cultural and epistemelogical frames of reference affect the outcome of any investigation" (101).

The book itself is structured fivefold around a discussion of "impact" (across both historical and particularly UK-based policy contexts); a meditation on the ideologies of "utility" as opposed to "value"; a section on interdisciplinarity; a penultimate debate on the humanities and market economics; and a final strand on the impact of digital forms upon our disciplines. This structure proves remarkably effective, most admirably so for its self-awareness. More so than, say, Stefan Collini's nonetheless excellent *What are Universities For?*, Belfiore and Upchurch's collection explicitly situates itself within cyclical historical discourses of crisis and methodological frameworks of humanities practice, citing discourse analysis and archival research as the foremost examples (7).[2]

That said, as Belfiore and Upchurch's book is comprised of cross-cutting arguments and multiple voices, the way in which they have chosen to structure this work often neglects other groupings and narratives that might have been profitably explored. Indeed, although they posit five topic areas, it seems to this reader that the work can also be fruitfully considered through a more economical three: 1.) academic laïcité: an exploration of recent attempts to decouple liberal humanism's supposed political functions of higher education (the production of autonomous, critically informed democratic citizens) from its didactic role; 2.) technological fetishism/utopianism: asking whether digital methods and dissemination can save the humanities (if they need saving); 3.) value: the systems and domains of appraisal for scholarship and teaching in the humanities.

The first of my redefined axes for traversing this work, academic laïcité, is perhaps the most

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1   Without wishing to overly fall here into the trap of construing Belfiore and Upchurch's own descriptivist characterization of the humanities as a defence, as is so often the case. See Stefan Collini, p. 61.

2   Although, in some ways Belfiore's opening essay is an expansion of a discourse analysis that Collini himself undertakes briefly. See Collini, p. 39.

important, even though smaller and in reality only a subset of the third. It asks: how is the liberal humanist political role of the humanities being transformed into mere "knowledge transfer"? Jim McGuigan passionately argues here that this depoliticization of academia is being achieved through top-down politics, the transformation of the soul that Margaret Thatcher claimed was the object of political economics (84). Focusing on the forced mutation of higher education from a public good to a private benefit, McGuigan's piece is among the most explicitly political in this volume. Of interest also in this sphere, though, is Mark O'Neill's revelation of museums as ideological forces to shape the future and mourn the past, as institutions that cannot be severed from the political contexts that surround them, but not by necessity put to benevolent use. In truth, it is among the proliferation of studies of the museum that this volume perhaps most clearly shows its power-knowledge hand: all showcases or acts of curation – including the specifically subjectively-shaped outputs of the humanities – are, by their nature, ideological (158). Our ethical qualms must be with the uses to which they are put, not their *a priori* entanglement with use. As O'Neill puts it: "both the employment and authority of experts in a democracy are contingent upon their supporting the legitimate aims of that democracy" (159).

Moving to the second axis – technological fetishism/utopianism – and it is clear, however, that this conclusion of an inherent political *use* remains debatable. Although multifaceted, the arguments that fall under this heading seem broadly to concern a resistance to instrumental reason, best embodied in Jan Parker's piece.[3] Although repetitiously over-populated with the phrase "our hermeneutic is" (51, 56, 60), Parker sets out a clear manifesto for the rejection of a totally digitized humanities (or at least the strands of toolset development/use and disciplinary reconfigurations (50) that here metonymically stand for the broad catch-all term, "digital humanities"). In Parker's eyes, it is the derivation of "plural, avowedly partial" interpretations "from a single, particular event" (56) that encompasses the core of humanities practice and that stands threatened by "inductive-deductive" (60) modes that are inherent to data-driven digital methods. This strand of

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3   This is also the explicit definition that Connie Johnston uses in her transdisciplinary study of geography (138).

pluralisation is continued in Howard I. Kushner and Leslie S. Leighton's contribution examining medical history.[4] In fact, they note that their field of study often sits in problematic contrast to the fetishised τέχνη of clinical historians: "If clinical historians are […] in search of *the history of medicine*, academic historians are committed to laying out *the histories of medicine*" (113). Interestingly, however, it seems that tolerance for plurality still comes ensconced within a ruthless dialectic of argumentation whose eventual aim is synthetic, particularly when it applies to our own disciplines. As Belfiore notes in her piece on open access, despite it being "impossible to find fault with the sentiment and possibilities" outlined by proponents of OA, the implementation remains "problematic", despite the presence of "considerable corporate resistance" and "remarkable profit margin" (203-4), aspects that one would imagine Parker's envisaged academic community to be definitely aligned against.

Bearing the great nuance of the volume in mind, there are nonetheless some problematic aspects of technological enthusiasm exhibited at points in this book. Consider, for instance, Rick McGeer's suggestion that, in the digital landscape, "any person's voice can be heard" (217). This must come as news to women who face online misogyny, people of colour subjected to overtly racist silencing on social media, members of LGBT communities who continue to experience marginalisation, those disabled through lack of accessibility, prisoners without internet access and those without the infrastructure or personal means to get online; the list continues.[5] That said, the chapter by Olson that closes this volume, in which he calls (*contra* Stanley Fish) for a practice-based, embodied, hacker ethos for the humanities offers a way out of false technical utopianism while also highlighting, through a well known dictum, that the point could well be to change the world, not merely to interpret it.

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4   It is notable that, in the original structure, this chapter does feel somewhat isolated/dis-integrated despite its fascinating and truly important subject matter.

5   In fact, I had some other problems with McGeer's essay (although greatly enjoyed his excellent scathing commentary on Mark Helprin) but will not list them all. For instance, however: "copyright […] has no stated public benefit *other* than the enrichment of the producer. […] The fundamental justification for copyright is the enrichment of the copyright holder, on the theory that rewarding content producers will lead to more content" (218). The second clause of this second sentence *is* the public benefit theorised in copyright, along with the eventual (even if, as McGeer rightly notes, unjustly deferred) release to the public domain.

On the final axis of the book, in my remapping, we come to "value", the clearest trouble spot for humanities discourse. In this grouping it is Michael Bérubé who leads the pack with his reproduced *Qui Parle* piece on "The Futility of the Humanities". Assessing here the humanities' contribution to real-lived experience of, for example, disability (73), Bérubé also persuasively, if contentiously. argues that the comparable increases in Collegiate Learning Assessment test scores of humanities students to their scientific peers demonstrates clear usefulness, with a 69 point lead over those studying business management. Interestingly, from the other side of this debate, David Loosely points out that he and other linguists have always had such a functionalist argument readily available, but worry that such logic may end in reduced disciplinary variance. Meanwhile, Upchurch and Jean McLaughlin take a novel premise for their discussion of value: the purported need by a consortium of environmental activists to move beyond the "facts and evidence" on an issue and, instead, to appeal to "emotions and personal values [beliefs tied to emotions] of individuals" (174). While I was less clear about the intervention signalled by this piece – is this just a matter of communicating a "mission statement" of "core values"? – I was still enthused by their suggestion that Penland School yields a model for education that could reclaim a true utopian field: as shelter from the "competitive experience of the market economy" (190).

Overall, despite my minor criticisms, this is a superb work that forms a solid starting point for thinking about the future of the humanities in the twenty-first century. I was left wondering, though, whether the editors' opening claim – that this book is not militant – was not slightly disingenuous. Beyond their note that most of the authors proceed from a shared suspicion of neoliberal messianism of the market, in the reconfigured mapping that I've set out above, which is one that I hope demonstrates the plurality of overlaps that can be drawn from the material singularity of this work, there emerged in my mind a core shared desire to see the work of these disciplines continue, regardless of whether this was achieved through, or in the name of, politics, technology or use/value. And I felt that the contributors, and probably the editors too, were ready to

fight for that.

Collini, Stefan, *What Are Universities For?* (London: Penguin, 2012)