

Public Intellectuals

*Public Intellectuals:
A Study of Decline*

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Contents

Introduction	1
PART ONE: GENERAL THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS	
1 Setting the Stage	17
2 The Market for Public Intellectuals	41
3 Care and Insight	83
4 Prediction and Influence	128
5 More Public, Less Intellectual	167
PART TWO: GENRE STUDIES	
6 The Literary Critic as Public Intellectual	223
7 Political Satire	247
8 The Jeremiah School	281
9 The Public Philosopher	320
10 The Public Intellectual and the Law	359

Conclusion: Improving the Market	387
Acknowledgments	399
Index	401

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Introduction

This made [Arthur] Koestler an uncomfortable presence, who brought disruption and conflict in his train. But that is what intellectuals are for.¹

The correspondence between the decline of the great public intellectuals and the resurrection of the professors is thus no mere coincidence.²

THIS BOOK reflects a long-standing interest of mine in the phenomenon of academics' writing outside their field or, what often turns out to be the same thing, writing for a general audience. But it has more immediate stimuli as well. One is the discussion, in my book on the Clinton impeachment fiasco, of the contemporaneous public commentary on that remarkable episode by philosophers, historians, and law professors.³ The commentary was of surprisingly low quality on the whole, but I made no effort in my book to account systematically for this surprising fact. Second, a review I did for the *New York Times* of public intellectual Gertrude Himmelfarb's book on the crisis (as she sees it) of contemporary American society⁴ provoked a surprising number of comments, many positive. It had struck a chord and led my longtime editor at Harvard University Press, Michael Aronson, to suggest that I attempt a fuller analysis of the deficiencies, as they seemed to me, in the treatment of political and social questions by

1. Tony Judt, "The Believer," *New Republic*, Feb. 14, 2000, pp. 40, 46–47.

2. Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944–1956* 297 (1992).

3. Richard A. Posner, *An Affair of State: The Investigation, Impeachment, and Trial of President Clinton* 199–216, 230–245 (1999). Some of this discussion appears in revised form in Chapters 3 and 10 of this book.

4. Richard A. Posner, "The Moral Minority," *New York Times Book Review*, Dec. 19, 1999, p. 14, reviewing Gertrude Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures* (1999).

“public intellectuals”—intellectuals who opine to an educated public on questions of or inflected by a political or ideological concern.

The third event that stimulated this book was my appointment in November 1999 to mediate the Microsoft antitrust case, which had drawn a raft of public commentary from economists and law professors. When I got into this extremely complex case I realized that most of the commentary by this segment of the public intellectual community, to the extent disinterested,⁵ reflected only a superficial engagement with the facts; it was little better than kibitzing.

But when I first began to think about the *general* subject of the public intellectual, I found myself at sea. The subject seemed formless—the term itself, “public intellectual,” undefined; the activities of public intellectuals, whoever they were exactly, too heterogeneous to be squeezed into a common analytical framework; the nature of the media’s and the public’s interest in public-intellectual “work” unclear; the borders between that work and other cultural domains such as journalism, politics, and scholarship hazy; problems of measurement and evaluation insoluble. The world of public intellectuals seemed, in short, random and chaotic. But as my thinking and research progressed, the subject began to assume a manageable shape. The term “public intellectual” could, I found, be defined in a way that would demarcate a coherent albeit broad body of expressive activity. Different genres of public-intellectual work so defined, some with surprisingly rigid conventions, could be described. Secular trends and demographic patterns became discernible, along with possibilities for measurement and for objective evaluation. Public-intellectual work could be seen as constituting a market and a career and could be analyzed in economic and sociological terms and compared with other markets and other careers. Reliable judgments about it—not all negative, either—began to seem possible.

The fuller study that informs this book reveals that public-intellectual work indeed has a structure, has patterns and conventions, is coherent and intelligible—yet part of that structure turns out to be an absence of the quality controls that one finds in other markets for goods and services, including the market for academic scholarship. The consequence is a striking variance in the quality of public-intellectual

5. Some of the commentators were in the pay of Microsoft or its competitors.

work, coupled with a low average quality—low, and maybe falling, though it would be more precise to say that public-intellectual work is becoming less distinctive, less interesting, and less important.

No blanket condemnation of the modern public intellectual, academic or nonacademic, is intended or would be warranted, however. Distinguished representatives of each group will be found in Chapter 5's list of the hundred most prominent public intellectuals (along with a number of the distinguished dead) as measured by frequency of mentions in the popular media, an indiscriminating measure from the standpoint of intellectual distinction but a good indicator of which public intellectuals have the public's ear. Some of these modern public intellectuals, such as Henry Kissinger, Patrick Moynihan, Robert Solow, Milton Friedman, Gary Wills, and James Q. Wilson, are distinguished ornaments of American public life.⁶ Yet intellectual quality may not even be the most valuable attribute of public intellectuals. Public-intellectual goods, I shall argue, are entertainment goods and solidarity goods as well as information goods; and I am not such a kill-joy as to disparage intellectuals for entertaining an audience (I am more dubious about solidarity building). "Information," moreover, must be understood broadly to include the work of public intellectuals in clarifying issues, exposing the errors of other public intellectuals, drawing attention to neglected issues, and vivifying public debate. Nor is it clear how many other markets in symbolic goods would display fewer signs of "market failure" than the public-intellectual market if subjected to the same close and critical scrutiny that this book attempts, or that "market failure" is even a correct characterization of this market. But as William Blake said, *bless relaxes, damn braces*, so my emphasis is critical rather than celebratory. And there is much to criticize.

There is nothing new about casting a jaundiced eye on the modern public intellectual.⁷ Nor about suggesting, as I shall also do, that a major cause of justifiable disappointment with him or her is the rise of

6. See, for example, Alan Wolfe, "Not the Ordinary Kind, in Politics or at Harvard: A Flawed Social Scientist with a Political Agenda? Or a Politician Whose Insights Inform His Studies?" *New York Times* (national ed.), Sept. 9, 2000, p. A15.

7. See, for example, Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (1987; reprinted in 2000 with new introduction); Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* 117–123 (1999); Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (1998); note 2 above. For a gentler critique, old but still timely, see Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, ch. 15 (1966).

the modern university⁸ and the concomitant trend to an ever greater specialization of knowledge.⁹ Not that specialization is a bad thing; quite the contrary. But not all its consequences are good. As the more illuminating term “division of labor” brings out, specialization works its magic by breaking up tasks into smaller and smaller components, enabling quicker learning, sharper focus, faster completion, and so greater productivity. The modern university is the symbol and principal locus of the division of intellectual labor. Knowledge is divided into disciplines, and disciplines into fields, and fields into subfields, so that an academic might devote the whole of his or her scholarly career to the stained glass windows of the Cathedral of Chartres that depict the trades, or to the history of world’s fairs, or to the theological relation between late medieval nominalism and the Reformation, or to the philosophical implications of quantum theory.¹⁰

The depth of knowledge that specialization enables is purchased at the expense of breadth, while the working conditions of the modern university, in particular the principle of academic freedom backed by the tenure contract, make the intellectual’s career a safe, comfortable one, which can breed aloofness and complacency. These tendencies are furthest advanced in American universities. That may be why so many of the most distinguished academic public intellectuals active in the second half of the twentieth century were foreigners—such as Raymond Aron, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas,

8. And of the think tank, which I treat as a quasi-academic institution. See Chapter 1.

9. See Josef Joffe, “The Decline of the Public Intellectual and the Rise of the Pundit,” in *The Public Intellectual: Theory and Practice* (Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman eds., forthcoming), for an analysis and conclusion similar to mine. Edward Said also sees specialization as incompatible with the role of the public intellectual, but for unconvincing psychological reasons, such as that “as a fully specialized literary intellectual you become tame and accepting of whatever the so-called leaders in the field will allow.” Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* 57 (1994). But the trend itself, toward ever greater specialization of knowledge, seems undeniable. See, for example, Aloysius Siow, “Tenure and Other Unusual Personnel Practices in Academia,” 14 *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 152 (1998).

10. Joffe, note 9 above, at 7, points out that whereas in 1960 political science was broken down into five subdisciplines, by 2000 this number had risen to 104. Robert T. Blackburn and Janet H. Lawrence, *Faculty at Work: Motivation, Expectation, Satisfaction* 294 (1995), reports that between 1978 and 1988, twenty-nine thousand new scholarly journals were launched. On the growth in specialization in university research, see also id. at 118–119, 293–294.

Friedrich Hayek, Leo Strauss, and Amartya Sen¹¹—even though American universities achieved ascendancy over foreign universities during this period. But of course they did so in part by hiring refugees, such as Arendt and Strauss, and other foreigners, such as Sen.

Not all intellectuals are professors, even today, but most are. Today, then, the typical public intellectual is a safe specialist, which is not the type of person well suited to play the public intellectual's most distinctive, though not only, role, that of critical commentator addressing a nonspecialist audience on matters of broad public concern.¹² That is a niche role, perhaps little more than a walk-on part in the play of politics, culture, and society. And often the wrong things are criticized. But it is *something*, and something for which few modern academic intellectuals have the requisite perspective, temperament, character, and knowledge. Their efforts to play the role are likely to yield little more than mistaken prophecy and superficial policy advice. Nowadays, moreover, because of the information overload under which the public sweats and groans, to gain traction as a public intellectual an academic normally must have achieved, however adventitiously, a degree of public fame or notoriety. Without that it is difficult to arouse the interest of even a sliver of the nonacademic public in one's opinions on matters of concern to that public. Many public intellectuals are academics of modest distinction fortuitously thrust into the limelight, acquiring by virtue of that accident sufficient name recognition to become sought-after commentators on current events. Some of them are what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls *le Fast Talker*.¹³

11. Not always an easy classification to make. In the statistical analysis in Chapter 5, I classify Arendt as an American, since, although she came here as an adult, her academic career and most of her public-intellectual writing was done in America and was in English.

12. "Specialized scholars and specialized scientists, notwithstanding their professional achievements, are likely to become a nuisance if not a positive danger when they make grand pronouncements pertaining to public choices." Theodore W. Schultz, *The Economics of Being Poor* 222 (1993).

13. Perhaps including Bourdieu himself, though he is a distinguished scholar. His book *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (1998), which he describes as a public-intellectual work ("public position-taking," id. at vii), and in which he identifies the defining characteristics of the intellectual as "freedom with respect to those in power, the critique of received ideas, the demolition of simplistic either-ors, respect for the complexity of problems" ("The Negative Intellectual," in id. at 91–92), is in fact a superficial left-wing rant against the market economy.

But those are not the public intellectuals mainly discussed in this book. The Camille Paglias of public intellectualdom are not my targets, although I cannot resist a glance at her extraordinary career (see Chapter 3). The public intellectuals I shall mainly discuss are distinguished academics. Their difficulty in contributing to social betterment is the failure of a market rather than of individuals. And it is not a complete failure; I shall give examples of worthwhile contributions that modern academic public intellectuals have made. Many of those contributions, however, are better regarded as modest extensions of academic work (for example, translating it into language that the lay public can understand) than as distinctive contributions of public intellectuals; they bespeak the academic moonlighting as journalist. And many of the distinctive contributions are negative in the sense of combating the fallacies and follies of other public intellectuals. I believe that it is fair to say that the position, the contribution, most precisely the social *significance* of the public intellectual is deteriorating in the United States and that the principal reasons are the growth and character of the modern university.

The book is in two parts. Part One looks at the public-intellectual enterprise as a whole. It is taxonomic, theoretical, and empirical, the emphasis and approach being social scientific, though there is a good deal of anecdotal material as well. On the theoretical side it is a study in the economics of symbolic goods, a nascent, as yet rather ill-defined branch—illustrated by Tyler Cowen’s book *What Price Fame?* (2000)—of the economics of nonmarket behavior. By symbolic goods I mean goods the principal content or function of which is expressive or informational: art, propaganda, journalism, and scholarship are all examples.¹⁴

Part One distinguishes the public intellectual from other types of “knowledge worker,” distinguishes among different types of public intellectual (for example, the commentator on current events versus the critic of social trends) and among different formats of public-intellectual work (for example, the magazine article versus the full-page paid advertisement), distinguishes among the different goods that the public

14. The term is used in a different sense by Elias L. Khalil in his article “Symbolic Products: Prestige, Pride and Identity Goods,” 49 *Theory and Decision* 53 (2000), the sense denoted in his subtitle, and by the sociological literature that he cites.

intellectual peddles (entertainment goods, solidarity goods, and credence goods), and identifies the various genres of public-intellectual work and the conventions that define those genres. The genres include translating one's scholarly work into a form that the general educated public can understand (self-popularizing, we might call this), making specific policy proposals based on one's academic specialty, politically inflected literary criticism, political satire, jeremiads and other prophetic commentaries on public issues, general and specific social criticism, proposing social reform outside one's field, "real time" commentary, and, the least important, expert testimony in court. The first two genres, self-popularizing and "own field" policy proposals, are the least interesting from the standpoint of analyzing what is distinctive and problematic about public-intellectual work, and so I do not discuss them at any length.

Part One also provides an economic framework for the study of the public intellectual conceived of as following a career in a market shaped by demand and supply, and it tests the implications of the theoretical analysis with empirical data. The data are both qualitative and quantitative; the statistical study of public intellectuals in Chapter 5 is the first comprehensive such study.¹⁵

Among the points emphasized in Part One are the decline of the independent intellectual; the debilitating impact, to which I have already alluded, on the public intellectual of academization and specialization of knowledge; the tendency of a public intellectual's media celebrity to be inverse to his scholarly renown; the problem of quality control that afflicts this market as a result, among other things, of a failure to keep track of public intellectuals' frequently mistaken diagnoses and prognoses; and the fatuity of supposing that the "marketplace of ideas" can be relied upon to optimize the performance of the public intellectual, given the serious knowledge deficits of his audience in an age of specialized knowledge and the incentives and constraints that play upon him. At least when conceived of as someone who is attempting to make a serious contribution to the improvement of public understanding, the public intellectual lacks accountability, an essential attribute of sellers

15. There is a previous statistical study of public intellectuals, Charles Kadushin, *The American Intellectual Elite* (1974), but its scope is quite limited. I discuss it in Chapter 5.

in a well-functioning market. He lacks it in comparison not only to the academic doing academic work but also to the journalist, the politician, and the policy analyst.

Part One culminates in the statistical analysis in Chapter 5; Part Two begins with a chapter on literary criticism as a public-intellectual genre. The shift in topic and, more, in method may startle some readers. In contrast to the social scientific emphasis and approach of Part One, the dominant perspectives in Part Two are those of philosophy, literary criticism, law, and intellectual history. The book thus bridges the “two cultures” of the famous debate between public intellectuals C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis (see Chapter 6). Like Snow, I regard the social sciences and the humanities as complementary rather than antagonistic systems of inquiry. Both are necessary for a rounded view of the public intellectual. The relation of the two systems, indeed, is ultimately one of mutual dependence. Part Two substantiates claims in Part One, goes beyond definition to an explanation of the varied genres of public-intellectual expression, and deals in depth with some of the most interesting and ambitious, and not merely the typical, public intellectuals active in the United States today. In Part Two we’ll see a number of different ways in which public intellectuals can go wrong in addressing public issues. We’ll see public intellectuals who try to force fields new to them into the Procrustean bed of their own discipline, or who plunge into new fields without attempting to master them, or who bend facts and law to fit their political preconceptions. Looking back we’ll discover that Part One has provided the tools for explaining the fundamental deficiencies in public-intellectual work that Part Two explores.

The first genre discussed at length in Part Two, politically inflected literary criticism, is the domain of literary critics and scholars who seek a general public by hitching their political commentary to works with which the public has at least a nodding familiarity. I have in mind not those literary scholars, like Stanley Fish and Michael Warner, who leave literature behind when they talk about political or other public issues, nor those literary scholars who have turned from the literary canon to nonliterary texts that have a political character (Fish again), but rather those who use accepted works of literature as commentaries on public issues. I claim that usually when they do this they are impoverishing literature, even when they are dealing with so overtly “politi-

cal” a work as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (see Chapter 7). Orwell’s novel, like Dickens’s *Hard Times* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*, is a political satire.¹⁶ That is a genuine, and historically very important, public-intellectual genre as well as one distinct from politically or ideologically inflected literary criticism. Orwell was one of the twentieth century’s preeminent public intellectuals, as Dickens was of the nineteenth. Orwell was not an *academic* public intellectual. He was not even a university graduate. But these deficits (which he shared with Dickens) may well have been assets in his career as a public intellectual. Yet I shall argue that the public-intellectual aspect of Orwell’s greatest novel, political satire though it is, is not necessarily the most interesting. This is another clue to the limitations of literary criticism as a genre of public-intellectual work.

Next up is the ever-popular jeremiad—the identification and denunciation of decadent trends (a “dolorous tirade,” as one dictionary defines “jeremiad”). This is a more popular genre of public-intellectual work than those genres that are tied to literature, because it appeals to a wider audience. Few Americans have much interest in literature, but everyone is interested in where the United States is headed. Along with the rest of the world it *seems*¹⁷ to be headed toward ever greater freedom, both personal and economic. The first trend disturbs social conservatives, the second egalitarians. But because the collapse of Marxism and growing prosperity have demoralized and disoriented the economic Left, contemporary Jeremiahs are to be found largely on the Right. Examples are Robert Bork and Gertrude Himmelfarb. There are counterexamples, however, such as Robert Putnam and the late Christopher Lasch.

The jeremiad illustrates but does not exhaust the prophetic strain in public-intellectual discourse. The jeremiad is governed by particularly strict conventions (it must be nostalgic, pessimistic, predictive, and judgmental) and assumptions, for example that of the unity of culture; without that assumption, trends in popular culture or sexual behavior would not have political significance. Other public-intellectual prophets, such as the eco-catastrophists (see Chapter 4), while no less gloomy

16. Orwell wrote another great political satire—*Animal Farm*.

17. By putting it this way I am emphasizing the high degree of uncertainty involved in extrapolating to the future from current trends. See Chapter 4.

than the Jeremiahs, do not insist on the unity of culture and in fact display little interest in cultural trends.

Next I take up the efforts of philosophers to reclaim the fallen mantle of Socrates, for it is that martyred gadfly philosopher, rather than the religious prophet Jeremiah, who is the patron saint of public intellectuals. But his emphasis was on criticism, and to a lesser extent reform, of existing institutions rather than on predicting the worst, though this is not to deny that Jeremiah's purpose was also to criticize, gloomy prophesying being merely the vehicle. Among Socrates' present-day successors I have picked out two well-known liberal philosophers, Richard Rorty and Martha Nussbaum, to focus on, the former more critic than reformer, the latter more reformer than critic. Both are social democratic in politics; their politics, indeed, are indistinguishable. Yet Rorty believes that the central philosophical tradition of the West is a stumbling block to achieving social-democratic goals, while Nussbaum believes it indispensable to their achievement—and Allan Bloom, her political opposite, believes the tradition indispensable to *preventing* their achievement. I shall argue that the tradition, and philosophy more broadly, have little to offer social critics and social reformers—except distraction from the practical considerations that determine the success or failure of efforts at social reform.

Rorty and Nussbaum are “general” social critics in the sense of ranging over a broad menu of public topics; they differ from “own field” policy proposers in roaming well outside the conventional boundaries of their fields. By the term “special” critics I refer to those public intellectuals who confine themselves to issues of particular importance to their group—blacks writing about the problems of blacks, lesbians about the problems of lesbians, and so forth—and seek their audience primarily among the members of that group rather than among a larger public. The general and the special critics overlap. A number of “general” Jewish intellectuals have written about Jewish issues without, however, making those issues the focus of their work. And some of the work of the special-interest public intellectuals is directed as much to the general public as to the members of their group. One thinks especially of black writers such as James Baldwin and Richard Wright, and, today, such black scholars as Orlando Patterson, William Julius Wilson, Shelby Steele, Patricia Williams, and Randall Kennedy. These public-intellectual scholars write primarily about the problems of

blacks but are read by whites interested in the nation's racial problems, as well as by blacks; indeed there is some resentment in the black community about the degree to which the work of public intellectuals is oriented toward a white audience.¹⁸ Nevertheless, any worthwhile analysis of the special critics would have to delve deeply into the issues concerning their special groups. Such an inquiry would carry me too far afield, and so I largely forgo it in this book. I have discussed a little of this work elsewhere.¹⁹

By “real time” commentary I refer to the interventions of public intellectuals in ongoing public controversies—the activity epitomized by the participation of Zola and other intellectuals in the debate over the guilt of Captain Dreyfus. That was a legal case; and because law so pervades American life, transmuting disputes of every character into legal disputes on which academic commentary is sought, real-time commentary on legal cases is a major activity of our public intellectuals.²⁰ I examine this activity, but I also examine the public intellectual in the courtroom, a related but distinct role from that of commentator on a case. Expert witnesses are increasingly a fixture of litigation, and not only in cases involving scientific or other technical kinds of issue. The witness box has provided an occasional though infrequent platform for public intellectuals. I question whether it is an appropriate forum for the expression of public-intellectual views.

The Conclusion examines possible measures for improving the performance of the market for public intellectuals by encouraging fuller disclosure of academics' public-intellectual activities and earnings in order to make them accountable for their forays into the public arena. I do not wish to silence the public-intellectual voice but to help it sound a steadier note.

Table 5.1 in Chapter 5 lists 546 public intellectuals who are either American or, if foreign, have a “presence” in current American social thought; and the list is incomplete. The activities of these public intel-

18. See Michael Eric Dyson, *Race Rules* 60–61 (1997). Some black scholars, like Stephen Carter, are not particularly focused on race issues at all, though Carter has written some about them, and so are “general” rather than “special” social critics in my terminology.

19. See, in particular, Richard A. Posner, *Overcoming Law*, ch. 18 (1995), discussing Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (1991).

20. The latest such episode, the commentary on the litigation that followed in the wake of the deadlocked 2000 presidential litigation, is discussed in Chapter 3.

lectuals cover an enormous range of media, formats, genres, and subject matter, not to mention periods (though only public intellectuals active in the twentieth century are included), quality, and nations. A complete analysis within the compass of a single book by a single author is out of the question. I am not aware of another book that covers as much of the ground as this one does, however, although a cardinal omission is the situation of the public intellectual today in countries other than the United States. Intellectuals are more respected in most western European and Latin American nations than they are in the United States and are therefore more likely to be solicited by the print and electronic media for comment on public matters. In France, leading intellectuals are media stars. Exploring the reasons for the cross-cultural differences in the status of public intellectuals would be a fascinating project, but it is not the project of this book, which considers foreign intellectuals only insofar as they have a presence in the U.S. cultural scene. I will merely venture the suggestion that countries with a smaller, more homogeneous governing class (the class of leaders in government, business, education, the professions, and the news media) than the United States will tend to give a more prominent role to public intellectuals. The public intellectuals in those countries, having been drawn from the same class as the political leadership and the business and technological elite, having attended the same schools and traveled in the same social circles, and sharing the same manners and mores and general outlook with the other members of the class, will, even if their stance is oppositional, tend to have more credibility with, indeed to be a part of, the nation's establishment. But I cannot develop this point within the compass of this book. A further difficulty of attaining a global perspective on the public intellectual is that public-intellectual work, like most political work, tends to be local, focused on the political and ideological concerns of a particular society.²¹

The systematic study of the intellectual, including the public intellectual, has been the domain primarily of historians and sociologists. I do not emphasize history in this book,²² and I take more of an eco-

21. For a good example, see Jan-Werner Müller, *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity* (2000). Tony Judt's books on French intellectuals, cited in notes 2 and 7 above, are exemplary studies of foreign intellectuals.

22. On the modern history of the public intellectual, see *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie* (Jeremy Jennings and Anthony Kemp-Welch eds., 1997). See also Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1966).

nomic approach to the subject than is customary. But I draw on sociology as well, in particular on Max Weber, an academic public intellectual of uncanny foresight. In its Weberian aspect the book is continuous with my earlier book *The Problematics of Moral and Legal Theory* (1999), which subjects a number of moral and legal theorists to a scrutiny similar to what I subject the public intellectual to in this book. I should add that if Weber is a guide, several other sociologists, including Daniel Bell and David Riesman, and Robert Putnam, a political scientist writing as a sociologist, are among the distinguished public intellectuals whose work I criticize.

So that is the book in a nutshell, and the reader will have gleaned that it is indeed critical rather than celebratory of the academic (though not only the academic) public intellectual. But the reader may sense here the paradox of self-reference. Am I not an academic public intellectual?²³ No longer a tenured academic, but tenured, nevertheless, for a number of years (thirteen and a half, to be exact), I was a full-time academic and am still one part-time, writing out of my field, writing not only judicial opinions and scholarly books and articles but also book reviews for the *New York Times* and the *New Republic* and a book on the Clinton impeachment called “journalistic” by Ronald Dworkin²⁴—and writing this book, which I hope will interest not only academics. And worse: scoffing at declinists (see Chapter 8—“The Jeremiah School”) yet contending that the public intellectual is in decline. And are not people often particularly acute at spotting their own weaknesses (of which they are unaware) observed in other people?

All true. I am aware that the arrows I shoot may curve in flight and hit the archer. The reader shall judge.

23. Having been described in print as a public intellectual a number of times, I reluctantly added my name to the list of such persons in Chapter 5. By the end of the book, the reader will understand that I do not consider the term “public intellectual” an honorific, but merely the name of a (usually part-time) career.

24. See Ronald Dworkin, “Philosophy and Monica Lewinsky,” *New York Review of Books*, March 9, 2000, pp. 48, 50. The book was written, moreover, while the Clinton imbroglio was unfolding, and I am particularly critical of public-intellectual commentary on current events that is delivered *in medias res*—what I call “real-time commentary.” See Chapter 3.

~ I

*General Theoretical
and Empirical Analysis*

~ 1

Setting the Stage

THE PUBLIC intellectual has not been studied systematically before, and so an important first step is to define the scope of my study. This will involve not only defining “public intellectual” but also describing the different genres and formats (overlapping but distinct methods of classification, as we’ll see) of public-intellectual work.

What Is a Public Intellectual?

The public intellectual is not what philosophers call a “natural kind,” something that exists apart from the needs and purposes of the human observer. Defining the public intellectual involves demarcating an area of social life that seems likely to repay focused attention.

The process of demarcation logically begins with the “intellectual,” generally understood as someone seriously and competently interested in the things of the mind. “There is in every society a minority of persons who, more than the ordinary run of their fellow men, are inquiring, and desirous of being in frequent communion with symbols which are more general than the immediate concrete situations of everyday life and remote in their reference in both time and space.”¹ “The emphasis is on a ‘mindset’ more than anything else. [Intellec-

1. Edward Shils, *The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays* 3 (1972).

tuals] are usually seen as generalists, rather than specialists, having a special concern with ideas which ultimately springs from disinterested sources (although this involvement with ideas may be part of their profession), as being—to varying degrees—creative, playful, sensitive, inquisitive, and somewhat impractical.”²

Ideas and cultivation are different, so an intellectual need not have “highbrow” tastes and a person with such tastes—someone who loves abstract art or the music of Elliott Carter or Philip Glass, for example—need not be an intellectual, just as a brilliant artist need not be an intellectual. So “intellectual” is not a synonym for cultured, cultivated, creative, or even bookish, though the last is close; perhaps every true intellectual is bookish, though not all bookish people are intellectuals.

Nor is “intellectual” a synonym for “intelligent.” While intellectuals (excluding people who merely have intellectual pretensions) are above average in intelligence—often far above average—many equally intelligent people are not intellectuals. They may have no interest in ideas. Or the ideas they use either at work or at play may have so limited a scope and so applied a character as to lack the *generality* that is a defining characteristic of the intellectual’s ideas. A physicist who uses abstruse mathematics to illuminate the origins of the universe is an intellectual; a physicist who uses abstruse mathematics to design a computer logic board or write software code need not be.

But it is unsatisfying to base the definition of an intellectual on the distinction between the general and the applied use of or interest in ideas; the distinction is not interesting. The difference at which the distinction gestures, which *is* interesting, is between applying ideas to matters of broad public concern on the one hand, and on the other applying them to specific tasks of making things or accreting, refining, or transmitting bodies of specialized or expert knowledge, whether commercial, professional, or academic. It is the difference between the critic and the scholar, engineer, lawyer, or other expert when they are

2. Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928–1978* 48 (1981). Chapter 2 of Hollander’s book is an excellent review of the literature on the intellectual, as is Jeremy Jennings and Tony Kemp-Welch, “The Century of the Intellectual: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie,” in *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie* 1 (Jeremy Jennings and Anthony Kemp-Welch eds., 1997).

working within their area of expertise.³ It is Foucault's distinction between the "universal" and the "specific" intellectual.⁴ Or between the reflective journalist—the columnist or "pundit"—and the scholar. Or between the amateur and the professional. Or between the political theorist on the one hand, and on the other the "policy wonk," the ordinary muckraking journalist, the political operative or activist, and the reform advocate (Ralph Nader, for example), any of whom may, of course, be highly intelligent. Some members of these groups may be intellectuals, and this suggests a further refinement: the intellectual applies *general* ideas to matters of public concern, working from the top down, *theorizing* about the abuses, corruptions, or injustices that he has discovered. He is not *just* a reporter or technician. So some journalists, some activists, some policy analysts are intellectuals, and others aren't.

But to define the intellectual as one who applies general ideas to matters of general public concern is still too broad. The definition would cover an art historian, or a journalist trained in art history, who reviews art books or art exhibits for a magazine aimed at a general readership, even if there is no political or ideological dimension to any of his reviews. Although such reviews are "intellectual" in a common sense of the word, the reviewers would not be what is generally or centrally thought of as "intellectuals."⁵ When we think of the great intellectuals of the twentieth century, such as John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, Max Weber, Arthur Koestler, Edmund Wilson, and George

3. See, for example, Lloyd Kramer, "Habermas, Foucault, and the Legacy of Enlightenment Intellectuals," in *Intellectuals and Public Life: Between Radicalism and Reform* 29 (Leon Fink, Stephen T. Leonard, and Donald M. Reid eds., 1996).

4. Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 3: *Power*; pp. 111, 126–133 (James D. Faubion ed., 2000). The "universal" intellectual is termed the "general intellectual" in Stefan Collini, "Lament for a Lost Culture: How the Twentieth Century Came to Mourn the Seriousness of the Nineteenth," *Times Literary Supplement*, Jan. 19, 2001, pp. 3, 5, an essay on the distinguished nonacademic intellectuals of Victorian England.

5. The qualification "centrally" may be vital. It would be strange to deny the label "intellectual" to an Arthur Danto, for example—a philosopher who writes art criticism from a philosophical perspective—or to so learned a music and cultural critic as Charles Rosen, both publishing in magazines (primarily the *Nation* and the *New York Review of Books*, respectively), and books that are aimed at a general educated public. Neither of them, however, salts his criticism with politics, or a political ideology, to any significant extent. (The last qualification is a bow to any reader who believes that all discourse is political.)

Orwell, a common thread is that all either wrote directly about political or ideological questions or, in the case of those intellectuals who were literary critics, such as Wilson (or Lionel Trilling, or F. R. Leavis, or C. S. Lewis), wrote about literature from a broadly political or ideological (sometimes religious) perspective.⁶ Some, like Orwell, and to a limited extent Wilson and Lewis, both wrote directly about political or ideological questions and wrote politically or ideologically inflected literary criticism. When Allan Bloom in his bestseller *The Closing of the American Mind* wrote about rock and roll, he was writing not as a music critic but as a social critic discerning signs of moral and political decay in the attraction that such music holds for college students.⁷ The noun “intellectual” first gained widespread currency during the Dreyfus Affair, when Zola, Durkheim, Barrès, Maurras, and other writers and thinkers participated actively in public debate over a tumultuous political issue.⁸

The consequence of defining “intellectual” so narrowly is to exclude from the scope of my analysis two classes of particularly valuable intellectual work. One consists of original, and sometimes very important, intellectual writing that just happens to be accessible to the educated public because the style in which it is written is plain and free of jargon. Most literary criticism until about 1970, most philosophical writing until about 1920, and much social-scientific writing until the 1970s was of this character. All such work that has no political or ideological angle is excluded by my definition.

The second class of intellectual work that I exclude, which flourishes to this day, consists of efforts, primarily in the natural sciences, to translate technical material into a form in which educated lay people

6. Contemporary examples of cultural critics who write with a political edge and aim at a nonspecialist audience, and thus are public intellectuals by my definition, are Jacques Barzun, Joseph Epstein, Hilton Kramer, and Louis Menand. They can be distinguished from literary critics such as Stanley Fish and Edward Said who also write explicitly on political subjects, but they of course are public intellectuals too.

7. See Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* 68–81 (1987).

8. See Venita Datta, *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France* (1999). Zola's *J'Accuse* “pitted the man of letters against the prejudices of his society . . . After *J'Accuse* the role of the man of letters in France and eventually in Western society was irrevocably altered.” David L. Lewis, *Prisoners of Honor: The Dreyfus Affair 197* (1973).

can understand it. A scientist who writes for the general public merely to explain science is not a public intellectual in the sense in which I am using the term, even though he is writing for, and therefore endeavoring to write in a manner accessible to, the general public. But scientists such as Paul Ehrlich, Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Lewontin, and Edward Wilson, who write for a general audience about the ethical and political dimensions of science,⁹ are public intellectuals.

The second class—call it explaining science—is not problematic. The first, which might be called accessible scholarship, is, and it is in decline for reasons similar to those that lie behind the displacement—with which I'll be much concerned in this book—of independent by academic public intellectuals. The disappearance of a common culture that embraces both intellectual specialists and the educated public is an important development and one that bears on the political and ideological role of intellectuals. Consider Keynes's famous book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920). It is about economics and was composed at a time when economics was not yet the specialized technical discipline that it has become. Though the most famous and probably the most influential economist of the twentieth century, Keynes had no Ph.D. In contrast to his formidable treatise *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1935), *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* is written at a level that a general audience would have no difficulty comprehending and is as much a political, in places a journalistic, work as a work of economic scholarship. Was it first-rate readable economics (in the same way that Hume and Nietzsche are first-rate readable philosophers) or a public-intellectual work, or, as seems closest to the mark, both?

These questions are not entirely idle, because I shall be arguing that public intellectuals are for the most part neither very prescient nor very influential, and *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* was both. It foresaw the economic dislocation that the Versailles Treaty, in particular its

9. And not only science: in his essay "The Cold War and the Transformation of the Academy," in *The Cold War and the University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* 1 (André Schiffrin ed. 1997), Lewontin argues that without our military and related governmental spending during the Cold War, our economy would have grown more slowly, or not at all. He is not an economist and offers neither theoretical nor empirical support for this Chomskyan (see Chapter 3) endeavor to explain the Cold War as a product of U.S. economic anxieties rather than of Soviet aggressiveness.

requirement that the defeated nations pay the victors' war costs, would visit on Germany and on Europe generally; and while it did not persuade the victorious powers to revise the treaty, it may have helped to avert a repetition of the treaty's mistakes after World War II. But the very difficulty of classifying Keynes's book suggests that it is an exception to my generalization that is unlikely to recur. It belongs to a period of greater fluidity of intellectual activity than ours. A person of Keynes's ability today would not have accrued the governmental experience that Keynes had acquired by 1919 (when he wrote the book), would not have hobnobbed with the leading political figures of the day, would not possess Keynes's intellectual breadth, and would be a specialist, a technician, disinclined to address large issues of foreign and security affairs in terms intelligible to a lay audience. The minuteness of the English educated elite in Keynes's day also fostered ease of movement across its various departments. Despite living in a less propitious time and place for first-rate influential public-intellectual work, Henry Kissinger may be somewhat comparable to Keynes in the respects I have mentioned, and, with reference to domestic rather than foreign issues, and minus the governmental experience, Milton Friedman as well. Neither is a youngster, however; and we may not soon see their like again.

The reader may begin to sense a certain redundancy in the term "public intellectual." Not only is "public" of the essence of the most common understanding of what an "intellectual" is ("a thinker with a public voice"),¹⁰ but part of that understanding is that the intellectual writes for a broader public than the scholar, the consultant, or the professional does, or even than many policy analysts do. That is why not all "knowledge workers" are intellectuals. John Rawls applies philosophical ideas to a range of important political issues, but he does not write *for* the general public.¹¹ Although his major work, *A Theory of Justice*, has sold some two hundred thousand copies, this is over a period of three decades and I suspect that with few exceptions the buy-

10. Colin Gordon, "Introduction," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, note 4 above, vol. 3: *Power*, p. xi.

11. The only public-intellectual foray of his of which I'm aware is his having signed the "philosophers' brief" supporting a constitutional right to physician-assisted suicide. See Chapter 10.

ers have been other academics, university libraries, and university students rather than members of a broader public.¹² A literary critic such as Geoffrey Hartman, who writes extensively on fascism, Judaism, and the modern university,¹³ as well as on literature, is surely an intellectual writing as an intellectual and not just as a literary scholar. But Hartman's style, which like Rawls's is forbiddingly academic, is too difficult for a general even though educated audience. A number of academics who would very much *like* to communicate with the big public, doubtless including Hartman when he is writing outside his field, simply cannot or will not express themselves in simple prose.

George Steiner, whose remit is at least as broad as Hartman's, probably represents the outer limit of difficulty of apprehension consistent with attracting even a tiny slice of the nonacademic reading public. Allan Bloom, despite his bestsellerdom, was in the border region too. It is unlikely that most of the people who bought *The Closing of the American Mind* could actually get through it, since most of the book is severely academic, and even esoteric, though less so than Hartman's writings. The book was published by a commercial press rather than an academic one and I am told that Bloom got a lot of help from his editor in making the book more accessible to a general audience. His sales no doubt benefited as well from the beautifully written foreword by Saul Bellow. An earlier example is David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, a dense though well written sociological tome that has become one of the all-time public-intellectual classics.

In short, and to an approximation only, the intellectual writes for the general public, or at least for a broader than merely academic or specialist audience, on "public affairs"—on *political* matters in the broadest sense of that word, a sense that includes cultural matters when they are viewed under the aspect of ideology, ethics, or politics (which may all be the same thing). The intellectual is more "applied," contemporary,

12. He had sketched the essential ideas in *A Theory of Justice* years earlier, in an article somewhat more accessible to a lay readership than the book. John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," 67 *Philosophical Review* 164 (1958). But it was published in an academic journal, and while it was widely read outside philosophy, the readers were other academics, not members of the general educated public.

13. See, for example, Geoffrey Hartman, *A Critic's Journey: Literary Reflections, 1958–1998* (1999).

and “result-oriented” than the scholar, but broader than the technician. Approximate synonyms for “intellectual” in this sense are “social critic”¹⁴ and “political intellectual.”

The intellectual, so defined, *is* the public intellectual, as in: “[Hannah] Arendt was the consummate embodiment of what we now refer to as ‘the public intellectual,’ putting her philosophical training to good—if often controversial—use by commenting on the major political themes of her day: totalitarianism, Zionism, desegregation, the Eichmann trial, the Pentagon Papers, and so forth.”¹⁵ So why the *term* “public intellectual”? Its most sensible, nonredundant use would be to distinguish between a person of intellectual disposition who did not write or speak publicly as an intellectual (a “private intellectual,” we might call him) and an intellectual who did write or speak as an intellectual. All the exemplars of this species whom I named earlier (Dewey, Zola, Steiner, and so on) would today be called public intellectuals and might even receive graduate training in that calling.¹⁶ An interme-

14. As in Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (1988).

15. Richard Wolin, “The Illiberal Imagination,” *New Republic*, Nov. 27, 2000, pp. 27, 28.

16. Florida Atlantic University is offering “the first interdisciplinary program to educate public intellectuals.” The program, leading to a Ph.D. in “Comparative Studies,” is designed “for students interested in an advanced general education and life as a public intellectual . . . The program will explore historical, conceptual, and practical relationships among such areas as public policy, mass media, literature, aesthetics, ethics, gender, culture, and rhetoric.” But there is a paradox here. The stated motivation is a concern that while “the pursuit of higher education can provide the space to identify that thing or area in which one excels . . . this space is more and more restricted by the pressure of finding one’s own niche in the academic market. This space is also congested, because people who would once have gone into public life no longer do: the academy now seems a more attractive choice than a public life in which persecution by the less thoughtful media is all too common.” (All these quotations are from the program’s Web site, <http://www.publicintellectuals.fau.edu>, visited July 31, 2000.) If academic specialization is what’s undermining the public intellectual, and I agree that it is, it is hard to see salvation in another Ph.D. program, which will tie the student ever tighter to an academic career, forcing him to specialize in order to get a job. Somewhat more promising, although much too new to evaluate, is a Center for Public Intellectuals that has been created “to re-engage the public in vital intellectual issues and examine how, why and under what conditions public intellectuals can help to transform society.” The Center plans to play host to conferences and fund research and fellowships and to maintain a database of information relating to public-intellectual activities. The quotation and description are from the Center’s Web page. See <http://www.publicintellectuals.org>. The Center is affiliated with the University of Illinois at Chicago, which will be offering courses (but not a degree program) in the work of public intellectuals.

diate case, a kind of semipublic intellectual, is one who has a day job as a political or corporate consultant, a politician, or a judge or other government official,¹⁷ while writing on the side for a general audience. Thomas Jefferson, Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Patrick Moynihan, and Newt Gingrich are examples of the public intellectual as politician. Kissinger, William Bennett, William Kristol, Moynihan (during the Nixon administration), Lawrence Summers, and William Galston are examples of public intellectuals as government officials.¹⁸ My interest is in the expressive dimension of public-intellectual work, that is, in communication with the public on intellectual themes by means of books, magazine articles, op-ed pieces, open letters, public lectures, and appearances on radio or television. The intellectual whose use of ideas is wholly intramural, the discrete intellectual courtier of the great and the powerful, is not a public intellectual in my sense.

Let me remind the reader of what I said at the outset of this chapter, that “public intellectual” is not a natural kind. Mine is not *the* correct definition, but merely the best for my purposes, which are not everyone’s. I could not quarrel with someone who wanted to call John Rawls one of our leading public intellectuals. There is a perfectly good sense in which that is true. Only it is not my sense, because for my purposes, which centrally involve analyzing a *market* for intellectual work, the fact that Rawls does not write for a general audience is critical. I am not entirely comfortable with this exclusion, because Rawls receives some play in the popular media. The media that I sample in Chapter 5 record 374 “mentions” of him in the last five years, which is modest (the one-hundredth most frequently mentioned public intellectual in the list of 546 public intellectuals in that chapter had 1,200 mentions during this period), but exceeds the number of mentions of such unquestioned public-intellectual philosophers as Thomas Nagel, Martha Nussbaum,

17. See *Intellectuals in Politics* (Nissan Oren ed., 1984).

18. The originals of the public intellectual as official are Cicero and Seneca; with Socrates they form a trio of martyred public intellectuals of the ancient world. Seneca has been described as Nero’s “ideologist and publicity expert,” Miriam T. Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics* 128 (1976), and Cicero not only served as a consul in the Roman Republic but also played a key role in opposing Mark Antony after the assassination of Julius Caesar, exhibiting on that occasion disastrous political judgment, including fatal underestimation of history’s most formidable nineteen-year-old, Octavius (later Augustus) Caesar. See Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* 136–147 (1939). Cicero was executed at the behest of Antony. Seneca committed suicide on orders of Nero.

and Richard Rorty (see Table 5.1). Yet all that this really means is that the media take some interest in scholars who are not public intellectuals in my sense even though they write about the things that public intellectuals write about.

The public intellectual has been with us for a very long time, even if we ignore the ancient world. His exemplars include Machiavelli, Milton, Locke, Voltaire, and Montesquieu, and his ideologist is Kant, who linked philosophy to politics through the argument that the only morally defensible politics is one based on reason.¹⁹ How then to explain the recency of the term? (It was coined by Russell Jacoby in a book published in 1987.)²⁰ Morris Dickstein ascribes it to the fact that in the 1970s and 1980s a number of U.S. academics—influenced by such Continental, mainly French, social theorists as Barthes, Lyotard, Lacan, and Derrida—adopted an esoteric, jargon-laden, obscurantist style. They were (are, in the case of Derrida) intellectuals and wrote about public affairs, but they either could not or would not write in a manner intelligible to the public beyond the university. Not for them Orwell's aspiration to write prose as clear as a window pane. Yet it would be arbitrary to deny them, Barthes and Derrida in particular, the status of public intellectuals. They have a definite though modest presence in the U.S. popular media.²¹ The obscurity of their style is a source of their charisma.

The vast expansion of the electronic media, and in particular in the number of radio and television talk shows, with their insatiable demand for expert commentary on matters of public concern, has given some intellectuals a degree of publicity that has made them almost celebrities. (Kissinger *is* a celebrity, and likewise Patrick Moynihan, George Will, William Buckley, and a handful of other public intellectuals.) Perhaps then a public intellectual is a celebrity intellectual. But I prefer the definition that affixes “public” before “intellectual” merely to emphasize that an intellectual who cannot communicate with more than a coterie of specialist readers is not a public intellectual in the sense in which I wish to use the term, however interdisciplinary and politically significant his writings may be.

19. See *Kant: Political Writings* (Hans Reiss ed., 2d ed. 1991).

20. “My concern is with public intellectuals, writers and thinkers who address a general and educated audience.” Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* 5 (1987).

21. Again see Table 5.1 in Chapter 5.

The likeliest explanation for the currency that the term has achieved is that it is a belated acknowledgment of the significance, for the intellectual's role, of the changing balance between the *independent* and the *affiliated* intellectual. Before there were universities in which serious intellectual work was done, and even later when universities were becoming important centers for the production of knowledge, no one would have thought to draw a distinction between public (with reference to audience) and nonpublic intellectual endeavors. You didn't write about public affairs for an academic audience because there was no such audience, or it was minute and accounted for only a small fraction of intellectuals, many being excluded from university positions because of religion, ethnicity, sex, or marital status. Anyway, you were in all likelihood not a professor yourself or even a university graduate. You wrote for some more general, less expert audience than an audience of academic specialists, though it might be a small audience, an audience of officials or other big shots or a tiny educated elite. Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Samuel Johnson, Voltaire, Burke, Bentham, Jefferson, Paine, Mill, Carlyle, Thoreau, Emerson—the list of public intellectuals before the twentieth century who were *not* professors and did not write primarily for professors is endless.

With the flowering of the modern university, an institution that fosters scholarly research and places only limited calls on its faculty's time the better to encourage creative scholarship, it became apparent that intellectuals had a career path that would enable them to write exclusively for other knowledge workers if they wanted to. But it would also allow them time to write on the same subject for two very different audiences, one consisting of students and academics in the writer's field, the other of nonspecialists, the educated general public, itself expanding with the expansion of university education. To the extent that his academic reputation or intellectual gifts were portable, an academic might even be able to write for the educated general public on subjects outside his area of specialization.

Think of the leading twentieth-century literary critics who wrote about literature under the aspect of politics, ethics, or ideology. Some were academics writing primarily for an academic audience, like Cleanth Brooks, Northrop Frye, Kenneth Burke, F. R. Leavis, and R. P. Blackmur. Some were academics writing for both academic and nonacademic audiences, like C. S. Lewis, Lionel Trilling, Edward Said, Frank Kermode, Robert Alter, Harold Bloom, and George Steiner.

Some, like Edmund Wilson, Allen Tate, Randall Jarrell, and Walter Benjamin, were nonacademics writing for both an academic and a non-academic audience. And some were nonacademics writing primarily for a nonacademic audience though happy to be read by academics, for example T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and George Orwell. Likewise in the moral and political philosophy of the twentieth century, we encounter austere academic writers such as Renford Bambrough, Christine Korsgaard, Onora O'Neill, and Derek Parfit; crossover types such as Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, Heidegger, Sartre, Arendt, Sidney Hook, Isaiah Berlin, Richard Rorty, Thomas Nagel, Peter Singer, and Martha Nussbaum; and even a few nonacademics such as Freud, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Aldous Huxley (see Chapter 6), and Camus.²² And so in other fields as well—law, history, sociology, psychology, and political science—though in some one might have to go back to the nineteenth century to find good examples of important nonacademic contributors to public discussion, such as Bentham and Mill in economics and Maine in anthropology.

By the end of the twentieth century the balance between independent and academic public intellectuals had changed. The relative number of public intellectuals who were not academics had shrunk—dramatically so if numbers are weighted by prominence or contribution. Such nonacademic public intellectuals as Orwell, Koestler, Camus, Holmes, Brandeis, Frankfurter, Freud, Lytton Strachey, Walter Benjamin, Max Eastman, Edmund Wilson, H. G. Wells, T. S. Eliot, George Bernard Shaw, T. E. Lawrence, Thomas Mann, Herbert Croly, Lewis Mumford, Dwight Macdonald, James Baldwin (who, like Mumford and Orwell, was not college educated), and Walter Lippmann, and such quasi-academic public intellectuals as Max Weber, who had only intermittent academic employment, or Philip Rahv, who became a professor only after many years as a free-lance writer and editor, loom large in the intellectual history of the first half of the twentieth

22. Called, significantly, “a philosopher uncorrupted by the pomposity and self-consciousness of the academy.” John Cottingham, Review [of a recent translation of *The Myth of Sisyphus*], *Times Literary Supplement*, Aug. 25, 2000, p. 13. “One of the things that [Camus] had come to dislike most about Parisian intellectuals was their conviction that they had something to say about everything, and that everything could be reduced to the kind of thing they liked to say. He also remarked upon the characteristically inverse relationship between firsthand knowledge and the confident expression of intellectual opinion.” Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* 121 (1998).

eth century. Nonacademic public intellectuals loom even larger in the intellectual history of the nineteenth century: think only of Bentham, Tocqueville, Marx, Emerson, Thoreau, Dickens, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Matthew Arnold, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and, among those with loose academic moorings, Friedrich Nietzsche and Henry Adams. All the people I have named would almost certainly be full-time academics today, or at least (in the case of the judges and writers) have had a number of years as full-time academics under their belts. The expansion and improvement of universities, and the decline of the nonacademic public intellectual, have moved in lockstep.

A number of nonacademic public intellectuals did manage to achieve prominence in the second half of the twentieth century—among Americans one might instance Susan Sontag, Renata Adler, Tom Wolfe, William Bennett, Lewis Mumford, Ayn Rand, Mary McCarthy, Irving Howe, Jane Jacobs, Gore Vidal, Michael Harrington, Rachel Carson, James Baldwin, Charles Murray, Hilton Kramer, Norman Podhoretz, William Buckley, Irving Kristol,²³ and—probably the most influential of all—Betty Friedan.²⁴ But the number was fewer than in earlier periods, especially when one considers how much larger the educated population has grown and how many more outlets public intellectuals have for their writing and speaking. The independent intellectual has been giving way to the academic intellectual. The trend has been apparent since the 1950s, if not earlier.²⁵

The academization of intellectual life has been noted and deplored,²⁶

23. Kristol had an academic appointment for some years, but has never done academic writing. My examples, by the way, are confined to the United States. It is no accident that the most illustrious nonacademic public intellectuals of the second half of the twentieth century have been foreign, such as Havel and Solzhenitzyn; they have lived under more challenging conditions than American intellectuals.

24. *The Feminine Mystique*, first published in 1963, was, in point of influence, along with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, the *Communist Manifesto* of the modern women's movement. I am talking about influence, not quality. See Alan Wolfe, "The Mystique of Betty Friedan: She Helped to Change Not Only the Thinking but the Lives of Many American Women, but Recent Books Throw into Question the Intellectual and Personal Sources of Her Work," *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept. 1999, p. 98. My nominees for the most influential other post-World War II American nonacademic public intellectuals are Ayn Rand, William Buckley, and Rachel Carson.

25. See Lewis A. Coser, *Men of Ideas: A Sociologist's View*, ch. 20 (1965); also Steven Biel, *Independent Intellectuals in the United States, 1910–1945*, ch. 1 (1992).

26. See, for example, Thomas Bender, *New York Intellectual: A History of Intellectual Life in New*

how justly the subsequent chapters will examine. Evaluative issues to one side, the trend is unmistakable, and here is another bit of evidence: many of the most prominent academic public intellectuals of the second half of the twentieth century, such as Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Irving Howe, and David Riesman, lacked what today would be (other than in law) the essential qualification for academic tenure: none had written a Ph.D. dissertation. McGeorge Bundy, a prominent public intellectual though an academic only in the early part of his career, became dean of arts and sciences at Harvard without a Ph.D.—unthinkable today. Today such people, if they don't become lawyers, have to submit to being finely ground in the Ph.D. mill, emerging as better scholars but possibly as less interesting intellectuals. The academy, ever more academized in the sense of professionalized, bureaucratized, and rationalized in the Weberian sense, is becoming ever less congenial to the free spirit, the gadfly (“tenured gadfly” sounds like an oxymoron), the scoffer—“someone,” as Edward Said puts it, “whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations.”²⁷ If this is what a public intellectual is, the modern university bids fair to squeeze him out of intellectual life.

Said's definition, however, is too narrow. It implies that the only opposition worth putting up is to governments and corporations. That is a good description of Said's own politics, which are far to the left. But dogma is not the exclusive preserve of governments and corporations.

York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time 343 (1987); Jacoby, note 20 above; Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (1999); Josef Joffe, “The Decline of the Public Intellectual and the Rise of the Pundit,” in *The Public Intellectual: Theory and Practice* (Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman eds., forthcoming). Joseph Epstein argues that the modern “public intellectual” is the debasement of the true intellectual. Epstein, “Intellectuals—Public and Otherwise,” *Commentary*, May 2000, p. 46. In contrast, Bruce Robbins, “Introduction: The Grounding of Intellectuals,” in *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics* ix (Bruce Robbins ed., 1990), while noting the criticisms that are made of the academic public intellectual, argues that the academic affiliations of leftist intellectuals, and the resulting loss of marginality for such intellectuals, do not fatally undermine their ability to influence the society. He repeats this argument more emphatically in his book *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (1993), which I discuss briefly in Chapter 4. For an intermediate view, see Ron Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics: Intellectuals in Modern Society*, ch. 7 (1994).

27. Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* 11 (1994).

There is religious dogma, and social dogma (such as neoconservatism), and political dogma not limited to the governing parties. Today there are academic dogmas as well, such as those of the cultural Left, the Austrian school of economics, and the followers of Leo Strauss. Intellectuals, moreover, often flock together; in fact very few of them are truly untamable individualists in the tradition of Socrates, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Camus, and Orwell. Nor is there any necessary virtue in an oppositional stance; it depends on what one is opposing. Intellectuals' oppositional reflex has frequently led them into an unthinking, and during the communist era a disastrous, rejection of the attitudes and values of their fellow citizens.²⁸

But Said is on to something. "Disputing the prevailing norms"²⁹ may not be part of the definition of the intellectual, or even of the public intellectual, but it is the public intellectual's characteristic stance and is perhaps what gives him a distinctive, though by no means unalloyed, social value. "The role of an intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do." It is "to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions."³⁰ That is the stance symbolized by Socrates, who is to the public-intellectual community as Jesus is to Christianity: founder, outcast, martyr.³¹

Public intellectuals on the view being expounded here "specialize in defamiliarizing the obvious." "Disturbers of the canonical peace,"³² they contribute to the diversity of thought and life-style that Mill argued in *On Liberty* was the precondition both for individual self-fulfillment and for social progress. The intellectual is an "ironist," "someone who thinks there is no single preferred vocabulary . . . While provisionally continuing to employ her present vocabulary, she nour-

28. See, for an excellent discussion, Michael Novak, *Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in American Life*, pt. 2 (2d ed. 1996).

29. Said, note 27 above, at 36.

30. Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth," in Foucault, *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984* 255, 265 (Lawrence D. Kritzman ed., 1988).

31. Socrates' famous ugliness, on which see Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity* 32-39 (1995), corresponds to the physical abasement of Christ on the Cross.

32. Both quotations are from Anthony G. Amsterdam and Jerome Bruner, *Minding the Law* 237 (2000).

ishes radical and abiding doubts concerning it, and has no truck with arguments phrased in it which seek either to underwrite or to dissolve these doubts.”³³

Oppositionality must be distinguished from opposition. Opposing one dogma with another is a form of opposition. There has never been a shortage of dogmatic public intellectuals (sometimes called “organic” intellectuals). The oppositional stance is the stance of such public intellectuals as Orwell and Camus, who write from the margins of their society and are clearer about what they are against than what they are for. Their negativity and self-conscious marginality distinguish them from such social critics as Sartre, who ground their criticisms in a dogma.³⁴ We shall encounter a tempered version of this dichotomy in Chapter 9 when comparing Richard Rorty and Martha Nussbaum.

A related point is that the public intellectual tends to be a counter-puncher. Whether oppositional or dogmatic, he is much more likely to be reacting to some contemporary event or situation (such as the impeachment of Clinton, the “crisis” of the university, cloning, the decline of sexual morality, or the Internet’s threat to privacy), or to some commentary on that event or situation, than to be pursuing a well-defined research path, which is the academic style. The public intellectual obtains an audience by engaging with some matter that has the public’s attention. Because the audience’s attention span is short, the public intellectual has to be quick on the trigger. And because he is purveying opinion rather than news, he is drawn to taking extreme positions (or perhaps people drawn to taking extreme positions are more likely to find the public intellectual’s career an attractive one); it is difficult otherwise to get the public’s attention.

The public intellectual is a social critic rather than merely a social observer. Scientific observing, or ordinary observing inflected by conventional attitudes, can be left to employed journalists, as distinct from free-lance journalists, and to the university-employed, government-

33. James Conant, “Freedom, Cruelty, and Truth: Rorty versus Orwell,” in *Rorty and His Critics* 268, 277 (Robert B. Brandom ed., 2000), summarizing Rorty’s view.

34. The *pose* of marginality is common among academic public intellectuals, a good example being Said, a tenured professor at Columbia University who claims outsider status on the basis of his Palestinian Arab origins. The pose is unconvincing. Nothing in Said’s speech or physical appearance marks him as foreign, and anyway Americans do not treat their foreign-born citizens as outsiders, as witness the career of Henry Kissinger, or of Gerhard Casper, another German immigrant, who recently retired as president of Stanford University.

employed, or think-tank-employed social scientists. These are the institutionally connected—the affiliated—intellectuals, and there are plenty of them. Yet there should be room in social space for free-range intellectuals as well—the naysayers, the heterodox, the intellectual *Luftmenschen*. Intellectuals “are usually regarded as outsiders, yet the conscience of society, the upholders of its true values and ideals.”³⁵ (So Jeremiah and the other Old Testament prophets are distant ancestors of the public intellectual, too.) They are at once engaged and detached. A difficult role at best, it is one especially difficult for intellectuals safely ensconced in tenured university professorships to play—insiders pretending to be outsiders.

Admittedly, any effort to appraise contemporaries risks selection bias. The untenured dare not spend time writing for popular journals, and academics in midcareer cannot be expected to have accrued reputations equal to those of the most distinguished dead. One of the chief sources of cultural pessimism is the tendency to compare the best of the past with the average of the present, because the passage of time operates to filter out the worst of the past. Nostalgia and romanticizing are dangers here too. And the problems of proof are formidable, maybe insurmountable. I don't want to fall into any of these pits. So I must be extremely careful in speaking of the decline of the public intellectual. All that is certain is that with the enormous expansion in universities in the twentieth century, and in the leisure, credentials, and financial security that a university appointment offers to anyone who wants to embark on a career as a public intellectual, few would-be public intellectuals will fail to seek such appointments. The principal alternative—journalism—is not an attractive, or even a feasible, alternative for most aspiring public intellectuals in an age of specialization; journalists are not in a good position to acquire specialized knowledge. Though even today a number of public intellectuals are journalists, such as William Buckley, Andrew Sullivan, George Will, Christopher Hitchens, Gregg Easterbrook, and Leon Wieseltier, they probably are outnumbered in the ranks of nonacademic public intellectuals just by former academics, such as Robert Bork, Patrick Moynihan, William Kristol, William Bennett, and Henry Kissinger. Even among public intellectuals who are writers, like Saul Bellow, E. L. Doctorow, Joseph Epstein, Norman

35. Hollander, note 2 above, at 48.

Mailer, Cynthia Ozick, and Gore Vidal, many have part-time or even full-time academic appointments. It seems that for the foreseeable future the dominant type of public intellectual will be the full-time, or at least nominally full-time, professor.

But we must consider the bearing on this prospect of the rise of “think tanks”—nonteaching research institutions that generally are not affiliated with universities (the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, which is part of Stanford University, is a notable exception) and that are oriented toward applied rather than basic research and toward public policy rather than scientific, technical, or cultural issues except those that bear directly on policy.³⁶ Among the best-known think tanks are the Brookings Institution, the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, the Hudson Institute, the Progressive Policy Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the Urban Institute, and the Manhattan Institute.³⁷ The majority of these are conservative, reflecting both the hegemony of liberals in many university departments and the greater availability of corporate donations to support conservative causes. All engage in some public-intellectual work, and in some of the think tanks that work dominates. Most think-tank output, however, is oriented not toward the educated public at large but toward legislators, officials, lobbyists, and other members of the political establishment. A think tank may have former government officials (sometimes officials in waiting) on its staff along with Ph.D.’s who might easily be teaching in universities instead but who either do not like to teach or are pursuing topics or using research methods that are unfashionable in their field in the universities—or who want to function primarily rather than secondarily as public intellectuals. The borderline between the think tank and the public policy school, such as the Kennedy School at Harvard or the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, is indistinct.

There is no doubt that the modern American think tank is an important site of public-intellectual work. But as a quasi-academic institu-

36. See the useful discussion in David M. Ricci, *The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks* (1993), esp. pp. 219–225; also *Think Tanks across Nations: A Comparative Approach* (Diane Stone, Andrew Denham, and Mark Garnett eds., 1998).

37. For a helpful list, see Donald E. Abelson, “Think Tanks in the United States,” in *Think Tanks across Nations*, note 36 above, at 107, 116 (tab. 5.1).

tion—just as an institution, perhaps—it is not an entirely comfortable home for the *independent* public intellectual. This is not just definitional (an independent is a free lance; an employee is not). Because most think tanks have a distinct political coloration, becoming an employee of one tends to be an act of affiliation with a political position, compromising independence. And like universities, think tanks hire specialists and encourage specialization. The most prominent ones—the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute—are, in terms of the makeup and quality of their professional staffs, virtually universities, albeit without students, just as university schools of public policy verge on being think tanks with students. I am inclined, therefore, to regard the think-tank public intellectual as basically interchangeable with the academic public intellectual.

To summarize, a public intellectual expresses himself in a way that is accessible to the public, and the focus of his expression is on matters of general public concern of (or inflected by) a political or ideological cast. Public intellectuals may or may not be affiliated with universities. They may be full-time or part-time academics; they may be journalists or publishers; they may be writers or artists; they may be politicians or officials; they may work for think tanks; they may hold down “ordinary” jobs. Most often they either comment on current controversies or offer general reflections on the direction or health of society. In their reflective mode they may be utopian in the broad sense of seeking to steer the society in a new direction or denunciatory because their dissatisfaction with the existing state of the society overwhelms any effort to propose reforms. When public intellectuals comment on current affairs, their comments tend to be opinionated, judgmental, sometimes condescending, and often waspish. They are controversialists, with a tendency to take extreme positions. Academic public intellectuals often write in a tone of conscious, sometimes exasperated, intellectual superiority. Public intellectuals are often careless with facts and rash in predictions.

Genres, Formats, and Styles

I mentioned in the Introduction that there are distinct genres of public-intellectual work. I elaborate on some of them here (see Table 1.1) and also distinguish genres from formats and styles.

Table 1.1 Public-intellectual genres

Self-popularizing
Own-field policy proposing
Real-time commentary
Prophetic commentary
Jeremiad
General social criticism
Specific social criticism
Social reform
Politically inflected literary criticism
Political satire
Expert testimony

The term “genre” implies a form of *expressive* activity; one would not call consulting a genre of public-intellectual work. The concern of this book is with expressive public-intellectual work, but I am least interested in the genre that consists of translating one’s scholarly work into a form that the general educated public can understand. Call this genre *self-popularizing*. An example is Amartya Sen’s book *Development as Freedom*. This is a book about the political economy of economic development written for the general educated public rather than for Sen’s fellow economists and philosophers. Essentially it is a summary of Sen’s academic work, some of which is highly technical, for a general audience.³⁸ An even better example involves the National Health and Social Life Survey, a large survey of the sexual practices of modern Americans. The survey was conducted by a team of academics, and their results were published by an academic press.³⁹ At the same time, adding as a coauthor a *New York Times* science journalist, Gina Kolata, the team published with a trade press an abridged and simplified version of their study under the title *Sex in America*.

I pass over this genre of public-expression work without much comment because the principal question that is germane to its evaluation, apart from whether the work is written at the right level to reach a gen-

38. A book on economics for a lay readership that, unlike Sen’s book, which is strongly normative, avoided all political and ideological issues in economics (were that possible) would not under my definition be a public-intellectual work at all.

39. Edward O. Laumann et al., *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (1994).

eral audience and whether the “translation” is accurate,⁴⁰ is whether the ideas in the work are good, and that is a question about *academic* ideas, not about anything special to public-intellectual work. The self-popularizer is, qua self-popularizer, more of a journalist or publicist than a public intellectual in an interesting sense; the explicit recognition of this fact by the sex-survey team in bringing a journalist on board to coauthor the popular version of the study is welcome. Sen’s book is quite unlike two other well-known books written by prominent economists for a general audience with which it might easily be confused at the level of genre, Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* and Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom*. These books range far beyond the authors’ academic specialties. Only in small part are they communicating the results of academic research to a general audience.

The next and also relatively unproblematic genre of public-intellectual work is making specific policy proposals based on one’s academic specialty; I call this *own-field policy proposing*. The scholar’s academic research has led him to think that public policy should be changed in a particular way, and he writes up his proposal in a form accessible to a general audience. Much of Milton Friedman’s public-intellectual work is of this character, including his advocacy of a volunteer army, a negative income tax, school vouchers, and the repeal of most economic regulation. (Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom* is a combination of this genre with *general social criticism*, discussed below.) James Q. Wilson’s influential “broken windows” theory of policing is of this character as well.⁴¹ In both cases a scholar packages reform proposals based on his academic training in a verbal form that the general public can understand. As with self-popularizing, the principal issue that own-field policy proposing raises, which is whether the academic idea behind the proposal is sound, is not the key issue for the analyst of the public-intellectual market.

I have said that these two genres of public-expression work are *relatively* unproblematic. When writing for a general audience, and therefore bypassing many or even all of the gatekeepers of academic publica-

40. Not likely to be a problem when the academic research is published at the same time, as in the case just discussed.

41. James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety,” *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1982, p. 29.

tion, the scholar may be tempted to exaggerate his case; we shall see an example in Chapter 3 involving the economist Paul Krugman. Cutting the other way is the fact that since the self-popularizing and own-field policy-proposing genres are parasitic on the public intellectual's academic training, the quality of work in these genres will tend to improve when the underlying academic field is improving. This is a factor in evaluating public-intellectual work in economics. The scope and rigor of economics have been growing steadily, and as a result the public-intellectual work of academic economists may today be superior on average to what it was in earlier periods, though there were, of course, outstanding public-intellectual economists then, ranging from Keynes back to Adam Smith. But an improving trend in the underlying field of learning is mainly relevant only to the first two genres. Improvements in an academic specialty are unlikely to increase the quality of an academic's commentary outside his specialty, or even within it when he is engaged in a type of activity, such as commenting on ongoing events or testifying in court, that is remote from academic activity. Physics is a constantly improving field, but it would be foolish to think that a modern physicist would do a better job than Einstein in opining on economic and foreign-policy questions merely because modern physicists know more physics than Einstein did.

It is in the other genres of public-intellectual expressive activity that the problem of quality is acute and a process of decline discernible. For the danger of exaggeration, distortion, and inaccuracy is greater the farther outside his specialty the scholar wanders in his public-intellectual work, the more current or otherwise unsuitable to the methodology of scholarship the events on which he is commenting, and the more political his take on those events. *Real-time commentary*, in which the public intellectual opines on hot ongoing controversies, such as the Clinton impeachment or the Persian Gulf campaign or the 2000 presidential election deadlock, is, as we'll see, a genre of public-intellectual work that has a particularly high failure rate.

A partial exception must be noted, however, for efforts to explain to the public complex or esoteric issues that are within the scope of an academic public intellectual's scholarly expertise but that even specialized journalists may have particular difficulty understanding because the issues have arisen suddenly, and are unfolding rapidly, as part of a current controversy. We could observe a little of this useful activity in regard to

the issues of election law, constitutional law, judicial procedure, and statistics that roiled the nation in the aftermath of the 2000 presidential election—along with, however, a good deal of tendentious, opinionated, even scurrilous public-intellectual commentary that I discuss in Chapter 3, plenty of erroneous predictions, and much obtuse commentary. A consensus quickly emerged among the constitutional-law professors who were commenting to the media on the unfolding crisis that the U.S. Supreme Court would not intervene. The consensus was based in part on a failure to foresee how badly the Florida supreme court would screw up the recount process, but less excusably on oblivion to the possibility that the clause in Article II of the Constitution that directs each state to pick its presidential electors “in such Manner as the Legislature thereof shall direct”⁴² might provide a basis for Supreme Court intervention. Nor were the experts sensitive to the possibility that the Court might intervene not for base political reasons but rather out of concern with the harm to the nation were the deadlock to be left unresolved until Congress met to count the electoral votes in January 2001. Even after the Supreme Court, in its first opinion, rendered December 4, flagged the Article II issue,⁴³ most academic commentators did not expect the Court to play the decisive role in resolving the deadlock. Typical was public-intellectual law professor Akhil Reed Amar’s response to the opinion. Asked on December 5 what the Supreme Court’s role would be, Amar replied, “Basically, minimal. The Supreme Court made a brief cameo appearance on stage and has now I think rather gracefully bowed out.”⁴⁴ A week later the Supreme Court ended the deadlock by its decision terminating the Florida recount.

Another especially questionable genre of public-intellectual expressive activity is *prophetic commentary*, such as that of the economic and ecological pessimists, though there are optimists in this group, like Marshall McLuhan, George Gilder, and Alvin Toffler. The prophetic commentary of cultural pessimists I discuss separately under the rubric of the *jeremiad*, a public-intellectual genre that has particularly rigid conventions. Closely related is *general social criticism*, for example that of Richard Rorty, who differs from the Jeremiahs only in employing the doomsday trope less insistently. Rorty, and to a greater extent Mar-

42. U.S. Const. art. II, § 1, cl. 2.

43. *Bush v. Palm Beach County Canvassing Board*, 531 U.S. 70 (2000) (per curiam).

44. National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, Dec. 5, 2000.

tha Nussbaum, whom I discuss together with him in Chapter 9, also make concrete proposals for *social reform*. Such proposing differs from *own-field policy proposing* in ranging outside the boundaries of the public intellectual's primary discipline. Nussbaum relates her proposals dealing with education, homosexual rights, and oppression of women in the Third World to her academic fields of classics and philosophy, but the relation is sufficiently attenuated to place the proposals outside the disciplines themselves.

About the remaining genres mentioned in the Introduction—*specific social criticism*, *politically inflected literary criticism*, *political satire*, and *expert testimony*—only the last requires further elaboration here. It illustrates the overlap between genres and formats. Commenting on an ongoing controversy belongs to the genre of real-time commentary, but the format might be an op-ed piece, a book review, an appearance on a radio or television talk show, participation in a teach-in, or a full-page paid advertisement. In principle, the same commentary on a public issue could take the form of an article or of an affidavit in a legal case. Expert testimony might therefore be classified as a format rather than a genre of public-intellectual work. So distinctive are the rules and usages of the legal process, however, that, as we'll see in Chapter 10, testimony by public intellectuals constitutes its own, tiny but fascinating and dubious, genre of public-intellectual expression.

There are, finally, the different styles of public-intellectual argument. Examples are the polemical; the “splitting the difference” or “above the fray” style that I discuss in Chapter 3; the obscurantist style; the journalistic; the confessional; the scholarly—and the pseudo-scholarly.