INTRODUCTION:

C.P. Snow’s Rede Lecture (1959), delivered in the Senate House in Cambridge, became an iconic statement about the shape and structure of knowledge. Its fame was enhanced shortly later when F.R. Leavis denounced it (and Snow) in his Richmond Lecture (1962) at Downing College, Cambridge. The dispute between Snow and Leavis became an argument about modern social history, the industrial revolution, economic development and the role of the university in those social, political and economic formations. The neglect of studies of the natural sciences in historical treatments of modern Britain has, perhaps, perpetuated the view that modern intellectual life has been separated into “two cultures.” It is a view which rests on the assumption that statements of fact are sharply distinct from statements of value, the former belonging to the domain of science, the latter belonging to the social domain.
Whether or not there are “two cultures,” or whether or not the arguments of Snow (or Leavis, for that matter) have merits, I do not wish to consider. I wish to discover how the concept of “two cultures” came into existence. This is not an exercise in intellectual or cultural history; it is an examination of social and institutional history. As it will show, concepts are not intentional; neither are they accidental or random. Concepts emerge from the “contingencies we inhabit.” Concepts seek to describe, understand, control, and use the opportunities those contingencies provide. In general I wish to argue that concepts are created in a social, in an associational world, as people carve out positions for themselves in the struggle for definition and standing in a material world. Concepts are units of consciousness and awareness which people devise as they locate themselves in systems of belonging. The concept of “two cultures” represents specialization and differentiation, but it does not hinge on cognition alone; it also hinges on authority. One site for the origin of the concept of “two cultures” was the moment in which the Royal Society refused to incorporate letters and literature into itself and in which, therefore, the British Academy was born.

Two issues have to be disposed of as preliminary matters. First, the shape of knowledge before it became specialized and differentiated into the disciplinary forms it took in the twentieth century was unified yet it was not uniform. It was a series of mental empires—multicultural and internally diverse—and, like the disciplines which replaced them, these intellectual and emotional empires were artificial. They were fabricated. Before the invention of “two cultures,” that is to say disciplinary specialization, the variety of mental experience and expression was obscured by the power of natural

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5 The phrase, though not the thought, is Adam Phillips’: Darwin’s Worms: On Life Stories and Death Stories (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 94-95.
theology\(^6\) and the absence of institutional opportunities to express variety and intellectual difference. It was a unified culture in the sense that it was a literary community,\(^7\) a system of signs which had a closer relationship to each other than to the world those signs were supposed to represent. But it was not uniform. Mathematics and classics competed with each other. Wissenschaft was highly factual, technical and rational. At the same time, its darker aspects, its more mysterious characteristics, were deep as mink because they were concerned, simultaneously, with mental, personal, and self-formation.

Second, the birth of the British Academy was not the only site for the invention of “two cultures.” Some might wish to regard it as a general and universal human tendency “to construct useful simplifications when we force this complexity into a simple system of successive dichotomous branching.” And it is a cognitive invention going at least as far back as Saint Thomas and Aristotelian logic which used dichotomous branching as a classification device to display conceptual structures. But it is an invention. To regard it as anything else is to conceal from ourselves the kinds of biases which may obscure more interesting and significant ways of the looking at the world.\(^8\) There were nineteenth-century sites in which the drive for specialization and differentiation were located. The creation of departments and faculties, with their libraries and laboratories, was part of university reform which produced such impulses. It was part of the competition for funds and resources to do things universities had never done before. The drive for research produced similar effects. At a meeting at Freemason’s Tavern on 16 November 1872, George Rolleston, FRS, the Linacre professor of Anatomy and Physiology at the


University of Oxford made out the case for research. As he put it, “a teacher is not really fit to be a teacher of the first class who has not given actual demonstration that he can enlarge the boundaries of the subject which he proposes to communicate to others.”

Burdon Sanderson observed that it was inadequate for a “Gelehrtes” to have as much, or even more, knowledge as others do, but they should also have “made a perfect study of some particular subject.” For this it was necessary for a “complete dedication of his whole life, or of a certain part of his life, to the object in view.” Then Henry Sidgwick weighted in and moved the discussion in a different direction. He called for the “mature study” of branches of knowledge other than the physical sciences. “I think we may regard knowledge as a whole, no part of which ought to be allowed to languish.” But since he was Henry Sidgwick, Sidgwick called for the introduction of strict methods at the same time he pointed toward a more unified culture. Political economy was among those subjects open to scientific methods. (And observe the perfect sidgwickisms (“to a certain extent” and “somewhat muddy”) in what he had to say.) “[I]t is of extreme importance that there should always be a body of persons who are able, to a certain extent, to pour the stream of pure science into the somewhat muddy channel of current opinion.”9 Even Mr. Gladstone contributed to the formation of a conception of “two cultures” when he said “[l]et the scientific men stick to their science, and leave philosophy and religion to poets, philosophers, and theologians.”10

My thesis is a simple one. The formation of the British Academy was one site for the invention of the concept of “two cultures.” The formation of the British Academy was

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a kind of fetishization which established borders and limits; it stabilized. What it stabilized was not knowledge (for knowledge cannot be stabilized); rather, it stabilized the shapes people took knowledge to have. Such fetishization produces mental gains: respectability and the illusion of coherence. It also produces losses: imagination, risk, alienation. The formation of the British Academy desacralized and resacralized at the same moment. Differentiation of integration are the same process; only inverted. The “two cultures” was, at the same time a cognitive map and a power grid. The Royal Society and the British Academy were not palaces of privilege; they were agencies of anxiety. Their anxieties were cognitive and emotional; they organized power and authority.

A NARRATIVE:

In October 1899 members of the Royal Society went to Wiesbaden for a meeting to establish an International Association of Academies. There they discovered that the proposed Association would include representatives not only of the natural sciences but of learned letters as well. When these delegates returned to London they reported to the Royal Society and, acting for the President and the Council of the Society, its secretaries, Sir Michael Foster and A.W. Rucker, wrote to “certain distinguished men of letters.” In their letter Foster and Rucker pointed out that the new international Association would consist of two sections, one devoted to the “Natural Sciences” and one devoted to “Literature, Antiquities and Philosophy.” Further, they said pointedly, “[s]o far as we are aware, there is no Society in England dealing with the subjects embraced by the ‘Literary’ section.” It was not for the President and the Council of the Royal Society to “suggest a remedy.” They only wished “the facts of the case to be laid before some

10 Quoted in Young, Darwin’s Metaphor, pp. 160-161.
eminent representatives of the branches of knowledge which would [be] probably
included in the ‘Literary Section’.” The furthest they would go was to suggest that “it
might be possible for a number of Societies which are present isolated to form some sort
of Union among themselves which would constitute an Academy.”

Lord Dillon. The president of the Society of Antiquaries, wrote to report that on
14 December 1899 a meeting of some of those who had been addressed by Foster and
Rucker had been held in the rooms of the Society of Antiquaries at Burlington House.
They voted to thank the Royal Society for their communication about a new Academy
and to report that “the simple federation of existing Societies was not one that appeared
to meet the views of those present.” As Sidgwick put it to Balfour earlier, the Academy
should be constituted in such a manner as to give it the kind of prestige the Royal Society
had. “[A] hasty amalgamation of a number of special societies…does not seem likely to
me to lead to the required result.”

And, since he was Henry Sidgwick, Sidgwick came forward for his own proposal
to the Royal Society. He proposed that the difficulties in establishing an Academy
representing literary studies could be overcome with the aid of the Royal Society and the
Government. And, in particular, the Royal Society might provide assistance in one of two
ways. The simplest would be for the Royal Society to reenlarge its scope and establish a
section of itself corresponding to “Philosophico-Historical’ and ‘Philological’ division

11 Sir Michael Foster and A.W. Rucker to Lord Acton, A.J. Balfour, James Bryce, Viscount Dillon, Sir
John Evans, R.C. Jebb, W.E. Lecky, Sir Alfred Lyell, Dr. J.A.H. Murray, Professor H.E. Pelham, R.E.
Protheroe, Professor Henry Sidgwick, Leslie Stephen, Sir E. Maude Thompson, and, penciled in, Sir
Walter Besant, the Revd, Professor Skeat, and Professor G.W. Protheroe, 21 November 1899, Royal
Society Letterbook, 19 June 1899-January 1900, ff. 406-408.
12 Dillon to the President and Council of the Royal Society, 15 December 1899, Minutes of the Council of
the Royal Society, vol. 8, (1898-1903), p. 106. Those attending the Burlington House meeting were:
Balfour, Bryce, Acton, Evans, Jebb, Lecky, Lyall, Sidgwick, Thompson, Stephen, Sir William Conway,
and Dillon himself.
of the German Royal Academies and Societies.” The other would be for the Royal Society to “limit its own work to Mathematics and Natural Science” and address a memorial to the Government advocating the formation of a distinct Academy for these other branches of knowledge. The Council of the Royal Society referred Lord Dillon’s letter and Sidgwick’s proposal to a Committee on the British Academy which would make inquiries into the proposal, consult with persons having useful advice on the project, and propose a course of action, “stating the various reasons which my be urged for an against them,” to the Council.14

Meanwhile, Sidgwick proceeded in his usual cautious way. (“My impulse is to take no steps,” he wrote to Balfour.15) However, he corresponded with Bryce, Jebb,16 Acton, and Michael Foster, laying out his proposals, and organizing a series of meetings to marshall support and to organize colleagues in Cambridge, Oxford, and London, hedging and trimming as he went.18 Sidgwick had to be careful about proposing a Royal Charter because Arthur Balfour, one of the principals in his schemes, was in Government at the time.19 Then, in the midst of all of this, Sidgwick withdrew because of the cancer which killed him in August, 1900.20

16 Richard Jebb to Acton, 27 May 1900, Acton Papers, Cambridge University Library, Add. Ms. 8119 (5) J23
17 Sidgwick to Acton, 27 May 1900, Acton Papers, Cambridge University Library, Add. Ms. 8119 (5) S111.
20 Sidgwick to Acton, 27 May 1900, Acton Papers, Cambridge University Library, Add. Ms. 8119 (5) S111.
In the meantime, the Committee of the Royal Society on the British Academy met. On 8 February 1900 they resolved to entertain “expressions of opinion” from Sidgwick, Acton, Jebb and any “they may choose to consult” with regard to the establishment of a new Academy. The also discussed the “present scope” of the Royal Society and consulted their history. The committee asked Bryce and A.B. Kempe, the Treasurer of the Royal Society, to report to them on “the limits imposed by the Charter as to the subjects with which it can deal.” Andrew Russell Forsythe, the Sadleirian Professor of Pure Mathematics at Cambridge, presented a proposal to the Committee of the Royal Society on the British Academy on 20 February which would have enlarged the Royal Society by adding a section on History and Philology to two other sections (one on Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry and the other on Biology).

The Committee met on 1 March 1900 and 15 March 1900. They prepared a draft of a report to the Council of the Royal Society which they discussed on 9 May 1900. The Committee discussed its draft report further on 15 May 1900 and resolved to invite Acton, Jebb, and Sidgwick to ask “a limited number of representatives of the Philosophico-Historical Sciences to discuss the draft report with the Committee.” On 29 May 1900 the Committee of the Royal Society met with “recognized leaders of thought”—Lord Acton, Sir W. Anson, Professor Bywater, Sir Richard Jebb, Dr. J.A.H. Murray, Professor James Sully, and Professor James Ward—from the “Philosophico-Historical” subjects.

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21 Royal Society, British Academy Committee Minutes, CMB 7, 8 February 1900.
22 Royal Society, British Academy Committee Minutes, CMB 7, 20 February 1900.
23 Royal Society, British Academy Committee, Minutes, CMB 7, 9 May 1900.
24 Royal Society, British Academy Committee Minutes, CMB 7, 15 May 1900.
25 Royal Society, British Academy Committee Minutes, CMB 7, 29 May 1900; Royal Society, Report of the British Academy Committee, 28 June 1900, p. 10.
The Committee submitted its report to the Council of the Royal Society on 28 June 1900. The report considered four alternatives: the creation of a separate organization; the creation of “two ‘Academies’” within the Royal Society; the creation of several sections within the Royal Society; and the “election of some 25 to 50 Fellows representing the Philosophico-Historical subjects to serve as a nucleus and the creation of three or four committees” to threat such subjects as philology, archeology, statistics, political economy, and psychology. The report recognized the “great benefits which might be expected to result to the progress of he Philosophico-Historical Studies” yet it went into the difficulties of advancing the project, as it said delicately, “with some minuteness.” The report recognized that in Germany, France, Belgium, and Italy various branches of learning had been gathered in single Academies, but asserted that those advantages did not exist in Britain. As the report made clear, the fundamental issue was whether or not the gains of adding history, economics, and philosophy to the scope of the Royal Society would be compensated for by the “disadvantage which might arise from the loss of singleness and concentration of aim, and the ultimate complication of organization.”

The report of the Committee on the British Academy was laid before the Council of the Royal Society on 5 July 1900 but a discussion of it was put off until the winter. On 6 December 1900 the Council set the Report on its agenda for its meeting in January. At a meeting of the Council on 21 February 1901 Henry Edward Armstrong, the doyen of British chemistry, a powerful personality who, it was said, once having formed a view

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28 Royal Society, 6 December 1900, Council Minutes, 8, (1898-1903), p. 177.
pressed it with what might be regarded as some little dogmatism, moved that it was “undesirable that any steps be taken by the Royal Society toward establishing a British Academy.” But it was moved as an amendment that a special meeting of the Royal Society should be called so that the President and the Council would have the advantage of the views of the Fellows. The Fellows met in their special meeting on 9 May 1901 and after “a very interesting discussion the feeling of the meeting was against enlarging the Royal Society to include other subjects.” On 13 June 1901 the Council agreed to put the issue on its agenda for July and on that occasion the Armstrong moved that “it is undesirable that any steps be taken by the Royal Society towards establishing a British Academy.” Whereupon Rucker offered a somewhat more conciliatory amendment to the effect that the Council “while sympathizing with the desire to secure corporate representation for the exact literary studies” it was undesirable that that the Royal Society should itself initiate the establishment of a British Academy.

In the light of these developments “various distinguished scholars” took independent action. On 28 June 1901 they held an informal meeting in the Committee Room of the British Museum. Those gathered resolved to form a society to represent “Historical, Philosophical and Philological Studies” at the International Association of

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29 DNB., 1931-1940, P. 17.
30 Royal Society, 21 February 1901, Council Minutes, 8 (1898-1903), p. 189.
32 Royal Society, 13 June 1901, 4 July 1901, Council Minutes, 8 (1898-1903), pp. 216, 219-220.
34 Eight, exclusive of Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, the Director of the British Museum, were invited from London (Lords Dillon and Reay, Bryce, Evans, G.W. Protheroe, Ker, Kenyon, Sidney Lee), eight from Oxford (Anson, Pollock, Murray, Bywater, Wright, Rhys, Gardner, Firth), eight from Cambridge (Jebb, Dr. Peile (the Master of Christ’s), A.W. Ward (the Master of Peterhouse), Skeat, Ridgway, Maitland, Sorley, and Gollancz), and J.F. Furnival representing the President of the Philological Society, F. Legg, representing the President of the Society of Biblical Archeology, and Dr. A.C. Haddon, the President of the Anthropological Institute.
Academies. They also resolved to form themselves into a Provisional General Committee and established a Subcommittee, consisting of Reay, Bryce, Anson, Evans, Maunde Thompson, Jebb, Ward, Bywater, Prothero, and Gollancz, to give form to its resolution to form a society.35

The Subcommittee met on 5 July 1901 at the Royal Asiatic Society and determined the provisional title of the new Society (“The British Academy of Historico-Philosophical Science, including Philology and Archeology, Political and Economic Science”) and that election to it should be by merit. It met three additional times in July, briefly considering the idea of calling themselves “The Royal British Academy of Letters,” to discuss how the initial members of the new Academy might be chosen and to give preliminary thought to an application for the Royal Charter. The Subcommittee agreed to its report at a meeting on 24 October 1901. The General Provisional Committee unanimously adopted the report of the Subcommittee on 19 November 1901. After constructing a list of eighty names, it selected forty persons who were to be the first members of the new Academy and organized them into the following groups: history, philology, Oriental and Biblical Studies, law and politics, metaphysics, economics, and archeology. The General Provisional Committee met again on 11 December 1901 and added the names of Lord Rosebery, Arthur Balfour, and John Morley, as persons “who combined political importance with scholarly eminence” to the list of first members. Before the end of the year such as Sir G.O. Trevelyan, Sir Alfred Lyall, Sidney Lee and Frederic Harrison were also added to the list. Herbert Spencer, Professor Westlake, Sir John Evans, and Professor Edgeworth refused election. Prothero withdrew when the General Provisional Committee refused his suggestion for a substantial enlargement of

the list.36 The “proposed Fellows of the British Academy” met for the first time on 17 December 1901 and discussed the draft of the petition for a Royal Charter, resolving that it should be presented “without delay.”37

The Charter of Incorporation of the British Academy was granted on 8 August 1902. It determined the original Fellows and described the Academy’s purpose as “the promotion of the study of the moral and political sciences, including history, philosophy, law, politics and economics, archaeology and philology.”38 Rosebery was invited to become the first president. He declined and Lord Reay became first president. Anson, Bryce, and Courtenay Ibert drafted the by-laws. In place of the original seven sections, the work of the Academy was divided into four:

- History and Archeology
- Philology (Oriental, biblical, Classical, Medieval, Modern)
- Philosophy (Logic, Psychology, Ethics, Metaphysics, and ominously “&c.”)
- Jurisprudence and Economics

Bryce, Jebb, Caird, and Courtenay Ibert, respectively, became the chairmen of these sections.39

So, the creation of the British Academy was a sattlezeit, a phase transition, a tipping point, a suite of interactions, interventions, and innovations toward the specialization and differentiation the concept of “two cultures” is a metaphor for. Lurking behind this narrative was the question of the identity of the Royal Society, the identity of British letters, and the international standing and reputation of British learning. But what

36 Kenyon, The British Academy: The First Fifty Years, pp. 10-11.
learning was that? And what standing? The incident exposed two issues: the concept of science and the concept of letters.

THE CONCEPT OF SCIENCE:

The Royal Society’s history of itself is a whig history. It is a description of the ways in which, since the seventeenth century, the Society restricted its membership to those who “actively practiced science as it was coming to be defined in English and had, moreover, achieved some eminence in it.” The rejection of those subjects which the British Academy came to represent was “the final, irrevocable decision to retain this commitment.” “Eminent in other fields and an interest in science was not now enough, nor was professional devotion to science, without eminence.”40 The formation of the Philosophical Club (limited to forty researching and publishing scientists) in the 1840s and the creation of the X-Club later in the century, and the declining numbers of Fellows who were also clergymen were markers of this process of specialization.41 So, in this telling practitioners dished dilettanti, players trumped gentlemen, and professionals crushed amateurs. It is very much the sort of triumphalistic history Fellows of the Royal Society might which to read. It would be nice if it were true. The narrative of the relationship of the Royal Society to the formation of the British Academy, however, reveals a continuing crisis in the identity of what some people called science. It was a crisis of identity which was about the anxieties of authority and cognitive competence.

Early and late these anxieties presented themselves. On 20 February 1900, Andrew Russell Forsythe, the Sadleirian Professor of Pure Mathematics at Cambridge,

presented a proposal to the Committee of the Royal Society on the British Academy
which would have enlarged the Royal Society by adding a section on History and
Philology to two other sections (one on Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry and the
other on Biology). Since the Royal Society existed for the “promotion of natural
knowledge,” the Forsythe report suggested that it be enlarged to include “all branches of
natural knowledge which are capable of consecutive and ordered development.” Since the
Royal Society was “practically an advisor upon projects of a scientific character,” its
enlargement would “broaden the range of scientific enquiry” and increase its influence
“on a correspondingly larger scale.” Against the possible objection that enlargement of
the scope of the Royal Society would draw it into regions of political controversy,
Forsythe argued that political controversies on such issues as economics would not be
more likely to come to the Royal Society any more than the “discussion of the laws about
vaccination” would.\(^{42}\) The Forsythe report, therefore, rested its conception of science on
the forms of knowledge which “are capable of consecutive and ordered development.” It
rested it argument for the enlargement of the Royal Society on the claim of enhanced
authority: to broaden its scope would yield it greater influence.

To resist efforts toward enlargement other members of the Council sought an
appeal to the law and an appeal to what they considered their history. On 8 February
1900 the Committee of the Royal Society asked Bryce and A.B. Kempe, the Treasurer, to
report to them on the “limits imposed by the Charter as to the subjects with which it can
deal.”\(^{43}\) On 15 March 1900, Sir Michael Foster duly reported to the Committee that he
had received advice from Lord Davey on “the general question of the legal limitations of

\(^{42}\) Royal Society, British Academy Committee Minutes, CMB 7, 20 February 1900.
\(^{43}\) Royal Society, British Academy Committee Minutes, CMB 7, 8 February 1900.
the Society.”44 As to their history, the Committee of the Royal Society on the British Academy concluded:

[Of] the 4,166 papers which appeared in the “Phl. Trans.” during the period from the foundation of the Society down to the end of 1800, the number which deal with subjects not usually included under the terms “science” or “natural philosophy” is scarcely sufficient to be regarded as establishing a usage affording such a contemporanea exposito as ought to control the meaning to be put upon the language of the Charters.45

The Committee considered whether or not “the real difference of object or method” in scientific or literary subjects justified their separation. It acknowledged that the “various branches of knowledge were so interwoven that it is difficult to trace accurately the lines of division between them.” Yet, the Committee concluded, the Royal Society concerned itself with mathematics and the study of non-living matter, as well as the “development, structure and forms of living matter.” Literary studies devoted themselves to “the mental constitution, the history, and the works of man.” And while scientific and literary studies might extend themselves into each other, their interpenetration was slight (“…the closeness of their relations between them depends on the relative size of this common region to the much larger area in which their methods are distinct”). The subjects treated by the Royal Society were “largely cultivated by the means of experiment and the use of apparatus,” modes of investigation rarely used by those in literary studies. And, the studies of the Royal Society could be “practically applied in industry, commerce, and

44 Royal Society, British Academy Committee Minutes, CMB 7, 15 March 1900.
medicine” because their conclusions were “much less disputed than the applications or inferences of political economy or history were.”

The frontiers separating the studies of the Royal Society and those of what became the British Academy were not even settled when the petition to establish a British Academy was put before the Privy Council. Lord Avebury and others proposed an inquiry “with a view to instituting a general and formal organization of all studies depending on the scientific method” and proposing further that such an organization “could best be provided in some relationship to the Royal Society.” Later in the spring, Charles Waldstein, the Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum (1883-1889) and Director of the American Archeological School in Athens (1889-1893), proposed to organize “the several branches of knowledge in one institution” with “the Royal Society forming one department.”

The Royal Society turned the Avebury proposal for a further inquiry aside, declaring it undesirable to include “the care of the studies in question” within the Royal Society’s organization. Citing its Charter and other “authentic records,” the Council of the Royal Society claimed it had been founded “to promote experimental philosophy to the exclusion of philosophy of other kinds.” It cited its records to show that the Society had confined itself for two and a half centuries, “with some few exceptions in quite early days,” to the “studies with which it is now occupied.” The forms of knowledge which preoccupied it were sufficiently large to “prevent a narrowness of spirit,” but sufficiently

47 Kenyon, The British Academy: The First Fifty Years, p. 8; A.W. FitzRoy from H.M. Privy Council to the Secretary of the Royal Society, 19 February 1902, Royal Society, Council Minutes, 8 (1898-1903), 20 March 1902, pp. 277-278.
48 A.W. FitzRoy from H.M. Privy Council to the Secretary of the Royal Society, 9 May 1902, Royal Society Council Minutes, 8 (1898-1903), 29 May 1902, p. 299.
homogeneous so that they could be dealt with efficiently. To enlarge the Royal Society’s scope would, as the President and the Council set it out, expose the Society “to the great danger of losing the firm hold it now possesses on the branches of learning to which it confines itself.”49 The Council dismissed the Waldstein proposal pretty tersely. It “could not consent to the Royal Society forming one department of any such institution or academy as he suggests.”50

But it was too late in the day even for those who would form the British Academy and lines had been drawn in the sand. As Maunde Thompson, the Director of the British Museum, wrote concerning the Avebury proposal, there had already been an “exhaustive inquiry” concerning the relationship between the Royal Society and the British Academy, and, since a majority of the Fellows of the Royal Society had declared themselves on the question of the British Academy becoming a department of the Society, “no advantage is likely to result from the institution of a fresh inquiry.”51

The Royal Society consolidated itself in a process of fetishization and formalization. By narrowing its concept of its scope of action, by its continued publication of Philosophical Transactions, the oldest continuous scientific journal, and by its movement from Somerset House in the Strand, where its library had outstripped space available to it, in the Strand, to enhanced accommodations in Burlington House in Piccadilly, closer to the center of London’s intellectual life and parliament,52 the Royal Society signaled a preoccupation with cohesion and internal control. Such convergence

49 Memorandum to H.M. Privy Council, 20 March 1902, Minutes of the Council of the Royal Society, 8 (1898-1903), 20 March 1902, pp. 277-278.
50 Minutes of the Council of the Royal Society, 8 (1898-1903), 29 May 1902, p. 299.
52 Hall, All Scientists Now, pp. 98-99.
produces a particular kind of community, one of cognitive security in which findings can be replicated, but it also produces the risk that those who belong to might actually believe what they are saying. The Royal Society celebrated cognitive reductionism and specialization. An effort to tame knowledge by making it finite, this kind of mental factoring was intellectually extremely powerful, but reordering Wissenschaft in this peculiar British way was morally weakening because Bildung was separated from knowledge. But a mask of cognitive confidence and competence cannot conceal anxieties of authority entirely.

And it is even a cognitive illusion. Concepts never conquer experience. Those outside the Royal Society did not accept its narrowing of the idea of Wissenschaft to the study of those subjects “cultivated by the means of experiment and the use of apparatus.” Acton, in the 1890s, spoke of Darwin the “philosopher.” 53 In Arthur Balfour’s view, the Royal Society “is occupied with the discovery of the laws of nature, not with their utilitarian application.” And, moreover, the Royal Society had departed from its originating purposes. What it had done so successfully for natural philosophy had been “originally intended for the sciences in general.” “Had the Royal Society felt itself able to carry out the design of its founders, no [British] Academy would be needed.” 54 And even among those within the Royal Society hegemonic claims were cognitively difficult. In 1928 G.H. Hardy could not feel his Rouse Ball lecture was suitable for mathematical journals (“where I normally publish things”), so he asked G.E. Moore to publish it in

53 Lord Acton to Mamy Acton, 24 June 1895, Acton Papers, Cambridge University Library, Add. 7956/163.
54 Memorandum by the Prime Minister in Regard to the Question of a Grant to the British Academy, 17 April 1904, Balfour Papers, British Library, Add. Ms. 49856, ff. 82-83.
Mind. 55 Twenty years later Hardy and Arthur Eddington were searching for a place to publish a paper for a friend who was off fighting the war. They could only put it, they decided, in “the Phil. Mag. — it is too mathematical for Mind, too philosophical for the Royal Soc. or the London Math. Soc.” 56 Viewed more broadly, what came to be called science continued to share the values of a broader moral culture attached to the world of letters. Ideas of individuality, integration, and progress remained part of both scientific and literary domains well into the twentieth century. 57 Power and control, even when exercised by the force and dignity of the Royal Society, cannot close off all niches for creative work.

THE CONCEPT OF LETTERS:

And if the formation of the British Academy provoked a crisis of identity in what came to be called science, it also provoked a crisis of identity in literature and letters. The British Academy rose as a genuflection in the direction of British patriotism. As Henry Sidgwick pointed out in the early going, a memorial should be addressed to the Government pointing “to the exceptional position in which England is placed, as compared with other European countries.” 58 It was a claim for British intellectual power and reputation. Since there was no institution to represent British letters abroad, one had to be created, so, as Arthur Balfour pointed out, the new British Academy mimicked the Royal Society. It was British, not continental. It did not propose to impose “French lucidity and logic onto English public life.” It copied “in other regions of learning a

Society of purely English growth.” And in mimicking the Royal Society, the founders of the British Academy narrowed its focus and adopted a policy which allowed them to claim the same sort of authority the Royal Society claimed. It was a claim for authority which shaped cognitive implications and expectations. From early days, people of letters realized that they would not be incorporated into the Royal Society. As Sidgwick wrote to Bryce, “I had some talk with Arthur Balfour about the ‘new Academy’—i.e. that question that will present itself in the case the Royal Society will have none of us.” It is not the case that the Royal Society simply ghettoized letters; literary people themselves were complicit in their own ghettoization by accepting the institutional authority of the Royal Society and by acquiescing in the language the Royal Society used about letters.

From the beginning everyone had a problem with nomenclature. People were uncertain of the language to apply to literature and letters. To some extent the language they used was a “straining against the increasingly standard restriction to ‘imaginative literature’.” The Council of the Royal Society spoke variously of “distinguished men of letters” for a “Literary and Philosophical” section of the International Association. Its Committee on a British Academy took the term “literary” to refer to language, history, philosophy and antiquities, “subjects the study of which is based on scientific principles.” They did not take it to mean “Literature as such” [sic], and, therefore, decided it “better to use the term ‘Philosophico-Historical,’ in accordance with frequent usage on the

59 Memorandum by the Prime Minister in Regard to the Question of a Grant to the British Academy, 17 April 1904, Balfour Papers, British Library, Add. Ms. 49856, ff. 83-84.
60 Henry Sidgwick to James Bryce, 1 August 1900, Sidgwick Papers, Trinity College, Cambridge, Add. Ms. 105 (40).
62 Royal Society, Council Minutes, 8 (1898-1903), 16 November 1899, p. 88.
continent of Europe.”63 The Forsythe Report, with its proposal to enlarge the scope of the Royal Society, used more generous language wishing to include those subjects concerning “the scientific study of Man in his reasoning, social, and historical relations.” This would admit “Psychology, Economics, Historical science, and Philology (in the widest sense of the term”).64 In the end, the Council of the Royal Society endorsed the petition to the Privy Council to grant a charter to a British Academy “for the Promotion of Historical, Philosophical, and Philological Studies.”65

Henry Sidgwick, for reasons we shall see, adopted the usage of the Council of the Royal Society and spoke of “Philosophico-Historical” and “Philological” studies in his proposal to them.66 Cautious always, Sidgwick wished to design an Academy “including in its scope all branches of systematic (in the wider sense ‘scientific’) study which the R.S. does not recognize.”67 At the meetings of the Provisional General Committee on the British Academy and its Sub-Committee they spoke of “Historical, Philosophical and Philological Studies.” The Sub-Committee proposed that it should be an Academy of “Historical-Philosophical Science” which would include philology, archeology, political and economic ‘science’.” And the meeting of the General Provisional Committee on 19 November 1901, where the report of the Sub-Committee was adopted, the organizers of the British Academy arranged its work in the following categories: history, philology, oriental and Biblical studies, law and politics, metaphysics, economics, and archeology.68 In the end, the older language of Continental literary studies was opened in a “triumph of

64 A.R. Forsythe, Royal Society, Memorandum for the “British Academy” Committee, 20 February 1900.
65 Royal Society, Council Minutes, 8 (1898-1903), 13 February 1902, p. 269.
66 Royal Society, Council Minutes, 8 (1898-1903), 18 January 1900, p. 106.
local idiom (‘the moral sciences’),”69 perhaps because Cambridge men had as much influence as they had in the foundation of the British Academy. Perhaps the point to make here is that labels they used to describe themselves were open concepts. There lay certain dangers, of cognitive and of authority and respectability, to opening them further.

If one question was what they were going to call themselves, another was who were they to be? When the Council of the Royal Society sent out its initial invitation to have literary studies represented at the international association of academies they wrote to “certain distinguished men of letters.” They included Acton, Sidgwick, Bryce, Murray and others who held university positions, Maunde Thompson, Lord Dillon, and Leslie Stephen, who was, well, Leslie Stephen.70 Sidgwick foresaw problems in selecting the first Fellows of a British Academy. “[T]he development of democracy and unlimited journalism” was more troublesome than it was when Kings & Princes made the continental academies.” Rejected candidates had always had their cliques supporting them, “but the number in our age is likely to be indefinitely larger & and the cliques indefinitely more noisy.”71 Sidgwick wished to create a society of distinguished people, not one “practically open to any one who will pay a subscription.”72 And when Sidgwick and his literary colleagues cast their net wider, they went to similar sorts of people: established figures in Oxford, Cambridge, and London. It is interesting to take note of those they did not approach. They did not approach theologians or, initially, figures of political prominence. And this also was a mimicking of the Royal Society (and especially those who belonged to the X-Club) who wanted people of intellectual but not social

69 Collini, Public Moralists, p. 22.
70 For the complete list, see note 11 above.
71 Sidgwick to Bryce, 1 August 1900, Sidgwick MSS., Trinity College, Cambridge, Add. Ms. 105 (40).
prominence to dominate their works. Balfour was drawn into the discussions of the
British Academy early on, but he could make a claim to intellectual distinction
independent of his political position. Only Rosebery and John Morley were added “as
persons distinguished in political life.”73 The Synthetic Society, founded by Balfour and
Wilfred Ward, was one intellectual center which gave force to the formation of the
British Academy.74 Balfour, Bryce, A.V. Dicey, Sir Richard Jebb, and James Ward were
members of the Synthetic Society who became founding Fellows of the British Academy.
Ward looked forward to the more formal features of the British Academy, feeling it
would produce more effective intellectual results than the Synthetic Society had.
“Possibly,” Ward wrote, “the projected new Academy, if the project is achieved, may
afford a better opportunity for philosophic discussions. The Synthetic at any rate seemed
to me too much of an ‘omnium gatherum’.”75

When Sidgwick and the other founders of the British Academy described the kind
of knowledge their studies represented, they used the formal language of the continental
academies, of Wissenschaft. They spoke of “systematic” and “scientific” study.76 The
role of literature and what was literary was extremely suspect. The Royal Society, in a
telling phrase used by its historian, “refused to accept considering responsibility” for
literary subjects.77 The anxieties Fellows of the Royal Society felt about literary studies
expressed themselves in its Memorandum to the Privy Council on the Avebury proposal.

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74 For the relationship of the Synthetic Society to the British Academy, see WC Lubenow, “Intimacy, 
Imagination, the Inner Dialectics of Knowledge Communities: The Synthetic Society, 1896-1908,” in 
Martin Daunton, (ed.), The Organization of Knowledge in Victorian Britain (London and Oxford: Oxford 
University Press for the British Academy, forthcoming).
The Memorandum spoke of the Royal Society’s reluctance to have the “care” of literary studies and of “the danger of losing the firm hold” it had over its subjects of study.\textsuperscript{78}

Henry Sidgwick, always cautious and careful, recognized these anxieties and stripped his proposals of references to “literature” and what was “literary.” As he put it to Acton, giving the kind of background Acton, with his Munich education with Döllinger, would understand:

I made a verbal change to avoid the word ‘literary.’ That is, I have taken the term used in the German academies to describe the proposed new academy or section. Unfortunately the Berlin and the Munich use of the terms do not quite agree.

B has “philosophisch-historisch” to include all that is not mathematics and natural sciences; M has “philosophisch-philologisch”\textsuperscript{a} and “historisch” for subdivisions. I thought it best to put all three together.\textsuperscript{79}

Sidgwick put it more tersely to Balfour: “[y]ou will see that I have modified my description of the proposed academy (or section) to as to avoid ‘literature.’”\textsuperscript{80} Even as the founders of the British Academy formed themselves into a Provisional Committee in June, 1901, their anxieties about literature presented themselves. (Sir) Israel Gollancz, Fellow of Christ’s College, Cambridge and lecturer in English in the university and later Secretary of the British Academy, read out a letter from the Secretary of the Royal Society of Literature inviting them to use the Society as the basis for the new Academy since it had a Charter already. Some, such as Sir John Evans, were taken by the idea and

\textsuperscript{77} Hall, All Scientists Now, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{78} Memorandum to H.M. Privy Council, 20 March 1902, Minutes of the Council of the Royal Society, 8 (1898-1903), 20 March 1902, pp. 277-278.
\textsuperscript{79} Henry Sidgwick to Lord Acton, 19 December 1899, Acton Papers, Cambridge University Library, Add. Ms. 8119 (S) S107.
\textsuperscript{80} Henry Sidgwick to Arthur Balfour, 20 December 1899, Balfour Papers, British Library, Add. Ms. 48932, f. 108.
returned to it at subsequent meetings. Other members of the Provisional Committee, however, called attention to what they regarded as the “main difficulty”: namely “the existing position” of the members of the Royal Society of Literature and shunned the proposal. They feared, as Frederick Kenyon later put it, that the prestige of the new Academy would be prejudiced “by making it a mere appendage of a body that had no strong position of its own.” In the ructions which followed, Evan withdrew from the Provisional Committee and, later on, he and Prothero refused to accept Fellowships in the Academy.81

The question of what was literary, and what was dangerous about literature, wound itself in and out of the formation of the British Academy in its pre-history as well as its history. E.A. Freeman, the Regius Professor of Modern History, in the controversy over the Merton professorship of English at Oxford in 1877, put the issues in a very provocative fashion. Knowledge of language, including “the facts about it,” could not be separated from knowledge of the books written in that language. The proper academical study of literature required the study of the “history and philology of language.” In short, the study of literature amounted to what could be taught and what could be examined. He opposed the sort of “literary” talk which “seems hardly to rise above personal gossip, sometimes personal scandal, about very modern personages indeed.” (Freemen used the sharp phrase “mere chatter about Shelley.”) Taste, he argued, can neither be taught nor examined. Facts can be taught, Freeman said, but “surely the delicacies and elegancies of literature cannot be driven into any man: he must learn to appreciate them for himself.” The crammer, Freeman when on:

cannot hammer into a man so much as an ear for metre and rhythm; still less can

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81 Kenyon, The British Academy: The First Fifty Years, pp. 9-11.
he hammer into him the thousand minute gifts, the endless delicate powers of appreciation which go to make the literary student in any sense worthy of the name. Those must be born with the man and grow with his intellectual growth. The crammer can but teach facts; the crammer in literature will have to fall back on the facts of literature; and these facts are, in practice, sure to be very largely nothing better than the gossip, the chatter, about literature which is largely taking the place of literature.  

Lying behind, or beside, Freeman’s criticisms of what, I suppose, are the aesthetic and critical characteristics of literature and letters, were larger transformations and destabilizations in literary life.

The philological revolution of the nineteenth century at once stripped letters of a representational claim, but at the same time conferred on them the greater authority and emotional risk of linguistic autonomy. Nineteenth-century Hellenic studies, in particular, opened a disorienting mental world of eroticism and destabilization. Walter Pater’s disturbing, beautiful, and sensuous thought that success in life is “to burn always with he hard, gemlike flame” is set in an even more disturbing passage. In the conclusion to The Renaissance Pater described life as a “perpetual motion” of moments. “[T]he cohesive force seems suspended like some trick of magic; each object is loosened into a group of impressions—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observers.” We dwell

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82 Freeman set out his arguments about the Merton professorship in “Literature and Language,” Contemporary Review, 52 (October 1877), pp. 549-567, see esp. 550, 559-560, 564, 566.
on this world “in thought.” Objects are merely “the impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them.” And then Pater concluded: “[e]very one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of the world.”

Pater’s hellenism transported him from the solid world of Greek statues to an imaginative world, formless, shapeless, infinite. And then there was Froude’s biography of Carlyle, a description of genius, but also of unproductive misery. And then there was the Wilde trial. How can literary genius and the people who produce literature be trusted and carry authority when they cannot (or will not) reproduce themselves? Plato excluded poets from the Republic and such were the fears which led to the exclusion of people of literature and letters from the British Academy.

THE ORIGINS OF CONCEPTS:

Historians have given a good deal of attention to concepts. Begriffsgeschichte, as it has been practiced in Germany, and the contextualism of J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner have pressed for a history of political and social concepts. These approaches are concerned with the changing meanings of concepts. This paper takes a different turn. It is concerned with the processes through which concepts are formed. Both are concerned with change but different notions of time underlie theirs and mine. Theirs is linear and regular. Mine is disjunctive and multidimensional. Theirs assumes a kind of

continuity in which there is a tradition. Mine assumes different chronologies for different processes.

These processes are intertwined and play against each other. Some are processes of change: how is it that knowledge is formed into specific intellectual categories (are there some road not taken)? Some are cognitive: do different disciplines represent different forms of knowledge and different ways of knowing? Some are about power and control: who and what institutions accept responsibility and take on the value of certain concepts? Some are about authority and morality. And some are about anxiety. All of these processes work themselves out in relation to each other in specific knowledge communities. So, transformationality and transactionality lurked together in what was the political (and what was politics) at the same time. Change, cognition, power, control, authority, morality, fear, and suspicion have to considered and thought about at the same time. Matthew Arnold the school inspector, dealing with tangible problems of public resources, has to thought about at the same time one thinks about Matthew Arnold the poet, musing on matters of the spirit. Musings of the spirit cannot be distinguished from tangible problems of resources.

Different forms of knowledge met and contested in the circumstances out of which the British Academy emerged. A concept of “two cultures” emerged in the dialectical and dynamic contestation within the Royal Society, and between the Royal Society and the British Academy, about the way in which British letters and literature would be represented in an International Association of Academies. “Two cultures” originated as a concept of specialization in which different cognitive activities were taken to belong to different mental domains. Those cognitive activities, what came to be called
science and literature, were also conceptualized and reconceptualized: one a concept associated with experiment and apparatus, the other associated with the literary and the (ever so slightly) louche. This process (about processes, acturally) sheds light on the nature of concepts and their formation and function.

Concepts, such as “two cultures” or “science” or “literature,” are formed associationally. Concepts locate people in relation to each other: they connect and, at the same time, they separate in dialectic and dynamical processes. They result from social transactions and they fuel transformations. Rousseau famously pointed to the apparent fact that human beings are born free but yet everywhere they are bound by social obligations. And E.M. Forster said, “only connect.” Concepts are created or invented or formed from the necessities of relationships of power and control. They assist in the sorting out of who is responsible for what knowledge. Claims of responsibility establish standing, reputation, status, and control. Concepts confer moral authority and therein lay their value.

Concepts, such as “two cultures” or “science” or “literature,” are not conclusions; they are never complete or finished. Concepts are tools for understanding. Their cognitive function is to locate people in relation to what they know (or what they can convince themselves of). So, to some extent, they stabilize or at least seek to harden conceptual edges. Therefore, one function of knowledge communities such as the Royal Society and the British Academy is to fetishize, to fix knowledge through institutions, rules of governance, elections to fellowships, periodicals for the publication of research, and heroic obituaries. Yet, concepts cannot be fixed finally; their edges are always, to no little degree, soft and their inherent values make them softer yet. Not only have concepts
value, they are multivalent. Their values tug and pull against each other, always seeking to open concepts to new possibilities and opportunities. They can never contain the experiences they purport or claim to represent.

Concepts emerge at sattelzeiten, at moments of transition, in which constituent characteristics shade and melt into each other moving back and forth in constant interaction. They express a kind of yearning for seemingly contradictory impulses: to sustain difference yet to seek unity. They bridge perception and action, wherein lies their transformative power. Concepts are both process itself and the results of process. Concepts’ bridges are multidimensional. They move laterally and vertically at the same time. They reach out in many directions at the same time that they reach up and down. They seek to give meaning to experience and they dissolve in their interactions with the experience they claim to represent. In seeking God, Luther famously said, look from the bottom upwards not from the top downwards.

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File Name: Two Cultures

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7/16/2003 11:42:11 AM/ 1,164 (1,312) words: pp. 3-4, Sidgwick introduction
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9/18/2003 9:06:45 AM/ 7,807 (9,528) words: p. 29 formation and function of concepts

9/26/2003 10:48:47 AM/ 7,914 (9,635) words: pp. 28-29 concepts’ edges
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10/2/2003 8:43:01 AM/ 8,110 (10,007) words: pp. 29-30, corrections yet

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