power of the notion of ability for this discourse of boundaries (as power and nonpower are doubled, recursive, inevitably a matter of the ability of ability), as well as for approaches to social or political categories. Disability scholars have begun explicitly to develop this line of thought in opening up the disability (or, more properly, dis/ability) involved in any expression of ability; indeed, disability studies has been moving in this direction for decades. A forthcoming special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*, titled *Disability and Rhetoric* (31.1 [2011]), promises to pursue this line, and Wolfe works with the ability-disability problematic in his recent book *What Is Posthumanism?* (U of Minnesota P, 2009). In short, the emergent emphasis on ability has great significance for the study of the human and of the products of humanity.

Scott DeShong
Quinebaug Valley Community College, CT

The Radical-Teaching Debate

To the Editor:

Jacqueline E. Brady and Richard M. Ohmann rightly broadened the conversation in the Forum by justifying "teaching for social justice" (125.1 [2010]: 217–18). It takes wisdom like theirs to encapsulate years of theory into a case that views not informed by radical critique implicitly promote hegemonic values. Teachers who hold such views cannot lead useful debates.

Gerald Graff, whose 2008 Presidential Address prompted Brady and Ohmann's letter, needs to admit that in certain arenas "teaching the conflicts" stops making sense. Lawrence Summers lost his job as president of Harvard University in part because he still thinks the inherent scientific intelligence of women is debatable. In the academy, even if some scholars argue that slavery was an economically sound institution, we no longer debate its merit. Most well-informed people, like most scientists, think that the human impact on climate change would not make an interesting subject of debate. Would Graff approve of conducting a debate on the Bush torture memos? Much of what was "radical" in 1848, 1920, 1954, 1968, and 2004 is now mainstream. Teaching students to become radicals has simply led them to become early adopters of humane values that much of American society was blind to.

So what is left in 2010 to be shocked about in radicalism, or "critical thinking," and to cause Graff to complain that faculty members are influencing students politically in ways that "discredit" higher education? The main radical arguments today, I imagine, involve the failures of capitalism. Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman, Jerome Groopman and Atul Gawande, David Cole and dozens of others now expound these in the mainstream: the failures of our health care system, our prison-industrial complex, and our overseas wars and the long-term high unemployment and midlife job discrimination that will affect almost all young people, even graduates of elite universities. It is the classrooms that never mention such issues, I submit, that are "isolated" and "self-protective" and deserve a responsible educator's scorn.

Margaret Morganroth Gullette
Brandeis University

Reply:

Thanks to Margaret Morganroth Gullette for adding another historical dimension to the conversation that we have been having with Gerald Graff about radical teaching. Indeed, much of what was radical once is no longer so. It's hard to see why biologists today should back up 150 years and give creationism a fair shot in the classroom. Let them use their "power, experience, and control of academic discourse" (as Graff puts it in his reply to our letter) to teach evolutionary science. Graff's objection to our teaching critical and radical perspectives, even if "we are up-front about [our political] commitments and encourage our students to disagree with us," seems like an objection to college teaching in general, as commonly and quite properly done. Students take courses other than ours, few of them radical. Why not let students

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know that all teaching is contingent and ideological and encourage them to use their educational time to work things through like grown-ups? And why should we suppose that there is only one effective method of teaching, as Graff does when he insists that we must all "teach the conflicts"? We note also that few nonradical courses are explicit about their commitments. How often do teachers of business courses announce their commitment to the system of power relations in which their students seek advancement? And how many economics courses lead off with full disclosure about the historical contingency of the market they take as universal, or about the chief beneficiaries of economic process and their interesting relation to what gets taught in American colleges, including in economics departments? So, yes, let's do teach about "the failures of capitalism," when they are not off topic, and treat students as historical agents who are capable of making up their own minds. In this manner, as Gullette suggests, we can combat the isolation of the college classroom by breaking down the university walls that matter most—the ones between the campus and the world.

Jacqueline E. Brady
Kingsborough Community College
City University of New York

Richard M. Ohmann
Wesleyan University

Reply:

Margaret Morganroth Gullette's defense of "teaching for social justice" does more to discredit the practice than anything I can say against it. She apparently can't imagine how "teaching students to become radicals" could be an abuse of the teacher's power over students. Though Gullette aligns herself with Jacqueline E. Brady and Richard M. Ohmann in their critical response to my Presidential Address, her conception of radical teaching seems more dogmatic and unqualified than theirs. The phrase Gullette happily embraces—"teaching students to become radicals"—misquotes the phrase "helping students become radicals" that Brady and Ohmann renounced in their letter as admittedly "ill-chosen" (217) after I criticized in my address its implication that our students are "*yearning* to become radicals and lack only a little 'help' from a friendly radical teacher to show them the way" (124.3 [2009]: 727–43; 740).

Gullette's logic is a good example of the self-righteousness and insularity I attacked in my address: since history has now demonstrated the truth of "radical critique," we have the right or even the obligation to try to radicalize our students. As Gullette puts it, "[V]iews not informed by radical critique implicitly promote hegemonic values. Teachers who hold such views cannot lead useful debates." There's apparently no alternative—we either teach radical critique or we are complicit with hegemony.

In my address, I argued that "teaching politics as *debate*—teaching the conflicts about politics, if you will—is the surest way to protect students from being bullied by teachers" (737). Teaching politics as debate achieves the legitimate goal of "teaching for social justice" programs (738), making students more reflective about pressing social issues, without the coerciveness that's inevitably a danger if we say it's all right for teachers to push their own politics on their students.

Gullette objects, however, that some questions, like whether women have the intelligence to pursue careers in science, don't merit debating. In fact, I conceded this point myself in my address (737), as I often do elsewhere (e.g., *Beyond the Culture Wars* [14]). But it hardly follows, as Gullette seems to imply, that there are no serious debates to be had about current political issues. Indeed, even when it comes to matters supposedly beyond debate, like Gullette's example of the Bush administration's torture policies, the situation may not afford us the luxury of refusing to debate. Opponents may have felt the torture policies should be beyond debate, but they did debate them in the media, and it's a good thing they did since the policies might not have been discontinued by the Obama administration had nobody been willing to argue against them.

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