A Guest of the Management

Servicing the literary pretensions of the MBA class

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Calvert has identified a type of rhetoric and language that many of us have encountered—if you've ever scrolled LinkedIn, you'll recognize it. But what, exactly, characterizes the distinct tone of "the MBA class"? What are other examples of where and how you see it used?

2. Calvert colorfully expresses his revulsion at shallow and self-aggrandizing deployments of literature and philosophy among entrepreneurs. But is there some good to be found in the trend? Put another way, would we prefer that our technological "overlords" not be referencing and thinking about the humanities?

3. "Writers have always considered themselves to be lowly 'guests of the management,'" Calvert explains. Sometimes, this has produced exceptional art—consider the patronage relationships between European royals and famous artists in the Renaissance. Does this relationship still bear fruit today? If not, why? What should the relationship between art and wealth be?

4. "From the ideology's point of view, I was easily digestible," Calvert writes. Is there any type of writing that's hard for Silicon Valley to "digest"? Can you think of some examples? What about them is especially "indigestible"?

5. "Guests are often envious of hosts," Calvert opines. "This was certainly true for me: my contempt for all the thought leaders who hired me to think for them was laced with envy and self-doubt." Do you ever fall into this habit of envy, even for those you disdain? Should we dislike or distrust this part of ourselves?

6. As Calvert notes, the rise of the humanities—or at least the aesthetic of humanities thinking—in tech spaces is not necessarily a one-way street. "At Stanford," he explains, "there were professors using big data to map trends in nineteenth-century literature— a form of institutional suicide called the 'digital humanities.'" What are the dangers of this approach, or the potential benefits, if any? What are the limits of applying technological methods to the humanities?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING & LISTENING:

Jackson Lears, "The Liberal Arts vs. Neoliberalism," May 1, 2015, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/liberal-arts-vs-neoliberalism

Nolen Gertz, "More than Machines?," September 2023, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/jacques-ellul-gertz-artificial-intelligence-AI-WGA-technology

John P. Slattery, "In Search of a Prophetic Voice for Tech Ethics," March 10, 2022, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/search-prophetic-voice-tech-ethics

The Commonweal Podcast, "A 'Mindset' of Misanthropy," April 13, 2023, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/podcast/mindset-misanthropy