

scholarly activities or universities themselves (“Spinach for spinach’s sake”, News, 25 April). Equally sound is Howard Hotson’s response that to attack defenders of “traditional” higher education on the basis of that notion is to “attack a straw man”.

Similar arguments are echoed in “The revolution that wasn’t” (Analysis, 25 April), where, in assessing Margaret Thatcher’s higher education legacy, Vernon Bogdanor recalls the debates following the 1985 publication of the Green Paper *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*. During them, a Conservative backbencher proposed that universities should “give up this Shakespeare nonsense and do something useful”, while Enoch Powell offered strongly worded criticism of any monetary cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the contents of higher education.

So what is there for us to learn from more than a millennium of intellectual squabble? When it comes to knowledge, dualistic thinking is prone to failure: knowledge is “of” and “in” this world, hence it cannot but be useful. The “knowledge for its own sake” notion is a “snow man” argument: it’s about time it melted away.

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In the know

Ferdinand von Prondzynski is right in pointing out that the notion of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” is not a useful justification for