

NEW FRONTIERS IN EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND POLITICS



HIGHER EDUCATION UNDER LATE CAPITALISM

IDENTITY, CONDUCT, AND
THE NEOLIBERAL CONDITION

JEFFREY R. DI LEO



New Frontiers in Education, Culture, and Politics

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Higher Education under Late Capitalism

Identity, Conduct, and the Neoliberal Condition

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INTRODUCTION

Is higher education in America in crisis or is neoliberal academe just the new normal? At what point do critics of neoliberalism in higher education concede that the corporate university is now the measure of higher education run well? When should these critics stop asking for a different model of higher education and begin to accept the constraints afforded to academe by the corporate university? How do we know if we have settled into a pattern of higher education behavior that is productive rather than destructive? Good for higher education in America as opposed to bad for it?

These are of course hard questions but nevertheless ones worth pursuing. For those whose careers are unfolding within neoliberal academe, the answers may be different than those who are looking at it from the outside. It is different to merely posit austerity and transparency as the regulative ideals for neoliberal academe than to participate as their subject. Those who champion the corporate model of higher education often do not teach under this model and are not students within it.

What looks good from the point of view of a higher education board or committee often fails in action. Not because it does not achieve the outcomes set for it. But because it fails *in spite* of achieving them. After all, there is no inconsistency with achieving outcomes and at the same time believing the outcomes are not the best measures of successful higher education. In many ways, this is the condition of neoliberal academe today.

To stop fighting against the negative consequences of neoliberalism in higher education is to stop fighting for education at its best. To concede that neoliberal academe is the new normal is to assume a sense of academic identity that is the product of the extremes of managerialism and austerity.

One's success and conduct in the neoliberal academy is based on measures that exclude considerations of pleasure and happiness. Numbers are everything in the corporate university, not the well-being of its subjects. Docile subjects that work within the parameters of its rules and outcomes allow neoliberal academe to function well. But what if we don't want to be docile subjects? What if merely teaching a class is not enough? What if we want to teach what we want how we want? Same with research? What if doing anything less is a source of displeasure or dissatisfaction?

Refusing to be a docile subject is tantamount to rejecting neoliberal academe.¹ The issue is in part one of academic freedom. The freedom to pursue our intellectual ambitions and pedagogical practices without fear of elimination from the system is a key part of academic freedom. But academic freedom is only part of the issue. There is also the matter of conducting one's academic life in a way that is both personally and professionally fulfilling. If one's academic identity and conduct are severely constricted such that one is not free to become the type of educational being that one aspires to *and* if one feels that their input into the governance and development of their university is contingent upon docile subjectivity, then there is little hope for academic satisfaction today.

But what if we refuse to bracket our pleasure and instead ask that our livelihood provide at least a modicum of it? What if considerations of our individual happiness start to temper our attitudes toward the new normal in higher education? If neoliberalism threatens to turn us into docile subjects, then what happens if *we* threaten neoliberalism with considerations of *our* happiness? Our fulfillment? What happens when those whose careers are staged within neoliberal academe ask for what presumably everyone wants, that is, to be satisfied and happy?

One of the key differences between a university and a corporation is that the latter is under no obligation to consider the well-being of those under its employ unless it hurts the bottom line. But should the same hold for universities? That is to say, should they be run as corporations in terms of their consideration of the mental and physical well-being of those under their employ? The university should be respectful of the dignity and desires of all those who entrust their lives and well-being to it just as it should be tolerant of differing beliefs and ideas of the good. Moreover, one of the overarching goals of the university should be the betterment of all of those who work for and study in it. To forget about human well-being is to forget about the reason there are universities in the first place: to make humans better beings.

Though we can debate what “better” means, it does not mean less intelligent, less compassionate, and less critically engaged. When it does, then we really don’t need universities anymore and can replace them with training centers. And by many accounts, this is the telos of the corporate university anyway.²

Higher Education under Late Capitalism focuses on questions concerning personal identity and individual conduct within neoliberal academe. It assumes that neoliberal academe is normal academe in the new millennium even if it is at the same time well aware of the contested nature and destructive capacities of neoliberalism in higher education.³ It asks what type of academic identity is formed by those who work in the neoliberal academy? What kind of conduct is expected of them? And at what peril does neoliberal academe put its participants? Thinking about higher education through key terms established for it by neoliberalism such as austerity and transparency is a journey into both its present and its past. My hope is that this process will contribute to a better future for higher education in America. It is not, nor should it be considered, however, an exercise in neoliberal apologetics or “crisis” management. By rejecting apologetics and the rhetoric of crisis, *Higher Education under Late Capitalism* approaches the neoliberal condition of academe in a way at odds with the more common approach, which is, namely, to call or rely upon in various ways one or the other.

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

If the pages of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* are a worthy barometer of our “crises,” then we are indubitably “in crisis.” According to their search engine, there are over 6000 articles on the *Chronicle’s* website dealing with our various crises, with the “debt crisis” and the “humanities crisis” topping the list with about 725 articles on each topic. But is the proliferation of higher ed “crisis” journalism because we are truly in “crisis” or because “crisis rhetoric” sells papers?⁴

Perhaps a false dilemma, but still a fair question to ask because for the academic barker, few terms are as effective in attracting our attention as “crisis.” Though other rhetorically supercharged terms, such as “birth” and “death,” “new” and “old,” garner our attention and are commonplaces of academic journalism, nothing seems to get our blood boiling faster than the use of the term “crisis” in association with anything higher ed. Or, perhaps, is it that nothing raises our anxiety level more than identifying our “crises”?

Some psychologist or narratologist can probably explain the attraction of crises better than I can. All I know is that everywhere I turn today in the house of higher education, all I hear about are our crises. Tenure, debt, funding, job, and humanities top the list of high-profile higher ed crises, but I'm sure that with your help the list could be expanded. Together these crises are a virtual catalog of the neoliberal condition in higher education today.

Still, shouldn't we be asking whether all of these things really are "crises"—or whether they are something else? Perhaps I'm throwing in the crisis towel too fast, but aren't we just a little fast and loose with this term or does 6000 articles in one journal alone dealing with higher ed's crises seem reasonable to you?

It might be very well argued that the rhetoric of academic barkers regularly features the noun "crisis" in its depictions of higher education not to announce a crucial or decisive point or situation but simply to voice displeasure with the ongoing state and direction of higher education. Many times a situation dubbed a "crisis" is less a "turning point" than a standing and stable condition, albeit an unliked or unfortunate one. But calling a standing state of affairs "unfortunate" or "unliked" does not have the rhetorical weight or darkness of "crisis"—does not instill terror in the academic heart anything like designated it a "crisis." A series of "unfortunate situations" warrants a drink, whereas a series of "crises" tells us it's time to get drunk.

Maybe I'm being too sensitive to the power of words and am old-fashioned when it comes to semantics, but dubbing something a "crisis" indicates that it is truly a "turning point." Having your home burn down and losing all of your earthly possessions is a "crisis." More students choosing to major in business rather than the humanities over the past decade is unfortunate, but not a crisis. There are worse majors and at least these folks are in college—which is half the educational battle anyway.

If, however, this turnabout in business versus humanities majors occurred suddenly and unexpectedly, then we might consider it a crisis. But when the turnabout is the result of a gradual transformation in undergraduate major selection, it does not warrant the crisis appellation. In fact, from the perspective of our colleagues in the business school, calling it a crisis is an affront to their academic integrity. The humanities might be dubbed "in crisis" if at some point in the near past they were one way, but now they are another way—and the new way is unliked. It makes no sense however to say that they are in "crisis" when in point of fact they have been in their current situation for a decade or more. To call them in crisis under such conditions is irresponsible—or worse.⁵

So the temporal focalization of crisis is important. If philosophy departments are now closing at a higher rate than they are opening, and this is a relatively recent phenomenon, then we can responsibly call this a crisis, particularly if we are philosophers or think that the study of philosophy is an essential or important part of higher education. It is a crucial point in the history of departments of philosophy when they begin to decrease in number. Usually it means that they have reached a peak and are beginning to fall off. But as a crisis or turning point, it cannot be a continuing condition of higher education and still be dubbed a “crisis.” Crisis does not mean “continuing condition.” It implies a turning point such that after a period of time, it just becomes the state of things.

This is not a trivial or irrelevant distinction. To say that higher education is in crisis because of the rise of neoliberalism is for all intents and purposes a misnomer. Neoliberalism has been at work at least since that 1980s, and its direct impact on higher education has been ongoing for at least the past 25 years. Though there have been periods of intensification, strictly speaking, higher education is beyond the point where it is in “crisis” because of the ascent of neoliberalism. Same with student debt and the job market. Each of these was at some point in the past indeed a “crisis,” but now they are merely the continuing condition of higher education in America. That is to say, the continuing condition of higher education in America is the neoliberal condition.

I’m not suggesting that any of these former “crises” are situations that we should like or be happy with or even accept. I am, however, suggesting that to dub them “crises” not only is a misnomer, but at this point in academic history is irresponsible as well. The train has left the station. We *are* a debt society; we live in the age of neoliberal academe; the job market for PhDs *is* weak—and getting weaker; academic freedom *is* under assault; and so on. All of these things are the case—but they are not crises. But why we continue to call them “crises” as opposed to learning to work within their constraints or working to move beyond them is the question of the day.

My own belief is that higher education deteriorated beneath the feet of many of us—and for one reason or another we were powerless to stop it. Using the rhetoric of crisis allows us to assume a level of plausible deniability for the deterioration. It allows us to voice our displeasure with changing aspects of the academic world. But a humanist who has worked for 25 years or more in higher education and who declares that there is a “crisis” in the humanities is calling attention only to their own failings.

The humanities failed to become what they had hoped they would become, and thus by dubbing them now in “crisis,” these longtime humanists are saying that forces beyond their own control brought them to their current condition. Can you think of one humanities professor who says, “You know, if I had only taught my courses differently, we might not be in this situation” or “If we ran our department differently, then we could have avoided the current state of affairs?” No, it is always everyone else’s fault that the humanities are failing, never our own.

The rhetoric of crisis is the last refuge for those who wish for an academic world different from the one in which we currently live. It is the term that both relieves them from any responsibility for the situation in which they are in and says to the world that I don’t like things the way they are—and want them to go back to a former state of affairs. The reality however is that the world has changed around them—and that they are not ready to accept it.

I’ve fallen into the crisis trap a few times myself, but now I always try to reserve the use of it for true turning points versus complaints about our situation. There is no crisis of neoliberal academe; rather, neoliberal academe is the condition from which we need to move beyond. We need to try to actualize academic worlds wherein we are not merely the docile subjects of neoliberal managerialism. But this will take acts of resistance and visionary performance. This is why I have suggested that we take up a more combative rhetoric in these times of education through the looking glass.

Instead of dialogue, I prefer paralogy. As a model for critical exchange about the university “in a time of crisis,” it encourages views that destabilize and disrupt a system of education that from most accounts is beyond repair. Paralogy’s agonistic dimension facilitates speech about the university that is passionate even frenzied. It calls for academics to become emotionally involved in university dialogue and encourages tough metaprofessional criticism. It is a rhetoric of “struggle” and “conflict” against a massive and repressive vision of the university—a guerrilla war of the marginals.

In short, a dialogical approach to the university that aims at consensus and stability within the existing system is not going to solve its problems—or bring about the downfall of the neoliberal university. Reform and change in higher education moves at a glacial pace—a pace at which one cannot reasonably hope to solve the educational system’s problems before the system as a whole collapses. This is why a paralogical approach is preferable in this time of so-called systemic crisis.⁶

I'm probably in the minority with not being enamored by the rhetoric of crisis, but whether you agree with my assessment or not, I ask that you consider that there must be a point where we stop complaining about the conditions of higher ed, and bemoaning a past that is no longer recuperable, and begin to live in the present. I wager that once you stop thinking about our academic condition as a crisis, you will begin to open up a space to regard it as one in which transformative and progressive action can reshape it into one which is more to your liking. Perhaps the solution is to truly create a crisis—a turning point—rather than to simply point them out—and parody has that power to do this.

A MEASURE FOR MEASURE

To be sure, the corporate university has not been kind to higher education. But no area of higher education has been more affected by the neoliberal condition than the humanities. Word on the street has been that the humanities are in peril and that neoliberal educational practices and the growth of the corporate university are pushing them toward demise. Reductions in financial support, declining numbers of majors, and a general lack of understanding of the nature and value of the humanities are opening the door to a more instrumentally determined and vocationally centered vision of higher education.

But, as we've established, this is old news. Neoliberal academe is now normal academe. The notion that educational values are determined by market share is a commonplace one, and the fact that majors and courses that cannot be directly connected to marketable skills and job attainment are at risk of extinction is well known. This situation puts advocates of the humanities in the dire position of either establishing strategies to slow down the decline and fall of the humanities at the hands of the corporate university or finding themselves gradually effaced and marginalized within the brave new world of higher education.

For many, defending the humanities against neoliberal assault has itself become a form of the new normal in higher education. Judith Butler, Maxine Elliot Professor in the Departments of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, one of the most virulent defenders of the humanities, finds it "quite incredulous" that the neoliberal world now makes it necessary for us to defend the public value of a basic humanities education. For her, the ability to "learn to think, to work with language and images, and to read, to make sense, to intervene, to

take apart, to formulate evaluative judgments and even to make the world anew” is “obvious” and that we now need to be able to defend them is “quite incredulous.”⁷ But such is the central task of the humanities in the age of neoliberalism—one that is made even more difficult, says Butler, when combined with “anti-intellectual conservatism.”⁸

Butler, while aware of the most common arguments in defense of the humanities, is critical of most of them. These include “the humanities have intrinsic value; the humanities are useless, and that is their value; public intellectuals exemplify the value of the humanities for public life; the humanities offer certain kinds of skill development that are important for economic mobility; [and] the humanities offer certain kinds of literacy that are indispensable to citizenship.”⁹ However, she has an affinity for one of the common lines of defense of the humanities, namely, “the humanities offer a critical perspective on values that can actively engage the contemporary metrics of value by which the humanities are weakened, if not destroyed.”¹⁰ In other words, the value of the humanities is to be found in its measure of measure.

“Oddly,” writes Butler,

our very capacity for critically re-evaluating is what cannot be measured by the metrics by which the humanities are increasingly judged. This means the resource we need to save the humanities is precisely one that has been abandoned by the metrics that promise to save the humanities if only we comply. So perhaps we must retrieve from the threat of oblivion those ways of valuing that can put into perspective the closing of the horizons enacted by the metrics we are asked to use. These are metrics of forgetfulness, perhaps, or metrics of effacement, conduits to oblivion, where the calculus emerges as the final arbiter of value, which means that the values we have to defend are already lost. This does not mean that we become conservative, endeavoring to reinstate a former time; rather, we must move forward in new ways, through new idioms, and with some impurity, to reanimate the very ideals that guide and justify our work.¹¹

Butler is less asking us to save the humanities than to protect the path that allows us to “move forward in new ways, through new idioms.” And “if obscurity is sometimes the necessary corrective to what has become obvious, so be it.”¹² Her argument in defense of obscurity as a corrective to the obvious, the ordinary, is also one against the transparency of neoliberalism. “This means,” concludes Butler, “that we exercise critical judgment in the breach, reentering the obscure into the obvious in order to affirm what is left between us still to lose, to keep, to keep animated.”¹³

There is much to like in Butler's analysis of how the humanities proceeds under late capitalism. I agree with her that we should not look to "reinststate a former time" by going back to the future of higher education—and have previously argued for this position in depth.¹⁴ I also agree with her that moving forward under the shadow of neoliberal academe requires us to "reanimate the very ideals that guide and justify our work." Butler is right on point when she argues that the metrics used by neoliberal academe need *themselves* to be evaluated. For her, "we need ways of evaluating our own work that rival or contest some of the notions of assessment."¹⁵ In short, we have to figure out a measure for measure.¹⁶

Following Butler, we might argue that neoliberalism in higher education functions uncritically through a number of ideals that have become obvious. If we can identify some of these ideals and critique them, then there is a chance that we can weaken the foundations of neoliberal academe. The first two chapters of *Higher Education under Late Capitalism*, "The Two Austerities" (Chap. 1) and "Unlit Classrooms" (Chap. 2), attempt this by taking measure of two of the key measures of neoliberalism in the academy: austerity and transparency. The result is that both measures, austerity and transparency, are found to have a profound effect on both our emotional and moral lives as members of the academy. They also both carry with them quite a bit of baggage, which we attempt to leave behind, in an effort to move beyond the neoliberal academy. But in examining these key measures of neoliberalism in the academy, we find ourselves repeatedly contending with a somewhat unlikely and widely unliked figure from our philosophical past, Jeremy Bentham. This warrants some introduction.

NEOLIBERALISM AND HAPPINESS

Neoliberalism has been broadly accepted as a fairly recent economic and political project. For example, David Harvey, distinguished professor of anthropology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, in his widely cited book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), looks upon the years 1978–1980 to begin his social and economic history of neoliberalism. For Harvey, key figures from this period, including Deng Xiaoping of China, Margaret Thatcher of Britain, and Ronald Reagan of the United States, set the stage for "a revolutionary turning-point in the world's social and economic history."¹⁷ Others, however, mark the turning point for the project of neoliberalism to the work of Milton Friedman

and the emergence of the Chicago School of economics in the 1960s. Still others trace it back to the work of Friedrich Hayek and Lionel Robbins and the London School of Economics during the 1930s. It is within this context of “standard” neoliberal economic and political history that the account provided by William Davies, who teaches at Goldsmiths, London, stands out and provides an important backdrop to *Higher Education under Late Capitalism*.

In a bold and intriguing move, Davies places the foundations of neoliberalism in the late eighteenth-century social and political philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). Davies reminds us that the English philosopher’s hedonism had strong connections with business, government, and the market—a point often overlooked in the rush to dismiss Bentham’s hedonistic utilitarian ethics as merely a philosophically weak precursor to the more philosophically mature eudaemonistic utilitarianism of his student John Stuart Mill. “The business of government,” wrote Bentham in *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), “is to promote the happiness of society, by punishing and rewarding.”¹⁸ “The free market, of which Bentham was an unabashed supporter, would largely take care of the reward part of this ‘business,’” comments Davies, “the state would take responsibility for the former part.”¹⁹

Thus begins Davies’s creative and convincing journey from the hedonic calculus and surveillance state of Bentham to the contemporary “happiness industry” and neoliberal state. But Davies’s project is much more than merely parsing out some of the originary moments of neoliberal thought in the happiness science of Bentham; it is also looking beyond the current formation of neoliberalism to its next position, the post-neoliberal era. A position pined for by all who are fed up with the neoliberal condition.

Referring to Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), Davies notes that “[o]ne of the foundational arguments in favour of the market was that it served as a vast sensory device, capturing millions of individual desires, opinions and values, and converted these into prices.”²⁰ However, for Davies, we may be “on the cusp of a new post-neoliberal era in which the market is no longer the primary tool for this capture of mass sentiment.”²¹ “Once happiness monitoring tools flood our everyday lives,” writes Davies, “other ways of qualifying feelings in real time are emerging that can extend even further into our lives than markets.”²² Imagining these monitoring tools extending into the measurement of higher education is not a big stretch. However, asking whether we are any better off with the market as the measure of higher education or digital monitoring devices is an exercise into competing visions of the academic abyss.

It is here, however, that Davies's arguments concerning business, government, and the market go well beyond the standard critiques of neoliberalism and the surveillance state—and extend into the fields of psychology, neuroscience, and health care. To be sure, Davies is very hard on all three. For him, governments and corporations have become obsessed with measuring how people feel and then cashing in on it. The measurement and commercialization of our feelings and emotions through “smart technology,” for example, is clearly not something that Davies thinks really improves our “well-being.” Rather, it is only part of a larger effort to cash in on our emotions and place them under continuous surveillance. “Any critique of ubiquitous surveillance,” argues Davies, “must now include a critique of the maximization of well-being, even at the risk being less healthy, happy, and wealthy.”²³ But is this what people really want? Namely, to be less wealthy, healthy, and happy?

While Davies never really answers this last question, he does a remarkable job of taking us on a 200-plus-year journey from the birth of a science of happiness in the eighteenth philosophy of Bentham through the various psychologies and sciences of happiness in the nineteenth century to its commercialization in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. His work in *The Happiness Industry* (2015) provides an important perspective on how the roots of neoliberalism interweaves philosophy, psychology, and economics—a perspective that helps understand why those seeking a measure for measure in neoliberalism can find themselves staring down the philosophy of Jeremy Bentham—even if they don't want to. It also provides a template as to future considerations of happiness in higher education, one where smart technology is used to help make smart people happier.

Davies reminds us that for Bentham happiness is a “physical occurrence within the human body” that can be measured.²⁴ He offers that Bentham provides two responses to the question, “How does utility manifest itself in such a way that it can be grasped by measurement?”²⁵ The first is “human pulse rate,” a response that Bentham “wasn't particularly taken with himself”; the second is “that money might be used.”²⁶ Notes Davies, Bentham “was well ahead of his time” in contending that “[i]f two different goods can command an identical monetary price, then it can be assumed that they generate the same quantity of utility for the purchaser.”²⁷ “When Bentham idly wondered whether pulse rate or money might be the best measure of utility,” concludes Davies, “he could scarcely have imagined the industries that would develop dedicated to asserting and reinforcing the authority of particular indicators to represent our inner feelings.”²⁸

Neoliberalism is a “depressive-competitive disorder,” argues Davies, that “arises because the injunction to achieve a higher utility score—be that measured in money or physical symptoms—becomes privatized.”²⁹ He shows how the Chicago School of economics (and the St. Louis School of psychiatry) breaks with the logic that says we have a moral and political responsibility toward the weak—one that often asks us to impose restrictions on the strong. For Davies, authority in neoliberalism “consists simply in measuring, rating, comparing and contrasting the strong and the weak without judgment, showing the weak how much stronger they might be, and confirming to the strong that they are winning, at least for the time being.”³⁰ Or, in short, that the very rich, successful, and healthy firms and people should become even more so. The same, of course, holds for universities under the tutelage of neoliberalism.

According to Davies, Thatcher and Reagan not only ushered in the era of neoliberalism, but also a “renewed reverence for both competitiveness and the management of happiness” in its rise. Davies is careful to note that American neoliberalism *does not* favor competitive markets, but rather markets as “a space for victors to achieve ever-greater glory and exploit the spoils.”³¹ In other words, competition according to the Chicago School of economics was about destroying rivals, not co-existing with them—and the market was the central site of this destruction. The neoliberal man, says Davies, is “possessed with egoism, aggression, and optimism of a Milton Friedman or a Steve Jobs.”³²

But the destruction wrought by the neoliberal era is not just limited to the individual. It also extends to the group, of which higher education might be seen as a paradigmatic example. The interweaving of the science of happiness with social media innovation in the age of neoliberalism brings about its own unique set of problems. For example, it has been shown that the social media technology, Facebook, actually makes people feel worse about their lives rather than better.

This is of course highly ironic given that universities now often link their success to increased use of social media technology. Faculty and students too often use social media in connection with their work at the university. “If happiness resides in discovering relationships which are less ego-oriented, less purely hedonistic, than those which an individualistic society offers,” writes Davies, “then Facebook and similar forms of social media are rarely recipes for happiness.”³³ “The depressed and the lonely, who have entered the purview of policy-making now that their problems have become visible to doctors and neuroscientists,” concludes Davies,

“exhibit much that has gone wrong under the neoliberal model of capitalism.”³⁴ We can now add the disaffected members of the neoliberal university to the exhibit of the casualties of late capitalism.

Davies describes a world where individuals seeking to “escape relentless self-reliance and self-reflection”³⁵ turn to social media such as Facebook only to find that it further deepens the malaise brought upon them by the extreme individualism of neoliberalism. In short, “neoliberal socialism” sees the “social” as “an instrument for one’s own medical, emotional or monetary gain”—and in doing so perpetuates the “vicious circle of self-reflection and self-improvement.”³⁶ “Once social relationships can be viewed as medical and biological properties of the human body,” writes Davies, “they can become dragged into the limitless pursuit of self-optimization that counts for happiness in the age of neoliberalism.”³⁷

Betraying our debt to the sociological and philosophical legacies of the work of Michel Foucault, Davies argues that the explosion of happiness and wellness data is “an effect of new technologies and practices of surveillance.”³⁸ The rise of “big data” is different from that of the “data survey,” as the latter was collected with the intention of analyzing—whereas with the former this is not the case.³⁹ Davies speculates that the “dream that pushes ‘data science’ forwards is that we might one day be able to dispense with separate disciplines of economics, psychology, sociology, management and so on,” replacing it instead with a “general science of choice.”⁴⁰ For him, “‘the end of theory’ means the end of parallel disciplines, and a dawning era in which neuroscience and big data analytics are synthesized into a set of hard laws of decision-making.”⁴¹ “Add mass behavioral surveillance to neuroscience,” continues Davies, “and you have a cottage industry of decision experts, ready to predict how an individual will behave under different circumstances.”⁴² In an ironic twist, the history of consumerism may even soon be looking at “predictive shopping,” where our purchasing decisions are made for us based on algorithmic analysis or smart-home monitoring—and sent directly to our home without our having to “ask” for them.⁴³ Why not also expect the same from higher education under late capitalism? Namely, “predictive education” where our educational decisions are made for us based on educational lacuna determined through smart technology.

Davies looks for an alternative to the Benthamite and behaviorist traditions, that is, those “which view psychology as a step towards physiology and/or economics, precisely so as to shut the door on politics.”⁴⁴ What if, in contradistinction to these traditions, we view psychology as a “door

through which we pass on the way to political dialogue”⁴⁵ “‘Critique’ will not show up in the brain, which is not to say that nothing happens at a neurological level when we exercise critical judgement.”⁴⁶ “The attempt to drag all forms of negativity under a single neural or mental definition of unhappiness (often classified as depression),” notes Davies, “is perhaps the most pernicious of the political consequences of utilitarianism in general.”⁴⁷ Pernicious, yes. But also yet another explanation as to why some today feel that critique has lost a lot of its steam.⁴⁸

The work of Davies touches on a lot of themes that are important to a consideration of happiness in higher education under late capitalism. His insight, for example, as to why critique is not championed in the age of neoliberalism is one way to reach the conclusion that neoliberalism favors docile subjects, but of course not the only way. The notion that happiness is now a commodity peddled in the neoliberal economy in cooperation with psychology and neuroscience begs the question of the role of higher education in the mix. While I do not have all of the answers here, Chap. 3, “Higher Hedonism,” takes up the notion of happiness in higher education with specific reference to the work of Jeremy Bentham, and Chap. 5, “Google U,” looks into the effects of big data on higher education including the prospect of the “end of theory.”

UNDER PRESSURE

The work of William Davies on the “happiness industry” does us a great service by calling to the fore the question of how our happiness is being used in the service of forwarding neoliberalism in government and industry. However, though higher education too is under the grip of neoliberalism, it would not be accurate to describe it as a “happiness industry.” In fact, if anything, given the problems facing students and faculty in higher education today, it might be better described as an “unhappiness industry.” Still, calling to the fore how individual and group happiness is served by neoliberalism in higher education is an important area of contemporary concern.

Higher education under late capitalism places incredible pressure on both individuals and institutions to conform or be left in the dustbin of economic “progress,” which translates under neoliberalism to “academic” progress. Whether it is state governments asking for greater transparency and austerity measures from institutions, accreditation agencies asking for more accountability and assessment measures, or individual students

dealing with the prospect of massive debt with limited employment prospects, higher education under late capitalism is a pressure cooker. This is why we all need to take a deep breath and try to understand better how the neoliberal condition contributes to our well-being and general happiness as participants in higher education in America.

What is amazing to me is that, if higher education by so many accounts is broken or in “crisis,” and so many people seem to be unhappy with it, why does change seem to be so difficult? Why does higher educational reform move at such a glacial pace in spite of widespread dissatisfaction with the fundamental economic and managerial conditions of the academy? In Chap. 4, “Homo Habitus,” an explanation is offered by looking into the notion of “academic habitus.” Here, it is not the work of Jeremy Bentham that provides the major explanatory framework but rather the social and political philosophy of the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu, who provides “useful weapons to all of those who are striving to resist” neoliberalism in his inspirational book, *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time* (1998), also provides an explanation much earlier in his career, through his notion of habitus, as to why behavior, even bad behavior such as that currently being exhibited in neoliberal academe, is so difficult to change.⁴⁹ Dating back to his early work from the 1970s, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu is incredibly prescient as to the conditions currently holding higher education in neoliberal chains. Chapter 4 asks him to help us to understanding why the neoliberal condition is such a hard habit (or habitus) to break.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 examine specific ways to deal with some of the negative consequences of neoliberalism in higher education. Chapter 6, “Against Debt,” explores how debt shapes our identity and conduct in higher education today. Rather than following some contemporary thinking that encourages us to not honor our financial debts in an effort to bring about an end to capitalism, I argue that honoring our debts is still an important moral and ethical imperative even in a broken economic system. Chapter 7, “Punch the Clock,” looks at how issues of class have fared in higher education under late capitalism, specifically how the notion of education as a source of class mobility has fared under neoliberalism. Finally, Chap. 8, “The Dark Side,” examines the role of administration in providing resistance to the neoliberal university. I argue that without the support of higher education administration, the fight against neoliberalism in the academy becomes a much less achievable one.

The last chapter of *Higher Education under Late Capitalism* turns away from the lived realities of identity and conduct in neoliberal academe to examine one powerful critique of the neoliberal man from the world of television. *Breaking Bad*, which, originally aired from January 20, 2008, to September 29, 2013, is one of the most powerful works of serial television programming of the new millennium. What is often disregarded in considerations of the series is that its protagonist, Walter White (played by Bryan Cranston), is a former graduate student and high school teacher. Much of the series centers on how the negative consequences of neoliberalism in higher education drive him to radically alter his identity and conduct. If Davies is right that the neoliberal man is “possessed with egoism, aggression, and the optimism of Milton Friedman or a Steve Jobs,” then Walter White pushes the limits of this possession to their neoliberal nadir. He is the model of what identity and conduct under neoliberalism looks like when driven to its extremes.

Higher Education under Late Capitalism asks perhaps some of the most obvious questions that one can ask about the neoliberal university. Namely, what kind of person does it encourage us to be? What type of conduct does it favor? What type of identity does it champion? Is this person one that is happy with their life? Or is this a person that is unhappy? Moreover, if higher education under late capitalism favors measurement, how do we measure this measurement? How do we measure, for example, key measures of neoliberalism such as austerity and transparency? If change in higher education is slow in spite of all that is wrong today with it, what can we do as students, faculty, and administrators in light of being subject to the neoliberal condition?

It is my hope that *Higher Education under Late Capitalism* will at least encourage more questions about the fate of our academic identity and conduct under neoliberalism. After all, as the philosopher said, the unexamined life is not worth living. This holds for academics too. If we do examine our academic life, what we may find under the rock of neoliberalism is something that may not meet our expectations or be worthy of our time and efforts. The only question then is what will *we* do?

NOTES

1. The notion of the docile subjects of neoliberal academe is established in some depth in my book, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,

- 2013). Two of the major theses of the book are (1) neoliberalism threatens to turn academics into docile subjects (xvii–xviii) and (2) docile academic subjects are a bad thing (xviii–xix).
2. For an excellent, albeit controversial, account of the rise of vocationalism in higher education, see Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus, *Higher Education? How Colleges Are Wasting Our Money and Failing Our Kids—And What We Can Do About It* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2010).
 3. For accounts of the destructive powers of neoliberalism, see *Capital at the Brink: Overcoming the Destructive Legacies of Neoliberalism*, eds. Jeffrey R. Di Leo and Uppinder Mehan (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014) and Jeffrey R. Di Leo, Henry Giroux, Sophia A. McClennen, and Kenneth J. Saltman, *Neoliberalism, Education, and Terrorism: Contemporary Dialogues* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013).
 4. Same goes for books. A standard sales feature of many books on higher education today is back cover copy announcing the “crisis.” This goes even for the most recent titles. The first line of the back cover copy of *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016) by Christopher Newfield, one of the most thorough critics of the financial model of American university, is the following: “Higher education in America, still thought to be the world leader, is in crisis.”
 5. Some have even suggested that the birth of humanism is co-extensive with the birth of versions of the humanities crisis. In his book, *The Humanities in the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), Paul Grendler writes the following in a section entitled “Humanists Avoid the University, 1370–1425”: “The reasons why humanists did not become university professors are easy to find. Teaching grammar, rhetoric, and authors in the university was poorly paid and lacked prestige. A humanist could earn a higher salary as chancellor to a republic or secretary to a prince. Most important, the chancellor or secretary was highly visible and could possibly shape events through his presence at the prince’s elbow” (208–209).
 6. For a defense of paralogy in higher education, see Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education*, especially 29–31.
 7. Judith Butler, “Ordinary, Incredulous,” in *The Humanities and Public Life*, ed. Peter Brooks with Hilary Jewett (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 17.
 8. *Ibid.*, 20.
 9. *Ibid.*, 27.
 10. *Ibid.*, 27.
 11. *Ibid.*, 33.

12. Ibid., 33.
13. Ibid., 37.
14. See my *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education*, passim.
15. Judith Butler, et al., “Concluding Discussion,” *The Humanities and Public Life*, ed. Peter Brooks with Hilary Jewett (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 147.
16. Ibid., 147.
17. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1.
18. Bentham cited by William Davies, *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being* (New York: Verso, 2015), 19.
19. William Davies, *The Happiness Industry*, 19.
20. Ibid., 10.
21. Ibid., 10–11.
22. Ibid., 11.
23. Ibid., 11.
24. Ibid., 20.
25. Ibid., 24.
26. Ibid., 25.
27. Ibid., 25.
28. Ibid., 39.
29. Ibid., 179.
30. Ibid., 179.
31. Ibid., 160.
32. Ibid., 161.
33. Ibid., 209.
34. Ibid., 211.
35. Ibid., 211.
36. Ibid., 212.
37. Ibid., 213.
38. Ibid., 219.
39. Ibid., 233.
40. Ibid., 237.
41. Ibid., 237.
42. Ibid., 238.
43. Ibid., 239.
44. Ibid., 267.
45. Ibid., 267.
46. Ibid., 269.
47. Ibid., 269.

48. See, for example, Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004), and Jeffrey R. Di Leo, “The Ruins of Critique,” *Criticism after Critique: Aesthetics, Literature, and the Political*, ed. Jeffrey R. Di Leo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
49. Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998; reprint, 2000), vii.

The Two Austerities

Austerity is the measure of responsible academic conduct in the age of neoliberalism. To tout its power and promise is a key aspect of being a fully engaged member of neoliberal academe; to deny its value and benefit is a central component of resisting neoliberal academe—and perhaps even moving beyond it. The docile subjects of the neoliberal academy are perfectly constituted to follow austerity measures into one of the darkest chapters in the history of democratic education.¹ Those within the academy who even offer the slightest hint of resistance to the allegedly perfect logic of austerity open themselves to marginalization—and ultimately failure.

However, assessing the role of austerity in the academy is not as uncomplicated as it may seem. From the perspective of austerity as an arm of the repressive and destructive neoliberal practices and policies of higher education, austerity is all darkness and no light. But even if this is the most recent and high-profile aspect of austerity in the academy, it is not its only dimension—nor even its most long-standing. Rather, austerity has played a large role in defining the emotional, moral, and pedagogical life of the academy. Namely, austerity has come to be a regulative emotional, if not also moral, imperative in the conduct of academic life. Furthermore, these emotional and moral imperatives predate the rise of neoliberalism and its austerity agenda.

Austerity as an emotional and moral imperative has long shaped the conduct of academic life. For some, this has been a problem; for others, it has been simply a part of being an academic. Nevertheless, the rise of neoliberalism in the academy has intensified the emotional and moral effects of its traditional relationship with austerity to the point where one must ask whether the resultant academic environment is a healthy or an unhealthy one? A harmful or an unhelpful one? It will be argued that the confluence of these two austerities within the neoliberal academy results in a higher educational environment that is fundamentally ineffective in meeting the emotional demands of academic life. This, coupled with the failure of the neoliberal academy to meet the needs of democratic education and critical citizenship, only strengthens arguments in support of rejecting neoliberal academe—and instead working toward an alternate educational praxis. Let's begin though with a brief overview of the more general and contemporary economic sense of austerity before moving on to its emotional and moral dimensions—and then, ultimately, to the confluence of these two austerities within higher education under late capitalism.

AUSTERITY AND THE STATE

What is austerity? And what does it mean for those whose lives are inextricably linked to its operation? The former question is a lot easier to answer than the latter. As the story goes, in the decades after the Second World War there was nothing like the conditions that came about in the 1990s. Namely, “diminished growth rates, the maturation of welfare states and an aging population.”² In many ways, the period after the Second World War was one marked by the rise and fall of “easy financing”—an era that reached its apex and end in the 2008 financial collapse.³ For the most part, in the 1990s, governments were finding that their public expenditures were exceeding their receipts. While this could have been counterbalanced by tax increases, “growing international tax competition has rendered it more difficult to raise taxes on companies and top income earners.”⁴

It has been said that the United States could have easily solved “its fiscal problems by raising its taxes by a few percentage points”; however, not only did it refuse to raise them, but in point of fact taxes in the United States *declined* in the 2000s—something which “warns against analytical and political volunteerism.”⁵ This resistance to tax increases “has been widespread in rich industrialized countries since the 1970s, when the end of the postwar growth period registered with citizens and ‘bracket creep’

could no longer be relied upon to provide states with a rising share of their societies' economic resources."⁶ It was at this point that governmental debt became the solution to close the gap between revenue and spending—at least until this practice imploded in 2008.⁷

Austerity is the response of some governments to these difficult economic conditions. Running deficits and accumulating debt may have been possible in the “age of easy financing,” but in the “age of austerity” it is no longer an option. When governmental revenue cannot keep up with governmental spending, and increased taxation or incurring more debt is not feasible, then reducing public expenditure is touted as an “austerity measure.” In the United States, these reductions often amount to fewer repairs to infrastructure, cuts in pensions, selling off of parks and public housing, cuts in firefighters and police, privatization of all aspects of public life including the military and prisons, wage stagnation, and so on. Allegedly, governmental austerity measures such as those recently enacted in Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and, most infamously, Greece are short-term responses to fiscal imbalance between spending and revenue.

However, the phrase “permanent austerity” has come to imply that the reductions in governmental funding expenditure may be ongoing—even should governmental revenue somehow come to exceed public spending.⁸ Still, even though the welfare state is essentially now in a state of “permanent austerity,” this does not “imply that the expected result is a collapse or radical retrenchment of national welfare states,” writes Paul Pierson, a political scientist from the University of California, Berkeley. “Major policy reform is a political process,” continues Pierson, “dependent on the mobilization of political resources sufficient to overcome organized opponents and other barriers to change.” For him, those opposed to the welfare state “have found it very difficult to generate and sustain this kind of political mobilization.”⁹

It is the specter of permanent austerity that is the most troubling aspect of recent responses to the financial meltdown of 2008. While many can understand, and sympathize with, “austerity measures” as a short-term and failed response to the debt crisis, few will agree to the necessity of an “austerity state” rising out of the ashes of the “debt state.”¹⁰ This is not because most are opposed to setting limits on state funding, but rather because of the fear that an austerity state may weaken democratic government. The real trouble here is the level of uncertainty regarding the long-term effects of austerity on democratic government. There really is no historical precedent for the flourishing of democratic government under

permanent austerity.¹¹ Therefore, while some are hopeful that democracy can flourish under permanent austerity, others are sure that it will fail.

Debt has played a large role in the establishment of a liberal democracy. It has been said that “the build-up of debt, first public and then private, helped preserve liberal democracy by compensating citizens for low growth, structural unemployment, deregulation of labour [sic] markets, stagnant or declining wages, and rising inequality.”¹² It has also been said that both the state and global fiscal crises

were the prices governments paid for their inability to prevent the advance of liberalization, or for their complicity with it. As governments increasingly gave up on democratic intervention in the capitalist economy, and the economy was extricated from the public duties it was promised it would perform when capitalist democracy was rebuilt after the war, it was through what came to be called the ‘democratization of credit’ that citizens were, temporarily, reconciled with the declining significance of democratic politics in their lives.¹³

The governmental model that has resulted from decreased interventionism into the capitalist economy and the increased reliance on market forces as the determinants of public value has been broadly called “neoliberalism.” Austerity may simply be regarded as one of the later stages of what might be termed “the age of neoliberalism.” Still, for all that is known about the effects of neoliberalism in state and governmental policy, very little is known as to how its most recent instantiation, the austerity state, will affect democratic values and governance.

An elegant way to view the tensions that arise in the austerity state is to view it as one in which two distinct constituencies are served: the people and the market. Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streek, researchers from the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne, Germany, describe the differing constituencies of the austerity state as follows:

Whereas a state’s citizenry is nationally organized, financial markets are global. Citizens are resident in their country and typically cannot or will not switch their allegiance to a competing country, whereas investors can and do easily exit. Citizens ‘give credit’ to their government by voting in general elections, whereas creditors do or do not give money. Rights of citizenship are based in public law, whereas the claims of creditors are regulated in civil or commercial law. Citizens express approval or disapproval of their government in periodic elections, whereas “markets” make themselves heard in auctions that are held almost continually. Whereas “the people” articulate

their views through public opinion, “the markets” speak through the interest rates they charge. There is an expectation that citizens will be loyal to their country, in contrast to the mere hope that creditors will have “confidence” in its government and the fear that they could withdraw this confidence if they were to become “pessimistic” or to “panic.” Finally, where citizens are expected to render public service and expect to receive public services, “markets” want debt service.¹⁴

Argue if you will as to whether each and every one of these differences and tensions are accurate, the more general point regarding the two different constituencies served by the austerity state is an important one. It gives the all-powerful and omnipresent market of neoliberalism a set of characteristics that can be clearly viewed as oppositional to and in conflict with the bearers of democratic culture and society: the people.

While predicting the future of the austerity state may be a difficult endeavor, predicting the future of its two constituencies is less difficult, particularly when one agrees to favor one over the other in matters of public policy. If the market is favored at the expense of the people, then there will be a continued decline in social justice and democratic values. One only needs to look to recent social unrest in Greece and other countries subject to extreme austerity measures for a sense of democracy’s future within the austerity state that favors the markets over the people.¹⁵ However, if the people are favored at the expense of the market, then, and only then, is there hope for a revival of social justice and a renaissance of democratic values—even within the austerity state. But don’t hold your breath waiting for the latter to occur. The age of neoliberalism is not and has never been about “the people.” It is, and will continue to be, about the neo-Darwinian ascent of the market as the regulator of public value and social justice.

FORMS OF AUSTERITY

The macro context of austerity, namely, austerity as a governmental response to reduce budget deficits, is one of the major topics of our day. It has been widely discussed and debated in both the popular press and scholarly arena—and because of this there is little need to extend our introduction beyond the simple confirmation of its presence.¹⁶ Nevertheless, there is another context of austerity that has been less examined and explored, namely, austerity within the context of academe. While perhaps not as globally pervasive as the governmental context of austerity, it is still a micro context of austerity that has significantly impacted life in the academy, particularly in the United States.

My general position regarding neoliberalism in higher education is that it is recalibrating academic identity—albeit not for the better. This general position has been developed over the course of a number of other occasions, most recently and deeply, in my book, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education* (2013). Therefore, I feel no obligation to demonstrate this more general claim here. However, I have not given much attention to the more specific claim, namely, that austerity is a major aspect of the recalibration of academic identity. This chapter, therefore, aims to be the occasion for it.

But examination of austerity in higher education immediately presents a problem, namely, that there seem to be at least two distinct dimensions to it with respect to its intersection with higher education.

From one angle, austerity requires that all behavior in the context of academic decision-making be made a function of fiscal restraint rather than academic freedom. It makes the precondition of higher education decision-making as “cost reduction” rather than “academic excellence.” The belief is that lowering the cost of administering academe allows for either more accountability to the sources of educational funding or less concern about the diminishing resources afforded to higher education.

Austerity from an economic angle aims for higher and higher levels of educational efficiency and financial accountability. It is the omnipresent voice of fiscal reduction both as a reaction to monetary constraint and rising debt, and as a projection of the normative value of education, namely, as that which can always be done with less—just as long as it produces standardized test scores that validate its efficacy.

If ontological austerity finds its highest expression in Ockham’s Razor, the notion that entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity, then economic austerity finds its most *pernicious* expression in Neoliberalism’s Razor, the notion that costs are not to be multiplied beyond necessity. The cuts made by Neoliberalism’s Razor are more than just economic. They destroy the very fabric of higher education in America. The razor of neoliberalism’s austerity measures cares not if higher education is well dressed to meet the needs of democratic education and critical citizenship. Rather, its only concern is to dress down higher education in an effort to alleviate the state from all fiscal responsibility toward public education—and to pass that responsibility onto the people. In short, as Neoliberalism’s Razor, austerity destroys the very *being* of higher education by allowing economic interests to determine educational ones.

It is this dimension of austerity, namely, the one that views it from the perspective of economic parsimony, that is the most recognizable aspect of austerity in higher education. Educational funding cutbacks are often reported by the press, particularly, reductions in state appropriations to public institutions of higher education. While these reductions are never well received by the colleges and universities that are affected by them, they are a popular and effective political platform for neoliberal politicians in statehouses across the country. Reducing state appropriations to higher education for them is an easy political decision, because it passes along the cost—and debt—of higher education from the state treasury to the consumer, that is, students and their families. As a result, educational debt is accrued at a higher rate for those least able to afford it, that is, poor and middle-class Americans who rely on state-funded higher education as an affordable option to high-priced private higher education.

The matter is often further complicated by the constraint that not only is state funding for higher education either frozen or reduced, but so too is the option of state colleges and universities raising their tuition and fees to offset reductions in state higher education appropriations. It is at this moment that the grim reaper of austerity brings a second level of death into the house of higher education.

Not only are state-funded institutions of higher education receiving fewer state appropriations as a response to calls for “austerity,” but now by not having recourse to increasing tuition and fees, academe is also forced to either increase productivity or decrease costs. Or worse yet, both, that is, increase productivity *and* decrease costs. This double death brought by austerity measures to higher education, that is, death by state cutbacks and death by internal cutbacks opens the door to the second dimension of austerity in higher education, that is, a sense of austerity that is less about economics and more about emotions.

As a financial concept, austerity involves thrift and economy, but as a non-financial concept, austerity involves gravity, strictness, severity, seriousness, and solemnity—feelings and emotions that have a long and special history in higher education. One of the less-commented-upon aspects of austerity measures in higher education is the intensification of academe’s predilection toward *emotional austerity*, specifically the way in which recent neoliberal austerity measures in higher education intensifies and affects the emotional condition of academe. This is austerity’s other dimension in higher education, albeit one that is not often recognized and even less discussed.¹⁷ Let us now take a look at this other side of austerity.

AUSTERE EMOTIONS

Academe's austere emotional front is well known. Professors who project an image of solemnity, gravity, and seriousness are more representative of the goals, values, and self-image of academe than those who do not exhibit these characteristics. This is of course not to say academics are incapable of emotions that are more playful, joking, and joyous. Of course they are. They are human after all and as such are capable of a wide spectrum of feelings and emotions. It is to say, though, that academe as an institution is one that privileges and encourages austerity of emotion over its opposite.

Organizations and institutions such as higher education stabilize the emotion work of their participants. The emotions that are supported by the organization are called "representative emotions." Such emotions are ones that are most supportive of the aims of the organization or institution. The better organizations and institutions are able to synchronize the emotion work of their participants in support of their general aims and goals, the more effectively they will be able to assure achievement of those desired aims and goals. Still, it should never be forgotten that these representative emotions are "constructed" ones, meaning that though they may have roots in or originate from "natural" emotions, they are different from them. In other words, within the workplace individuals are expected to express some of their feelings, but not all of them. Finding the right balance here between feeling and expression is often the difference between institutional success and organizational failure. Of less concern though is how these constructed emotions affect individuals—and in this regard higher education is no different from most other organizations.

It is important for organizations to control the passions of their participants because in doing so, they present the organization with the best chance of not only achieving its goals, but also maintaining the *image* it wishes to project. Faculty who laugh and joke in the pursuit of knowledge and truth are taken less *seriously* than those who pursue the same ends with solemnity and gravity. This may not be a problem for individuals who, for example, work in creative industries such as game design or music production, but in an institution such as higher education, higher emotions and more austere feelings are the norm. The latter are more representative of the *image* of higher education than the lower emotions and feelings.

Scholars of organizational behavior tell us that organizations establish *norms* regarding the feelings and emotions of their participants, and these norms are regulated by rules and procedures. Some have even proposed

theories as to how emotions are formed by organizational values and cultural expectations. For example, the American sociologist, Arlie Hochschild of the University of California, Berkeley, proposes that there is a difference between rules regarding feelings and those with respect to expression.

“*Feeling rules* refer to emotions that the culture prescribes as appropriate to a given context, while *expression rules* refer to norms regarding how, and the extent to which, the emotions in question should be expressed.”¹⁸ The key insight here is that within organizations we sometimes feel things that are not appropriate for expression. We then engage in a process whereby we work with our emotions to adapt them to the feeling rules of our organization. This “emotion work” is important for it affords those within the organization the opportunity to temper their emotional responses to events within the organization in ways supportive of its aims and image—a general process Hochschild calls “the commercialization of feeling.”¹⁹

For those who believe that higher education over the past 25 years has seen a gradual yet steady increase in corporatization and commercialization, it is important to recognize the emotion work that has been constructed in support of its corporate aims and the commercialization of its image. It might be argued that the changes that higher education has undergone in becoming an increasingly corporate and commercial institution *are* due in large part to the effectiveness of transforming its traditional emotion-work into its corporate emotion-work. But what then is the traditional emotion-work of higher education?

Charlotte Bloch, a sociologist from the University of Copenhagen, the author of a pioneering study of the emotion work of higher education, *Passion and Paranoia: Emotions and the Culture of Emotion in Academia* (2012), describes the traditional, representative emotions of higher education as follows:

Modern academia is an organisation [sic] that is historically rooted in the tension between the Enlightenment’s thirst for knowledge and the constricting dogmas of the religious world-view of that time. This entails that Academia is historically constituted by distinguishing the spheres of science and religion, by distinguishing systematic method, specialisation [sic] and objectivity on the one hand and traditional religious awareness based on passion, faith and feeling on the other. These historical roots can be interpreted as providing the basis for a culture of emotions, the representative emotions of which are actually an “absence of feelings.”²⁰

While Bloch's project in *Passion and Paranoia* is neither a historical survey of the representative emotions of academe, nor a defense of their appropriateness, it does shed some light on a much neglected and overlooked area of scholarly research, namely, the sources of academe's representative emotions.²¹

Bloch's own project is a quantitative survey of the wide range of emotions present in academic culture in spite of norms that move it in the direction of purging academe of feelings. "The culture of Academia," comments Bloch at the end of her study, "is one from which feelings are absent—a culture of 'no feeling.'"²² Her research, though only drawn from institutions of higher education in Denmark, draws quantitative conclusions that one would expect to find in other parts of the world including the United States, specifically, those "feelings abound in Academia."²³ However, it also reveals the ways in which the culture of "no feeling" and no emotion serves as the norm against which the abounding feelings of academe are put in relief.

While I admire Bloch's pioneering work on the culture of emotion in academe and agree with her assessment of the range of emotions present in academe today (in spite of a norm enforced by practices and policies to purge academe of feeling), I don't exactly agree with her that "[a] cademic culture prohibits emotions."²⁴ Rather, I view academe as having inherited an emotional landscape characterized by emotional "austerity." That is, the representative emotions and feelings of academe are severity, strictness, seriousness, solemnity, and gravity. One could take this one step further and even say "self-discipline."

Moreover, it is a mistake to think that the cold and frosty representative emotions of academe are tantamount to a culture of "no feeling." Rather, they should be thought of as part of a culture that favors a certain range of emotions over another range of emotions. Bloch is right though to point to religion and science as potential sources for academe's emotional austerity. Here one needs to look no further than the asceticism that both defines certain classical philosophies and tempers early Christianity for some of the sources of academic emotion.

AUSTERITY AND ASCETICISM

The philosophical and religious roots of austerity can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy and the late antiquity of early Christianity. Here were to be found various lines of thought advocating a life of austerity and

self-discipline. The most prominent school of philosophy in Greek antiquity to develop and defend this line of thought came to be known as the “Cynics,” which in Greek (*kynikos*) literally means “dog-like.”

Cynicism and the Cynics, who took their name from “Cynosarges,” the building in ancient Athens that housed the school, flourished for about a thousand years, from roughly the fifth century before the common era to the fifth century of the common era. Cynicism generally contends that anything that disturbs the austere independence of the will is harmful and should be avoided. They either ignored or despised both the conventions of society and material possessions—behavior which provoked opposition from both Greek and Roman society.

Michel Foucault can be credited with a revival of interest of sorts in the Cynics and Cynicism through his public lectures and later philosophy. In his last public lectures at the Collège of France, for example, held from February to March 1984, he speaks extensively about the Cynics and their view of life. Of particular note is his commentary on the Greek sources of care (*epimeleia*) of self, “[s]tarting from the *Laches*, a text in which *bios*, much more than the soul, appears very clearly as the object of care.”²⁵ “And this theme of *bios* as object of care,” continues Foucault, “[seems] to me to be the starting point for a whole philosophical practice and activity, of which Cynicism is, of course, the first example.”²⁶ But Foucault’s interest in Cynicism is not merely because of its emphasis on care of self, rather than care of soul—a dominant topic of his later philosophy. It is also because of its emphasis on *parrhesia*, that is, truth-telling.

For Foucault, “in Cynicism, in Cynic practice, the requirement of an extremely distinctive form of life—with very characteristic, well defined rules, conditions, or modes—is strongly connected to the principle of truth-telling, of truth-telling which pushes its courage and boldness to the point that it becomes intolerable insolence.”²⁷ Moreover, the “essential connection” in Cynicism “between living in a certain way and dedicating oneself to telling the truth is all the more noteworthy for taking place immediately as it were, without doctrinal meditation, or at any rate within a fairly rudimentary theoretical framework.”²⁸ “Cynicism appears to me, therefore, to be a form of philosophy in which mode of life and truth-telling are directly and immediately linked to each other,” concludes Foucault.²⁹ But, for the Cynics, truth-telling does not come without an extreme cost in terms of one’s mode of life.

“The Cynic,” writes Foucault,

is the man with the staff, the beggar’s pouch, the cloak, the man in sandals or bare feet, the man with the long beard, the dirty man. He is also the man who roams, who is not integrated into society, has no household, family, hearth, or country ... and he is also a beggar. We have many accounts which testify that this kind of life is absolutely at one with Cynic philosophy and not merely embellishment.³⁰

Cynicism “makes the form of existence a way of making truth itself visible in one’s acts, one’s body, the way one dresses, and in the way one conducts oneself and lives.”³¹ “Cynicism,” concludes Foucault, “makes life, existence, *bios*, what could be called an *alethurgy*, a manifestation of truth.”³²

The links between Cynicism and Christianity can be made through asceticism and monasticism. One of the examples used by Foucault comes from an oration of Gregory of Nazianzus (fourth century CE) where he says while he “detests the impiety of the Cynics and their contempt for the divinity,” still “he has taken from them frugality” and their mode of life.³³ Speaking to Maximus, a Christian of Egyptian origin, who later becomes a heretic and is condemned, Foucault reports that Gregory says,

I liken you to a dog ... not because you are impudent, but because of your frankness (*parrhesia*); not because you are greedy, but because you live openly; not because you bark, but because you mount guard over souls for their salvation....You are the best and most perfect philosopher, the martyr, the witness to the truth (*marturon tes aletheias*).³⁴

Foucault sees in Gregory’s praise of Maximus not just praise of someone for speaking the truth, but also praise for someone because of the mode of life from which they speak the truth. Foucault says the following of Gregory’s comments about Maximus:

It involves someone who, in his very life, his dog’s life, from the moment of embracing asceticism until the present, in his body, his life, his acts, his frugality, his renunciations, his ascesis, has never ceased being the living witness of the truth. He has suffered, endured, and deprived himself so that the truth takes shape in his own life, as it were, in his own existence, in his own body.³⁵

Gregory's comment then brings us back to the ways in which both Cynicism and Christianity embraced asceticism and a life of austerity.

Moreover, according to Foucault, the "mission" of the Cynic

will be recognized only in the practice of *askesis*. The asceticism, exercise, and practice of all this endurance, which means that one lives unconcealed, non-dependent, and distinguishing between what is good and what is bad, will in itself be the sign of the Cynic mission. One is not called to Cynicism, as Socrates was called by being given a sign by the god of Delphi, or as the Apostles will be, by receiving the gift of tongues. The Cynic recognizes himself in the test of the Cynic life he undergoes, of the Cynic life in its truth, the unconcealed, non-dependent life which remakes, unravels the division between good and evil.³⁶

It is the asceticism of Cynicism and Christianity that provides a historical backdrop for the emotion work of the academy as well as the economic work of neoliberalism through its austerity measures.³⁷ In a world where we are asked to expect less support from our government because of "austerity measures," and an academy where not only does the state provide less and less financial support for education, asceticism seems to have become the new ideal of the neoliberal state under the aegis of austerity.³⁸

ASCETICISM REBORN

Academe has become the confluence of two differing, though powerful, forms of austerity. On the one hand, the moral imperative of higher education has long been connected to a form of emotional austerity that implores academics to favor an austere mode of life in the practice of academic *askesis*. This moral imperative favors austere feelings such as solemnity, seriousness, and gravity over those that are *indulgent*. It also normalizes a form of existential austerity that accepts minimal economic conditions as part of the truth-telling and truth-seeking mode of life. Like the Cynic in his "dog's life," who exercised frugality and asceticism, the academic in the age of neoliberalism is asked to find comfort in an austere mode of life that is best exemplified in the beggar's pouch of ancient asceticism.

On the other hand, the economic imperative of higher education has more recently been connected to a form of fiscal austerity that implores academe to not multiply costs beyond necessity—and then reduce them even more.³⁹ While the moral imperative of higher education has long been

connected to emotional austerity, the economic imperative has only recently been so closely allied with austerity. One only needs to look to the pillars, marble, and ivy of America's elite institutions of higher education for a visual representation of an economic imperative that is anything but austere.

Moreover, particularly at private institutions of higher education, the motto has always seemed to be "You pay for what you get." In other words, the higher the cost of providing students with higher education, the better the education will be. This has pushed elite and private institutions of higher education to go into something like a bidding war to see who can offer the highest tuitions, and therefore, by some law of the market, decree that this is an indicator of the quality of the education they will receive.⁴⁰

But the economic collapse of 2008 even brought the private universities and colleges into the age of austerity. Why? Because as a result of the collapse, endowments at these universities were greatly reduced, thereby reducing their fiscal capacity.⁴¹ This, in turn, led to even higher tuition and fees at the privates to offset endowment shortfalls.⁴²

This confluence of a long-standing moral imperative regarding academic life and a more recent economic imperative regarding academe has brought about a higher educational world that is widely regarded as in "crisis." Many believe that to get out of this crisis, we need to go back to a conception of the academy prior to the rise of the neoliberal economic imperative. Others, such as myself, believe that there is no going back to an academy more suited for the Middle Ages than the Age of New Media. Part of the problem then of neoliberal academe is not just the austerity measures that have resulted in massive cutbacks in educational funding, but also the way in which neoliberalism has affected the moral asceticism that has been a long-standing feature of higher education.

Arguably, the confluence of austerities in higher education today has brought about a "new asceticism." In other words, the neoliberal mandates to operate higher education under conditions of *economic* austerity have intensified the deeply rooted *moral*, *emotional*, and *existential* austerity of higher education.⁴³ Looking back to the Cynics is looking forward to the philosophical justification for accepting the "dog's life" as a model for the neoliberal academic's life. Or, perhaps put another way, the middle ground between higher education's moral and economic imperatives is something very much like asceticism. It is not difficult to find in the mode of life of this ancient school of philosophy many parallels with our own neoliberal academic condition.

Why not then just admit that the mission of the neoliberal academic, to quote Foucault on the mission of the Cynic, “will be recognized only in the practice of *askesis*”? Why not see in the “endurance” required of the Cynic philosopher to practice austerity a similarity with today’s academic who is required to perform a similar task? If the Cynic “recognizes himself in the test of the Cynic life he undergoes,” then so too does the neoliberal academic recognize himself or herself in the test of the austere neoliberal academic life he or she undergoes. Moreover, if the *askesis* of antiquity came in different forms such as “training, meditation, tests of thinking, examination of conscience, control of representations,”⁴⁴ then the *askesis* of academic neoliberalism comes in comparable forms such as *assessment* training, *standardized* tests of thinking, program elimination, and cost-cutting.⁴⁵

But the similarities do not end with comparisons. Rather they end with *intensifications*. If academic sociologists such as Charlotte Bloch are right, and the culture of academe is one of “no feeling,” then the austerity of neoliberal academic practices and policies will only serve to intensify the emotional vacuum of academe.⁴⁶ The managerialism of neoliberal academe functions through and creates “docile” subjects who are emotionless to the repressive and destructive policies and practices of neoliberal academe. When these docile subjects are merged with the ascetic subjects of academe’s more traditional environment, one can only fear a deepening of their emotional distance to their academic environment. Or, to draw upon the work of sociologist Arlie Hochschild, the “emotion work” of higher education in the age of neoliberalism will be the further “commercialization of feeling,” which in this case will amount to a new, or even neoliberal, form of asceticism.

CONCLUSION

Academe under neoliberalism has become a dog’s life. It is also a life filled with cynicism regarding neoliberal policies and practices such as recent economic austerity measures from both outside and inside the academy. Part of the reason for the recent entrenchment of neoliberalism within the academy is the long-standing belief that as academics we need to leave our feelings at the door when we enter the academic world. This emotional asceticism has a long-standing and strong tradition within higher education, and in an unfortunate way plays into the neoliberal agenda of managerialism and economic austerity. Whereas the ascetic life may have

worked in ancient Greece and Rome for the Cynics, in a world of global markets and international finance it just intensifies the negative capacities of academic neoliberalism. Doing without emotions and economic resources is viewed as a cost of leading a life of truth-telling.

A new asceticism is not the future of academe—even if it describes well the current state of higher education under late capitalism. While the truth-telling and frankness (*parrhesia*) of the Cynics should be part of our future, the beggar’s pouch, the roaming, the lack of integration into society, household, family, hearth, and country is not. Neoliberal academe has turned us into beggars through its austerity measures; has set the majority of college and university faculty roaming from position to position seeking enough income to continue their life of truth-telling; has not provided many with the minimal economic and emotional conditions to care for their families, households, and self; has brought about policies and practices that do not forward the ends of critical citizenship and democratic education. The new asceticism of the neoliberal academy is not a cause for celebration.

Rather, it should be a rallying cry to move beyond the neoliberal academy and seek a way of life within the academy that is fit for truth-seeking, committed individuals who care about both family and country; care about democratic values and social justice, who are not beggars on the fringes of society, but rather well-integrated and respected members of American culture and society. Enough with austerity—economic and moral—let’s establish a new model for higher education. One that supports a more robust sense of our economic needs and emotional life; one that is less corporate and more corporeal; one that is built on pleasure rather than its absence; one that is healthy rather than unhealthy, helpful rather than harmful. Let’s just say “no” to living like dogs on the short leash of neoliberal academe and its austerity measures.

NOTES

1. Again, the notion of the docile subjects of neoliberal academe is established in some depth in my book, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Two other sources on this topic are Bronwyn Davies, Michael Gottsche, and Peter Bansel, “The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal University,” *European Journal of Education* 41.2 (2006) and Joëlle Fanghanel, *Being an Academic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

2. Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streek, "Introduction: Politics in the Age of Austerity," *Politics in the Age of Austerity*, eds. Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streek (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 1.
3. For a fuller account of the rise and fall of easy financing, see C. Eugene Steuerle, "Financing the American State at the Turn of the Century," *Funding the Modern American State, 1941–1995*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
4. Schäfer and Streek, "Introduction: Politics in the Age of Austerity," 2.
5. Wolfgang Streek and Daniel Mertens, "Public Finance and the Decline of State Capacity," *Politics in the Age of Austerity*, eds. Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streek (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 55.
6. *Ibid.*, 55.
7. For some perspective here, consider that during the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s, the top marginal tax rate was over 90%. Senator Bernie Sanders, who ran in the 2016 Democratic presidential primary, said he could back this top marginal tax rate. "When radical, socialist Dwight D. Eisenhower was president, I think the highest marginal tax rate was something like 90 percent," said Sanders in an interview with CNBC's John Harwood. "When you think about something like 90 percent," asked Harwood, "you don't think that's obviously too high?" "No," replied Sanders. "What I think is obscene...when you have the top one-tenth of one percent owning as much as the bottom 90." "Bernie Sanders would Tax the Income of the Wealthiest Americans at 90 Percent," *ThinkProgress.org* (26 May 2015). <https://thinkprogress.org/bernie-sanders-would-tax-the-income-of-the-wealthiest-americans-at-90-percent>
8. See Paul Pierson, "Coping with Permanent Austerity: Welfare State Restructuring in Affluent Democracies," *Revue française de sociologie* 43.2 (2002), for an account of the "permanent austerity" and its potential to intensify. As austerity measures become a rewarded political habit in the age of neoliberalism, it would not be surprising to see them utilized in times of both fiscal deficit *and* surplus.
9. Paul Pierson, "Coping with Permanent Austerity," 370.
10. There is also the contradiction of calling for "austerity measures," while at the same time bailing out the banks.
11. See Schäfer and Streek, "Introduction: Politics in the Age of Austerity," 17 ff.
12. Schäfer and Streek, "Introduction: Politics in the Age of Austerity," 17.
13. *Ibid.*, 17.
14. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
15. The first stage of the debt crisis in Europe came in March 2009 with Hungary nearing financial collapse. Just over a year later, in May 2010, the second and more severe stage began when Portugal, Italy, Greece, and

Spain went into financial crisis. The latter four countries were often referred to by the acronym “PIGS” during the debt crisis. Mass protest regarding austerity measures was particularly high in Portugal and Greece. See Mabel Berezin, “The Normalization of the Right in Post-Security Europe,” *Politics in the Age of Austerity*, eds. Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streek (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013). For example, the Greek protests were held from May through July 2011 and were known as the “Indignant Citizens Movement.” On June 3, 2011, it is estimated that between 300,000 and 500,000 people gathered in front of the Greek Parliament. Later, Greek police were investigated for use of excessive force to control the protesters in Athens. See Helena Smith, “Greek Police Face Investigation After Protest Violence,” *The Guardian* (1 July 2011).

16. See, for example, Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) and “The Austerity Delusion: Why a Bad Idea Won Over the West,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2013), Paul Krugman, “Myths of Austerity,” *The New York Times* (1 July 2010) and “How the Case for Austerity Has Crumbled,” *The New York Review of Books* (6 June 2013), Robert Kuttner, *Debtors’ Prison: The Politics of Austerity Versus Possibility* (New York: Knopf, 2013), Brad Plumer, “IMF: Austerity Is Much Worse for the Economy than We Thought,” *The Washington Post* (12 October 2012), David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu, *The Body Politic: Why Austerity Kills* (New York: Basic Books, 2013) and “How Austerity Kills,” *The New York Times* (12 May 2013), and Richard Wolff, “Austerity: Why and for Whom?” (4 July 2010).
17. The general subject of the politics of emotion in academe is not widely discussed in the scholarly literature of higher education. However, the emotional world created within higher education is an important aspect of academic life. For an introduction to this topic, see Jeffrey R. Di Leo, “Shame in Academe: On the Politics of Emotion in Academic Culture,” *Academe Degree Zero: Reconsidering the Politics of Higher Education* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2011) and “On Academic Terrorism: Neoliberalism, Higher Education, and the Politics of Emotion,” *Neoliberalism, Education, Terrorism: Contemporary Dialogues*, Jeffrey R. Di Leo, Henry Giroux, Sophia A. McClennen, and Kenneth J. Saltman (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013), and Charlotte Bloch, *Passion and Paranoia: Emotions and the Culture of Emotion in Academia* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).
18. Charlotte Bloch, *Passion and Paranoia*, 10.
19. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling, Updated with a New Preface* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) develops these concepts and others regarding emotions in the workplace in more detail.
20. Charlotte Bloch, *Passion and Paranoia*, 10.

21. See my review of Bloch's *Passion and Paranoia* in *The British Journal of Sociology* 65.3 (2014) for a fuller overview of her remarkable and pioneering study.
22. Charlotte Bloch, *Passion and Paranoia*, 140.
23. *Ibid.*, 140.
24. *Ibid.*, 141.
25. Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983–1984*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 128.
26. *Ibid.*, 128.
27. *Ibid.*, 165.
28. *Ibid.*, 165.
29. *Ibid.*, 166.
30. *Ibid.*, 170.
31. *Ibid.*, 172.
32. *Ibid.*, 172.
33. *Ibid.*, 172.
34. *Ibid.*, 173.
35. *Ibid.*, 173.
36. *Ibid.*, 298.
37. Certainly a vast amount of genealogy would need to be worked out here to establish the continuities *and* discontinuities among Cynicism, Christianity, and neoliberal academe. For example, the Cynics were strongly resistant to authority, whereas neoliberal academic austerity involves an acceptance of authority. Nonetheless, by being heirs to a certain tradition, we have a predisposition to identifying austerity with truth, and hence academic life with austerity.
38. It should be noted that *sexual* austerity is a major theme in Foucault's later work. For example, in *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume Two* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), he proposes a number of themes regarding sexual austerity (14–24). "From the few similarities I have managed to point out," comments Foucault, "it should not be concluded that the Christian morality of sex was somehow 'pre-formed' in ancient thought; one ought to imagine instead that very early in the moral thought of antiquity, a thematic complex—a 'quadri-thematics' of sexual austerity—formed around and apropos of the life of the body, the institution of marriage, relations between men, and the existence of wisdom. And, crossing through institutions, sets of precepts, extremely diverse theoretical references, and in spite of many alterations, this thematics maintained a certain constancy as time went by: as if, starting in antiquity, there were four points of problematization on the basis of which—and according to schemas that were often very different—the concern with sexual austerity

- was endlessly reformulated” (1985, 21–22). Presumably, following Foucault’s lead, there is also a thematics of *emotional* austerity formed around and apropos of the life of the academic. However, speculation on this topic is best left for another occasion.
39. The irony here seems to be that while neoliberal academe implores its workers to do more with less, its students are given just the opposite message, namely to amass things and consume. In fact, arguably it is the opportunity to become consumers with more capacity that attracts students to neoliberal academe, rather than the opportunity to exercise austerity and truth-telling.
 40. “A rational pricing strategy for a liberal arts college...begins with increasing—not reducing—list price and, indeed, colleges have proved to be rational in this regard,” writes Victor Ferrall in *Liberal Arts at the Brink* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 73. But, this is just the “list price”—and few buy anything at list price. Again, Ferrall: College pricing “is based on discounting; the higher the tuition, the greater the discount. It is a matter of economic indifference to a college whether its tuition is \$30,000 and its average aid grant is \$20,000, or its tuition is \$40,000 and its average aid grant is \$30,000. Either way, the college’s net revenue per student is \$10,000” (72).
 41. A 2009 National Association of College and University Business Officers’ study reported that the endowments of the 842 participating institutions dropped an average of 23% in value. The rate of return also fell an average of 18.7% (Ferrall, *Liberal Arts at the Brink*, 29).
 42. That is, those *with* endowments. “In the face of a major recession,” writes Victor Ferrall, “both the average published tuition and fees and the total charges at all private baccalaureate colleges were 4.4 percent higher in 2009–2010 than in 2008–2009, even in the face of a 2.1 percent decline in the consumer price index between July 2008 and July 2009” (*Liberal Arts at the Brink*, 73).
 43. However, *economic* austerity is not equally distributed over neoliberal academe (even if moral and emotional are more equally distributed), especially when one considers things like start-up packages in the sciences, and business and medical school salaries.
 44. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume Two*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 74.
 45. See Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 72–77, for a fuller account of the forms of *askesis* in antiquity. Academic *askesis* as a practice of endurance to sustain the neoliberal academic life of truth-telling is a fully modern form of *askesis* that only shares formal characteristics with its ancient predecessor. Though a voluntary practice of the neoliberal academic self, failure to perform puts the individual at risk of elimination from neoliberal academe.

46. It bears mentioning that the Cynics were not about being entirely emotionally numb, nor are they the only historical backdrop against which to understand emotional austerity in academe. While there is a genealogical relation between the Cynics and neoliberal academic austerity, not only is it not without many complications and discontinuities, other, more contemporary, relations too can be established. Still, the Stoic ideal of *ataraxia* casts a long shadow over both the Cynics and the emotion work of contemporary academe.

Unlit Classrooms

If austerity is the measure of responsible academic conduct in the age of neoliberalism, then transparency is its watchdog. It is widely touted today as that which protects the public from both the misuse of academic resources and poor governance of the university. The public has come to expect increasing levels of transparency in the administration and governance of higher education both as a means of accountability and as a mode of publicity. Implied in these calls for more transparency is a mistrust and cynicism regarding higher education in America. But transparency carries with it a lot of baggage.

For one thing, calls for transparency always carry with them an implicit opposition to privacy and secrecy. Namely, increased transparency entails decreased privacy, and more publicity means less secrecy. The roots of the latter, in particular, can be connected to the rise of the modern state as one grounded not on secret practices, but rather on transparency, or more accurately, publicity. The emergence of representative governments in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century established a consideration of publicity and transparency as protections against bad administration and misrule.¹ As such, philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, and Immanuel Kant played a large role in establishing the social, political, and ethical foundations of transparency. And it is these foundations that need to be recalled in order to gain some

perspective on the role and function of transparency in higher education theory and practice today.

The general questions raised in this chapter are fairly transparent ones. Namely, what does it mean to call for “transparency” in the conduct of higher education? And is this a good thing? That is, is transparency something that contributes to the well-being of the university and those whose lives and education are connected to it—or is it something that works in the opposite direction? For that matter, what do we mean when we ask for “more” transparency from our colleagues? And how is this different from those whose aim is “perfect” transparency in the conduct of academe? While there is no doubt that transparency often can bring about greater levels of understanding and trust regarding the workings of academe, it is also the case that it can do the opposite. Namely, increased calls for transparency can also become a hotbed for cynicism regarding academe. This is particularly true when those asking for more transparency are not members of academe.

In this chapter, it will be argued that even if the questions regarding transparency are transparent ones, responses to them are better classified as opaque. The social, economic, moral, and political issues surrounding calls for transparency in higher education involve a complicated and vexed dynamics. From one perspective, transparency of the administration to faculty is one of the most important gauges of shared governance. Administrators who do not share with faculty important decisions and the rationales for them are in many ways *de facto* bad administrators. However, from another perspective, transparency by the administration to the government and those outside of higher education has become one of the most destructive forces to the modern university, especially when university life is reduced to performance measurement and based upon mistrust and cynicism regarding higher education in general.

Consequently, it will be argued that transparency is one of the most contested and controversial aspects of higher education today. Unpacking its dynamics within the university today reveals it to be at once the measure of effective shared governance as well as the perennial watchdog of the neoliberal academy. Transparency in neoliberal academe often pulls it in two opposing directions: one moves toward greater levels of efficiency, surveillance, and austerity as well as preservation of the economic interests of the academy, whereas the other aims toward protecting the interests, rights, and dignity of the faculty as well as toward ensuring the academic integrity of the institution. As such, the push and pull of transparency between conflicting sets of interests greatly complicates its role in the academy.

Let's begin with an overview of the major philosophical foundations of transparency. We'll start with more recent analytical work on transparency and then move back to the work of a group of late eighteenth-century thinkers that include Rousseau, Bentham, and Kant. The aim of these readings is to gain a better vantage point on what transparency means in the contemporary context and how it works. It is hoped that by looking backward to how transparency operated in the philosophical tradition we can better understand its more contested and controversial contemporary dimensions.

TRANSPARENCY AND OPACITY

In philosophical circles, transparency can and does function in a number of different ways, not all of which seem immediately relevant to a discussion of transparency in higher education. For example, there is a major sense of transparency in philosophy today that concerns the reference of objects in primarily linguistic contexts. The idea here is that while generally the truth about a given object is not affected by the manner in which we refer to it, in some linguistic contexts it is. So, for example, while it is generally possible to switch without affecting the truth of the given object (Jean-Jacques Rousseau) between say "Jean-Jacques," "he," "the author of *Confessions*," and "the Lambercier's adopted son," some linguistic contexts do limit this freedom. For example, "He knows who ____ is" may be true with "that philosopher" in its blank, but false when the philosopher is referred to as "the owner of the footprint." Linguistic contexts such as this one are described as "referentially opaque" as opposed to "referentially transparent."²

Discussions of "transparency" in this and similar contexts have occupied philosophers at least since the third century BCE, when Eubulides famously dubbed this situation the "masked man fallacy." Statements like "You say you know your brother, but that masked man is your brother, and you did not know him" are notoriously referentially opaque, whereas normal contexts where if you touched the mask, you thereby touched your brother, are transparent.³ Problems with the relative transparency and opacity of reference were not only extensively discussed by medieval logicians but were then again taken up with great intensity by philosophers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, the German mathematician-logician, Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) contended that referentially opaque contexts such as those exemplified by

the masked man fallacy refer to something else,⁴ and the English philosopher, Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) claimed that the expression does not really refer.⁵ Such discussions about transparency have carried through to the current time, with more contemporary philosophers such as W. V. O. Quine of Harvard University arguing that the expression does more than refer.⁶

However, as interesting and important as the discussions over the relative transparency of language among logicians may be, their significance to understanding transparency in academe—let alone the rapid increase in calls for more transparency in government and other facets of the public sphere—is at best, tangential. Still, there is something to be learned from these discussions. Namely, by asking the relative degree of “referential opacity” and “referential transparency” acceptable in responses to public calls for transparency, one is pulling the debate about transparency out of the politics of language and into the analytics of language—a space where considerations of transparency without regard to considerations of logic, truth, and reference are ultimately empty. If nothing else, such requests may foreground the fact that most public calls for transparency are not calls for truth or appeals to reference. Rather, they are something else—something that is more specifically captured by the social and political side of the house of philosophy, rather than its linguistic and logical side. And to this, we will turn in a moment.

Still, there is an eerie feeling that overcomes one when the full powers of analytic philosophy are turned on transparency: a feeling that considerations of knowledge, let alone self-knowledge, are somehow irrelevant to contemporary cries for transparency in the academy in particular, and in governance at large. This is particularly evident when we look to the contemporary epistemological dimensions of transparency, rather than their metaphysical and logical ones.

In contemporary discussions of self-knowledge, there is an epistemological position today that utilizes transparency as a concept in a very significant way. The philosopher Paul Boghossian of New York University, for example, makes a useful distinction between *strongly transparent* epistemic states and *weakly transparent* ones.⁷ For Boghossian, an epistemic state is *weakly transparent* to someone if and only if, when they are in the epistemic state, they can know that they are in it. However, an epistemic state is *strongly transparent* to someone if and only if they can know that they are in it, *and* when they are not in it, they can know that they are not in it.⁸ This means, for example, that pain is a *strongly transparent* epistemic state for most people: when we are in pain, we know it, and when we are not, we also know it.

As one of our standing goals in understanding and evaluating academe is to gain a sense of its emotional dimensions, the distinction between strongly and weakly transparent epistemic states can be a useful one. Differentiating levels of self-knowledge regarding our academic states will help us to better sort out the emotional effects of neoliberal academe. If one can say with confidence that the pain (or even terror⁹) associated with neoliberal academe is strongly transparent as opposed to weakly transparent, and more people concur with this position than do not, then it becomes more apparent that we need to move beyond neoliberal academe sooner rather than later. Transparency in this context is not only a useful dimension of self- and meta-knowledge, but also of meta-professional knowledge, which is after all one of the main reasons that we engage in critical studies of academe.

Nevertheless, when all is said and done, the analytics of transparency do not get us very far in understanding how transparency functions in the academy in general—even if they are useful in providing an account of transparency as it relates to self-knowledge in the academy. While being able to separate opaque references about the academy from transparent ones is a good philosophical exercise, it is not one that is going to make much of a difference in evaluating the destructive legacies of the neoliberal university; and while distinguishing between strong and weak transparency in our epistemic states with respect to the university may be useful in putting together a collective account of the emotional toll that neoliberal academe has had on most who participate within it, this too is not what calls for transparency in the academy are about.

A TRANSPARENT HEART

Though the analytics of transparency are a philosophically rich area for many logicians and philosophers of language, this work rings hollow when applied toward the aim of reaching a greater understanding of the role and nature of transparency in public discourse about the academy. This is not to say that there is nothing in the analytics of transparency that may produce a greater understanding of transparency in academe. Some suggestions have been offered here, and there are surely other opportunities to tie together an analytic notion of transparency with the sense in which it is used in neoliberal academic discourse. Rather, it is to say that pursuing the analytics of academic transparency takes us through the backwoods of neoliberal academe, when all of the action is occurring elsewhere. What philosophical sense of transparency then moves us toward the action?

Odd as it may sound, we need to look back to the work of a group of late eighteenth-century thinkers in order to gain a better sense of the role and function of transparency in contemporary academic discourse. While the figures of Kant and Bentham in this context will not raise many philosophical eyebrows, the same cannot be said of introducing the work of the French novelist and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)—especially when it is proposed that we need to look to his posthumously published autobiography, *The Confessions* (1782/1789), to begin to build an account of transparency in academe. But, strange as it may seem, such is the case.

Rousseau was born in Geneva in 1712 and orphaned at the age of ten. In philosophical circles, he is best known for his work in political philosophy, particularly for his two *Discourses* (*Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, 1750; and *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 1755) and his crowning philosophical achievement, *The Social Contract* (1762). In short, his discourses established that the growth of civilization corrupted natural goodness and increased inequality among men, and the point of his social contract theory is to demonstrate that “legitimate society exists by the agreement of the people, and acts by popular will.”¹⁰ For Rousseau, “[t]he State is not a mere accident of human history, a mere device for the protection of life and property; it responds to a fundamental need of human nature, as soon as men have to find ways of living in conditions which make it impracticable to maintain the isolation characteristic of the primitive ‘state of nature.’”¹¹

However, while the portrait of Rousseau as the philosopher of the social contract is well known, what is not as widely recognized, but no less significant, is the key role of transparency in Rousseau’s social and political thought. This is something that can be appreciated in his thought not by working forward through it, but rather by working backward. And for this insight, we are all indebted to Jean Starobinski’s landmark study of transparency in Rousseau.

Completed in 1957 and originally published in 1971 as *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l’obstacle*, Starobinski establishes the fundamental position of transparency in Rousseau. For Starobinski, Rousseau’s complex relationship with transparency began with the crucial trauma of his childhood, namely, his punishment for refusing to confess to breaking a comb that he had in fact never broken.

In *The Confessions*, which were completed in 1770, eight years before his death,¹² Rousseau portrays the traumatic event as follows:

One day I was learning my lessons alone in the room next to the kitchen, where the servant had left Mlle Lambercier's combs to dry on the stove top. Now when she came to take them off, she discovered that the teeth of one were broken off, all down one side. Who was to be blamed for this? I was the only person who had been in the room; but I said I had not touched it. M. and Mlle Lambercier jointly lectured, pressed, and threatened me; but I stubbornly maintained my denial. Appearances were too strong for me, however, and all my protests were overruled, although this was the first time that I had been convicted of a downright lie. They took the matter seriously, as it deserved. The mischief, the untruth, and my persistent denials, all seemed to deserve a punishment; but this time it was not Mlle Lambercier who inflicted it. They wrote to my Uncle Bernard, and he came.¹³

For most children, being punished for a crime that they did not commit would be an unpleasant experience, but not a particularly traumatic one. However, for the young Rousseau, the experience was a devastating one. Writes Rousseau,

There ended the serenity of my childish life. From that moment I never again enjoyed pure happiness, and even to-day I am conscious that memory of childhood's delights stops short at that point.¹⁴

All of this, though, is perfectly clear from Rousseau's text. However, what is not as apparent is the way in which this early trauma is pivotal in the formation of his deep and fascinating positions on transparency. And it is for this reason that Starobinski's reading is so important.

Starobinski reminds us that Rousseau believes his soul is transparent to himself and that his aim is to make it transparent to others. At the opening of *The Confessions*, Rousseau writes,

I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world.¹⁵

Much later, he adds,

I should like in some way to make my soul transparent to the reader's eye, and for that purpose I am trying to present it from all points of view, to show it in all lights, and to contrive that none of its movements shall escape his notice, so that he may judge for himself of the principle which has produced them.¹⁶

The purpose then of the autobiography is to make his heart, which is transparent to himself, transparent to others. Yet, in spite of this, *The Confessions* is widely viewed as a labor of self-construction—and far from perfectly transparent. It has been said that “his longing for transparency can be understood as a reaction to the trials of modern self-creation”—and that “what is remarkable about Rousseau’s claims of transparency is how easily they collapse.”¹⁷

Starobinski, however, establishes a much deeper role for transparency in Rousseau’s life and thought. He begins by noting that for Rousseau,

The revelation that appearances are deceiving is experienced as an injury. Rousseau discovers the falsity of appearances as a victim of that falsity. He perceives the limits of his subjectivity when that subjectivity becomes the object of *calumny*. He is misperceived by others: the self suffers for its appearance as from a miscarriage of justice, inflicted by people by whom it wished to be loved.¹⁸

Thus, according to Starobinski, before the comb incident, Rousseau’s childhood was one of “complete confidence and total transparency.”¹⁹ But after the incident, the “world is lost and everything turned dark.”²⁰ “When a man’s heart loses its transparency,” he adds, “nature turns dark and tangled.”²¹ When “the heart’s transparency is gone,” continues Starobinski, “so is the luminosity of nature.” “Gone, too, is the almost divine ability to ‘read in hearts.’” As a consequence, concludes Starobinski, “[w]e must live in opacity.”²²

In many ways, Rousseau’s notion of transparency is the polar opposite of the analytic. Whereas the analytics of transparency push us toward a more precise catalog of the referential veracity of statements and the epistemic strength of transparent states, Rousseau’s romantics of transparency leave us in a perpetual state of opacity, albeit longing with all of our heart for its opposite.

In a way, *The Confessions* is a romantic rabbit-hole. Crawling down the hole one will discover that up until the traumatic incident of the comb, Rousseau lived in a world of perfect communication and pure transparency with his adoptive family, the Lambercier’s. As Robert Darnton describes it, everyone in the Lambercier household “spoke his mind and read the mind of everyone else, not by careful study but through spontaneous effusions of the soul.” “It was a little utopia,” writes Darnton, “a state of pure transparency.”²³

But all of that came crashing down after the comb incident. Notes Rousseau,

No longer were we young people bound by ties of respect, intimacy, and confidence to our guardians; we no longer looked on them as gods who read our hearts; we were less ashamed of wrongdoing, and more afraid of being caught; we began to be secretive, to rebel, to lie.²⁴

This notion of the possibility of the transparent communication of the heart, that is to say, of reading the hearts of others, then becomes the cornerstone of a vision of a transparent society.

Michel Foucault notes that it was Rousseau's dream of a transparent society that motivated many of the revolutionaries of the eighteenth century. Writes Foucault,

It was the dream of a transparent society, visible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zones of darkness, zones established by the privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of some corporation, zones of disorder. It was the dream that each individual, whatever position he occupied, might be able to see the whole of society, that men's hearts should communicate, their vision be unobstructed by obstacles, and that opinion of all reign over each.²⁵

Some have even gone so far to say that revolutions have failed to the extent that they failed to achieve sufficient levels of transparency.²⁶ In this context then, if neoliberal academe were regarded as a revolution in higher education, it is not difficult to understand why there is such a strong demand today for increasing levels of transparency.

But in spite of the romantic dreams of transparency, living up to them is easier said than done. Even Rousseau, a philosopher who was preoccupied with and longed for transparency as few others, had major difficulties in balancing transparency against obstruction and opacity. Moreover, we know that while the romantics of transparency look toward a transparent society, we have also seen how the prerogatives of the corporate university under the aegis of neoliberalism have ironically thrust the academy into darkness through their calls for increasing levels of transparency.

The problem here is not with the desire to know transparently one's heart and to communicate it with others or even the dream being able to read the hearts of others. This is the uncontroversial side of Rousseau's romanticism. Rather, the problems arise when one attempts to build this

up into a transparent society. As Foucault and others have pointed out, the combination of truth, power, and transparency do not always add up to justice, rights, and equality. In the academy, a similar story can be told today through the neoliberal abuse of transparency and power to further the aims of finance and corporate greed. Hopefully, the neoliberal revolution in higher education is the one example where in spite of achieving sufficient levels of transparency, failure is imminent. Nonetheless, part of the staying power of neoliberal academe may simply be tied back to its incorporation of this romantic dream of a transparent society, one that can be traced back to the father of romanticism, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

THE POWER OF PUBLICITY

If the analytics of transparency take us through the backwoods of neoliberal academe, then the romantics of transparency lead us up a mountain from whose vantage point the entirety of academe is visible. Nevertheless, fulfilling the dream of a perfectly transparent academe is about as likely as fulfilling the dream of a perfectly transparent language or, for that matter, a perfectly transparent society. Though each is a beautiful vision, neither is an account of transparency that is capable of dealing with the contemporary scene in higher education, let alone the social complexities of privacy and the political realities of secrecy. While the romantics of transparency bring us closer to an understanding of its presence in neoliberal academe, romantic ideology is ill suited to deal with the political and economic dynamics of transparency in the contemporary academy. However, there is a position on transparency, more or less contemporaneous with Rousseau's, that is better suited to illustrate the way it works in neoliberal academe—namely, the social and political philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832).

In philosophical circles, Bentham, the father of the hedonic calculus, needs little introduction. Still, the comparison of Bentham to Rousseau regarding transparency might seem a stretch. Foucault, of course, is famous for introducing and analyzing Bentham's work on the "panopticon." To this end, he writes,

[Bentham] poses the problem of visibility organized entirely around a dominating, overseeing gaze. He effects the project of a universal visibility which exists to serve a rigorous, meticulous power.²⁷

According to Foucault, though, Rousseau and Bentham are "complementary" figures regarding transparency,

... Bentham's obsession, the technical idea of the exercise of an "all-seeing" power, is grafted on to the great Rousseauist theme which is in some sense the lyrical note of the Revolution. The two things combine into a working whole, Rousseau's lyricism and Bentham's obsession.²⁸

Their differences, though, can be most clearly seen in their views on the comrade/overseer relationship. Whereas Bentham uses the phrase "Each comrade becomes an overseer" in the *Panopticon*, Foucault contends that "Rousseau no doubt would have said the reverse: each overseer should become a comrade."²⁹

Though it is difficult today for most to find a humanitarian intention in Bentham's project,³⁰ Foucault reminds us that this is not the way he was viewed from the position of the French Revolution.³¹ Comments Foucault,

When the Revolution poses the question of a new justice, what does it envisage as its principle? Opinion. The new aspect of the problem of justice, for the Revolution, was not so much to punish wrongdoers as to prevent even the possibility of wrongdoing, by immersing people in a field of total visibility where the opinion, observation and discourse of others would restrain them from harmful acts.³²

So the quest for total visibility in Bentham is grounded in a fear that its opposite, darkness, is the breeding ground of bad governance and injustice. Again, Foucault writes,

A fear haunted the latter half of the eighteenth century: the fear of darkened spaces, of the pall gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths. It sought to break up the patches of darkness that blocked the light, eliminate the shadowy areas of society, demolish the unlit chambers where arbitrary political acts, monarchical caprice, religious superstitions, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and the illusions of ignorance were fomented.³³

Thus, to pull Bentham into the contemporary context of calls for transparency in neoliberal academe is to rekindle the spirit of fear that haunted the latter half of the eighteenth century, albeit in a different context.

Neoliberal academe, however, takes the revolutionary calls for transparency from the late eighteenth century and turns them on their head. That is to say, for neoliberal academe and its proponents, the system of higher

education in America is that darkened space that needs to be brought out into full visibility to the public. Calls for transparency in higher education today view it as one of the “shadowy areas of society,” a place where arbitrary educational acts are conducted in unlit classrooms, a place where superstitions regarding religion and illusions of ignorance are fomented. Part of neoliberalism’s agenda, then, is to solve these problems through calls for more transparency.

Bentham’s transparency stages as its opposite privacy and secrecy, which are ultimately viewed as enemies of the transparent society. But his work on transparency goes at least one step beyond that of Rousseau, namely in his advocacy of “publicity” as the guarantor of public confidence in and consent to governance and applications of the law. In other words, the public will tend to trust the government more and public opinion of it will be higher, if it is less secretive and more open with the public. And it is here that his arguments in favor of publicity are among the most extensive and systematic contributions in the history of philosophy.

Bentham’s most concentrated discussion of publicity is found in Chapter II of *An Essay on Political Tactics* entitled “Of Publicity.” Here he outlines the reasons for and objections to publicity for public assemblies, the objects to which publicity ought to be extended, the means of publicity, and the exceptions to the rule of publicity. In “Of Publicity,” Bentham writes that the “fittest law for securing the public confidence, and causing it constantly to advance towards the end of its institution” is the law of publicity.³⁴ The major reasons for publicity are “to constrain the members of the assembly to perform their duty,”³⁵ “to secure the confidence of the people, and their assent to measures of the legislature,”³⁶ and “to enable the governors to know the wishes of the governed.”³⁷ While not a major reason, Bentham also states that one of the advantages of publicity is “the amusement that results from it,” which he views as kind of pleasure “sufficient by itself to increase the happiness of any nation.”³⁸ “One of the Roman emperors,” comments Bentham, “proposed a reward for the individual who should invent a new pleasure: no one has more richly deserved it, than the individual who first laid the transactions of a legislative assembly before the eyes of the public.”³⁹

Though the reasons for publicity are many including giving us a good laugh, there are some who do not share Bentham’s passion for the law of publicity. “The enemies of publicity may be collected into three classes: the malefactor, who seeks to escape the notice of the judge; the tyrant, who seeks to stifle public opinion, whilst he fears to hear its voice; the timid or indolent man, who complains of the general incapacity in order to screen his own.”⁴⁰

While Bentham's discussions and elaborations here border on the tedious, what is quite apparent is that publicity is essential to good governance. The exceptions here are limited, but telling: if the effect of publicity is to favor the projects of an enemy; if the effect of publicity unnecessarily injures innocent people; and if the effect of publicity is to inflict too severe a punishment upon the guilty.⁴¹

Bentham, like Rousseau, aims to avoid opacity and darkness. However, unlike Rousseau,⁴² publicity for Bentham is the means through which calumny can be prevented:

Suspicion always attaches to mystery. It thinks it sees a crime where it beholds an affection of secrecy; and it is rarely deceived. For why should we hide ourselves if we do not dread being seen? In proportion as it is desirable for improbity to shroud itself in darkness, in the same proportion it is desirable for innocence to walk in open day, for fear of being mistaken for her adversary.⁴³

Secrecy and mystery then is to be avoided, because it can result in calumny. Notes Bentham, through publicity

[c]alumny will lose its force; it collects its venom in the caverns of obscurity, but it is destroyed by the light of day.⁴⁴

However, publicity is not the path of least resistance for government. Still, in the long run, it is better than the path of secrecy:

That a secret policy saves itself from some inconveniences I will not deny; but I believe, that in the long run it creates more than it avoids; and that of two governments, one of which should be conducted secretly and the other openly, the latter would possess a strength, a hardihood, and a reputation which would render it superior to all the dissimulations of the other.⁴⁵

Publicity then is a calculated decision on the part of the government, for:

[t]he best project prepared in darkness, would excite more alarm than the worst, undertaken under the auspices of publicity.⁴⁶

The notion that darkness, mystery, and secrecy are breeding grounds for calumny, encourage mistrust, and bring about suspicion is the heart of Bentham's argument of how publicity protects the reputation of government and builds public confidence in its operation. Publicity allows disagreements to be aired and sorted out. One of the positive effects of which

is an increase in the critical capacities of the public: “A habit of reasoning and discussion will penetrate all classes of society.”⁴⁷ “The multitude,” writes Bentham, “will be more secure from the tricks of demagogues, and the cheats of imposters; they will most highly esteem great talents, and the frivolities of wit will be reduced to their just value.”⁴⁸ In addition, Bentham believes that public displays of deliberations and disagreements about taxes, the laws, and so on will “operate upon the general spirit of a nation in favour of its government.”⁴⁹

Bentham’s arguments in favor of transparent government are persuasive ones. Elevating the national spirit, building critical capacities among the multitude, and preventing demagogues from tricking the public are all noble aspirations. Moreover, the calumny that was at the root of Rousseau’s descent into the world of darkness is at the center of Bentham’s arguments in favor of transparency. What then does all of this mean for transparency in higher education?

In short, Bentham’s work on publicity is a very good précis of many of the current arguments as to why higher education *should be* more transparent. Faculty often tend to mistrust administrations that run by means of secrecy and mystery. And, just as Bentham says, secrecy and mystery often result in calumny about both faculty and administration.

But, just as his arguments in favor of transparency in higher education are apropos to our current situation, so too are his warnings about the limits of transparency. And it is here that we perhaps see how transparency in the hands of the neoliberal academic regime has come to breed mistrust and a sinking spirit among the academic multitude, rather than its opposite.

Remember, Bentham argues that if the effect of publicity is to favor the projects of an enemy, then publicity should be avoided. Is it too much of a stretch to say that calls for transparency in the name of reducing funding for higher education are projects that favor its enemy, namely, ignorance? Or is it too much of a stretch to say that calls for transparency in order to demonstrate that higher education is not meeting the workforce demands of society is a project that favors its enemy, namely, a reduction in vocational training? Or that calls for transparency that aim to curtail democratic education is a project that deflates the national spirit, and therefore, a project that favors our enemy, political apathy?

Bentham also warns against publicity that unnecessarily injures innocent people or inflicts too severe a punishment upon the guilty. Are not calls, for example, to post faculty teaching evaluations and other performance

measures online unnecessarily injurious? Why does it feel that the effect of transparency in the hands of neoliberal government is to inflict severe punishment on the guilty, that is, higher education? And would we in higher education all not agree that this punishment is *too* severe?

Neoliberalism has convinced much of the public that higher education is an enemy of publicity. On some days, it is painted as the malefactor, who seeks to escape the notice of the judge of neoliberalism; on other days, higher education is the tyrant who seeks to stifle public opinion, while he fears to hear its voice; and other days, higher education is portrayed as the timid man, who complains of the general incapacity in order to screen his own. With each cry higher education makes against publicity and transparency, through the lens of Bentham's logic of transparency and that of neoliberalism, it is increasingly seen as the enemy.

But what needs to be remembered here is that it is only in the age of neoliberalism that it is possible to view higher education as the malefactor, the tyrant, or the timid man. Neoliberalism, through its policies and practices, *created* these individuals—and now uses its own logic to marginalize them. Think about it: if docile academic subjects are the creation and modus operandi of neoliberal academe, how is it at the same time possible for them to be *enemies* of higher education through their displeasure with increasing levels of transparency?

KEEP IT FROM THE KIDS

Bentham's thoughts on the social and political foundations of transparency are among the most powerful and extensive in the modern philosophical canon. His early work in *An Essay on Political Tactics* in 1791, set the stage for his thoroughgoing incorporation of his principle of publicity into *Constitutional Code*, a work regarded as the culmination of his long career as an advocate of reform and codification. Begun in 1822 when Bentham was 74 years old and unfinished at the time of his death in 1832, *Constitutional Code* is intended "for uses of All Nations and All Governments professing Liberal Opinions."⁵⁰

But Bentham was not the only classical utilitarian to defend the principle of publicity. One can also find defenses in the work of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900), and others.⁵¹ What we find in these works is that while the scales favor publicity over secrecy in most contexts, there are some noteworthy exceptions. Sidgwick, for example, claims that "on Utilitarian principles, it may be right to do and privately

recommend, under certain circumstances, what it would not be right to advocate openly.”⁵² Thus, for Sidgwick, the conclusion of utilitarianism is “that secrecy may render an action right which would not otherwise be so should itself be kept comparatively secret.”⁵³ So Sidgwick believes not only that some practices should be kept secret or private but also that keeping them secret is part of the moral acceptability of the practice. Moreover, for Sidgwick the conclusion that utilitarianism may require secrecy should *itself* be kept secret.

Two examples used by Sidgwick are celibacy and lying, which if widely practiced would become a problem for utilitarianism. However, so long as they are not widely practiced and are justifiable on utilitarian grounds, they are morally acceptable if they are not widely publicized as being acceptable on utilitarian grounds. Sidgwick seems to believe that if the public were composed entirely of “enlightened Utilitarians,” there would be no need to be secretive about these things. Writes Sidgwick, “[i]f therefore we were all enlightened Utilitarians, it would be impossible for anyone to justify himself in making false statements while admitting it to be inexpedient for persons similarly conditioned to make them; as he would have no ground for believing that persons similarly conditioned would act differently from himself.”⁵⁴

But as we do not live in a world comprised of only enlightened Utilitarians, it becomes necessary to keep these complex moral rules secret. Otherwise, we risk both general misapplication of the utilitarian principle by those less “enlightened” than the Utilitarians as well as general distrust in Utilitarianism.

Sidgwick starts to take us down a road where lying to the general public is morally acceptable on the grounds that they are not as “enlightened” as the Utilitarian. It is based on a segmentation of the public into its ideal (enlightened Utilitarians) and its non-ideal, namely, “society as it is actually constituted” or “the vulgar.” This, of course, is also a *non-ideal* road to take to understanding transparency in higher education.

Once we start separating audiences into the enlightened and the unenlightened, and providing each with different levels of publicity, we are well on the road of intellectual elitism, which cannot and does not serve the democratic ends of higher education. It is the kind of thinking which says “keep it from the kids” because they will not understand it and will draw false conclusions from their misunderstanding. Our public role as intellectuals is not to keep complex ideas secret in fear that they will not be understood by those outside of our circles of affiliation, but rather to share

them with those outside of our circles of knowledge in ways that provide them with entry points into these conversations. Once intellectuals lose confidence in the public, then all really is finally lost, particularly in achieving public confidence in higher education.

But the path from Bentham to Sidgwick is also one from considerations of *actual* publicity to *hypothetical* publicity. The former deals with things which are actually said and whether they should be shared with others, whereas the latter deals with things that hypothetically might be said, and whether they should be shared with others. In a way, hypothetical publicity engages publicity more at the theoretical level, whereas actual publicity, more at the empirical level. Bentham is writing about how the courts and government should actually deal with publicity regarding their transactions and operation. The courts try cases with judges and juries, and the government levies taxes, passes legislation, and looks after the interests of the citizens and the country. Whether, how, and why their deliberations are publicized is a matter of ongoing and continuing interest. These are the matters of actual publicity.

Hypothetical publicity, however, functions on the level of what might hypothetically be said. This is the level of Sidgwick's engagement with publicity. As a development of Bentham's utilitarianism, Sidgwick on publicity is of great interest. Still, his work leaves much to be desired, especially the dimensions of it that move toward secrecy regarding not only some of the more morally controversial consequences of utilitarianism (such as the moral justification of lying), but also regarding utilitarianism itself. Covert utilitarianism such as Sidgwick's, grounded on the notion that its justification is too complicated for some to understand or that some of its consequences might be mistaken as general advocacy, is best left in the nineteenth-century dustbin of ideas. But doing so does not mean that hypothetical publicity is without merits as a philosophical point of departure. To see its value, one needs to only turn to the work of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in this area.

PERPETUAL PUBLICITY

In his late essay, "To Perpetual Peace" (1795), which it is speculated he wrote on the occasion of the signing of the Treaty of Basel on April 5, 1795, Kant takes up the topic of the relationship of nations among themselves. For Kant, while "the single greatest problem humanity faces is forming a just civil constitution, humanity may be most threatened by the intractability nations

display in the relations among themselves.”⁵⁵ Kant’s essay thus takes up the topic of the cosmopolitan state, “that state in which nations co-exist under the rule of law” as the “only one in which the rights of individuals can be fully guaranteed.”⁵⁶ Thus, it is within the context of the relations among nations that the subject of publicity is broached by Kant.

In the final pages of “To Perpetual Peace,” Kant discusses the agreement between politics and morality under the transcendental concept of public right. Here he is not concerned with actual publicity, which he describes as “the different empirically given relations among men in a nation or among nations,”⁵⁷ but rather what was introduced in the previous section through the work of Sidgwick as hypothetical publicity. But unlike Sidgwick, who worries about the conditions under which publicity regarding utilitarianism must be restricted, Kant is concerned with “the *form of publicity*.”⁵⁸

With respect to the form of publicity, Kant argues “unless every such claim has this form there can be no justice [Gerechtigkeit] (that can be regarded as *publicly knowable*), thus no right either, since the right can be conferred only through justice.”⁵⁹ Consequently, for Kant, considerations of publicity regarding claims to the rights of other men are determinable through pure reason.

Every claim of right must have this capacity for publicity, and since one can easily judge whether or not it is present in a particular case, i.e., whether or not publicity is compatible with the agent’s principles, it provides us with a readily applicable criterion that is found *a priori* in reason; for the purported claim’s (praetensio iuris) falseness (contrariness to right) is immediately recognized by an experiment of pure reason.⁶⁰

Thus, for Kant considerations of whether publicity is morally permissible with regard to issues relating to national and international rights is never founded upon empirical details, but rather is determinable only through the exercise of the following principle:

All actions that affect the rights of other men are wrong if their maxim is not consistent with publicity.⁶¹

For Kant, this principle is an *ethical* one (as it belongs to the doctrine of virtue), a *juridical* one (as it pertains to the rights of men), and, perhaps most importantly, a *negative* one (as it serves only as a means for recognizing what is *not right* in regard to others). This last characteristic of Kant’s *transcendental formula of public right* is the most important one.

Kant's transcendental formula of public right, is in a way, simply a publicity test. It asks us to hypothetically submit a maxim regarding the rights of men to public acknowledgment. If public acknowledgment of the maxim arouses opposition to the plan or if publicly acknowledging it defeats its own intention, and it must be kept secret in order to be successful, then Kant believes that its source is *injustice*. Writes Kant of the hypothetical opposition aroused by publicizing the maxim, "this necessary and universal, and thus *a priori* foreseeable, opposition of all to me could not have come from anything other than the injustice with which it threatens everyone."⁶²

But again, Kant's publicity test is purely a negative one. It only tells us through an act of pure reason what is *not* a maxim consistent with justice concerning national and universal rights. It is not a test or proof of what is right in regard to others. Kant also says that the *transcendental formula of public right* provides us with a "good indication of the *incommensurability* of politics and morality (as a doctrine of right)."⁶³ But as for "the conditions under which the maxims of politics agree with the rights of people," Kant proposes another transcendental, but this time, *affirmative*, principle of the public right:

All maxims that *require* publicity (in order not to fail of their end) agree with both politics and morality.⁶⁴

However, he does not develop the principle or explain the principle in much detail, postponing it "for another occasion."⁶⁵

The negative principle of publicity is demonstrated by Kant through examples: one involving civil right, another involving international right, and a comment that the example of international right holds analogously to the case of cosmopolitan right. For our purposes, the civil right example, which concerns rebellion, is sufficient to understand how Kant views his publicity test in action.

Civil rights concern the rights internal to a nation. Consider, if you will, "May a people rightfully use rebellion to overthrow the oppressive power of a so-called tyrant (*nontitulo, sed exercitio talis*)?"⁶⁶ Kant begins by noting that in this situation, "there is no doubt" that the "rights of the people are injured, and no injustice comes to him (the tyrant) who is deposed."⁶⁷ However, "it remains wrong in the highest degree for subjects to pursue their rights in this way, and they can in no way complain of injustice if they are defeated in this conflict and must subsequently suffer the harshest punishment for it."⁶⁸ But why?

Here is Kant's response:

According to this principle, before establishing their social contract, the people have to ask whether it dare make known the maxim of intention to revolt in some circumstances. One can readily see, first that if one were to make revolt a condition of the establishment of a nation's constitution that force might then in certain circumstances be used against the ruler and, second, that the people must in such an instance claim some rightful power over the ruler. In that case, he would not be ruler; or if as a condition of establishing the nation, both the people and the ruler were given power, there would be no possibility whatsoever of doing what it was the people's intention to do. The wrongness of revolt revealed by the fact that the maxim through which one *publicly declares it* renders one's own intention impossible. One must therefore necessarily keep it secret.⁶⁹

As such, announcing a revolt of the people against the ruler *fails* the transcendental publicity test. In short, as there are no provisions in the civil constitution for revolt, any effort to publicize a maxim regarding revolt of the people against a tyrant would need to be done secretly, if it were to have any chance at being successful. But it is the secrecy regarding the maxim that ultimately determines that it is not in the interests of justice and the rights of man.

The difference then between Sidgwick and Kant on hypothetical publicity is that the former maintains the necessity of secrecy, whereas the latter does not. In fact, Kant's transcendental publicity test is a negative argument *against* secrecy. Furthermore, Kant does not build his theory of publicity upon a segmentation of the population into the "enlightened" and the unenlightened, rather he asks what would happen if a maxim were made publicly available to *all* people. It is for this reason that Kant's approach to hypothetical publicity is preferable to Sidgwick's.

Furthermore, it is possible to view transparency in higher education today more productively from the perspective of Kant's transcendental publicity principle than it is from Sidgwick's work on hypothetical publicity. The Kantian perspective requires us to move away from the empirical dimensions of transparency (actual publicity) and to rather engage it at a more universal and *a priori* level (hypothetical publicity). Whereas Bentham by examining publicity from every corner of the constitutional, parliamentary, and judicial code more closely follows Rousseau's method of dealing with transparency by "present[ing] it from all points of view," Kant's transcendental approach to publicity encourages us to not get

bogged down in empirical matters and to focus more on transcendental ones. And this is ultimately, at least in my opinion, the most productive lens through which to view transparency in academe today.

Not only does a transcendental approach encourage us to think more generally about the rights of faculty and students in considerations of publicity, it also encourages us to imagine higher education as being founded upon a “knowledge” or “educational” contract. This contract is one that is tacitly entered by faculty and students when they become participants in the academy. It is also one in which administrators participate both as former students and former faculty, but also simply as those who are entrusted in viewing faculty and student rights in view of the knowledge contract.

When viewed from the perspective of educational rights, namely, the rights internal to education of all forms in America, publicity becomes a much more tractable and positive dimension of academic life. It requires that in negative considerations of it, we always keep in mind the effect of it on the rights of faculty and students, and that in positive considerations of it, we consider its political and moral effects.

It would be incredibly uplifting and powerful for the academy to be able to say the following with regard to publicity:

All actions that affect the rights of [other] students and faculty are wrong if their maxim is not consistent with publicity.⁷⁰

But such is not the way of neoliberal academe. Transparency is used as a political tool to disenfranchise faculty and students from university governance, and publicity is seen as a means of increasing the bottom line of the university. There is no room in neoliberal calls for transparency for the rights of students and faculty. For neoliberal academe, “All maxims that require publicity (in order not to fail of their end) agree with both politics and economics” and “All actions that affect the bottom line of the university are wrong if their maxim is not consistent with publicity.” In other words, if by publicizing an action the university will lose money, then it should not be publicized.

In short, in the age of neoliberal academe, transparency and its double, publicity, have very little to do with the rights of faculty and students, and even less to do with education and learning. Rather, they have more in common with market maximization and financial growth than the rights of faculty to academic freedom and reasonable working conditions, and the rights of students to intellectual growth and the free pursuit of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The reputation of transparency as the watchdog of neoliberal academe is one of the more unfortunate consequences of higher education today. As we have seen, transparency not only has been central to romanticism and the function of good government, but also has its greatest role in the philosophical canon—the maintenance of world peace. It is ultimately through this latter role established by Kant in his remarkable essay, “To Perpetual Peace,” that we can begin to re-appropriate transparency as a noble aspiration in higher education.

Neoliberal academe, however, has done a remarkable job at reducing transparency down to a mechanism whereby the university can become a more economically efficient through the effacement of its educational functions. However, as we work to move beyond the neoliberal academy and bring the interests of students, faculty, and democratic education back to the foreground of higher education, it is worth considering what role, if any, transparency should play in the post-neoliberal academy.

Why not consider regarding its function within the post-neoliberal academy as one that is more hypothetical rather than actual? That is, why not use transparency as a means of ensuring that justice regarding the rights of students and faculty with respect to the knowledge contract is ensured, rather than viewing its only potential role in the academy as being the watchdog of neoliberal academe? After all, the neoliberal academy is widely viewed as the darkest time in the history of education. What better way to bring it out of the darkness than through the light of transparency?

NOTES

1. See Sandrine Baume, “Does Transparency Engender the Confidence of the Governed? A Contribution to Political Thought,” *Economics and Other Branches—In the Shade of the Oak Tree: Essays in Honour of Pascal Bridel*, eds. Roberto Baranzini and François Allisson (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014).
2. See Christopher Kirwan, “Referential Opacity,” *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 752.
3. See Jack MacIntosh, “Masked Man Fallacy,” *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 529.
4. See Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Reference [Ueber Sinn and Bedeutung, 1892],” *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, sec-

- ond edition, eds. Peter Geach and Max Black, trans. Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960).
5. See especially, Bertrand Russell “On Denoting [1905],” *Logic and Knowledge: Essays 1901–1950*, ed. R. C. Marsh (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956). For an explanation of Russell’s position, see David Kaplan, “What is Russell’s Theory of Descriptions,” *Bertrand Russell: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. David Pears (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972).
 6. See W. V. O. Quine, “Reference and Modality,” *From a Logical Point of View*, second rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).
 7. See Paul A. Boghossian, “The Transparency of Mental Content,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994).
 8. More formally: an epistemic state is *weakly transparent* to a subject S *if and only if* when S is in state E, S can know that S is in state E; an epistemic state E is *strongly transparent* to a subject S *if and only if* when S is in state E, S can know that S is in state E, *and* when S is not in state E, S can know S is not in state E.
 9. For an account of terror in neoliberal academe, see Jeffrey R. Di Leo, “On Academic Terrorism: Neoliberalism, Higher Education, and the Politics of Emotion,” in Jeffrey R. Di Leo, Henry Giroux, Sophia McClennen, and Ken Saltman, *Neoliberalism, Education, Terrorism: Contemporary Dialogues* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013).
 10. G. D. H. Cole, “Introduction,” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (London: J. M. Dent, 1990), xliii.
 11. *Ibid.*, xliii.
 12. The first part, Books I to VI, were written between 1765 and 1767, and published in 1782; the second part, Books VII to XII were written between 1769 and 1770, and published in 1789. Rousseau died in 1778, so while he read from *The Confessions* during his lifetime, they were not published until after his death.
 13. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. with an intro., J. M. Cohen (New York: Penguin, 1953), 29.
 14. *Ibid.*, 30.
 15. *Ibid.*, 17.
 16. *Ibid.*, 169.
 17. Margaret Ogrodnick, *Instinct and Intimacy: Political Philosophy and Autobiography in Rousseau* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 31–32.
 18. Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 10. First published as *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l’obstacle* (1971).

19. Ibid., 10.
20. Ibid., 10–11.
21. Ibid., 10.
22. Ibid., 11.
23. Robert Darnton, “A Star is Born,” *New York Review of Books* (October 27, 1988).
24. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 30–31.
25. Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 152.
26. See, for example, Marc Richir, “Révolution et transparence sociale,” in *Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Considérations sur la Révolution française* [1793] (Paris: Payot, 1989).
27. Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” 152.
28. Ibid., 152.
29. Ibid., 152. In terms of academe, this pushes us to the nadir of neoliberal calls for transparency, namely, the point where through a disciplinary model of power, faculty know that they are under scrutiny and come to feel the gaze of surveillance. This gaze is in turn internalized and becomes a means of self-regulation and self-monitoring.
30. The most common route to the humanitarian Bentham is through his efforts to maximize human happiness and minimize pain. However, his public policy and prison reform work often go in the opposite direction. In addition, the legacies of his work on “happiness” have been highly scrutinized. See, for example, William Davies, *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being* (New York: Verso, 2015).
31. It should not be forgotten that Bentham’s panopticon with its “power through transparency” was read by Foucault as a model of surveillance that would ensure discipline. The transfer of power from the “overseer” (prison warden) to the “comrade” (prisoners) was aimed to internalize the watchful gaze so that the “comrades” would become self-disciplining, that is, cease to even contemplate certain behaviors. This form of disciplinary power leads subjects to become agents of their own subjection. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Penguin, 1979), Foucault comments, “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (202–203).
32. Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” 152.
33. Ibid., 153.

34. Jeremy Bentham, “Of Publicity [1791],” *An Essay on Political Tactics*, Chapter Two, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 2, ed. John Bowring (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), 310.
35. *Ibid.*, 310.
36. *Ibid.*, 310.
37. *Ibid.*, 311.
38. *Ibid.*, 312.
39. *Ibid.*, 312.
40. *Ibid.*, 310.
41. *Ibid.*, 315.
42. For Rousseau, the incident of the comb demonstrates that transparency is not an effective guard against calumny—unless, of course, one lives in a transparent society.
43. *Ibid.*, 310.
44. *Ibid.*, 311.
45. *Ibid.*, 311.
46. *Ibid.*, 310.
47. *Ibid.*, 311.
48. *Ibid.*, 311.
49. *Ibid.*, 311.
50. Intended as a three-volume work, only the first volume of *Constitutional Code* was published in Bentham’s lifetime. It was published in 1830 under the title, *Constitutional Code: For the Use of All Nations and All Governments Professing Liberal Opinions* (London: Robert Heward, 1830).
51. See, for example, Mill make the case against secret ballots in “Considerations on Representative Government [1861],” *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 203–467.
52. Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics* [1907], Seventh edition (New York: Dover, 1966), 489.
53. *Ibid.*, 490.
54. *Ibid.*, 488.
55. Ted Humphrey, “Translator’s Introduction,” Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), 13.
56. *Ibid.*, 13.
57. Immanuel Kant, “To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), 135.
58. *Ibid.*, 135.
59. *Ibid.*, 135.
60. *Ibid.*, 135.
61. *Ibid.*, 135.

62. Ibid., 135–136.
63. Ibid., 138.
64. Ibid., 139.
65. Ibid., 139.
66. Ibid., 136.
67. Ibid., 136.
68. Ibid., 136.
69. Ibid., 136.
70. Ibid., 135. This principle works the same way with or without inclusion of the word “other.” However, to be consistent with Kant’s principle, “other” is left in the principle, albeit bracketed.

Higher Hedonism

University life has its pleasures. For some, there is pleasure in conversing and spending time with one's colleagues or students. Others enjoy the challenge of pursuing research or solving problems. Others still take delight in teaching and service to their university. The French semiotician and critic Roland Barthes even theorized as to the specific kinds of pleasure involved in one of the most rudimentary of university acts, namely, reading texts.

To view academe as bereft of pleasure is to see it without one of its most appealing dimensions and enduring characteristics. Arguably, the pleasure of academe is one of the key factors in its continuous persistence since the formation of academies in the ancient world. It is hard to believe that without pleasure the academy would have survived—if not thrived—this long. In addition to all the other things that academe is to and for us, it is a source of pleasure.

So one might ask, just what are the “pleasures” of academe? And furthermore, are they something we should aim to maximize? What is the role of “enjoyment” in educational theory and practice? And how should we organize the academy such that students, faculty, and administrators can optimize enjoyment? What does it mean to say that we take “delight” in our teaching or research—or, dare I say—administration? And how can we ensure that these delightful aims are sought, if not also achieved?

These are good—or at least reasonable—questions. So why does no one seem to be asking them today? Is the problem with the pleasure of the academy similar to the one Barthes identified with the text? “No sooner has a word been said, somewhere, about the pleasure of the text,” comments Barthes, “than two policemen are ready to jump on you: the political policeman and the psychoanalytical policeman: futility and/or guilt, pleasure is either idle or vain, a class notion or an illusion.”¹ Are the politics of the academy such that pleasure gained in the pursuit of education is regarded as illicit? Or is it that once the topic is placed in the hands of the psychoanalytical police, it is drowned in guilt and/or futility?

Either way, pleasure curiously absents—or at least distances—itself from the text of academe. Foregrounded, however, are the “pains” of academe. Each week the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed* provides us with field reports on the current state of academic suffering: increasing student debt, loss of academic freedom, job insecurity, unreasonable teaching and research expectations, bad colleagues, evil administrators, clueless students. Scores of recent titles track the decline and fall of higher education as we know it—and continuously remind us of our existential condition in higher ed’s house of pain. The working assumption is that examination of what pains us is smart, insightful, and committed, whereas what pleasures us is naïve, vapid, and vain.

I think there are several reasons why we dwell on academe’s painful aspects—and why we avoid serious engagement with its pleasurable dimensions—and would like here to begin to reflect on them. If nothing else, I would like to offer that we need to achieve a better balance between accounts of the pains of academe—and its pleasures. While saying what we don’t like or want to avoid is important, so too is expressing what we enjoy—and what gives us pleasure in the academy. Such accounts are important because of the formative role they can play in shaping attitudes and conversations about the academy of the future.

If we continue to primarily view the academy through the lens of pain and suffering, that is, its negative or repellent aspects, rather than pleasure and enjoyment, that is, its positive or appealing aspects, it will become increasingly difficult to articulate a future vision of the academy that amounts to something more than merely one that avoids pain. While this is admirable, it is not the end we should seek. Rather, we should work to establish a vision wherein academic pleasure is part of the groundwork of the academy—and I don’t mean an academy where we take pleasure in our pain.

If we share with others what we enjoy about the academy and what gives us pleasure within it, it will be much easier to work toward reforming the academy so that it is more pleasurable, and thus better, for all. If we don't, then don't be surprised if we are left with an academy fit only for masochists.²

TEXTUAL PLEASURE

To pose questions about pleasure and pain in the house of higher education is to associate it with an old and long philosophical tradition, namely, the one which generally contends that pleasure or enjoyment is or ought to be the end of human life and action—a tradition that dates back at least as far as one of Socrates's disciples. It is a tradition whose name when mentioned immediately raises eyebrows and one widely aimed to be kept silent: the name of this philosophical tradition is *hedonism*.

Barthes himself was criticized by many when he turned to it relatively late in his career—though was well aware of the risk he took in introducing the subject in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975).³ “An old, a very old tradition,” comments Barthes, “hedonism has been repressed by nearly every philosophy; we find it defended only by marginal figures, Sade, Fourier; for Nietzsche, hedonism is a pessimism.”⁴ “Pleasure is continually disappointed, reduced, deflated, in favor of strong, noble values: Truth, Death, Progress, Struggle, Joy, etc.,” he continues. “Its victorious rival is Desire: we are always being told about Desire, never about Pleasure; Desire has an epistemic dignity, Pleasure does not.”⁵

Barthes's introduction of textual pleasure aimed to address the fact that textual pleasure was not yet a concern of academic criticism. It also sought to unite notions about textual generation then current in literary theory and psycholinguistics with his own lifelong intuitions.⁶ In broad terms, Barthes proposes three distinct kinds of pleasure: the first is the pleasure and comfort that comes from Readerly textual fulfillment, which he terms “plaisir”; the second is the rapture and ecstasy that comes from Writerly textual unsettlement and discomfort, which he terms “jouissance”; and the third is the textual pleasure that comes from finding ecstatic moments in Readerly texts.⁷

Details of Barthes's hedonism aside, it stands out because it stands alone in contemporary literary studies. One will search in vain to find another contemporary literary theorist who explicitly engages the hedonic tradition; and even if someone is found, it is hard to imagine this person

doing it as brazenly and unapologetically as Barthes. The question now is, who is going to take the heat and attempt to connect academe with hedonism? We know academe involves pleasure; what we don't know though is how to account for it—or even if it is possible.

LIVING PLEASANTLY

For the most part, Barthes is right about the marginality of the figures who historically defended hedonism. Hedonism, stemming from the Greek “hedone,” can be traced back at least as far as the Cyrenaics, and their founder, the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristippus (435–356 BCE).⁸ A student of Socrates, Aristippus was born and lived in Cyrene, which is in Libya. After the death of Socrates, he opened one of the three major Socratic schools in his hometown from which the philosophical movement took its name, Cyrenaicism (the other two movements were Cynicism and Megarianism). The leaders of this school included: Aristippus's daughter, Arete; his grandson, Aristippus the younger; Bio; and Euhemerus.⁹

Generally speaking, Aristippus contended that good and evil are reducible to pleasure and pain, and that the end of life is self-gratification. Aristippus interpreted Socrates's teaching that happiness (*eudiamonia*) is one of the ends of moral action to mean that pleasure is the sole end of life. While he emphasizes immediate pleasures, he also tempers them with a measure of rational control. For him, the sole criterion of pleasure is intensity, and bodily pleasures are preferred to intellectual pleasures. Philosophy, for Aristippus, is the study of the best means of living pleasantly.¹⁰

Cyrenaicism is the first of many chapters in the history of philosophy that utilizes *hedone* as its centerpiece.¹¹ For example, there was the school founded by Epicurus in 306 BCE, which not only put the Cyrenaicists out of business, but flourished until the fifth century of the common era through the work of philosophers such as Hermarchus, Polystratus, Lucretius, Philodemus, Asclepiades, and even to some extent Cicero, all before the common era, and Diogenes of Oinoanda and Diogenianus in the second and third centuries of the common era. Much later, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Lorenzo Valla and Erasmus established the so-called Christian Epicureanism, which then influenced the “Utopian Epicureanism” of Thomas More.¹²

In addition to Epicureanism and its variations, *hedone* is at the center of Thomas Hobbes's materialism, the naturalism of eighteenth-century

French *philosophes* such as Helvetius, Holbach, and de La Mettrie, and the Utilitarianisms of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.¹³ For that matter, it is fairly safe to contend that any materialist or naturalist-based theory or system of human nature functions through some notion of *hedone*.

PLEASURE AND PAIN

Arguments aside as to the marginality of the aforementioned figures (as everyone's margin can be someone's center), Bentham and Mill at least are well-known and much studied figures in contemporary philosophical circles. In fact, their utilitarianism—founded upon *hedonism*—is still one of the commonplaces of contemporary philosophical ethics.

Bentham, is the “father” of utilitarianism and the leader of a reform group based on utilitarian principles called the Philosophical Radicals. He argues that it is a fact of nature that the goal of individual lives is the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. For Bentham, good is only another word for “pleasure” and “the absence of pain.”¹⁴ In terms of social morality, what is the right thing to do is whatever produces “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.”¹⁵ We should strive in our lives to maximize pleasure and to minimize pain for as many people as possible. Actions that produce the greatest amounts of pleasure are to be valued morally over actions that produce lesser amounts of pleasure. His “hedonic” or utilitarian calculus asks us to consider the quantity of pleasure or pain resulting from our behavior in a number of respects including its intensity, duration, and certainty. Bentham believes that this is the most rational way to settle all moral controversies.¹⁶

Mill (1806–1873) follows the broad lines of Bentham's utilitarianism but with a couple of major qualifications. Mill, unlike Bentham, distinguishes between “higher pleasures,” which are of greater value, and “lower pleasures,” which are of lesser value. Furthermore, unlike Bentham, Mill also distinguishes between happiness and mere sensual pleasure. “It is better to be human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied,” says Mill, “better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.”¹⁷ Mill tells us to maximize the sum of *higher* pleasure.¹⁸ Consequently, Mill's utilitarianism is sometimes called *eudaimonistic utilitarianism* (*eudaimonia* is Greek for “happiness”) to distinguish it from Bentham's *hedonistic utilitarianism*.

It is through the utilitarian philosophies of Bentham and Mill that hedonism makes its most direct philosophical route into contemporary discussions. Though not a marginal line of contemporary thinking, it is

nevertheless a much-contested one. This is largely because of Bentham's and Mill's incorporation of hedonism into their consequentialist ethics. And contemporary heirs to their legacy, such as Peter Singer, the Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, cannot seem to write anything that does not draw the ire of major segments of the philosophical community. Arguably, even Singer, who is one of the most well-known philosophers in America, is a marginal figure, primarily through his association with utilitarian ethics, or more specifically, his association with hedonism.¹⁹

However, if a simple distinction is made, hedonism moves from the margins of contemporary thought to its center. This distinction is between the hedonism of *ethics* and the hedonism of *psychology*. Psychological hedonism is the notion that humans always act and must act from a desire for pleasure; and ethical hedonism is the notion that humans always ought to act in whatever manner will bring them the most pleasure in the long run. Whereas the latter is a much-contested notion, the former is not. In fact, from the standpoint of behavioral psychology, psychological hedonism is a given.²⁰

Recently, psychologist Edwin Gantt has argued that most recent theories of cognitive psychology "have been united by a common—though usually inexplicit and unexamined—commitment to one or another form of hedonistic explanation."²¹ Writes Gantt, "many in contemporary cognitive psychology have simply equated rationality with hedonistic self-concern. That is to say, for many in cognitive psychology, human reasoning is, at its fundamental root, nothing more nor less a matter of self-interest, and the processes of decision-making are ultimately driven by matters of individual self-concern."²²

Consequently, for Gantt and others, explanation in the social sciences today is dominated by the doctrine of naturalistic hedonism. Today naturalistic hedonism is used by the social sciences to explain everything from crime, drug addiction, and changes in sexual morality to warfare, regret, voting, marriage—and even altruism.²³ In *Theory and Progress in Social Science*, James B. Rule even goes so far as to contend that the doctrine of naturalistic hedonism "offers the best—and perhaps the only—hope for meaningful progress in social science."²⁴

Moreover, running alongside naturalistic hedonism in contemporary social sciences is another central theme, namely, "that human existence is fundamentally economic existence."²⁵ "We are, it is held," comments Gantt, "*homo economicus*, and as such, in all our interactions with others and the world we perpetually and inescapably seek to maximize

our individual gains (or pleasures) and minimize our individual costs (or pain).”²⁶ As such, one does not have to work hard to connect the foundations of economic Darwinism, or more fashionably, neoliberalism, to naturalistic hedonism. The eviscerating consequences of the neoliberal imperatives for corporate managerialism, instrumentalism, and rationalization in social policy and higher education practice have already been well established by myself and others—and are in themselves enough to drive us away from any form of hedonism.²⁷

HIGHER PLEASURE

My aim here though is to open up a conversation about the role of pleasure in higher education rather than to shut it down—something that the close affiliation of naturalistic hedonism to academic neoliberalism has the immediate potential to do. My suggestion then is that we back away from the more general notion of *homo economicus* with its broad conception of maximizing individual gains and minimizing individual costs, and focus instead on specifically increasing pleasure and decreasing pain in higher ed. In other words, we focus on hedonism without or outside of the context of a more general theory of exchange.

Doing the aforementioned is easier with the understanding of the centrality of hedonism to the social and behavioral sciences. If hedonistic explanation were not regarded as mainstream—though perhaps inexplicit and unexamined in much social and behavioral theory, then one might need a notion like *homo economicus* to drive inquiry into pleasure in higher ed. But as hedonism is a major assumption in much contemporary social, political, and economic explanation, then higher ed can ride on the coattails of hedonic explanations of crime, drug addiction, warfare, voting, and marriage. That is to say, if it is commonly utilized in explanations of crime, drug addiction, warfare, voting, and marriage, why then can’t it also be used in explanations of higher education?

While the notion that academe is fundamentally hedonistic may disturb the moral majority or those who wish to think of higher education as above the pleasure economy (the ascetic majority?),²⁸ situating it within the context of hedonism will put the study of higher education on the same explanatory grounding as other dimensions of society studied by the social sciences. But still, this comes with a major caveat: though hedonistic explanation may be a given in the social and behavioral sciences, it is not a given in the moral sciences.

In other words, while hedonistic explanation might be able to drive a cognitive psychological account of behavior in higher education, it will have a much more difficult time driving an ethical account, particularly one not grounded in moral psychology—and for some ethicists, this may be a deal breaker. Nevertheless, let's take a preliminary look at an ethical account of pleasure in higher education from the perspective of a sympathetic philosophical model, namely, Mill's eudaimonistic utilitarianism.

Taking our lead from Mill, one might begin by making a separation between the "higher pleasures" of academe and its "lower" ones. Higher ones may be things like solving a mathematical problem or succeeding in helping a student to understand a difficult topic, whereas lower ones may be getting a good lunch in the dining hall or completing an assessment report. Assume for the sake of argument that it were possible to provide at least the skeleton of a "higher/lower" academic pleasure taxonomy. This might involve, for example, assigning higher values to intellectual pleasures and lower ones to bodily pleasures. Assume also that we *ought* to strive to maximize the sum of higher "higher education" pleasures. What then does this imply for an ethics of pleasure in higher education? Most likely that there will be a lot of dissatisfied Socrates-types—and even more satisfied fools.

The reason for this is that the higher academic pleasures are in much shorter supply than the lower ones. There are many more opportunities to get a good lunch on campus and complete assessments reports than to solve Fermat's Last Theorem. The concern with a Mill-type approach to academic hedonism is that while one may strive to maximize the higher academic pleasures, because they are more rarified than the lower ones, we may end up with a more frustrated than fruitful doctrine of academic pleasure. Or, alternately, we may end up with better food services and assessment strategies than intellectual progress and scholarly success.

All of this assumes that there is some reasonable way to sort out types of pleasure on a hierarchy. If we have a fairly simple hierarchy of pleasure like Barthes, namely with *plaisir* on the lowest end and *textual pleasure* on the highest end of a trilogy of pleasure, then a Millian model of pleasure in higher ed might work. But for most, pleasure in higher education involves more than just reading pleasure.

There are, to begin with, the pleasures of being a student, faculty member, and administrator—and each can be very different. Students read, write, learn—and party; faculty teach, research, serve—and complain; and administration leads, facilitates, enforces—and plays politics. Each comes

with its own set of pleasures, and what is most pleasing to one individual may not be so to another. For example, some administrators take pleasure in enforcing compliance with university policy—whereas others find it painful.

None of this however denies the presence of pleasure in higher education; nor does it negate the existence of pain in academe. Rather, what it brings to the fore is that accounting for pleasure in higher ed is probably not as simple as postulating a tripartite division akin to Barthes's pleasures of reading. However, there is a lesson that we can gain from the examples of Barthes and Mill: from Mill, even a quick application of his theory of pleasure to higher ed reveals a level of taxonomical necessity that quickly deflates the feasibility of the theory; from Barthes, in spite of the extreme idiosyncrasy of his textual pleasures and the simplicity of his account, he is able to immediately establish a connection between pleasure and the text. So, what would you rather have? Which direction is the right one?

CONCLUSION

In my estimation, Mill and Barthes are but two of a number of different directions that an account of pleasure in higher education can take. Whether or not they are feasible, or whether a psychological or an ethical account is preferable, is not the issue here. What is the issue is that there are plenty of pathways to examining pleasure in higher education. What is now needed are individuals with the courage to engage the marginal discourses of hedonism to explore them.

Perhaps Aristippus and the other Cyrenaics were not entirely wrong to focus on the connection between happiness and pleasure; to focus on bodily pleasures over intellectual ones, particularly given the paucity of intellectual pleasures even in the institution most centered on their generation, namely, the academy. Hedonism in higher education need not be a plea for the return of couches to faculty offices; nor need it be an apology for being a dissatisfied Socrates. Rather, hedonism in higher education can be about returning enjoyment—and happiness—to the academy. And if it is the case that the post-Cyrenaic academy has never been an enjoyable or happy one, then let's start a conversation about the shape of such an academy—as I think many today would like to take part in it.

Academic hedonism should not be the scourge of the academy or a marginal concern. Rather it should be regarded as an opportunity to inquire into the pleasures of academe—and the ways to achieve them.

NOTES

1. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 57.
2. Arguably, as we've already established, the root cause of the intensification of pain and suffering in higher education today is the rise of neoliberal managerialism, which produces a form of emotional austerity in the docile neoliberal academic subject.
3. Originally published in French as *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil) in 1973. All quotations refer to the 1975 translation by Richard Miller.
4. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 57.
5. *Ibid.*, 57.
6. Annette Lavers, *Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 205.
7. Barthes's distinction between "plaisir" and "jouissance" draws on the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan, who on March 5, 1958, told his students he wanted to show them what was meant by "a notion...that has always been implied in our reflections on desire but that deserves to be distinguished from it, and which can only be articulated after one is sufficiently imbued in the complexity that constitutes desire" (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire V. Les Formations de l'inconscient, 1957–8* [Paris: Seuil, 1998], 251). Lacan would spend the next 20 years unraveling and deepening our understanding of what is meant by the notion "jouissance." Writes Néstor Braunstein, in Lacan, "with jouissance we have a double polarity; first in respect to desire, as advanced in 1958, and then in respect to pleasure, according to conventional use" (Néstor Braunstein, "Desire and Jouissance in the Teachings of Lacan," *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 104). "Jouissance," continues Braunstein, "is the dimension discovered by the analytic experience that confronts desire at its opposite pole. If desire is fundamentally lack, lack in being, jouissance is positivity, it is a 'something' lived by a body when pleasure stops being pleasure. It is a plus, a sensation that is beyond pleasure" (104).
8. For an overview of Greek *hedone*, see Justin Gosling and Christopher Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
9. See "Cyrenaics," *Encyclopedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition*, Volume VII (New York: The Encyclopedia Britannica Company, 1910). See also, Ugo Zilioli, *The Cyrenaics* (New York: Routledge, 2014) and Kurt Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism: The Cyrenaic Philosophers and Pleasure as a Way of Life* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

10. For a classical account of the life and philosophy of Aristippus and the Cyrenaics, see Diogenes Laertius, “Life of Aristippus,” *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers, Books 1–5*, trans. R. D. Hicks, Book Two, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).
11. See, Kurt Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism* (2014), and Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics* [1907], Seventh ed. (New York: Dover, 1966), Book II, Chapters II, III, IV, and VI.
12. For good recent introductions to Epicureanism, see Tim O’Keefe’s *Epicureanism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), Gisela Striker, “Epicurean Hedonism,” *Passions and Perceptions: Studies in Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Jacques Brunschwig and Martha Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and James Warren, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See also, for example, James Hankins, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and Peter G. Bietenholz, *Encounters with a Radical Erasmus: Erasmus’ Work as a Source of Radical Thought in Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), for material on Epicureanism in Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus, and More.
13. See Frederick Vaughan, *The Tradition of Political Hedonism: From Hobbes to J. S. Mill* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), Erin Frykholm and Donald Rutherford, “Hedonism and Virtue,” *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Peter R. Anstey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics* [1907], Seventh ed. (New York: Dover, 1966) and *Outlines of the History of Ethics*, Fifth Edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Classics, 1988). It might be noted that while the English utilitarians and the French *philosophes* of the late eighteenth century were defending hedonism, the German romantics of the same period, for example, Schlegel and Novalis were emphatically rejecting it. See Fred Beiser, “A Romantic Education: The Concept of *Bildung* in Early German Romanticism,” *Philosophers on Education: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Amélie Rorty (New York: Routledge, 1998).
14. “By good, understand either **pleasure**, or the **absence**—or say, on the occasion in question, the non-existence—of **pain**. **Pleasure** is positive good; **absence of pain**—negative good. By evil, understand either **pain**, or the **absence**—or say, on the occasion in question, the non-existence—of pleasure. Pain is positive evil; absence of pleasure—if arising from loss—negative evil.” Jeremy Bentham, “Pannomial Fragments,” *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, Published Under the Superintendence of His Executor, John Bowring*, Volume III (Edinburgh: William Tait, 78 Prince’s Street, 1843), 214.

15. Jeremy Bentham, *Principles of Judicial Procedure, The Works of Jeremy Bentham, Now First Collected; Under the Superintendence of His Executor, John Bowring*, Part VII (Edinburgh: William Tait, 78 Prince's Street, 1839), 138.
16. See Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), especially Chapter 1, "Of the Principle of Utility" and Chapter 4, "Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, How to Be Measured."
17. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Third Edition (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), 14.
18. Mill is here responding to critics of both Bentham and the Epicurean tradition: "To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure—no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit—they designate as utterly mean and groveling; as a doctrine worthy only of swine, to whom the followers of Epicurus were, at a very early period, contemptuously likened; and modern holders of the doctrine are occasionally made the subject of equally polite comparisons by its German, French, and English assailants" (*Utilitarianism* 10). Mill, however, concedes that this characterization of the Epicureans is a false one: "there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation" (*Utilitarianism* 11).
19. See, for example, Jeffrey A. Schaler, ed. *Peter Singer Under Fire: The Moral Iconoclast Faces His Critics* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2009).
20. It should be noted that it is possible to be an ethical hedonist without also being a psychological hedonist. John Cooper, for example, argues that Epicurus is only an *ethical* hedonist, not both an ethical and psychological hedonist. See John Cooper, "Pleasure and Desire in Epicurus," *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
21. Edwin Gantt, "Cognitive Psychology, Rationality, and the Assumption of Hedonism," *The General Psychologist* 35.3 (2000), 83.
22. *Ibid.*, 83.
23. *Ibid.*, 83. For a naturalistic hedonism explanation of crime, see Gary S. Becker, "Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach," *Journal of Political Economy* 76 (1968); for drug addiction, Helge Waal and Jørg Møreland, "Addiction as Impeded Rationality," *Addictions: Entries and Exits*, ed. Jon Elster (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999); for changes in sexual morality, see James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); for warfare, see John Paul Scott, "Biological Basis of Human Warfare: An Interdisciplinary

- Problem,” *Interdisciplinary Relationships in the Social Sciences*, eds. Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn W. Sherif (Chicago: Adeline, 1969); for regret, see Marcel Zeelenber, “The Use of Crying over Spilled Milk: A Note on the Rationality and Functionality of Regret,” *Philosophical Psychology* 12.3 (1999); for voting, see William H. Riker, “Political Science and Rational Choice,” *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy*, eds. James Alt and Kenneth Shepsle (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990); for marriage, see Gary S. Becker, “The Theory of Marriage, Part 1,” *Journal of Political Economy* 81.4 (1973) and “The Theory of Marriage, Part 2,” *Journal of Political Economy* 82.2 (1974); and for altruism, see Ian Vine, “Altruism and Human Nature: Resolving the Evolutionary Paradox,” *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives on Altruism*, eds. Pearl M. Oliner, Samuel P. Oliner, Lawrence Baron, Lawrence A. Blum, Dennis L. Krebs, and M. Zuzanna Smolenska (New York: New York University Press, 1992).
24. J. B. Rule, *Theory and Progress in Social Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 79. Cited by Edwin Gantt, “Cognitive Psychology, Rationality, and the Assumption of Hedonism,” 84. To be fair to Rule, he does not explicitly use the phrase “naturalistic hedonism” in his book. Rather, he defends something called “rational-choice theory,” which Gantt says is the “most well-known and widely embraced social scientific formulation of the naturalistic hedonism thesis” (Gantt 2000, 84). According to Rule, rational-choice theory has three essential tents: (1) “Human action is essentially *instrumental*, so that most social behavior can be explained as efforts to attain one or another, more or less distant, end”; (2) “Actors formulate their conduct through *rational calculation* of which among alternate courses of action are most likely to maximize their overall rewards”; and (3) “Large-scale social processes and arrangements—including such diverse things as rates, institutions, and practices—are ultimately to be explained as results of such calculation” (Rule 1997, 80).
 25. Edwin Gantt, “Cognitive Psychology, Rationality, and the Assumption of Hedonism,” 83.
 26. *Ibid.*, 83.
 27. See, for example, Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Henry Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), Jeffrey R. Di Leo, Henry Giroux, Sophia McClennen, and Ken Saltman, *Neoliberalism, Education, and Terrorism: Contemporary Dialogues* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013), and Joel Fanghanel, *Being an Academic* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

28. I have argued in Chap. 1, “The Two Austerities,” that the confluence of the austerities in higher education today has brought about a “new asceticism.” That is, the neoliberal mandates to operate higher education under conditions of economic austerity have intensified the deeply rooted moral, emotional, and existential austerity of higher education.

Homo Habitus

University reform is slow—even when times are bad. In spite of the downward corporate spiral taken by most universities over the past 25 years, efforts to release the university from its neoliberal chains have been widely regarded as ineffective. The cost of education continues to rise as does the amount of debt incurred by students; academic freedom is now more than ever subject to the interests of capital while the curriculum faces increasing degrees of vocational recalibration and political scrutiny; and department closures, unreasonable job expectations, and job insecurity all may be linked back to a destructive form of managerialism that continues to hold sway over academe. What then, may we ask, is impeding university reform? What is restricting resistance to these unwanted and unpleasant aspects of academe? The answer, in short, is *habitus*. Specifically, *academic habitus*.

Habitus, in its most general sense, refers to the “system of shared social dispositions and cognitive structures which generates perceptions, appreciations, and actions.”¹ This shared system of social dispositions and cognitive structures tends toward *reproduction*, that is, it tends toward reproducing, most importantly for our purposes, in the case of academics, a “fairly stable and homogeneous” set of “social and academic characteristics.”² This, of course, is not a problem when the academic world that is being reproduced is the object of admiration. However, it is a problem *if* one is not satisfied with academe’s status quo—and today we are not satisfied.

One of our goals now needs to be the production of alternate and competing visions of higher education in America because the current system is outdated and broken. This begins with the generation of academics who have the ability and disposition to think differently about higher education. In order for this to occur, academics need not necessarily share the social dispositions and cognitive structures of their predecessors and peers. That is, academics are not simply the products of an academic system geared toward the reproduction of homogeneity, but rather are exemplars of heterogeneity and agents of difference. Elsewhere, I have referred to them as *paralogical* thinkers because of their negative dialogics, that is, their use of “dialogue aimed at disrupting the system, rather than bringing it into equilibrium.”³ But this is easier said than done.

The academic *system* is a deeply internalized, if not, *unconscious* one. It is geared toward the production and reproduction of social and emotional dispositions that are fairly stable and homogeneous. It is almost as though academe has a neurosis to repeat what is familiar even if it is bad for us. Freud would call it a “repetition-compulsion” in the unconscious mind of academe. In “The ‘Uncanny,’” he says that the repetition-compulsion is “based upon instinctual activity and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts—[it is] a principle powerful enough to overrule the pleasure-principle, lending to certain aspects of mind their daemonic character, and still very clearly expressed in the tendencies of small children; a principle, too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neurotic patients.”⁴ Perhaps academe then could benefit from some psychotherapy?

The cognitive structures that shape the academic system are highly resistant to reform and change, particularly if the reform aims to not just shake, but ultimately break the system. Repetition compulsion says that “from the moment at which a state of things that has once been attained is upset, an instinct arises to create it afresh.”⁵ Is this not how we react to academic change that strives to upset the apple cart? In a word, the academic system has deeply internalized protections against reform and, as such, is highly resistant to change. Upset its given state of things, and there is an instinct to recreate it. Or, in less psychological terms, sever one of its arms—and another grows back.

Some of the most important protections of the academic system from change are its professional production and reproduction strategies. “Despite transformational changes in the scale, missions, and constituencies of American higher education,” comments Harvard English professor

and educational theorist Louis Menand, “professional reproduction remains almost exactly as it was a hundred years ago.”⁶ If things are going well for academe, this might not be such a bad thing. But as things are not going well, this lack of change in professional reproduction does not work in the best interests of the academy.

In order for change to occur, there must be individuals or groups within the academy that think differently about it—and are not neurotic about upsetting academe. That is, there need to be individuals or groups that do not share the widely held social dispositions and cognitive structures that generate perceptions, appreciations, and actions in academe, namely, *academic habitus*. However, again, this is much easier said than done as most who persist (or succeed) in the academy over the long run share a *habitus*. “Professors tend increasingly to think alike,” comments Menand, “because the profession is increasingly self-selecting.”⁷ “The university may not explicitly require conformity on more than scholarly matters, but the existing system implicitly demands and constructs it.”⁸ In short, thinking and acting differently within academe generally selects one from the group. Thus, if one values a role within academe, they will adapt to its *habitus*.

So, *habitus* in the context of academe is more than just merely an individual way of life. Rather, it is a *shared* unconscious system that enforces systemic stability and homogeneity. Studying it helps us to understand *what* we do as academics and *why* we do it. It also brings us to an understanding as to why academics seem to think alike, and in the words of Stanley Fish, “tend to run in packs.”⁹ *Habitus* is the social and cognitive glue of academe—it is what binds us together, and generates a sense of solidarity and shared *esprit de corps*. Perhaps it is the promise of solidarity that makes the topic of *habitus* so appealing to academics, particularly of late.

ACADEMIC STUDIES

The most influential formulation of the concept of “habitus” was developed in the early 1970s by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. However, the influence, particularly with regard to academe, was not immediate. Before Bourdieu’s landmark study of *habitus* in *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d’ethnologie kabyle* (1972),¹⁰ that is prior to 1970, there were just over 10,000 articles and books dealing with the general topic of “academic habitus”—10,510 to be exact.¹¹ A major topic, to be sure, but nothing like what was to happen in the coming years.

Over the next ten years, that is, through 1980, about 1500 works were added to the bibliography; and again, over the next ten, that is, through 1990, about 2500 additional works were added. However, the next ten-year period, that is 1990–2000, revealed a dramatic increase in research on this topic, with almost 10,000 works added. In other words, in the 1990s alone, there was as much scholarship on academic habitus than the entire period predating 1970. What happened in the 1990s? Why the sudden burst of interest? Answer: the rise of cultural studies.

In the 1990s, cultural studies exploded onto the academic scene.¹² Consequently, the work of sociologists such as Bourdieu provided direction to the emergent discipline. Many looked to Bourdieu's work for a manner in which to pursue the study of cultural phenomena that avoided absolutism and rigid frameworks. In addition, Bourdieu was particularly helpful in providing a pathway for the study of culture that rejected *method* in favor of *practice*.¹³

For many, the rejection of method in favor of practice was indicative of a shift from *theory* to *studies*. From the 1990s, and arguably through the present, “studies” designates an absence of theory and the rejection of method in the field of concern—and there are many: postcolonial studies, border studies, diaspora studies, New American studies, patronage studies, subaltern studies, working-class studies, debt studies, technoscience studies, animal studies, food studies, resistance studies, surveillance and security studies, body studies, cyborg studies, gender studies, disability studies, age studies, leisure studies, whiteness studies, new Southern studies, indigenous studies, ethnic studies, women's studies, queer studies, masculinity studies, sexuality studies, celebrity studies, fashion studies, sport studies, gaming studies, sound studies, visual culture studies, TV studies, film studies, media studies, archive studies, professionalization studies, canonization studies, labor studies, institutional studies, narrative studies, affect studies, trauma studies, memory studies, Holocaust studies, translation studies, Francophone studies, Lusophone studies, and so on.¹⁴ Simply put, anything and everything can be “studied” without recourse to method—and in a non-totalizing manner.

To be sure, the shift from theory to studies has been more than cosmetic. Studies are produced by critical writing practices, and do not necessarily immediately provide the meaning of a cultural artifact. At their best, they are self-reflective enterprises that are credited and discredited relative to historical and social pressures. Each carries with it the imprimatur of contingency, rather than the sanction of essentialism. And as the list above

illustrates, both the topic of study and what counts as a study can and will change over time. Whereas today “critical climate studies” is a hot topic, ten years ago, for example, it was not even on the “studies” radar.¹⁵

Theory today has come to be associated with method, whereas studies are in part distinguished by their absence of method. One of the major differences, say, between deconstruction and cultural studies is that the former can be and has been reduced to a method, whereas the latter (supposedly) cannot be totalized in this way. Furthermore, theory does not continually seek to redefine itself through a process of self-analysis and self-reflection. Structuralist theory, for example, does not change or redefine itself when its object of study changes. But are these studies really different from theory? My long-held belief is that they are not. Rather, they are part of an effort to repackage theory into a politically and ideologically palatable form. But this, of course, is another story.¹⁶ Here, however, I would like to approach *studies* from another direction, that is, I would like to present one of the more unfortunate consequences of studies, namely, their inability to serve as effective agents of resistance and reform, particularly when directed at an area such as academe. While it may be true that studies cannot be reduced to method and avoid the alleged absolutism and rigid frameworks of theory, it is also the case that in themselves, studies are always already weak agents of reform and change. While for some topics, especially historically distant ones, this may not be a problem. However, for studies of current cultural phenomena, it presents a problem, particularly if the culture subject to the study is one that is, for some, undesirable.

Overall, studies are more voyeuristic than visionary. They are constrained to the habitus that they present and struggle to offer value judgments on and afford critical distance from the phenomena they study. My general contention is that one of the places in which change is thwarted and reform is resisted is through the application of *habitus* to the study of culture. Moreover, one of the best defenses of this contention is an examination of the relationship of sociological practices to one specific form of cultural studies, namely, academic studies.

THE AGE OF HABITUS

The new millennium is the age of *habitus*. This is especially true in the realm of considerations of academe. From 2000 to 2015 alone, there are 69,005 entries under the keywords “academic habitus,” with 59,826

listed as journal articles alone. The vast majority though were done in the last ten years, with 55,811 entries for the years 2005 through 2015, with 48,783 of those entries being journal articles. In the past five years (2010–2015), there are 31,123 entries with 27,424 of them being articles. And in 2013–2014 alone, there were 9763 entries, with 8724 of them being articles. All in all, the research database of the Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO), one of the most comprehensive in the world, lists 91,555 entries under the keywords “academic habitus.” If this data does not indicate a trend in the consideration of academe, then nothing does.

While much of the work on academic habitus is diverse and wide ranging, it does have a *locus classicus*, namely, it draws on Bourdieu’s work on the general concept of habitus in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and his magisterial study of academic habitus *Homo Academicus*.¹⁷ These two works in particular frame a large part of the discussion of academic habitus; therefore, understanding them goes a long way toward getting a handle on this unwieldy and growing body of scholarship.

For Bourdieu, the sociological study of academe is not like the study of other aspects of society. “It is a comic scenario,” writes Bourdieu, “that of Don Juan deceived or The Miser robbed, and there are those who, hoping to feel endangered or to make others feel threatened, prefer to treat it in tragic terms.”¹⁸ Bourdieu, moreover, likens the situation of the *homo academicus* seeking to trap *homo academicus* as akin to the story of a young man who, “as a result of a quarrel with his girlfriend, writes in despair to the director of the zoo to offer him a mammal missing from his collection, that is, himself, so that he is placed in a cage, next to the chimpanzee, with a notice saying: ‘Homo sapiens. This specimen is the gift of John Cromantie, Esquire. Visitors are requested not to tease the man with personal remarks.’”¹⁹ However, all joking aside, there is something very different between the academic study of specific cultural practices and the academic study of academic practices—and maybe for the same reason we do not find humans caged in the local zoo. Academics are all too familiar to academics.

“The sociologist who chooses to study his own world in its nearest and most familiar aspects should not, as the ethnologist would,” comments Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus*, “domesticate the exotic, but, if I may venture the expression, exoticize the domestic, through a break with his initial relation to intimacy with modes of life and thought which remain opaque to him because they are too familiar.”²⁰ He then notes that unlike Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss, where “there is no prospect of subjecting to analysis the ‘forms of classification’ employed by the scholar, and

seeking in the social structures of the academic world...the sources of the categories of professional understanding,” his own sociological practice allows for both.²¹ For Bourdieu, “social science may expect to derive its most decisive progress from a constant effort to undertake a sociological critique of sociological reasoning.”²² Still, in spite of Bourdieu’s observation, academics who study academics have a problem—a problem that few today seem interested in confronting.

The problem is one that was left behind in the dustbin of theory by cultural studies. It is essentially the problem of self-analysis, namely, how is it possible to study oneself if one rejects the notion of method? Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss are called out by Bourdieu because of the inability of their work to redefine itself through self-analysis and self-reflection. However, Bourdieu’s sociological practice allegedly allows for self-analysis of self-analysis while still eschewing method and fixed categories of understanding. But how?

Much of the work to avoid objective structures, and thus to overcome the limits of the work of Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss, is done through the concept of *habitus*. Bourdieu defines *habitus* as follows:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.²³

In a very Kantian manner, Bourdieu regards the *habitus* as somehow providing prelinguistic and preconscious perceptual structures that organize the way we see and act in the world:

The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of conscious and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will.²⁴

However, unlike Kant who believes that they can be objectively determined by transcendental deduction,²⁵ Bourdieu regards them as “beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny.” Nonetheless, they are “embodied structures,” internalized by social agents:

The cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world are internalized, ‘embodied’ social structures.²⁶

Still, in order to avoid both objectivism *and* subjectivism, Bourdieu’s twin boogie men, he regards the schemes of perception and appreciation as “historical”:

The practical knowledge of the social world that is presupposed by ‘reasonable’ behaviour within it implements classificatory schemes (or ‘forms of classification’, ‘mental structures’ or ‘symbolic forms’—apart from their connotations, these expressions are virtually interchangeable), historical schemes of perception and appreciation which are the product of the objective division into classes (age groups, genders, social classes) and which function below the level of consciousness and discourse.²⁷

Thus, for Bourdieu, objective social conditions are unconsciously internalized, such as one’s age, gender and social class, and on the basis of these unconsciously internalized divisions, appropriate tastes and practices are exercised by the social agent.

Being the product of the incorporation of the fundamental structures of a society, these principles of division are common to all the agents of the society and make possible the production of a common, meaningful world, a common-sense world.²⁸

In a way, for Bourdieu, we unconsciously fulfill the social roles we have internalized. Habitus makes us, as social agents, *products* of our objective social destiny. It also sees that we act in accordance with the logic of the situation.

Moreover, as a bodily disposition, habitus is at the root of our negative reactions to phenomena that do not fit our habitus. For example, in *Distinction*, Bourdieu discusses why we may feel “disgust” with “facile” things such as the predicable charm of “light” music or the “vulgar sensuality” of “cabaret music.”²⁹ Habitus, in effect, both determines our bodily response to phenomena—and explains them. Why do horror movies make one person sick and another happy? For Bourdieu, the answer is to be found in habitus. One would assume that feelings of disgust with fundamental changes to the academic system stem from the same source as aesthetic taste.³⁰

But this is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the level of control exercised by habitus on agents. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, he writes,

Each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning. Because his actions and works are the product of a *modus operandi* of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery, they contain an “objective intention,” as the Scholastics put it, which always outruns his conscious intentions.³¹

While Bourdieu would be unhappy with the comment that this “modus operandi” is reducible to a “repertoire of rules” or that it is a “predetermined set of discourses,” passages like the one above do have this tenor—one that he rejects in the opening pages of *Outline*. To be sure, Bourdieu seeks to establish a theory of practice that avoids seeing agents as merely having a “rôle,’ i.e. a predetermined set of discourses and actions appropriate to a particular ‘stage-part.’”³²

Nevertheless, the habitus, whether a “repertoire of rules” or not, is instrumental in the production and reproduction of social agents:

The habitus is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g. of language, economy, etc.) to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions, in the organism (which one can, if one wishes, call individuals) lastingly subjected to the same conditionings, and hence placed in the same material conditions of existence.³³

Thus, it is habitus that allows us to regard as “individuals” social agents reproduced by the same “modus operandi”:

Therefore sociology treats as identical all the biological individuals who, being the product of the same objective conditions, are the supports of the same habitus: social class, understood as a system of objective determinations, must be brought into relation not with the individual or with the “class” as a *population*, i.e. as an aggregate of enumerable, measurable, biological individuals, but with the class habitus, the system of dispositions (partially) common to all products of the same structures.³⁴

Finally, even though Bourdieu regards members of a common habitus as identical, he leaves room for some variation in experience:

Though it is impossible for *all* members of the same class (or even two of them) to have had the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for the members of that class.³⁵

As such, for Bourdieu, the habitus is neither subjective, nor objective. Rather, it might be considered something like “intersubjective.” While the “individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception” is objective, the “relations between class, habitus and the organic individuality” should be “defined by a *social trajectory* strictly speaking irreducible to any other,” which is to say, it is subjective.³⁶ Still, Bourdieu’s habitus does not leave much room for individuals or groups to reject or resist their habitus.

Much like the rose-colored glasses of philosophy’s schemes of apperception that only allow us to see and experience the phenomenal world, but not the noumenal world, habitus is something that cannot simply be removed and replaced with another habitus (or set of colored glasses) to allow us to see the world differently. The world is what it is through habitus—and there is no recourse to something like the regulative ideal world of the noumenal. In the case of academe, from the perspective of habitus, there is little or no possibility for an alternate vision of academe, that is, one that sees it differently. Habitus defines the parameters of academe and determines the social destiny of academics as social agents. There is no world outside of their social destiny within academe for these agents—not even a hypothetical one. Though habitus reveals the structuring structures of academe, it does not provide us with a means of moving beyond them—and for this reason, it is an impediment to academic reform and is resistant to change.

CONCLUSION

Louis Menand has said “trying to reform the contemporary university is like trying to get on the Internet with a typewriter, or like trying to ride a horse to the mall.”³⁷ Habitus helps us to better understand why this is so. From the vantage point of academic habitus, resistance and reform are virtually impossible. At least one will eventually get to the mall on a horse;

from the perspective of habitus, at least as outlined in the above passages from Bourdieu, resistance in academe is much more akin to getting on the Internet with a typewriter.

Last year alone almost 10,000 pieces of research and scholarship on academe utilized habitus—and over 30,000 in the past five years. Given the basic characteristics of habitus, it is no wonder that resistance to change in academe is so strong and seems so difficult and distant. Simply put, if habitus is leading the charge toward educational reform of and resistance to the corporate university, then we are all in trouble. Cultural studies of the university without the ability to step outside of one's academic position (or habitus) are doomed to be merely reproductions or validations of existing conditions. If one truly believes that it is not possible to utilize method or make essentialistic or idealistic claims in the evaluation of the university, then we are in for many more years of life in the salt mines of the corporate university.

While there may not be a need to reject cultural studies or sociology *in toto* as they fulfill an important intellectual role in being able to help us understand many diverse aspects of culture, we need to draw the line and reject habitus in the study of the academy, especially in dark times. While studies of the academy that do employ habitus have a place at the table of the academy, they should not be regarded as capable of resetting the table. And today, this seems to be one of our most urgent concerns, particularly if we want to change academic dispositions as opposed to merely understanding them.

NOTES

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 279n2.
2. *Ibid.*, 143.
3. Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 32.
4. Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny [1919]," *Collected Papers, Volume IV: Papers on Metapsychology; Papers on Applied Psycho-Analysis*, authorized translation under the supervision of Joan Riviere, Fourth impression (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948), 391.
5. Sigmund Freud, "Anxiety and Instinctual Life," *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Lecture XXXII, trans. and ed., James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1965), 106.

6. Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 157.
7. *Ibid.*, 155.
8. *Ibid.*, 155.
9. See Stanley Fish's work on interpretive communities in, for example, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).
10. Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1972). Translated as *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
11. Data here is based on figures from EBSCO using the keywords "academic habitus."
12. See, for example, Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler's influential collection from the early 1990s, *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
13. For Bourdieu's contributions to cultural studies, see Bridget Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu on Society and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) and Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman, eds. *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).
14. This list draws from "Figure 1" in Vincent Leitch's *Literary and Criticism in the 21st Century: Theory Renaissance* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), a chart inserted at the beginning of his book listing the multitude of "studies" active today.
15. Two pioneering collections of essays in the area of critical climate studies are Tom Cohen, ed. *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities, 2012) and Henry Sussman, ed., *Impasses of the Post-Global: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 2* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities, 2012).
16. I have previously argued that cultural studies repackaged semiotics. See Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Academe Degree Zero: Reconsidering the Politics of Higher Education* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 89–102.
17. Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984). English translation (op. cit., 1988).
18. *Ibid.*, xi.
19. *Ibid.*, ix.
20. *Ibid.*, xi.
21. *Ibid.*, xii.
22. *Ibid.*, xii.
23. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

24. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 466.
25. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), A84–130, B116–169.
26. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 468.
27. *Ibid.*, 468.
28. *Ibid.*, 468.
29. *Ibid.*, 468.
30. To be sure, the habitus includes emotions and feelings. In his *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), Bourdieu addresses emotions and feelings common in academe such as shame, anxiety, and guilt in terms of the dominant and the dominated. “The practical recognition through which the dominated, often unwittingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting, in advance, the limits imposed on them, often takes the form of *bodily emotion* (shame, timidity, anxiety, guilt), often associated with the impression of *regressing* towards archaic relationships, those of childhood and the family. It is betrayed in visible manifestations, such as blushing, inarticulacy, clumsiness, trembling, all ways of submitting, however, reluctantly, to the dominant judgement, sometimes in internal conflict and ‘self-division’, the subterranean complicity that a body slipping away from the directives of consciousness and will maintains with the violence of the censures inherent in the social structures” (169). As such, one may look toward bodily emotions like shame and anxiety in academe for important signs of complicity and resistance to academic habitus—an insight that gives further evidence of the importance of studying emotions in academe (cf. Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Academe Degree Zero*, 33–42).
31. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 79.
32. *Ibid.*, 2.
33. *Ibid.*, 85.
34. *Ibid.*, 85.
35. *Ibid.*, 85.
36. *Ibid.*, 86.
37. Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas*, 17.

Google U

Not so long ago data suddenly became “big.” How and why though is still very much open to debate. While related to increases in the number of zeros of data collected, stored, and searched, it was also something more. Not like one day data was small, the next big. But more like at one time data had no ego, then almost overnight, it appeared.

Along with the phrases *big* business, *big* money, and *big* government, big data has become a locus of conversation and critique. And much like business, money, and government, data acquires the adjective as a sign of fear and opprobrium, not awe and admiration. Not because massive amounts of data is in itself fear inspiring, but rather because there are those whose use of it we fear. Nor because this data cannot be used to make the world a better or safer place, but rather because there are far too many who choose not to or who use it to the opposite effect. We fear big data because of what might happen if it were put in the wrong hands. Using it to protect civil rights and promote democratic values would be wonderful; however, when utilized by those who disregard these rights and values, the effects would be horrific. Therefore, big data is often met, along with its corporate, governmental, and financial peers, with a healthy dose of fear and trepidation—in spite of its technological wonder.

Like many technological advances, hope can quickly fade to fear when these technologies are turned against us. Among the harshest examples of this is when big government uses big data against its own citizens.

The door to this was kicked open when big data became the sword of national security and the shield against terrorism with the Patriot Act, which has expanded to include areas other than terrorism such as narcotics cases and domestic policing. Recently, for example, it has been reported that the National Security Agency (NSA) will share its information with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) without first applying for any screens for privacy. It has also been known for a couple of years that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Internal Revenue Service (IRS) were getting data from the NSA. Big data is all warm and fuzzy like a big bear until it claws you in the pursuit of “domestic policing.”¹

Big data is also the handmaiden of neoliberalism. It has become the tool of choice for neoliberal culture and has contributed greatly to its rise to power. Without the numbers generated through computers, drones, bar code scanners, cars, fitness trackers, smartphones, and even televisions, neoliberal culture would have a much less robust grasp of the market—and arguably a much less commanding hold over politics and society. Moreover, advances in cloud technology position data in a way that makes possible the analysis of larger and larger sets of data. And as the data sets grow, so too do the hopes that big data will more efficiently advance the ends of neoliberal culture.

If facilitating the invasion of our privacy and the denial of our civil rights, and making us the subjects of a surveillance state in addition to fueling neoliberalism with numbers were not enough reasons to be afraid of big data, one more item needs to be added to the list, namely, the role of big data in bringing about the end of theory. While the world of literary and critical theory has been contending with numerous versions of this apocalyptic story at least since the early 1990s, the one recently presented by big data is an entirely new and much more ambitious effort in this regard. Consequently, the various deaths that theory has suffered over the past 25 years look small when compared to the death of theory at the hands of big data.²

The story of the end of theory at the hands of big data is important not just because it reveals more of our dystopic fears about big data, but also because of the way it interweaves the rise of neoliberalism with a turning away from knowledge in favor of the tempting fruits of transactional data. It is a story that also contributes to the neoliberal crusade in higher education to reduce the pursuit of knowledge in favor of an increase in vocational training.³ This story begins though not in the halls of higher education, but rather in those of Google at the dawn of the so-called Petabyte Age.

THE AGES OF BIG DATA

Amid the economic collapse of 2008, Google celebrated its tenth anniversary.⁴ But few outside of the company hierarchy were lighting candles for it. At the time, it was “under attack for its privacy and China policies, for its growing dominance in search, for its perceived threat to copyright owners, for its disruption of such traditional businesses as advertising, for its efforts to muscle into the mobile telephone business,”⁵ and, among other things, for its assumed “master plan for world conquest.”⁶

Stephen A. Arnold, head of Arnold Information Technology, headed a team of researchers in 2002 in a five-year study of “Google’s various patents, algorithms, and SEC filings.”⁷ The report, entitled “Google Version 2.0: The Calculating Predator,” concluded “while Google may have started out to ‘do no evil,’ it has, to some, morphed from a friendly search engine into something more ominous.”⁸ “Googzilla,” writes Arnold, “fueled by technical prowess, is now on the move.”⁹ It “stalks a market,” comments Arnold, “then strikes quickly and in a cold-blooded way.”¹⁰

At the time, the perceived threat of Google was an economic one. Arnold, for example, believed that Google was aiming “to become a digital Wal-Mart, an online shopping powerhouse that allows consumers to shop for the best price, an essential middleman that offers efficiency and data to advertisers, and shovels revenues to Web sites and services to merchants, including back-office computers that find the quickest and cheapest way to reroute their delivery trucks.”¹¹ These worries, however, were misguided, as it was the Internet more than Google that was undermining old models of business. The real danger, however, lay elsewhere.

In 2008, Google was involved in a number of new initiatives including YouTube, which it had purchased in October 2006 for \$1.65 billion.¹² But what excited CEO Eric Schmidt the most was cloud computing. It was an idea that captured his attention since he was at the computer company Sun Microsystems when he promoted the idea that “the network is the computer.”¹³ At the annual Google shareholders meeting on May 8, 2008, he called the shift from PC to the Web “the defining technological shift of our generation.”¹⁴

In retrospect, however, his comment was also a portent. By 2008, Google was generating more data than ever through its various applications including Gmail, Google Earth, Google Maps, Google Scholar, Google Finance, Google Product Search, Google Calendar, Google Desktop, and Google Docs. “Eventually,” said Schmidt at the time, “this will be a very

large source of revenue for our company.”¹⁵ “Everything we do,” reported Google co-founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin in September of the same year, “is running on the Web platform.”¹⁶ But Google’s emerging Web platform was to become more than just a major source of its revenue; it would also become the locus of its power in the rising neoliberal economy.

By 2008, scholars were reporting on the transformative power of big data that cloud computing infrastructure could facilitate, not on some remote supercomputer in Silicon Valley, but on the laptop in your office. For example, in an article posted on the Computing Community Consortium in December that year, Randle E. Bryant, Randy H. Katz, and Edward D. Lazwoska comment that “Just as search engines have transformed how we access information, other forms of big-data computing can and will transform the activities of companies, scientific researchers, medical practitioners, and our nation’s defense and intelligence operations.” For them,

Big data computing is perhaps the biggest innovation in computing in the last decade. We have only begun to see its potential to collect, organize, and process data in all walks of life. A modest investment by the federal government could greatly accelerate its development and deployment.¹⁷

To get a sense of the amount of data being collected and processed at the time, consider the following: in June of 2008, you could buy a one-terabyte hard drive for \$200 that could store 260,000 songs. Using that hard drive as a benchmark, consider that 20 times its capacity was the number of photos being uploaded on Facebook each month; 120 times its capacity was all the data and images collected by the Hubble space telescope; 320 times its capacity was the amount of data produced each week by the large Hadron Collider; and 460 times its capacity was all the digital weather compiled by the National Climate Data Center. Now consider that in 2008, *all* of the videos on YouTube amounted to 530 times the capacity of that hard drive. To get a sense of how much data this is, consider that 600 times the capacity of that \$200 terabyte hard drive would be equivalent to the complete contents of the genealogy database Ancestry.com, one which includes all US census records from 1790 to 2000.¹⁸

But the big data news item of 2008 was really none of these figures. Rather it was Google’s report that the amount of data being processed by its servers was 1000 terabytes—every 72 minutes. For some, this was the dawn of a new age in data storage and processing, the Petabyte Age, named after the term used for 1000 terabytes.¹⁹ Consequently, the evolution of

the ages of big data was set to proceed as follows: Petabyte will yield to the Exabyte, which will be followed by the Zettabyte, the Yottabyte, the Brontobyte, and the Geobyte ages. The argument might also be made that the dawn of the Petabyte Age is the point where we finally became “post-human,” because it is also a good point to stop measuring evolution in terms of human development—and to start measuring it in terms of computer development. But let’s not stray too much.

The scale of these amounts of data is telling. In terms of stored words, here is what it comes to: one byte is a character; ten bytes a word; and 100 bytes a sentence. A kilobyte (1000 bytes) is a short paragraph and 100 kilobytes a page. It would take about 100 megabytes (100,000 kilobytes) to store a couple of volumes of an encyclopedia. A gigabyte (1000 kilobytes) could store ten yards of books and 100 gigabytes an entire library floor of academic journals. Which now brings us to the capacity of our two-hundred dollar 2008 hard drive: it could hold 1000 copies of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (though only 300 hours of high-quality video). Ten terabytes could hold the printed contents of the Library of Congress.²⁰

Why the petabyte captures our attention—and is a good point of entry into big data—is because it is difficult to imagine what it could hold in terms of printed text, which is arguably the benchmark of the informational imaginary. Saying, for example, that it can hold 500 billion pages of standard printed text is hard to imagine unless you think of it as 100 times the contents of the Library of Congress. Beyond the petabyte though is truly unimaginable. Though it has been said that five exabytes (or 5000 petabytes) would be equal to all the words ever spoken by mankind, there is no way to confirm or deny this estimate. And it only gets worse for imagining the scale of subsequent ages of data.

Martin Hilbert, a professor from the University of Southern California, is one of a number of people who have tried to calculate how much data there is out there. According to Hilbert, if one takes into account everything that has been produced, communicated, and stored in history including “not only books, paintings, emails, photographs, music and video (analog and digital), but video games, phone calls, even car navigation systems and letters sent through the mail,” then he estimates that in 2007 it amounted to more than 300 exabytes of stored data.²¹

But, because digital information expands so quickly, doubling a little more than every three years, Hilbert sets the 2013 grand total at 1200 exabytes. However, it should be noted that less than 2% of the total is non-digital stored information.²² Compare this with 2007, when Hilbert

set the non-digital total at 7%. Moreover, as recently as 2000, only 25% of stored information was digital.²³ The rest, namely, 75% of stored information, was “paper, film, vinyl LP records, magnetic cassette tapes, and the like.”²⁴ To be sure, non-digitized information is becoming increasingly rarified, bordering on extinction, in the age of big data.

Though eight years later, the numbers have gone up a bit, the basic data scenario has not changed: more and more data is produced every day. Instead of 20 petabytes a day as in 2008, Google now processes 25 petabytes a day. Instead of 20 terabytes a month, Facebook generates 200–400 terabytes *a day* by users uploading photos and another 130 terabytes in just user log data each day. The Hadron Collider has gone from producing 320 terabytes of data a week to a petabyte *a second*. In short, it has been said that the total amount of data created worldwide in 2011 was about one zetabyte (or 1,000,000 petabytes) and that this figure will increase by 50%–60% in each subsequent year. If this estimate is accurate, then in 2016 we will worldwide produce about 8.5–10.5 zetabytes of data.²⁵

While new information technology always increases the amount of information produced, there is no historical comparison for increases of doubling every three years let alone 50%–60% increases annually. Gutenberg’s printing press (1439) resulted in producing more information over a 50-year period (1453–1503) than was produced by the scribes of Europe since the founding of Constantinople over 1200 years earlier.²⁶ However, compared to estimated increases of 60% a year in the Petabyte Age, the print age is a tortoise to the petabyte’s hare.

But what does this rapid increase of data mean? What should we expect from the age of big data? Surprisingly, it has been argued that we should expect something even worse than the federal government using big data to become a better Big Brother, namely, we should expect the end of theory—the last firewall between big data and big business, money, government, and brother.

THE END OF THEORY

The most radical thesis to come out of the digital optimism of the early Petabyte Age came from the editor of the magazine *Wired*. In the summer of 2008, Chris Anderson boldly asserted the end of theory—and people listened. For Anderson, the increased data storage capacity of the early Petabyte Age is significantly different than the increased storage capacities

of the previous ages of data. Whereas previous ages allowed for us to *visualize* collected data “in its totality,” data storage in the Petabyte Age does not. Data stored in the cloud is “not a matter of simple three- and four-dimensional taxonomy and order,” writes Anderson, “but of dimensionally agnostic statistics.” Consequently, for him our inability to visualize data storage in the cloud “forces us to view data mathematically first and establish a context for it later.”²⁷

While Anderson and most others who write about big data seldom give a definition of it, the distinction between our ability and otherwise to visualize data is as good a place as any to start. For some, like Anderson, when the scale of data collected, organized, or processed resists visualization, the phrase big data is used to describe it. Big data, on this view, is more about the limits of the human imagination than the frontiers of technology. The idea here seems to be that when the human imagination fails to produce an image of the amount of data stored, but mathematical symbolism can, the scale of data moves from small to big. On this view, big data has more in common with mathematical objects than material ones, that is, with the world of equations than the world of bookshelves and filing cabinets. But what does this mean?

It means that big data asks us to take a leap of faith to a world where there is no direct analogy with any of the ways in which information has been stored and retrieved for almost the entirety of recorded history. All of this data appears “small” in comparison to data shared across multiple technological platforms and often collected without a specific purpose. But for that matter, there is not much precedent either for data “collected by default, without any intention to analyze it”²⁸ outside of the context of the brave new informational world of the new millennium.

In opposition to big data, then, small data may also be characterized as data that is collected with the *intention* to analyze it. Survey data, for example, is paradigmatic small data, whereas surveillance data is not—and, as such, better termed big data. Given then these two potential characteristics of big data, it is no wonder that many find it significantly different than previous generations of data and are enthralled with its potential.

Anderson, though, sticks with the visualization view of big data, and illustrates his point about the “difference” between visualizable small data and non-visualizable big data by referring to the example of Google:

Google conquered the advertising world with nothing more than applied mathematics. It didn't pretend to know anything about the culture and

conventions of advertising—it just assumed that better data, with better analytical tools, would win the day. And Google was right.²⁹

But right about what? That transactional data can be utilized by companies to dominate markets and invade privacy? Or that making decisions purely on the basis of numbers can be financially rewarding though ethically dubious?

Though Anderson does not say this, the name of the strategy employed by Google is commonly referred to as “neoliberalism.” As social and political commentator, Henry Giroux has said, “[I]t is an ideology and a politic buoyed by the spirit of market fundamentalism that subordinates the art of democratic politics to the rapacious laws of a market economy that expands its reach to include all aspects of social life within the dictates and values of a market driven society.”³⁰

In the case of Google, commitment to market fundamentalism is facilitated and maximized through the collection of increasing amounts of data and the development of analytical tools to utilize it to increase corporate profits. There is no need for any knowledge of the conventions of advertising, because data analysis provides Google all it needs to know about consumer behavior. Moreover, there is no need to know anything about culture, because consumer market behavior is the sole determinant of value.

For Anderson, the case of Google is one wherein a company learned how to conquer the advertising world by producing and analyzing more data on market behavior than its competitors. “Google’s founding philosophy,” comments Anderson, “is that we don’t know why this page is better than that one: If the statistics of incoming links say it is, that’s good enough.”³¹ This, of course, is textbook neoliberal culture, a culture wherein value—and everything else that we need to know—is solely determined by the market.

Links that are used more are more valuable, and links that are used less are less valuable. As Anderson notes, this type of philosophy of value has no need for “semantic or causal analysis.”³² Value in neoliberalism is not determined by knowledge of *why* something is more sought after than something else. It cares not about meaning or content. It is not even concerned with the causal connections between things. All that it concerns itself with is numbers—and their maximization in the pursuit of market domination.

Anderson is convinced that because we collect, store, and analyze more data now than at any other time in history, and that because our capacities to collect, store, and analyze data will only increase with advances in technology, we no longer need theories. He cites George Box's 30-year-old proclamation that "All models are wrong, but some are useful" as prescient.³³ However, for Anderson, now that we are in the Petabyte Age, we can move beyond Box's proclamation to an even stronger one. Appropriately, though, he is egged on by a presentation by Google's artificial-intelligence guru.

At a research conference in March of 2008, Google's research director, Peter Norvig updated George Box's maxim, "All models are wrong, and increasingly you can succeed without them." Norvig is said to have told the audience at the O'Reilly Emerging Technology conference that "a lot of the time Google does not rely on complex models and theories, but simply on large amounts of data."³⁴ At the time, Norvig and his colleagues were calling for simpler models. "Simple models and a lot of data trump more elaborate models based on less data," wrote Norvig and his colleagues in another conference presentation published in early 2009, fittingly entitled, "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Data."³⁵

Anderson, though, carried away by the big data euphoria of the summer of 2008, one-ups Norvig. "This is a world where massive amounts of data and applied mathematics replace every other tool that might be brought to bear," says the editor of *Wired*. "Out with every theory of human behavior, from linguistics to sociology," he continues.

Forget taxonomy, ontology, and psychology. Who knows why people do what they do? The point is they do it, and we can track and measure it with unprecedented fidelity. With enough data, the numbers speak for themselves.³⁶

But instead of concluding that this only applies to advertising, Anderson goes one step further and says that it applies to science as well.

The cornerstone of the scientific method, testable hypotheses, are now "becoming obsolete" comments Anderson.

Scientists are trained to recognize that correlation is not causation, that no conclusions should be drawn simply on the basis of correlation between X and Y (it could just be a coincidence). Instead, you must understand the underlying mechanisms that connect the two. Once you have a model, you can connect the data sets with confidence. Data without a model is just noise.³⁷

Or, at least this was the tenor of scientific traditions dating back to Aristotle. Not only are there different types of causation, for example, Aristotle's four-fold analysis of causality distinguishes between efficient, material, final, and formal causes,³⁸ there are also different ways to link necessity to causation, such as Hume's argument that the source of necessity may be attributed to the causes in the constant conjunction of events.³⁹ However, the notion of data without a model is not merely noise. Rather, it is akin to data considered without or outside of philosophy.

"Data," plural of "datum," is derived from the Latin *dare*, "to give." The notion that the world is immediately given to our awareness through data is nothing less than naïve realism. It would mean that all of the qualities we sense in objects are in fact qualities of these objects. So, for example, if we sense a particular sound, color, taste or smell, naïve realism says that the particular sound, color, taste or smell is *in* the object. No one has ever argued, for example, that the bad taste of the beer is in the beer or the tickle in the feather—even though beer can taste bad, and feathers can tickle us.

Philosophy uses naïve realism as a position to be avoided. In general, the more critical the philosophy, the less the world will be regarded as immediately given, that is to say, mere datum. Suffice it to say, there are plenty of forms of realism, but none that say that data without a model is just noise. This is part of reason that Anderson's argument for the end of theory given the rise of big data is so controversial and wrong-headed. No one has ever been a naïve realist, though it appears Anderson is vying for that unenviable position.

"But faced with massive data," said Anderson, "this approach to science—hypothesize, model, test—is becoming obsolete." "Correlation supersedes causation, and science can advance even without coherent models, unified theories, or really any mechanistic explanation at all," continues Anderson. "It's time to ask: What can science learn from Google?"⁴⁰

Anderson's "correlation is enough" argument against theory is the big-data version of the neoliberal dream and the end of philosophy. In this world, "all generalizable rules about how the world works, how humans behave, what consumers buy, when parts break, and so on may become irrelevant as analysis of big data takes over," writes one commentary.⁴¹ "The 'end of theory,'" it continues, "seems to imply that while theories have existed in substantive fields like physics or chemistry, big-data analysis has no need of any conceptual models."⁴² Or, more

simply put, naïve realism, the view that data gives us immediate access to the world, is the logical consequence of collecting and storing increasing amounts of data.

If the desire of the big data dream is fulfilled, then “we might one day be able to dispense with separate disciplines of economics, psychology, sociology, management and so on,” writes sociologist and political economist, William Davies. “Instead,” predicts Davies,

a general science of choice will emerge, in which mathematicians and physicists study large data sets to discover general laws of behavior. In place of a science of markets (economics), a science of workplaces (management), a science of consumer choice (market research) and a science of organization and association (sociology), there will be a single science which finally gets to the truth of why decisions are made as they are. The “end of theory” means the end of parallel disciplines, and a dawning era in which neuroscience and big data analytics are synthesized into a set of hard laws of decision-making.⁴³

But dispensing with some of the disciplines with the aim of creating a single discipline upon big data is not, strictly speaking, the *end* of theory. Rather, it is a repositioning of theory and methodology to more effectively and efficiently utilize data to meet various needs. In Davies’s analysis, these will be the needs of government and corporations, who are already spending “tens of billions of dollars...monitoring, predicting, treating, visualizing, anticipating the smallest vagaries of our minds, feelings and brains” rather than spending the same dollars “designing and implementing alternative forms of political-economic organization.”⁴⁴

Contained within the dreams and aspirations of big data demagogues such as Anderson are the seeds of the continued destruction of our democratic values and critical capacities. To call for the end of theory as well as the pursuit of causation in science opens the door to scientific fantasies if not also dystopias. Hanging things together through correlation may be enough for science fiction, but it is not enough for the pursuit of science. Moreover, it opens the door to the non-philosophy of naïve realism. If big data really entails more neoliberal culture along with less privacy, more surveillance, and an increasing disregard for philosophy and critical inquiry, then the allocation of resources to the implementation and pursuit of alternative forms of political-economic organization in the near future seems remote.

Moreover, the complicity of Anderson's argument for the end of theory with neoliberal arguments against supporting non-vocationally oriented liberal arts disciplines like sociology and philosophy is uncanny. Through the eyes of big data, the neoliberal academy can be seen as both the beneficiary of its advanced market analytics, and the guarantor of a diminished role for liberal arts disciplines seen as superfluous in the age of big data. Though unintended, Anderson's swipe at theory is also one at the liberal arts and academe's support of them.

If Anderson's argument is sound, all we need to know can be obtained through Google's search engines. Perhaps too at the end of the university as we know it, it is replaced with Google educational centers complete with Google libraries, Google books, and Google scholars. If so, then why not also think of the end of theory at the hands of Google as opening up the door to its own form of education? Might not Google U, the first university founded solely on big data, be in our future?

CONCLUSION

After writing the piece, and seeing the understandably unfavorable responses it elicited, Anderson backtracked a bit. Less than a month later, in an interview on National Public Radio with Brooke Gladstone, Anderson said that his use of the word "obsolete" was a "little overstatement for effect."⁴⁵ However, while the scientific method may not be obsolete, "what we have is a new way to do science which adds an option that wasn't available before the ages of massive data." He continues, though, with the naïve realism of big data by describing it as "a new scientific tool, like a microscope or telescope."⁴⁶ In other words, big data is a kind of tool that provides us immediate access to the aspects of the world not visible to the naked eye.

"We start with the fact that we have data," says Anderson to Gladstone. "And then we statistically analyze that data, and out of the data comes correlations."⁴⁷ But is correlation really enough? Is the Google model of "science" really theory-neutral? Hardly. To deny that observation and data collection is not at least to some extent theory laden is to ignore some of the most important work in twentieth-century philosophy of science. Do you really think that Google knows more about the workings of science than, for example, Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend?⁴⁸

Anderson says that "the notion of a data led science as opposed to a theory led science is the new model."⁴⁹ While it is true that there are many

things in the world that are not known, that science cannot explain, that elude causal explanation, there is no need to infer from this that a model that works strictly on statistical correlation is a better one. Adoption of the Google model asks us to give up on knowledge for belief; causation for correlation; philosophy for finance.

“The Google model does not know,” comments Anderson, “and the Google model maybe can’t know.” “But,” continues Anderson in his interview, “what the Google model might be able to do is to allow us to act in the absence of knowledge.”⁵⁰ Excuse me, but isn’t acting in the absence of knowledge also called acting from ignorance? If this is the contribution of the Google model, that is, to encourage people to act more from ignorance, then we lose more than theory with the ascent of big data. We also lose the will to separate knowledge from opinion—and science from fiction.

The ramifications of Google’s efforts to conquer the world have been much more than mere corporate greed. Though Anderson’s claims to the end of theory may still be hyperbole, they indicate the ways in which neoliberal culture has benefitted from the big data revolution. For this reason alone, the philosophy of Google must be seen as an extension of both the neoliberal agenda as well as a direct attack on knowledge in favor of ignorance. Finally, looking around the world today, it is hard not to conclude that Google is succeeding.

NOTES

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Against Debt

Debt is rotting higher education in America—and destroying the lives of far too many students and their families. If something is not done soon to reverse the course of student debt in America, all will be lost for yet another generation of students. *College* should be a life-altering activity—*financing* it should not. But what can be done and—more importantly—who is going to do it?

Change is surely not going to come at the hands of the financial institutions that profit from extending credit to students without even knowing their ability or willingness to pay. Lenders have little motivation to cease these lucrative and often predatory lending practices, because student debt cannot be discharged through bankruptcy.¹

It is also not going to come from institutions of higher education who seem to be collectively determined to raise the cost of education well beyond the limits of affordability for students from working-class and low-income families. In 1981, the year I began college, the average total cost for tuition, fees, room, and board was \$3489. Though this seemed costly at the time, I was able to afford it with help from my parents and Pell grants, and by working various jobs on and off campus for the duration of my undergraduate studies. In the process, there were lots of Ramen noodles, but no loans.

However, looking at the price of higher education 30 years later, it would have been much more difficult for a first-generation student from

a working-class family to accomplish the same feat with the average total cost for tuition, fees, room, and board at \$19,339. Even adjusting for inflation, the constant dollar increase per year is about \$11,000.² For most working-class Americans, the current cost of higher education places unreasonable and severe financial pressure on them—so much so that it is not affordable without one or more loans. Now, more than ever, those without the capital get the punishment, which in this case is debtors' prison without bars.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to save students and their families from a future chained to debt; a future where a significant portion of their income is robbed from them; a future where they could even go to their grave without having paid off their student debt. The first step is recognizing that student debt is a serious problem today—and not one just for students; the second is finding a way to overcome it; the third is achieving it. A democracy where the cost of higher education threatens the future well-being of individuals is unconscionable. Not only is democratic education threatened by effectively pricing working-class and low-income people out of the halls of higher education, but so too is democracy and civil society by excluding on the basis of class major sectors of the population from fair and equitable access to education.

Still, change regarding the student debt debacle is not going to just happen on its own. It is going to take revisionary thinking and collective action to turn around this sad state of affairs. Things will not just get better regarding student debt simply because they are bad and getting worse. Complicating matters is the fact that the student debt situation today is simply unprecedented. At no point in the history of American higher education has the cost of education to students been higher, or have more students been in debt. In short, there is no looking back in order to look forward when it comes to the amount of student debt amassed to date.

Higher education in America today fattens itself on student debt—and has little motivation for slimming down. As long as the loans keep being offered to students, it is business as usual in higher ed. After all, what university or college in America would go so far as to protect its students from debtors' prison without bars by prohibiting them from leveraging their financial future? They want their money now—no matter how painful it will be in the long run for the debtor.

In this chapter, I would like to offer a way out of the prison house of student debt—albeit a somewhat unorthodox one. My audience here is not the families or people in the upper quintile of the household income chart. They can afford higher education in the sense that, for them, the choice is more between competing luxury items than one of handing over their financial soul to the banks. Rather, my audience here is working-class and low-income Americans who not only struggle every day to make ends meet, but also believe that higher education increases their chances to make their lives better or easier in the long run. For them, the decision to increase their educational attainment level has also become one about living in debt. It is one where the road to economic stability and personal fulfillment will most likely take a long detour through student debt—and for some, this detour will occupy them for the rest of their lives—or at least a major portion of it.

Moreover, this chapter is predicated on the assumption that America is indeed, to borrow Andrew Ross's fitting term, a "creditocracy," that is, a society wherein "the goal is to keep debtors on the hook for as long as possible, wrapping debt around every possible asset and income stream to generate profit." Like Ross, I too believe that "creditocracy" is destroying American society and think that "[f]iguring out which debts we can legitimately *refuse* may turn out to be the only way of salvaging popular democracy."³

However, I'd like to go one step further and suggest that we not only encourage debt amnesty and pursue "clean slates" but that we also take both senses of the phrase "debt refusal" very seriously. That is, I suggest we take seriously both the proposal of refusing to pay student debts that were the consequence of predatory lending practices such as those of unscrupulous for-profit institutions such as the Corinthian network, and also of refusing to take on student debt in the first place. I will suggest that we should consider adopting a more critical position on personal debt in general, and educational debt in particular, namely, one that encourages students and others to not take on financial responsibility that has the potential to negatively impact their future. And then, and only then, we should ask whether the punishments of debt outweigh the rewards of avoiding it. To do so is to push back against the powers of "creditocracy." Call it a case for the return of "responsible living" or "living within one's means," or simply call it an argument against debt.⁴

GET YOUR DEBT MOTOR RUNNING

The luxury of being able to afford higher education today without significant impact on one's quality of life is really the minority report. For the majority of Americans, higher education is a financial burden—albeit one that many still feel they have no option but to bear.

The median income in the United States in 2013 was \$51,939.⁵ However, this only tells part of the story. The whole story here only becomes apparent when median income is subdivided by race. White, not Hispanic, median income in 2013 was \$58,270 and Asian was \$67,065, both above the level for all races. However, below this threshold is Hispanic (any race) at \$40,963 and Black at \$34,598. The story becomes even clearer when shares of aggregate household income received are divided by quintile: the lowest quintile in 2013 had 3.2 shares of aggregate income; the second quintile had 8.4 shares; the middle 14.4 shares; and the fourth 23 shares. The highest, though, had 51.1 shares—and among the highest, the top 5% held 22.2 shares. In short, the state of economic inequality in America is clearly revealed through these shares and the racial distribution of income.

It is estimated that 45.3 million people or 14.5% of the population of the United States are living in poverty. Though the poverty rate changes from year to year, in 2013 it was set at \$12,119 for a single person under 65 and \$11,173 for a person aged 65 and older. Two people under 65 is \$15,600; three people, \$18,222; and four people \$24,028. The scale tops out at \$51,594 for nine people or more. It is also slightly increased or decreased in each area for the number of children under 18 in each household. But you get the general point—not much income in these households relative to the number of people in them.⁶

I mention income inequality and race at this point, because they get at the heart of the real trouble with student debt in the United States, namely, that higher education is one of the most reliable ways to raise one's earning potential and get out of poverty. However, one of the conclusions of the most recent census is that “[h]ouseholds with householders who had lower levels of education were more likely to remain in or move into a lower quintile than households whose house-holders had higher levels of education.” But if the only way to increase one's income is through increasing one's educational attainment level, then the grim reaper of debt preys upon the poor with the greatest fury. A quick look at the cost of higher education today relative to the median income level in the United States tells us all that we need to know.

Topping the list of the priciest public, four-year institutions in 2014–2015 is the University of Pittsburgh where in-state tuition, fees, room, and board is \$28,572 a year. However, its out-of-state tuition is relatively modest (\$38,968) compared to the priciest out-of-state public institution, University of California (UC), Berkeley, which charges a jaw-dropping \$51,288 to out-of-state students—three dollars more than the second priciest institution, UC, Riverside. But, still Berkeley is a bargain compared to the privates.⁷

Harvey Mudd College, Columbia University, New York University, University of Chicago, Claremont McKenna College, Bard College, Scripps College, Dartmouth College, Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering, Fordham University, Johns Hopkins University, Oberlin College, Haverford College, Trinity College (Connecticut), Pitzer College, The New School, Northwestern University, University of Southern California, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Wesleyan University (Connecticut), Carnegie Mellon University, Drexel University, Tufts University, Amherst College, Vassar College, University of Pennsylvania, Williams College, Brandeis University, Occidental College, Cornell University, Connecticut College, Tulane University, Washington University (St. Louis), Franklin & Marshall College, Georgetown University, Bates College, Hampshire College, Barnard College, Boston University, University of Rochester, Boston College, Southern Methodist University, George Washington University, Duke University, Pomona College, Bennington College, Union College (New York), and Stevens Institute of Technology are all members of an exclusive club—the 60-K Club—institutions of higher education where the list price of residential learning comes in at over \$60,000 a year—a figure significantly higher than the median United States income, let alone the average annual income of Hispanic and Black households.

Topping the exclusive 60-K Club is Sarah Lawrence College, which sets its annual rate for tuition, fees, room, and board at \$65,480.⁸

But fortunately not every institution of higher education in America annually charges more than the median household US income—or better yet, the cost of a fine luxury car. The average cost of tuition, fees, room, and board for all four-year institutions of higher education in the United States for the 2012–2013 academic year was \$23,872 with the publics coming in at \$17,474 on average, and the privates coming in at \$35,074 on average. So, for publics, think one Mazda subcompact per year on average; and for the privates, think one bottom-of-the-line Mercedes per year.⁹

So, no matter how you cut it, higher education in America is expensive. The analogy with new cars is an easy one to visualize, so I think appropriate: just as few Americans can afford to purchase a new car every year, and fewer still can afford to buy a new car *four years in a row*, and even fewer still can afford to purchase multiple new cars each year let alone over several years, so too with purchasing higher education. That the average annual cost of higher education is comparable to the purchase of a new car, the most expensive single item most people will purchase in their lifetime aside from their home, illustrates well the fiscal strain put on the average family to put one, if not several, children through college.

But unlike a car purchase, which can often be put off without significant consequences to one's quality of life, education does not offer the same option. Choosing *not* to pursue higher education because you cannot afford it means putting in significant detriment your future quality of life. Choosing *not* to buy a new car, however, does not have such serious ramifications: it means either continuing to drive around in your current car until it no longer moves (which can become "a death drive" if your car gets old enough) or something like taking public transportation (which can become "a hard drive" if you live in a public transportation-challenged state like Texas). While neither a new car or advancing your educational attainment level entails a better life, most would agree that the chances of improving your quality of life over *the long run* are better attained through one of these rather than the other. Perhaps this is why academics usually drive such crappy cars.

For most working-class Americans, providing a college education for their children means providing them with the best chance that their earning potential and quality of life will be better than their own. In other words, it gives them the best chance at achieving the "American Dream." Consequently, unlike the decision to forego the purchase of a new car (or even a better-used one), there is not a lot of choice in the matter as to whether one supports the educational future of one's children. Rather, given the enormous financial commitment necessary to participate in higher education in America, the choice becomes one as to whether—and how much—one will go into debt in order to support it.

Few Americans, even those with generous scholarships and grants, can afford to attend an institution of higher education in the United States without also sacrificing a chunk of their future earnings to cover what they have borrowed in pursuit of higher education. This is especially true of families in the lower economic quintiles—and the 45-plus million people

living in poverty. And remember, student debt often affects both students and their parents as the latter often are co-signatories on student loans. So, how many people in the United States do you think have at least one outstanding student loan?

Many are surprised to learn that today 40 million Americans have at least one outstanding student loan. If all of the Americans with student debt were a state, they would be the largest state in the country, exceeding the population of California by one million;¹⁰ if they were a country, they would be the 33rd most populous country in the world, displacing Algeria for the honor, and exceeding the total population of countries such as Poland and Canada.¹¹ Overall, in a country of 320 million, one person in eight has student debt—12.5% of our population.

But there is more. The average student borrower in 2014 is carrying *four* student loans. This is an increase from 2008, the year of the economic collapse, when the average student borrower carried less than three loans. In addition, the average student loan balance has increased from \$23,000 in 2008 to \$29,000 in 2014.¹²

Overall, it is estimated that the nationwide total student debt is \$1.2 trillion. This is an 84% increase since 2008—and the highest sum total in American economic history.¹³ As a point of comparison, car loans too in the United States are at a record high, but still only totaled \$839 billion in mid-2014—\$361 billion less than student loans.¹⁴ So how did we get to the point where there are more people in student debt in the United States than there are residents of Canada?

LESS THAN ZERO

The 1970s were a good time to be a student. Cars were hot orange, music a hazy purple, and it was possible for students to stay out of the red—and into the black. Inflation-adjusted tuition charges were declining, and education was relatively affordable for working-class families. This all changed relatively overnight when the 1970s gave way to the 1980s. But even so, the changes were gradual and took many years of state appropriation roll-backs for higher ed to reach its current march toward zero.

The story of how we got to this point has been told well many times over though still cannot be retold enough. The ascent of neoliberal public policy since the 1980s has resulted in a steady decline in state support of public education. Evidence that neoliberalism is a scourge on higher

education is visibly demonstrable through the increased financial burden of higher education transferred from the states to the students.

At its highest point, 1975, state and local governments accounted for 60.3% of the cost of higher education. However, since the 1980s, in spite of growing demand for higher education since the mid-1970s, state fiscal investment in higher education has been steadily declining. The biggest reductions in state appropriations for higher education from 1980 to 2011 have occurred in Oregon (61.5%), Arizona (61.9%), Rhode Island (62.1%), and South Carolina (66.8%). The winner however of the state appropriations reduction race is Colorado (69.4%), where it is estimated that state appropriations for higher education will reach zero anywhere from 2022 to as soon as 2019. Moreover, it has been estimated that the average state fiscal support for higher education will reach zero in 2059.¹⁵

Still, the story of the race to zero state funding for higher education has a few noble—and surprising—outliers. For example, Wyoming and North Dakota have both slightly *increased* their state funding for higher education over the past 30 years, with the former increasing it by 2.3% and the latter by 0.8%.¹⁶ These states show that the logic of neoliberalism regarding the reduction of state appropriations for higher education is not an inevitable one. Rather it is a vicious one used by choice by shortsighted state governments to pass the burden and debt of higher education back to the citizenry. Perhaps the Wild West is not entirely wild after all when it comes to state higher ed funding.

Since 1980, inflation-adjusted tuition and fees have increased 230% at state universities and colleges—and 247% at state flagship universities. As a consequence, many public universities have been enrolling decreasing numbers of lower-income students and have sought more students who are able to afford the higher tuitions albeit usually with some type of institutional discount. There has also been a push to increase the number of international students as they often are charged three times the rate of in-state students. This of course is the dark side of university drives for a more diverse, international student mix—one that many who are proponents of global education and opponents of neoliberal academe are embarrassed to acknowledge.

In a nutshell, since 1980, states have been progressively turning away from supporting their public universities—and state universities have found themselves with more in common with private universities regarding funding and revenue than at any other time in history. The question

now has become what is the difference between a state university that relies minimally on the state for its funding and a private university that receives no state funding? The answer seems to be, “Not much.”

The most obvious differences right now are the increasing levels of accountability and restrictions that states are placing upon state universities for their decreasing levels of state funding support. The phrase that best captures the neoliberal extremes of these public educational policies is “performance-based funding.” Whether it is teaching to the test or maintaining particular levels of persistence, retention, time-to-degree, or graduation rates, state universities have been subjected to increasing degrees of oversight and performance measurement in order to receive a slimmer and slimmer slice of their overall operating budget. In other words, deal with the devil or else.

But or else what? Unless you are Dante, hell is hell.

The terms “accountability” and “transparency” have become the Scylla and Charybdis of neoliberal academe. Accountability asks of state institutions that they continuously demonstrate the value of what they do—and transparency makes sure that nothing “wasteful” is being hidden from public view. Performance-based funding, accountability, and transparency all present a negative image of the value of the state university, namely, one of an institution that must be kept under continuous surveillance for fear of it becoming a house of fiscal sloth.

The hidden agenda of much performance-based funding and accountability measurement is to turn all state-supported higher education including research universities into vocational training centers. If you have any doubt about this just consider Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker’s recent effort to change the mission statement of the University of Wisconsin System in the state code. In a draft budget proposal that cuts the university system budget by \$300 million—a state that is estimated to hit zero in 2040—Walker eliminated the phrases “search for truth” and “improve the human condition” replacing them with “meet the state’s workforce needs.” Though pushback from educators and others in the state convinced him that this was “a drafting error,” it reveals the hidden agenda of neoliberal public policy makers to radically reconfigure—if not also destroy—the *academic* mission of the university.¹⁷

While it is argued that neoliberal state managerialism and surveillance is in the interest of the public good, those who work under such conditions will argue quite the opposite. The docile subjects of neoliberal academe learn that to succeed at the state-sponsored university, one must comply

or be eliminated from the system. There is always someone else in a weak job market willing and able to play by the rules of the neoliberal academy and take one's place. This is higher education through the looking glass—a place where surveillance is seen as a public good, but higher ed funding is not.

So the race to zero state funding of public higher education is also a race toward increasing levels of accountability, transparency, and efficiency. With one hand, we take away state support of public education and imply that education is not a public good that should be supported by the state, and with the other we slap and humiliate the state university by asking it to continuously demonstrate the value of the limited resources afforded to it. The race to zero is indeed an ugly one.

If predictions are right, and 2059 is the year when the average state fiscal support for higher education will reach zero, then it is also the year that the major difference between private and public institutions will no longer exist. Question is what will happen to state oversight of higher education when funding hits zero? Will state universities no longer have the same level of state oversight? Or will it become one where the buildings are owned by the state, but the university is expected to secure from tuition and private funding the resources necessary to operate them—with the same level of oversight? I don't think there is much question about the direction.

Oversight will be dramatically increased and annual state support will be zero. In other words, the worst of all possible worlds. The race toward zero average state funding for public institutions of higher education is a race toward destroying public higher education in America. It is a race that will not only erase the major difference between state and private education, that is, one is state supported and the other is not, but will create a higher educational world where all institutions of higher education are completely beholden to private investment, either through student's taking out loans to attend them—or university administrators seeking the support of private individuals and companies to help underwrite their operation. What then to do?

SET THE TUITION FREE!

As state support for higher education races toward zero there are still some counter-movements that indicate that affordable public higher education is not a complete impossibility or its value totally lost on the public.

Take for example the case of public higher education in California—a state where tuition is maximally affordable, which is to say, free.

The Golden State has always sold itself as the promised land for affordable education. Residents of the state who are admitted to any of the state's public colleges and universities do not have to pay tuition. Only non-California residents are required to pay tuition—even today.¹⁸ Sounds good, right? Pack your bags kids and leave today! But hold on—all is not how it appears.

While it is still true that residents of the state of California do not pay tuition, they are required to pay “fees”—which unsurprisingly have greatly increased over the years. In 2009, the last time the California Postsecondary Education Commission conducted a comparative study of fees, both the UC and California State University (CSU) had lower fees than nearly all of their national comparator universities. This all still sounds good until you learn that “lower fees” is far from “free”: CSU fees were \$4890 and UC fees were \$9310. To get a sense of the fee differences with comparable institutions, Rutgers Newark charged \$11,890 for fees—over twice as much as CSU; and University of Illinois charged \$12,510 for fees, nearly 30% more than UC. California also brags that their community college fees are the lowest in the nation.

But the report also indicated that fees are only *one-third* of the cost of attending CSU or UC. Room and board was 47% of the total cost to attend UC, books 6%, and other costs 13% totaling \$27,120. For a CSU student living at home, food was 21%, books 12%, and other costs 30% totaling \$12,980. It also indicated that higher living costs make the overall cost of attending UC higher than at most major public research universities. So for example, while the fees at the University of Michigan and the University of Virginia are higher than those at UC, the costs are lower than those of attending UC. Furthermore, it indicated that the median family income in California is \$67,600—significantly higher than the national average.¹⁹

Conclusion: free tuition is not free higher education in California. Not even close.

It is important to recall the case of California as one considers the highest profile and most extreme response to the student debt crisis, namely, the campaign most visibly advocated by Adolph Reed—and now many others.

As Reed and others point out, the total cost for tuition and fees for all students enrolled in public colleges and universities only amounts to a

small fraction of the national budget—or in the most persuasive versions of their argument—the United States Defense budget. Therefore, the federal government can *afford* to pay for higher education—though chooses not to, because it does not regard it as a public good.

In 2001, for example, Reed points out that the total cost of tuition and fees for all students attending public universities and colleges was \$32 billion—an amount that represents less than 2% of the federal budget.²⁰ He points out that in 1975, the maximum Pell Grant covered 84% of costs of a four-year public college. Whereas by 2004, the grant only covered 42% of the cost of a four-year public college and only 16% of the cost of a four-year private college. Many of the figures that he discusses reveal the depths to which state *and* federal governments have sunk in their defunding of higher education.²¹

While Reed continues to be a leading voice in the free public education movement, his arguments have generally been falling on tin ears at the state and federal level for at least the past 15 years. Still, there is hope that his vision of free higher education is making headway at least at the federal level when President Obama announced in his recent State of the Union address (2015) a goal of making all community college education available at no cost.

The most recent academic intervention in the free education movement is Robert Samuel's 2013 book, *Why Public Education Should Be Free*. According to Samuels, basing one's calculation on 2008–2009 student and cost data, the price tag of free higher education in America would be approximately \$33 billion annually for all community colleges and \$95 billion for all public universities (figures much higher than Reed's). However, the sum total of \$128 billion is then contextualized by pointing out that the federal government spent \$35 billion on Pell Grants in 2010—and \$104 billion on student loans. Consider as well that the states spent \$10 billion on financial aid for universities and colleges, and another \$76 billion for direct support of higher education. In other words, free higher education is doable, if we only came together as a society and valued it as a public good.²²

Reed, Samuels, and others are absolutely convincing in their arguments that free higher education is both the way out of the student debt situation and the way to improving American society. Still, the public consensus to move toward free higher education seems remote. Even President Obama's relatively modest proposal regarding free community college has been met with widespread skepticism and criticism. Making the case seems to be more difficult than it would appear.

The power however to move this argument forward into public policy may not be with higher education students of the future—but rather with indebted students of the present. Why?

For one thing, there are a lot of them—40 million to be exact. As a collective body, they represent a potentially massive bargaining unit. Efforts such as Andrew Ross's to organize them into a Debt Collective, a pilot for his "debtor's union project," has the potential to not only deal with massive individual and collective student debt, but also to place pressure on state and federal governments to at the very least bring down the present and future costs of higher education, particularly, to those most unprepared to handle them—but also to think ahead as to how we might eradicate future student debt entirely.

CONCLUSION

The student debt situation and the rising cost of higher education, particularly for working-class and low-income families, need to be turned around now. While it would be wonderful if a magic wand simply eliminated all existing student debt, the chances of a complete debt jubilee are slim to none. Still, the work being done to buy out the student debt resulting from some of the most egregious predatory student lending practices is a step in the right direction—and must be supported by everyone who cares about the future of higher education in America and believes that education is a public good.

Also, the movement to make all future higher education free is a noble one. States like California who were once the leaders in areas such as affordable education might again be the places where such collective action takes shape. But again, the road to free higher education is more idealistic than realistic. Perhaps President Obama was correct though in at least localizing the discussion to the most obvious (and affordable) sector of the higher education system, the community colleges, as a place to pilot the free higher education project.

My own belief is that we are still in the first stages of a long process of saving students and their families from a future chained to debt; namely, in spite of there being 40 million people in America who have student debt, many people still do not recognize this as a problem—let alone a serious one. This, of course, is the power of a "creditocracy," namely that it normalizes the desire to be in debt. We need to get more people to understand that being in debt is not the best path toward a better life either in

the short run or the long run. Debt destroys lives—and often begets a vicious cycle of deeper and deeper levels of debt.

As educators, we need to advocate for not only free higher education in the future, but also for current students to live responsibly and to not live beyond their means even when it comes to higher education. We need to encourage them to at least think twice before signing off on a student loan—and to stop thinking that they need to get into the workplace as quickly as possible by taking out as many student loans as is necessary to do this—something that they are told time and again by those who only see instrumental value in higher education. But rather to think about slowing down the race to get out of higher education and to apply themselves more directly to the subject matter of higher education—and not its end.

In a way, encouraging students to take out fewer student loans and to slow down the race toward a diploma pushes back on neoliberal academe's empty infatuation with efficiency and its henchman, "time-to-degree." It also provides pushback to the financial institutions that tell us that debt is the only pathway to a higher education.

While it is important for us to share our horror stories of lives strapped by student debt, it is also vital that we share stories of working-class and low-income students succeeding in higher education without debt—or at least significant debt. My own story, for example, while really not that remarkable, is perhaps the kind of story though that needs to be shared with more people.

I worked while attending the university at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. From painting houses during the semester and full-time summer jobs to the graveyard shift at the library and at the particle accelerator where I was a "warm body," I labored both in and out of the classroom for the duration of my higher education. And don't even get me started about my various teaching and grading duties in graduate school. All these funds, however, went back into supporting my education.

If my life pursuing higher education were to be placed on the national household income chart, I would be in the lowest quintile every year until I left graduate school and got my first full-time academic job. In other words, as a student I lived in economic poverty. But so too do most students.

My second year of graduate school was the only one wherein I took out a loan—a couple thousand bucks for a new Zenith "microcomputer" that I felt was necessary to get the faculty and my peers off my back about using an IBM Selectric typewriter to write and submit my graduate papers.

And though I could have paid off the loan much more quickly, I waited until I received my graduate degree—and then paid it off in a month or two with no interest charge.

No magic here—just patience, hard work, and a desire to learn and to live within my means.

Neoliberal academe and its bully, student debt, tells us that higher education needs us to sell our future to get our degree now. But this is a vicious lie. The truth is that if one chooses to make education a part of their life, rather than a means to an end, there are many roads to a degree that do not involve student debt. To be sure, many of them are not flashy—and finding the right balance between work and education is never easy and not one-size-fits-all. Additionally, most of these roads will slow down the educational process rather than speed it up. But what’s wrong with that? In the end, it’s better than getting an education in order to spend the rest of your life paying it off.

In short, this is why I’m against debt.

NOTES

1. Andrew Ross, “Payback’s a Bitch,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (12 December 2014), B5.
2. Average total tuition, fees, room and board rates charged for full-time undergraduate students for all institutions in constant dollars was \$8438 in 1981–1982 and \$19,339 in 2011–2012. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2012* (NCES 2014–2015), *Chapter 3*. <http://nces.ed.gov/fast-facts/display.asp?id=76>
3. Andrew Ross, “Payback’s a Bitch.”
4. An excellent overview of “creditocracy” and arguments for debt refusal is Andrew Ross’s *Creditocracy: And the Case for Debt Refusal* (New York and London: OR Books, 2013).
5. The income and poverty estimates shown in the US Census report are “based solely on money income before taxes and do not include the value of noncash benefits, such as those provided by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicare, Medicaid, public housing, or employer-provided fringe benefits.” <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-249.pdf>
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7. “The College Board’s ‘Annual Survey of Colleges 2014,’” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (14 November 2014), A6. Print.
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21. Adolph L. Reed, Jr., “Majoring in Debt.” January 2004. <http://www.progressive.org/news/2007/07/5072/majoring-debt>
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Punch the Clock

It is difficult to imagine academe without politics—let alone working-class politics. Parties or factions seem to naturally coalesce around common interests or concerns. These interests are more often than not professional, though they can also be personal. Some like to believe that all professional interests are personal interests in academe—a position that often leads to fighting—and faction-building. So and so disagrees with my position on Milton becomes so and so does not like me. This behavior is not unique to academe though its vicious practice within our profession today is dangerous and as common as concussions in football.

The layers of complexity regarding academic politics are perhaps more involved than the casual observer might expect—even when one tries to determine something as basic as party lines. Just within an average department, there are a plentitude of options for political differentiation: senior faculty versus junior faculty; contingent faculty versus non-contingent; staff versus faculty; students versus faculty; and so on. Add race, class, gender, and sexuality to the mix, and you get a boiling cauldron of political difference.

Moreover, each discipline has a way of creating its own unique scholarly political lines. For example, just within a large English department, you may find that the linguists disagree with the historians; the theorists with

the creative writers; the phenomenologists with the feminists; and so on. Through the lens of party lines and academic affiliations, discussions about everything from curricular matters and new positions to tenure decisions and teaching assignments can get complicated and ugly very fast, particularly when university resources are limited—and coveted.¹

Add to this mix majority and minority interests between and among students, departments, schools, colleges, administrators, and trustees—and you have a political world that makes our red-blue governmental politics seem simplistic. In the black and blue world of academic politics, there is no hiding behind or taking cover under a pre-established two-party system. But even if this were the case, what would those parties be? Democratic and Republican? Conservative and progressive? Humanist and post-humanist? State university and private university? Liberal and neo-liberal? Union and non-union? “Yes” people and “No” people? Working class and bourgeois?

From the vantage point of the differences that constitute academe’s polis, the notion of academe without politics seems impossible to even imagine. Disagreement is the fuel of university politics—and democratic education. Take it away and you kill the spirit of higher education. We argue with each other and form factions around positions so that differing visions of the good and the right—the just and the true—may compete against each other for institutional dominancy and practice.² At the very heart of the notion of faculty governance, there is the assumption that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to run a university; rather there are competing visions that create difference and variation from department to department—and university to university.

The warp and woof of academe *is* politics—and professors are political animals. The better able one is to navigate the political waters of academe, the better chance one has for success—and happiness—in academic life. Over the past 25 years or so, academics have done a remarkable job in not just engaging in academic politics, but making it an academic genre of its own. Arguably, more books, articles, and conference presentations concerning the politics of higher education have appeared in the past 25 years than in any other similar period in the history of higher education.³

Nevertheless, I would like to propose that, on the way to making academic politics more transparent and demystifying some of its mystery, we inadvertently short-circuited academe’s political agency such that the academy of the present is effectively one without politics—or at least politics in any significant sense, namely, politics that both determines how we run the

university and that motivates a working class/bourgeois distinction. This, in turn, has created the perception that the university today is more like a factory with workers or a worker training center than an oasis from the working-class world. The difference between an ivory tower and a Ford factory is the difference between pursuing knowledge for its own sake and acquiring it to become a better worker.⁴

From the perspective of a working-class student entering the brave new academic world of the knowledge factory, this will be disappointing. For the working-class student, higher education was supposed to be everything that the working-class world was not even if the image of the ivory tower and the promise of release from the working-class life has never been realized or fulfilled. Demystifying the university has had the unintended effect of killing the working-class dream of going to college as an escape from a way of life that our parents and their parents hoped their children could avoid. Working-class college graduates today are still part of the working class in spite of allegedly having fulfilled one of the sufficient conditions for exit from the working class, namely, receiving a college degree.⁵ So, how did this happen?

ACADEMIC WORK

We have been so focused on laying bare the conditions of power, the effects of prestige, the nature of academic identity, and the limits of academe itself that we failed to realize that someone might actually be listening to us—and use these things against us.

Take for example the long battle to get the public to understand the notion of academic “labor” or “work”; to view the academy as a “workplace” where working conditions are often felt to be unfair; to recognize that some academics, particularly, adjunct faculty, are “exploited”; to see that many people who work in the academy are “contingent”; or even to recognize that some regard academe merely as a “business.”⁶

To their credit, many of those who introduced politics to the academy in the 1990s and beyond were *very* effective. By taking discussions of the political dimensions of the academy from the faculty lounge all the way to the statehouse, we accomplished our goal of getting the public, that is, those who do not earn their living directly through higher education, to not just hear our story—but to accept it.

Academe *is* a workplace; professors *do* work; many faculty do more work for less pay than others; some professors are guaranteed a job for life,

whereas others can barely have a life with their job; and so on. Moreover, we have convinced them that the work conditions of academe are—by and large—dismal.

Find me a student or a parent or a legislator that has not heard about the dismal state of the academic condition today—and I will show you someone who more than likely either has zero interest in education of any form or lives in a cave—or both. From the abysmal salaries of public secondary school teachers and the horrors of “teaching to the test” to the rising cost of higher education and its perceived lower value, we live in a media world saturated by vignettes from the politics of academe—many of them negative.

If the challenge of the past 25 years was to make people more fully aware of the political dimensions of academe in the hopes of creating a more just, fair, and equitable academic workplace, then we have met the challenge (political awareness), but have not achieved the end (justice, fairness, and equity). In fact, if anything, political understanding of the academy has only coincided with a less just, more unfair, and decreasingly equitable workplace.

The best term for the academy that arose amidst the nascent political efforts of the 1990s is the “neoliberal academy.”⁷ Its politics are allegedly not red or blue; conservative or liberal; working class or bourgeois; but rather engaged at a level “without politics.” In the academy of the present, politics has been usurped by economics. Decision-making is based on getting the maximum amount of “labor” from the academic working class—with the lowest level of cost and risk. Teaching has truly become labor—and its going rate is whatever the market will bear. The pursuit of knowledge means depositing in the workforce of the future the requisite skills to be productive workers. There are no competing visions of the university from the vantage point of neoliberalism—only better ways to capture the education market and train workers.

The politics of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the neoliberal university matter only if they become impediments to the maximization of the financial capital of the university. In other words, if students—who are regarded as “consumers” in the neoliberal university—desire to buy the products of race, class, gender, and sexuality studies, then the neoliberal university will provide them. But the market for these products is diminished by conservative voices from the statehouse who are fixated on the notion that higher education in its most productive form is about “workforce” training—and standardized testing to ensure that academe is adequately training its workers. In this

context, the politics of race, class, gender, and sexuality are only relevant if they become impediments to market maximization—or public approval, the left hand of market maximization.

In a way, I cannot help but think that we are victims of our own success at uncovering the political economy of the university. It is now commonplace to regard faculty as a form of labor that fundamentally works to serve the interests of students—and the general economy. We *have been* successful in making others see what we do as “work” and regarding the general outlines of it as “workload,” but it has not resulted in a greater appreciation of the “work” we do, nor has it brought about a general reduction in “workload.” In fact, it has brought about quite the opposite.

Now that many within academe and outside of it regard us as “education workers,” we no longer are protected by or enshrouded within the mystical distinction between academe and the workplace. As members of the “ivory tower,” terms like “professor” and “student” betrayed a qualitative difference between the kind of things that were done within the university tower—and the kinds of things that were done in the factory “workplace.” In the pre-neoliberal university, professors taught students, pursued their scholarly passions, and shared in the stewardship of the university albeit with a low level of cognizance or care of the time and effort spent on each task.

However, when we introduced the notion of “academic work” and reimagined the university as a “workplace,” we also introduced to it the “time clock.” You know, the thing Fred Flinstone punches when the whistle blows at the end of his day in the stone quarry—the kind of thing that is an anathema to those seeking respite from the working-class life. Through our own efforts to make others *value* more what we do in the university, we inadvertently destroyed the very thing that made it valuable: namely, the *timelessness* of our activities and their almost mystical economy.

On the idealistic side, it meant that professors did whatever they needed to meet the educational ends that *they* set for their students. The clock had two zones: one attuned to that of undergraduate and graduate studies, and the other attuned to a life of the mind. Tenure meant that we had demonstrated that we were committed to serving the educational needs of our students, our scholarly passions, and the university at which we were tenured. Seven years, though a random number, was one that those in the academy had come to feel was a long enough period of time to make a fair judgment as to whether a professor should be granted a “timeless” appointment (*viz.*, tenure) or not.

But the segmentation of academe into work and workdays brought with it a high level of questioning as to exactly how we spent our time—and whether it was worth it to invest in these uses of time. Just as most successful “workplaces” with “time clocks” have a good sense of the time it takes to produce things, so too would academe. Workload became the excuse to separate productive academic work from unproductive academic work; furthermore, it came with the desire to look more closely into this work and determine its quality. And the need for academic quality control brought with it one of the new banes of contemporary academic existence: assessment.

But workplaces are generally not places for politics, because the workers generally have little or no say as to how to run the workplace. One has their role in the workplace, and as long as one fulfills it with a sufficient level of quality and consistency, then their continued role is assured. Workers are judged by how they work, not *why* they work; by what they produce, not by what they think about it. The politics of “widgets” is not their concern; their only concern is getting better at producing them.

As workers within the neoliberal academy, we are expected to produce academic widgets that meet a market demand. Once the demand is gone, so too is the need for widgets and their makers. And unless the widget maker can also make something else that meets the demands of the market, then the worker is no longer needed by the manufacturer. In the face of this neoliberal approach to education, the notion of hiring a widget maker for life makes no sense; neither does it make sense to train people to be widget makers, if there is no need for widgets. Substitute “make” for “teach”—and “widget” for “humanities”—to get some sense of the situation now facing those who now manufacture for the humanities industry.

These decisions regarding widgets and widget makers are not “political” decisions, but rather “economic” ones. They are based on the demands of the market—and nothing else. Race, class, gender, and sexual identity as well as all other affiliations are virtually meaningless—or depoliticized—within the widget-making industry. Life in the neoliberal university is without politics. Argue if you will whether it is apolitical, non-political, or post-political, the result is still the same. Our efforts to politicize the academy have put us in a double-bind: if we consider ourselves “workers,” then we become indistinguishable from all of the other workers in neoliberal industry; if we don’t, then we are renouncing the political heritage established through the academic labor struggles of 1990s and after. In other words, we are damned if we do—and damned if we don’t. What then

to do? Construct another “tower” out of a new material, perhaps “silicon” as an escape from neoliberal academe? Or just suck it up and get used to the idea that faculty are labor and students consumers in the dystopic world of neoliberal academe?

NUMBERS PAINTING

Like most, my view of university politics is distinctively tempered by my own personal history. While there is no need to go very deep into it, the topic at hand warrants at least an account of its broad outlines.

Be that as it may, I recognize and would like to emphasize though at the outset that the path that has brought me to the place where I am now in higher education is not open to everyone. The system we live in presents far more barriers to class and educational ascendancy than paths upward. There are not only racial barriers, which today often seem no less difficult to overcome than before the Civil Rights movement, but also many others including, but not limited to, those presented through gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and poverty. Moreover, the problem of barriers is exacerbated under neoliberalism as capital is always vying for more areas to turn to profit.

Until paths to class and educational ascendancy are opened to all people in this country, the hard work of opening up more paths to achievement must be one of our priorities. While there probably will always be restrictions to access, more roads to access can be established by broader distributions of capital, establishment of a living wage, and making sure social needs are met. As educators, we are particularly well positioned to help others fulfill their personal dreams. However, if there is a “dream” in America, it comes with a condition. Its condition is that it must be one that is open to everyone. And right now it is not.

Those of us who have been afforded opportunities have an obligation to pay it forward by helping open pathways for others, especially those whose barriers to achievement seem insurmountable. So: now to my story.

My father worked in the same factory most of his life; when the product he produced was no longer needed, neither was he. Neither of my parents—or their parents—went to college. Growing up, I was always told that college was a way out of the kind of work my father did—and for me, it has been true.

I spent time as a grossly underpaid graduate assistant instructor and a contingent faculty member for many years, but I never regretted the path I took. Compared with the various non-academic jobs I held during my

life, college was not “work”—it was (and still is) more akin to pleasure—even now as I complete over a decade as a dean and over two decades as an editor. Academic days are long and the tasks endless—but there is always time to do something one enjoys.

I have participated through editing, presentation, and publication in the politicization of higher ed since the early 1990s. And though my material conditions have changed greatly over the years as has my position in the academy, I still believe that what we do in higher ed is much different than the “work” my father—and his father—did.

One of the many sad consequences of the neoliberal university is that it has stripped higher ed of the need for politics with its overemphasis on the market as the determinant of academic value and the shape of the university. It encourages “paint-by-number” administration where each color is determined by market studies of consumer behavior. As such, the painting is always the same—even if color variation presents the illusion of difference.

Within the neoliberal university, there is little or no place for alternate visions or narratives of the academy; docile academic subjects are privileged—and political ones cast out. Stripping higher ed of its politics and turning its aspirations to understand more completely its conditions of possibility against it is reprehensible.

My feeling is that one of the ways out of the neoliberal condition of higher ed is to support educational leaders—if not to be one yourself—who don’t merely paint by neoliberal numbers; who can appreciate both the economics *and* the politics of higher education without letting one get the better of the other. Perhaps under such conditions it would be healthy to be considered an “academic worker”—but anything short of this is a recipe for misery—and more academic factory work.

University politics with a small “p” goes on whether the university is run by faculty or Ford. However, university politics with a big “P” is a much different beast from the standpoint of neoliberalism than it was when the university was a much less clearly and substantially understood institution. There may be no going back to the naiveté and myth of the “ivory tower,” but neither can we endure much longer neoliberalism’s “academe without politics.” One of our major tasks today is to find university people who are willing to help higher ed rid itself of neoliberalism’s paint-by-numbers approach—and bring some balance and vision to higher ed today. But, even so, this will not solve the social problem presented by the neoliberal university to those who self-identify as or with the working class. Namely,

the problem that a university degree is not an automatic ticket out of the working class. In fact, a college degree has arguably become nothing more or less than a ticket *into* the working class. So what now?

TICKETS TO PARADISE

The relationship of the working class to education changed greatly over the course of the twentieth century—and probably made another major change with the advent of the new millennium. When my grandparents were growing up, education was regarded by the working class of America as a luxury for the bourgeoisie. Completing high school for their generation was a major accomplishment—and they vigorously made sure that their children accomplished this educational feat.

Both of my grandmothers worked in sewing factories when I was young, and I can still remember visiting them at work. There was no sense in my family that this was “sweatshop” work, rather quite the contrary. As women who could sew well, they were using their skill to earn money to help provide for their family—and they were proud of their work. And, as an added bonus, whenever there was a rip or tear in our clothing, there was never thought of throwing it away with two grandmothers adroit at cross-stitching.

My grandfathers, on the other hand, were much more entrepreneurial than my grandmothers. Though both had worked for others earlier in their lives, they both aspired to be self-employed, and both accomplished this. One who had worked earlier in his life in the shipyards came to run his own poultry farm. He literally was “the eggman.” By the time I was young, the chickens were gone, replaced by a cornucopia of produce that fed our entire family. He grew everything from tomatoes and potatoes to peanuts and pumpkins. I can’t remember my mother ever buying a vegetable at the supermarket and swear that growing up we had sweet potatoes with every meal.

My other grandfather held many jobs working for others and himself over the course of his life. For others, among other things, he drove a bus and worked as a watch repairman in a department store, but it was for himself that he strove to work—and with this he achieved varying degrees of success. He was a taxidermist, bred and sold tropical fish, and, finally, ran his own watch and jewelry repair shop all out of his small house.

All of this work done by my grandparents was accomplished with very little formal education. We never asked them about their educational background

nor did they volunteer it very often. Rather, their goal in life was to put food on the table, have a roof over their head, and see that their children graduated from high school. And at this, they were quite successful. My parents both graduated from high school and both took up jobs immediately thereafter. My mother worked for a while as a secretary, and then became a stay-at-home mom. After I received my undergraduate degree, she went back to work. Today, with my father retired, she works twice as much as back then, with two jobs, one in a bank and one in a department store.

Aside from a few short-lived jobs, my father worked his entire career in the same factory. While I knew many of his co-workers as they were the folks with which our family primarily socialized, I never set foot in his place of employment. It was enough for him to tell me that it was hot and dangerous work, and that there was really nothing to see. My parents' goal in life was much like the goal of their parents, but with one major difference: in addition to putting food on the table, having a roof over their head, and seeing that their son graduated from high school, they also wanted him to go to college. And at this, they too were quite successful.

My takeaway from my working-class background and my experience with higher education is that my upbringing, while unique, is far from atypical. There are many first-generation college students whose family educational values are similar to mine. For my parents' generation, a high school education was a ticket to a better life than their parents' generation. While that life would always involve work, it would be steady work and enough eventually to provide, in turn, a better educational path for their children. In other words, if the educational attainment of their parents for their children was high school, then theirs was and would be college.

But the key difference between my parents' parents and my parents was that the expectation of educational attainment of my parents was not entry into the working class for their son, but rather entry into the "middle class." What this was and how it worked was and is still fuzzy to them, but it definitely did not involve "factory work" (academic or otherwise) nor did it involve merely putting food on the table and a roof over one's head.⁸ The knowledge that many of those who have college degrees today struggle to put food on the table and maintain a roof over their heads because of poor-paying employment, unemployment, and/or massive debt, educational or otherwise, is simply incomprehensible to my parents' generation. Moreover, that many of us who work at universities feel that they are like factories seems to our parents more like paradise lost—than paradise found.

As I think about the students who are pursuing undergraduate degrees today, I cannot help but come to the conclusion that an undergraduate degree will not be enough. They will need a master's degree to provide them with the best opportunity to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads in addition to providing their children with a shot at higher education. In other words, even with a college degree, the working-class values of my parents (and their parents) continue to persist albeit with *lesser* chance of success. The generational difference though is apparent: while working-class parents in the last quarter of the twentieth century believed that an undergraduate degree for their children was a ticket to paradise, working-class parents at the dawn of the new millennium are finding out that both an undergraduate degree and a post-graduate degree or certificate may now be necessary though not sufficient. In other words, it takes two tickets now, rather than one. So, in the words of the immortal Eddie Money, "Pack your bags and leave tonight"—for grad school, undergrads.

THE NEW WORKING CLASS

If we have learned anything from the working-class experiences with higher education since the 1950s, it is that higher education is not necessarily the road out of the working class. The ivory tower image of higher education over the second half of the twentieth century provided working-class parents and their children the belief that a college education was less about preserving one's place within the working class than about leaving it for some other social class. Call this other class the "middle class," the "upper class," the "bourgeoisie," or whatever, the notion of working-class students remaining in the working class after college was not the regulative ideal of working-class parents who encourage their children to attend college. Rather, they aspired for more upward class mobility for their children. But today, the situation seems much different than the one confronted by our parents (and their parents).

There seems little hope today that a college degree—or two or even three—will transport its bearer out of the working class. Not only does the neoliberal university configure itself as a place of work (akin to a factory), but it also markets and measures itself on its ability to train students for swift and painless entry into the workforce. No more images of students meandering in grassy college courtyards waiting for inspiration and creativity to find them. Those images today are replaced by ones of the successful knowledge industry consumer, that is say, college student, who has seamlessly moved from higher education into the workplace.

What needs to be recalled in this context is that the neoliberal university not only transforms its faculty into “workers,” but it also regards its students, that is, its “consumers,” as “workers-in-training.” Thus, if the faculty and staff of the neoliberal university are workers, and its students are workers-in-training, then why should we not regard the university itself as a working-class institution? Not only does the erasure of politics in neoliberal higher education afford us the opportunity to see it more like a factory or place of work than an oasis from these two things, but so too do the specific profiles of those whom are its primary residents, namely, faculty and students.

The world of the new millennium is indeed a new working-class world. Gone are the illusions of escaping from the working class through higher education. They are replaced by the notion that there is a 1% population who own and control the means of production in society and there is a wide array of workers who are the labor force for them. Working-class academics are thus lumped into the ever-expanding world of the working class—a world that is arguably as wide as everyone who subsists and makes their living through work. Now that the university too is a working-class environment aimed through its neoliberal configuration toward the training of workers, gone is one of the last oases from the working-class world. To be sure, the world is flat when it comes to work.

CONCLUSION

As a working-class student who has gone through most of the various levels of academic training and employment to become a working-class academic in the age of neoliberalism, it is disappointing to see both the erasure of politics in neoliberal academe and the disappearance of the ivory tower. As a first-generation working-class student, I found the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake afforded to me by the pre-neoliberal university a privilege and an opportunity. The notion that academe was an ivory tower of sorts set apart from the world of work offered me the prospect that there was a future way of life for me, if I studied hard enough and applied myself, that would be significantly different from my parents’ working-class life.

For my part, this belief lasted both through undergraduate and graduate school. It was only when I entered professional academic life that I began to realize that though things might appear different in academe, they were for many quite the same as working-class life. As such,

being a working-class academic meant that I was one both by upbringing *and* by professional vocation. For me, the final barrier between my two working-class selves was broken down when neoliberal academe began to significantly erase the political agency of faculty in the governance and operation of the university.

Consequently, I believe that my desire to release the university from the chains of neoliberalism stems in part from the way it has destroyed the dreams of the current generation of working-class students to aspire to something besides a vocational telos. Until academe restores political agency to its constituency, it will be locked with an operational logic that is blind to any aim other than more efficient and well-managed entry into the working class for its consumers. This is not why I got into higher education or why my parents saved and sacrificed so that I could become a first-generation college student. I entered the university not to re-enter the working class of my parents' generation, but to escape from it. However, midway through life's journey, I cannot help but feel that I and others of my generation have failed miserably in this journey. It is time now to move beyond the neoliberal university and its workforce ideals—and to bring back some of its mystery and impracticality.

NOTES

1. For a comprehensive introduction to the politics of affiliation in academe, see Jeffrey R. Di Leo, ed., *Affiliations: Identity in Academic Culture* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).
2. For a defense of the notion that argument and disagreement is central to the healthy university and democratic education, see Jeffrey Di Leo, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 27–44.
3. My term for this type of scholarship is “meta-professional studies.” For an account of their rise, see, Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Academe Degree Zero: Reconsidering the Politics of Higher Education* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2012). However, the work that Jeffrey J. Williams has recently coined “critical university studies,” also covers much of the work in this area. See Jeffrey J. Williams, “Deconstructing Academe: The Birth of Critical University Studies,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (19 February 2012). <http://chronicle.com/article/An-Emerging-Field-Deconstructs/130791/>
4. Again, for an excellent, albeit controversial, account of the rise of vocationalism in higher education, see Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus, *Higher Education? How Colleges Are Wasting Our Money and Failing Our Kids—And What We Can Do About It* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2010).

5. The notion of the working class as those without a college degree is a popular notion. See, for example, its use in Thomas B. Edsall's recent article for *The New York Times*, "Canaries in the Coal Mine" (17 June 2012) in relation to voter demographics. <http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/canaries-in-the-coal-mine/>
6. The best account to date of the university as a workplace is Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2008). For an excellent overview of the history of the university with regard to its business interests, see Frank Donohue, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).
7. The best general account of neoliberalism is still David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). For recent accounts of the neoliberal university, see Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014) and Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
8. The difference here between the "working class" and the "middle class" is one of greater economic and educational resources. One way to distinguish one from the other is that the former live paycheck to paycheck whereas the latter have greater disposable or discretionary income. However, where and how to draw these lines is fuzzy and debatable, and not relevant for our purposes.

The Dark Side

These are dark times for higher education in America. Most institutions of higher education in the United States are caught up in the pursuit of prestige and status, rather than knowledge and democratic values. Their missions are driven by economic concerns, not educational ones.

Maybe you are one of the fortunate few that works for an institution of higher education whose mission is educationally driven, rather than economically driven. If so, you may be at a university that is immune to the neoliberal condition afflicting academe today. But the chances of this are slim.

Most of us work for institutions of higher education with some type of economically driven mission. The subjects that maximally serve economically driven university missions are docile ones. This is because docile subjects provide little resistance to this mission, and the greatest chance of its success and persistence. Neoliberalism is the best way to describe the most extreme versions of these economically driven missions. It is a discourse that views the social and economic world as structured by equations. When applied to the university, it seeks to replace “education” with “equations” in every corner of the academic world.

But, as Pierre Bourdieu has warned, neoliberalism is not like most other discourses. In fact, it is more like psychiatric discourse because of the power relations that bolster it. For Bourdieu, because economic choices

are dominated and directed by these power relations, neoliberalism is a “strong discourse.” And as a strong discourse, it is one that is difficult, but not impossible, to defeat.¹ So, how *do* we beat it?

Acts of resistance to neoliberalism in academe can be offered through our capacities for critical dialogue. I believe that we can use critical dialogue as an effective force to disrupt, resist, and eventually move beyond neoliberalism. If the managerialism of neoliberalism is fueled by docile subjects and uncritical dialogue, then why not introduce a more paralogical approach to academic dialogue? That is, why not introduce into the world of neoliberal academe dialogue that is disruptive rather than affirmative, particularly if our aim is to overcome neoliberalism as opposed to bolster it?²

The heart of academic freedom is critical exchange. To be sure, there is no academic freedom when we cannot teach as we choose without interference. Or, more positively, academic freedom ensures that we *can* teach as we choose without interference. Keeping the “critical” in critical exchange alive is keeping the active ingredient in academic freedom alive. One of the aims of neoliberal culture is to curb critical thinking and thought. We can be a force of resistance to neoliberal academe simply by awakening and privileging our critical capacities. Moreover, it may be the case that the only way to awaken academe from its neoliberal slumber is to encourage a strong auto-critique discourse to counter the strong discourse of neoliberalism. Without encouraging tough criticism in the academy, resistance to the neoliberal condition of academe becomes difficult, if not impossible, to carry out.³

While the fight against the repressive discourse of neoliberalism is often fashioned as one *without* the support of university administration, this is not the best approach. Rather, a better approach is one wherein administrators and faculty through solidarity work together on strategies to pull academe out of the neoliberal abyss. In order to achieve this solidarity the notion that administration is always already the “dark side of academe” must be qualified with the understanding that administration is only a world of darkness and managerial myopia if one allows it to be so. There is another vision of university administration, namely, one that encourages progressive, activist faculty to join its ranks—rather than merely to rail against it. And it is this progressive vision of administration that must be embraced if the university is to have any chance of moving beyond neoliber-

eral academe. Faculty activism alone will not be enough to turn the tide of economic Darwinism.

The central argument of this chapter is that without the enlistment and support of progressive and activist administrators, there is little hope that the university can be redirected toward educational goals rather than merely economic ones. While faculty can and will voice their displeasure with neoliberal academe, doing so within a system that is built through the construction of docile subjectivities aimed toward eliminating dissent of this type places the livelihood of these faculty at risk. Though the same can be said of administration that do not play by the rules of neoliberalism, that is, they too stand to be eliminated from the system, it is still vital that there be an engaged administrative core within academe that recognizes the challenges raised by economically driven university missions and works with faculty in a deliberate and diplomatic manner to both mitigate the harm done by them and to redirect the world of education back to its true mission, namely, education.

The problem though for administration in the age of neoliberalism is that it is far too often viewed as merely the home of economic hatchet men and myopic managers who only act in the best interests of job survival and careerism. Furthermore, the easiest way to protect one's managerial position in neoliberal academe is to simply internalize the ground rules of economic expediency and to consistently act upon them. To do so is, in effect, to close one's eyes to the ways in which such decision-making can often be destructive to the educational and democratic ends of academe. Enter the dark side: a world where administration is expected to blind itself to the negative effects of neoliberalism in academe in order to maintain its administrative status.

Consequently, if administration continues to be perceived as always already co-opted by neoliberal concerns, then it will be increasingly difficult to recruit progressive and activist individuals to administrative positions, that is, individuals who will administrate with their eyes wide open to the negative effects of managerialism and are committed to pulling academe out of the neoliberal abyss. Without the support and solidarity of activist administrators who work in consort with faculty to overcome neoliberalism's destructive academic legacies, there is little hope that education's future will be any different than its recent past.

DARK ADMINISTRATION

Administration is the dark side of academe.⁴ Few sayings in higher education are more commonly known, if not also believed and beloved, than this one. As soon as one mentions to others that they are considering taking on an administrative position such as a directorship or chairmanship, some version of the saying is tossed their way in the same manner that “bless you” and “gesundheit” is the response to a sneeze.

“So, you’re entering the dark side,” a colleague will say to your announcement of a pending administrative role. And just as the secular person does not usually take umbrage at being “blessed” in response to their sneeze and says “thank you,” most nascent administrators do not challenge a “dark side” response. It is widely understood that to enter administration is to enter the dark side—even if one has no intention of committing any acts of darkness. But why is a “dark side” comment such a common reaction to the announcement of a pending or existing administrative role? And when did we start reacting this way to administrative roles in academe?⁵

To answer the latter question is probably akin to answering the question when did “bless you” or “gesundheit” begin to be a response to sneezing—and probably just as productive. No one knows for certain the origins of either sneezing response, though some speculate that a sneeze is “letting the demons in,” and that “bless you” is meant to guard the sneezer and the responder from these demons. Similar with “gesundheit” as the sneeze was viewed as a prelude to an illness and the German roughly translates in English to a wish for “health” or “good health” for the sneezer. The analogy among common responses to sneezing to those regarding administrative roles in academe is instructive.

Just as “gesundheit” in response to a sneeze implies a wish for good health in light of the possible onset of illness, “dark side” comments in response to administrative roles imply the onset of a form of illness. This illness is brought upon one in the transition from the “healthy” side of academe (non-administrative roles) to the “unhealthy” side of academe (administrative roles). “Dark side” administrative responses thus reveal a basic distinction between faculty and administration, namely, that faculty is by function the healthy side of academe, and that administration is its unhealthy side. Furthermore, the analogy with “bless you” decidedly carries this distinction well beyond that of mere health concerns, and into the realm of morality. Namely, to be on the dark side of administration is to be on the side of demons, evil, and immorality, whereas to be on the side of faculty is to be on the side of saints, goodness, and morality.⁶

In short, our conditioned and customary response to administrative roles in academe is highly negative. It is a response that few have come to challenge and almost everyone finds at least more or less reasonable. To enter administration is to enter the dark side; to be in administration is to be on the dark side; and the greater the administrative role, the greater the level of darkness. It is interesting though that the “dark side” vision of academic administration far precedes its more recent economically driven mission.

I can clearly recall, as an undergraduate in the 1980s and as a graduate student in the 1990s, faculty complaining about administration and frequently describing it as the “dark side.” All in all, there was little respect for administrators—and a whole lot of complaining about them. Chairs were more often than not defined by their “bad” decisions, and deans were viewed as detached from the interests of faculty and students. Provosts and presidents were the exemplars of the “dark side” and never to be trusted. Few of my colleagues had anything good to say about administration, and most faculty avoided administrative roles with a vengeance. The general opinion was that administration should be avoided by faculty lest one risk descent into the “dark side.”

But this of course is not to say that faculty had “healthy” feelings toward each other or that they regarded their colleagues as essentially “good.” It is also not to say that I have not known or worked with good administrators, that is to say, those who managed to avoid the administrative sickness. Quite the contrary. Looking back on my experiences as a student and a faculty member reveals a consistent pattern of faculty members falling into packs with regard to their feelings about other faculty members. Animosity, distrust, and lack of respect often divide one faculty member against another, and groups of faculty members against other faculty members. Frequently, a small disagreement leads to a large reversal of feeling among colleagues.

As for administrators, I can run down a list of chairs and deans that have positively impacted my life and career as well as that of others. From Dean John Yolton at Rutgers University, who patiently nurtured my entry into the world of philosophy, and Peter Klein, chair of the philosophy department, who wisely mentored me regarding a future in philosophy to the various chairs of the philosophy and comparative literature departments at Indiana University who encouraged my unusual desire to pursue doctoral work in both areas (even if each department saw the other as *my* dark side).⁷

The examples and stories here could be multiplied many times with the help of our colleagues across academe. The dark side quickly becomes nothing more than an expectation for administration that is often (and fortunately) not fulfilled just as the “sweetness and light” of faculty life can be challenged without much effort. So, it is not true that on one side of the academic role fault line lies “goodness” and “health” and on the other “sickness” and “evil.” Rather it is true that the general perception in academe is that faculty is on the side of “goodness” and “health”—and administration on the side of “sickness” and “evil.” Nevertheless, this is a perception that it is time to move beyond.

If one goes with a more robust definition of neoliberalism, namely, one that marks its start at the beginning of the Reagan era, then all of my experiences in higher education have come within the age of neoliberalism. Consequently, the level of distrust of administration by faculty should be no surprise, nor should the dysfunction and distrust among the ranks of faculty. The competitiveness and individualism encouraged by neoliberalism brings about this type of behavior among those who participate in its institutions and organizations. Still, after the economic crisis of 2008, neoliberalism has brought about new heights of fear and terror within academe. If administration before this period at least held out the hope of respecting the interests of students, faculty, and society, then post-2008, if not post-9/11, these hopes were to be completely dashed.⁸

In the increasingly economically driven world of higher education, administration rules with a calculator and a red pen. Good educational decisions are distinguished from bad ones based on financial dollars, not educational sense. In the twentieth century, there was still at least a chance for administration to steer clear of the dark side—the side where academic decisions are made on the basis of economics, not education. However, the twenty-first century seems to have all but closed off that opportunity.

Administrators in neoliberal academe are expected to view all considerations of self-knowledge, social import, and political advocacy as sub-species of economic impact. If what one is doing as an administrator is not maintaining or improving the economic welfare of the university, then within the world of neoliberalism one is doing the wrong thing. It is within this context, namely, one of the mission of the university to be economically driven, that for all intents and purposes administration is and only is a dark side enterprise. This gives us all the more reason to strive to move beyond neoliberalism as doing so will give us a better chance of ridding academic administration of its sickness.

BEYOND THE DARKNESS

To become an administrator in higher education is to make a transition from one “side” of academe to the other—or at least that is the common belief. For many, academic administration is viewed in fundamental opposition to the interests of faculty. It is also perceived by some to be a haven for myopic managers, hatchet men, and spineless careerists. The rise of neoliberal academe has only deepened this belief by multiplying the number of administrative roles and responsibilities. The situation though is not a new one.

Over two decades ago, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) produced an entire issue of *Academe* on “Administrative Bloat.” An article in the issue, penned by the then president of the AAUP, economist, Barbara R. Bergmann, described the situation as follows:

Undetected, unprotected, and unchecked, the excessive growth of administrative expenditures has done a lot of damage to life and learning on our campuses. On each campus that suffers from this disease, and most apparently do, millions of dollars have been swallowed up. Huge amounts have been devoted to funding positions that a few years ago would have been thought unnecessary.⁹

The situation described by Bergmann decades ago continues today.

The recent AAUP annual report on the economic status of the profession reports that from 1976 to 2011, the number of graduate student employees has increased 123%, full-time executive 141%, full-time, non-tenure-track faculty 259%, and part-time faculty have risen by 286%. However, the greatest increases have been in the area of full-time, non-faculty positions that have grown by a whopping 369% since 1975. This area includes lawyers, loan counselors, management analysts, human resources specialists, training personnel, purchasing agents, and other non-academic workers. By comparison, during the same period full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty have risen only 23% and full-time non-professional positions (e.g., service and maintenance) has only grown by 19%.¹⁰

The AAUP speculates that the slow rise in non-professional positions is the result of the outsourcing of these tasks. However, there does not need to be any speculation as to why the number of full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty have grown so slowly: the 286% growth in part-time faculty and 259% growth in full-time, non-tenure-track faculty clearly reveal the cause. This coupled with the disproportionate growth in full-time executive positions (a category formerly called “executive, administrative,

and managerial”) and full-time, non-faculty professional positions are the numbers that underwrite the perpetuation of the “dark side” imagery. More specifically, while tenure-track and tenured faculty lines have flattened, the administration has more than doubled its numbers.

Faculty often wonder at the wisdom of more executives, managers, and administration when their own ranks are plagued by contingency. They also blame administration for the explosion of non-faculty professional appointments and positions. To be sure, there are now more administrative and non-professional titles and subtitles than at any other time in the history of higher education. There is also a higher ratio of administrators to faculty than ever before. But as Bergmann pointed out decades ago, the issue is not just the increase in non-faculty university staffing expenditure; it is also that the multiplication of positions of this type do not seem to improve university performance:

If it were just a matter of the money wasted, that would be bad enough. But the bloating of college administrations over the past decades has made administrative performance worse than better. It has bogged us down in reels of time-consuming and despair-creating red tape. It has fostered delusions of grandeur among some of the administrative higher-ups, whose egos have grown along with the size of the staffs under their supervision.¹¹

If the red tape was bad in the early 1990s, it was only a prequel to the intensification of despair the new millennium has wrought in this area.

Neoliberal academe validates itself through increasing levels of assessment and accountability, which ironically are called for in the name of continuous academic program improvement. For most faculty today, the only thing that the culture of assessment and accountability improve are the time and number of people devoted to these tasks. Making matters worse is that as the red tape continues to grow, so too do the egos of those who call for it—especially for those whose titles are prefaced with the words “assistant,” “associate,” and “vice.” The common belief among these second-tier administrators seems to be that the amount of red tape generated is directly proportional to their chances of being promoted to even higher heights of managerial status—status that is indicated by a change in, if not the complete loss of, their subtitle.

All of these conditions understandably have brought about a higher degree of skepticism toward administration and its ends. The recent AAUP report concludes a section entitled “Do We Need More Administrators?” with the following observation:

There is no question that higher education enrollments continue to rise, institutions are faced with increased reporting and regulatory burdens, and students come to college from more diverse academic and cultural backgrounds than ever before. But the massively disproportionate growth in the number of administrative employees, coupled with the continuing shift to an increasingly precarious corps of mostly temporary, underpaid, and insufficiently supported instructors, represents a real threat to the quality of our academic programs.¹²

The problem then for administration today is a simple one: increasing numbers of administrators cannot be reconciled with the problems facing higher education today. In fact, for many, administration *is* the major problem or threat to higher education today. So, if there were any doubt regarding the prevalence of negative perceptions of higher ed administration, there should be none now. Not only do we not need more administrators the ones we have now are widely viewed as causing more problems than they solve.

Thus, perhaps the solution to the problem of the “dark side” is simply to blow it up?

WHO NEEDS ADMINISTRATION?

While it is healthy to complain about the increase in administrative roles in neoliberal academe and to even believe that it has multiplied beyond necessity, it is unhealthy for the future of higher education in America to simply write off university administration as unnecessary and evil.

Just as a ship needs a captain, academe needs administration. With a destination in sight, the ship captain assures to the best of their ability that the crew, passengers, and cargo reach port as comfortably, quickly, and safely as possible. The quality of a ship captain is gauged less by their ability to navigate through calm seas than turbulent ones; by their ability to bring crew and passengers to port when the unexpected, not the expected, occurs; when external and internal conditions make the journey difficult, not when the conditions for travel are optimal. Why shouldn't we then draw an analogy between navigational and academic administration excellence?

There is little disagreement between faculty and administration that higher education is undergoing heavy weather with limited supplies. Rising student debt, decreasing state support, increasing use of contingent labor, and attacks on tenure and academic freedom top a long list of challenges that

have placed higher education in a precarious and unprecedented situation. Pressures to reduce costs while increasing productivity are filtered through a relentless matrix of assessment and accountability that makes faculty discouraged and administration the enemy. The question though is what is the best type of administration to guide higher education through the turbulent and dangerous seas of neoliberalism? The captain who abandons their crew and passengers midstorm or the one who tirelessly fights to bring them safely to port? The administrator who bails on students and faculty contending there is nothing they can do or the one who in spite of the bad economic weather continually advocates for a better education for students and fairer work conditions for faculty?

Regarding administration as de facto oppositional to the educational interests of students and the professional life of faculty is counterproductive to the aim of moving beyond the neoliberal academy. To assume that just because someone is in administration that they do not passionately believe in the educational mission of the university in spite of working under conditions that strive toward an economically based mission is a mistake. Just as a ship's captain has little control over the weather, administration has little control over the economy or forces external to the university that can alter its educational course. What is within the control of administration is the choice of whether to disregard the opinions and values of faculty and students regarding their educational aims or to take them seriously and find ways to honor them in spite of the bad economic weather. But by the same token the mirror should be turned back on faculty as well.

Regarding faculty as always knowing what is best for the university and its students is just as big a mistake as dubbing all administration evil. Just as there are self-interested administrators who will do anything and everything to advance their careers and pocketbooks *in spite of its effect* on student education and the academy, there are faculty who will do the same. Commitment to the ends of higher education is determined less by our role and position in the academy than by our actions and values.

The problem with placing all administration on the "dark side" is that one assumes what they are going to do when the heavy weather hits rather than actually witnessing it and judging it accordingly. Moreover, and more importantly, just as we ask our students to avoid stereotypes of others, we should do the same with administration. Not only will this encourage good faculty with good intentions to serve their universities as administrators, it will give the university the best chance of navigating through the rough waters of neoliberalism toward a better future for higher education.

One must believe that all administrators are not alike. The difference between one administrator and another in the age of neoliberal academe is their ability to mitigate the harm done to faculty and students by neoliberalism. It is the difference between the administrator who “blindly” and continuously calls for cost reductions and the one who considers them only in light of their effect on faculty excellence and student achievement. An algorithm written for a computer program can continuously reduce costs without consideration of their impact on education. However, only a person with the ability to calculate the educational intangibles of this cost reduction can do it properly. Perhaps then we need to apply the Turing test to administration? If we cannot tell the difference between administrative actions and those of a computer, then perhaps those administrators have failed the test—and us.¹³

The question of what makes one administrator better than another should be as important to us as the question of what makes one faculty member better than another or one student more successful than another. While there is no set formula here, nor should there be, there is still a way to pursue this question. It involves calibrating the educational interests of faculty and students with the external conditions that prohibit their achievement. Once this is determined, the role of the administrator needs to be one of maximizing conditions for achievement—for both students *and* faculty.

Administering with a cookie cutter may work in good economic times, but it surely does not work in bad economic times. Rather, bad economic times require higher levels of flexibility, diplomacy, and courage from administration than good times. One should administrate differently with a blank check before them than with massive debt. Just as one should not blame bad weather on the captain, so too should one not assume that all administrators are in favor of high student debt, contingent labor, and salary compression. However, administration should be judged on the way in which they deal with these unfortunate conditions and the ways in which they work in consort with faculty and students to alleviate them. Progressive administration works to mitigate the pain of others and to increase the attainment of those whom they serve; neoliberal administration does not care about the pain of others or their attainment, and works only to increase their individual attainment. Or, to put it more directly, neoliberal administration furthers the ends of neoliberalism; progressive administration works to overcome neoliberalism. To be sure, if administration has a dark side, it is its evil neoliberal variation. Few should disagree that progressive administration is better than neoliberal administration. The only question though is how to achieve it.

CONCLUSION

The dark times facing higher education in America are an opportunity for us to forge a new beginning for the academy. Our fight against the neoliberal condition is an effort to move beyond it, not to go back to the future in higher education. Those who say that the neoliberal condition is the “end” of higher education in America have given up on saving the academy. It will only be the end or the fall of higher education if each of us gives up our individual efforts to forge this new beginning. These efforts begin with things within our control such as the way we teach our classes, converse with our colleagues, and present our scholarship to the world.¹⁴ This new beginning is also only going to happen through the support and solidarity of progressive, visionary university administrators who understand the damaging force of neoliberalism in academe—and are willing to work in consort with students and faculty to overcome it.

As a first-generation, working-class student, I advanced from the position of graduate student and contingent faculty member to full professor and dean during the first decade of this century. And every day for the past 12 years, I have faced the challenges of academic administration in dark times in solidarity with the faculty of our school. These and other characteristics provide a unique angle on the workings of the university and academic activism. From this angle, there are reasons to be excited about the future of the academy, and to be hopeful that we can effect change in higher education. Still, I am well aware of the ways in which the neoliberal condition in higher education has negatively impacted many lives, and has led many to lose hope that we can effect progressive change in academe. My aim in this chapter is to offer hope for the return of education-based university missions and to help plot a path out of the dark woods of neoliberal academe.

My belief is that faculty must be in solidarity with administration if we are to have any chance of defeating the neoliberal beast. The conditioned belief that administration is the dark side of academe discourages progressive faculty from becoming progressive administrators. It also belittles the efforts of administrators who fight every day to end the tyranny of neoliberal academe. Academe needs students, faculty, and administrators to be in solidarity in dark times. An open dialogue of hope and resistance against the stormy waters of economic Darwinism gives us perhaps our best chance of opening a new chapter for higher education in the twenty-first century.

Over the years, I have seen and learned from many examples of positive and negative alliances among students, faculty, and administration. Negative alliances many times stem from differences of vision as to the direction of the department or university. One of the more memorable negative ones was a dean who in response to a department that did not like his/her choice for their next chair, yelled at them and told them they did not know what they needed—and went forward with the hire in spite of a lack of faculty support. His/her style was not to hold a dialogue with faculty about their interests and vision for their university, but rather to ram his/her own peculiar and particular vision down their throats. This resulted in low faculty morale and much anger about the lack of respect and hope afforded to faculty. Fortunately for all concerned, s/he only served one term as dean, left the university, and has since then not been a university administrator. Academic behavior like this only further weakens faculty faith in administration and makes the road to solidarity more arduous.

However, I've also witnessed the opposite: namely, when many students and some faculty approached a dean about the suitability of a chair who was appointed by him/her during a break when few faculty members were present to weigh in on the decision. When students and faculty questioned the decision, the dean listened to them, and replaced the chair with a more suitable person. The openness to critical dialogue with students and faculty regarding their education and needs rewarded the dean with a long and successful tenure.

But all negative and positive alliances begin with individual relationships between faculty and administration. The more open both parties are to nurturing these relationships, the better the chances of more positive alliances than negative ones. I have been fortunate as a faculty member to work for many chairs that listened to my needs as a faculty member and worked with me to meet them.

One of the positive results of these alliances is the journal *symplokē*, which I founded as a graduate student and maintained as a faculty member at several institutions under several different chairs. That it has continuously served the profession by publishing critical theory for nearly 25 years is a testament to numerous positive faculty/administration alliances. Conversely, I was so surprised when a fellow journal editor told me some years back that his top-25 university cut back support that was promised to him for his similarly prestigious journal. While this may not be everyone's prime example of a negative alliance between faculty and administration, for me it is, especially when he stepped down as editor

and found a new home for the journal.¹⁵ Great journal editors are in short supply. When one is lost because of a negative alliance, we all lose, namely, everyone who looks to journals as an outlet for their research and a source of information for work in their area of concern.

The shape of higher education to come is yet to be determined. Perhaps seeing closer solidarity among faculty and administration, for example, in areas such as leadership decisions and journal support in good *and* bad economic times, is a preview of the shape of higher education to come. Though these are just a small sample of the different ways faculty and administration can benefit from stronger alliances, it is important to have at least a few success stories to keep hopes alive. Moreover, the strength of alliances need not only be gauged by their positive outcomes: just forging the alliances, successful outcome or not, is half the battle.

When progressive administrations take up arms in the fight against the beast of neoliberal academe, they provide “top cover” for the progressive faculty also involved in the fight. For as we know, to fight against neoliberal academe is not to exhibit the docile subjectivity that it privileges, but it is a fight that puts its faculty combatants at risk of elimination from the system.

“Top cover” should be regarded as a form of administrative activism that will help bring about the end of neoliberal academe, but it will only be possible if we relegate to the dark side only those whose actions earn them entry. To continue the commonplace response that to enter administration is to enter the dark side only discourages progressive faculty from joining the administrative ranks. It also plays into the hands of neoliberal academe, which *expects* administration to be the dark side. Let’s now think of the dark side academic characterization as an unfortunate designation fitting for both administration *and* faculty who work in consort with the ends of neoliberal academe—and not use it to discourage progressive faculty from entering the ranks of administration.

NOTES

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998; reprint, 2000), 95.
2. See Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 27–43, for an account of paralogy as an approach to academic dialogue in the neoliberal academy. See also, Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern*

- Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 63–66, for a more general account of paralogy.
3. See Jeffrey R. Di Leo, “In Praise of Tough Criticism.” *The Chronicle Review, Chronicle of Higher Education*, section B (18 June 2010): B4–B5.
 4. “Administration” here includes all full-time university employees classified as managers, executives, and administrators. While many of these individuals come from the ranks of faculty, some do not.
 5. If higher education is indeed increasingly modeling itself on corporate life, then it is interesting to note that management is *not* considered the “dark side” within the world of corporate life. Rather, corporate management and administration is widely sought after by lower level corporate employees and is usually regarded as their career aspiration.
 6. While “demonizing” administration in general is not a very controversial characterization, ascribing “sainthood” to all faculty may be. To be sure, saintly faculty are about as common as non-demonic administration. However, what would the parallel construction be to the “demonizing” of administration? To call faculty angels? Gods? These seem even less fitting. Perhaps attempts at drawing a parallel reveal more about the shortcomings of “demonizing” administration than about finding an appropriate noun for their faculty “other.”
 7. For an account of the professional aporia and affiliational difficulties of choosing to pursue graduate work in both philosophy and literature, see Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Academe Degree Zero: Reconsidering the Politics of Higher Education* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 43–54.
 8. See Jeffrey R. Di Leo, Henry Giroux, Sophia McClennen, and Ken Saltman, *Neoliberalism, Education, and Terrorism: Contemporary Dialogues* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).
 9. Barbara R. Bergmann, “Bloated Administration, Blighted Campuses,” *Academe* 77 (November–December 1991), cited in John W. Curtis and Saranna Thornton, “Losing Focus: The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2013–14,” *Academe* 100 (March–April 2014), 7.
 10. “Figure 1, Percentage Change in Number of Employees in Higher Education Institutions, by Category of Employee, 1975 and 1976 to 2011” in John W. Curtis and Saranna Thornton, “Losing Focus: The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2013–14,” *Academe* 100 (March–April 2014), 7.
 11. John W. Curtis and Saranna Thornton, “Losing Focus: The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2013–14,” *Academe* 100 (March–April 2014), 7.
 12. *Ibid.*, 8.
 13. The Turing test is one where a person and a machine (computer) respond to questions from an interrogator. If after a certain period of time, the

interrogator cannot tell which is the person and which is the machine, the machine will have passed the Turing test. In my example here, the computer only considers cost reduction and does not consider impact on education. If, under these circumstances, which are really quite constrained, one cannot determine the difference between a computer response to an administrative question and the response of a person, then indeed this is a bad omen for administration—and decidedly a good one for computers as potential replacements for administration. This is why I say that the administrator *failed* the Turing test rather than the computer passed it. The Turing test was suggested by Alan Turing in his paper, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” in 1950 and is also called “the imitation game.”

14. I present my case for this in *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education*.
15. See, Jeffrey J. Williams, “My Life as Editor,” in *How to Be an Intellectual: Essays on Criticism, Culture, & the University* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 205.

Breaking Bad

Does working in neoliberal academe make us neoliberal men and women? Moreover, when critics like William Davies describe the neoliberal man as “possessed with egoism, aggression, and the optimism of Milton Friedman or a Steve Jobs,” is that our fate too as participants in higher education under late capitalism? Just how far will the consequences of neoliberalism in higher education drive us? Will our identity and conduct as workers in neoliberal academe degenerate to the point where egoism and aggression push us to our moral and emotional nadir?

One of the aims of this book has been to suggest some of the ways that higher education under late capitalism affects our identity and conduct. The hope is that by critically taking stock of the present, we can work toward progressive changes that move beyond the neoliberal academy. The jury though is still out as to when and whether these changes will occur. In the meantime, neoliberal academe is altering our identity and conduct. The question is whether it is for the better or worse?

To get some perspective on this question, it is at times important to look outside of the lived realities of the academy for inspiration and guidance. One such source is the world of television, which in certain cases can be an instructive window into our dreams and fears. In the case of the fate of the neoliberal man, there is no more powerful source than the television series

Breaking Bad. The fact that its central protagonist, the notorious Walter White, starts as a teacher—and was before that a graduate student—makes it all the more appropriate for our purposes.

In this chapter, Walter White’s story will be presented as the story of the neoliberal man in general. I would also like to offer it, particularly because of his role as an educator, as a parable of the fate of the neoliberal academic. While dedicated viewers of the series know the story of Walter White very well, there are others who have no idea who he is. Therefore, there will be some plot summary in this chapter aimed more at those unfamiliar with *Breaking Bad* than its dedicated legion of fans. Also, because it was a very long series, running for 62 episodes over the course of five seasons, this chapter will focus on one particular episode, rather than trying to deal with the series as a whole.

The central argument of this chapter, therefore, is that the “Fly” episode of *Breaking Bad* is its philosophical center. It is an episode that is a self-reflective one not only for its major character, Walter White, but also for the series itself—and arguably is its most self-reflexive moment. “Fly” reveals both some of the historically Nietzschean strains of *Breaking Bad* as well as its contemporary neoliberal dimensions. It also illuminates a semiotic system that provides a wholly non-verbal dimension that beautifully complements the verbal dialogue of the series.

The “Fly” episode of *Breaking Bad* is a major work of art and philosophy, and arguably the most philosophically powerful episode in the series, if not also among its kindred series, *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, and *The Wire*. Moreover, it exemplifies well the neoliberal magical realism of the series that arguably has lifted *Breaking Bad* from a mere criminal drama to a window into the devastating effects of the neoliberal condition on our identity and conduct.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the series followed by an introduction to the “Fly” episode. It will then proceed with a discussion of its direct connection with the philosophical tradition, most notably the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, and then show how this episode also reveals major aspects of *Breaking Bad*’s critique of neoliberalism. The chapter will conclude that the power of the “Fly” episode comes from its ability to both look backward to the philosophical tradition and forward into the negative dimensions of contemporary neoliberal social behavior and political thought in a way not often exemplified in contemporary visual media.

As a major source of philosophical inquiry, and critique and resistance to the terrors of neoliberalism in America, *Breaking Bad* is potentially appealing to a wider public than more traditional modes of philosophy and critique, namely, articles and books. To regard it as well as a statement concerning the destructive power of neoliberalism on identity and conduct in higher education might be regarded as just an added bonus, albeit, for our purposes, an important one.

FROM TEACHER TO DRUG KINGPIN

Walter White does not have long to live. Or, more precisely, he has 62 episodes of *Breaking Bad* to live. Dying of terminal lung cancer, Walt (played in the series by Bryan Cranston), an overqualified high school chemistry teacher, decides to start cooking and selling methamphetamine in order to provide his wife and children with a strong financial future after his demise. His pregnant wife Skyler (Anna Gunn) and his teenage son Walter Jr. (RJ Mitte), who has cerebral palsy, are unaware of his criminal undertakings for much of the series because Walt tells lie after lie to protect his secret identity. His wife only learns of his “breaking bad” midseries and his son not until the final episodes. Adding to the dramatic tension and irony of Walt’s deceit is the fact that the people he is closest with outside of his immediate family are Skyler’s sister, Maria Schrader (Betsy Brandt), who is a healthcare worker (and kleptomaniac) and her husband, Hank (Dean Norris), who is a Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agent—a federal agent who unbeknownst to him is pursuing his own brother-in-law and close friend.

Walt learns about his cancer and makes his decision to cook and sell meth in the series pilot. He also is introduced to his partner, Jesse Pinkman (Aaron Paul), in the inaugural episode. Walt rides along with Hank to observe him busting a meth house. Unaware to Hank, Jesse slips out a window during the drug raid and avoids identification and capture by the DEA. Walt though witnesses Jesse’s escape, and recognizes him as his former high school chemistry student. They soon decide to become entrepreneurs and go into the meth business, where Walt will “cook” and Jesse will “sell.” This, as it will turn out, is a teacher/student relationship straight from the imaginative nadir of the neoliberal abyss.

By midseries, both Walt and Jesse have amassed millions of dollars, and by the end of the series Walt himself has some 80 million dollars in cash buried in drums in the New Mexico desert. All of this happens over the

course of a few months, or at the very most, less than a year. The magical realism of the series is grounded in our suspension of disbelief that this is possible. Or, more progressively, the underlying neoliberal vision of this series (what might be termed *neoliberal magical realism*) is that anyone strapped with debt can become an entrepreneur in the free market if they are willing to ignore their moral and social conscience by engaging in violent criminal activity that destroys lives and society. Walt lives the American neoliberal dream—a dream where self-interest and market forces beget violence and financial reward. In the neoliberal world of Walter White, crime pays, and pays well. Or does it?

Though Walt has amassed a fortune, perhaps enough money to provide financial security for his family for many generations, he has in the process lost them—and himself. By the end of the series, his son hates him and refuses to take his money; his wife is broke and barely evading prison for aiding Walt in his criminal enterprise, and his brother-in-law has been murdered while trying to bring Walt to justice. In a last-ditch effort to get money to his family after his death, he threatens to have his former grad-school colleague, Elliott Schwartz (Adam Godley), and Elliott's wife (and Walt's former lover), Gretchen (Jessica Hecht), murdered after his death if they do not “donate” the remainder of his meth fortune to his family.

Over the course of the series, Walt transforms from a mild-mannered, high school chemistry teacher into a lying, murdering, violent drug kingpin, who is known and feared by the name “Heisenberg.” Interestingly, his cancer is in remission when he is “cooking,” but acts up when he stops. Walt tries to lead a dual life by hiding his Heisenberg persona from his family including his brother- and sister-in-law. However, by the end of the series, his criminal persona is known not just by his family, but the world over. As public enemy number one, he hides out in a shack in the woods of New Hampshire, trying to evade capture, but decides to return when his son refuses to take his money, and he is renounced by Elliott and Gretchen on television as having had no role in the founding of their highly successful business. No one wants to associate with Walt including his former partner, Jesse, who now wants Walt dead.

As we shall see, if Walter White is pop culture's neoliberal everyman, then his alter ego, Heisenberg, is neoliberalism's superman. The dialectics between “everyman Walter” and “superman Heisenberg” is a master narrative of neoliberalism for our time. Following the path of a failed graduate student whose conduct quickly runs out of control, and whose character becomes more and more despicable, is also a parable of the destructive forces of

neoliberalism in academe. Just substitute selling drugs with pedaling or enforcing neoliberal academic culture and policy, and you have the story of an academic whose character and conduct is gradually consumed and overpowered by the neoliberal condition. Walt's enlistment of his former student, Jesse, into the mix puts faculty *and students* at equal risk of becoming victims of neoliberalism's destructive forces. And while it is painful enough seeing a faculty member (Walt) being consumed by neoliberalism, it is even more difficult to see it happening to a student (Jesse).

NEOLIBERALISM GOES TO THE MOVIES

For someone who believes that visual narrative (e.g., film) can present epistemological, metaphysical, and moral issues as effectively as verbal narrative (e.g., stories), *Breaking Bad* is a philosophical goldmine. Among the many topics addressed are the nature of evil, the meaning of life, the meaning of death, our freedom to control our actions and choices, social justice, our obligations to others, friendship, and so on. One of the virtues of dark and philosophically rich contemporary visual series like *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men*, *The Wire*, and *The Sopranos*, is their power to engage a broader public in both the social and political issues of the day along with the moral and philosophical problems of the ages. Series such as these play an important social role in educating a public that is increasingly more visually literate as opposed to verbally literate. For many, television and film are their only exposure to philosophical thinking and critical inquiry.¹

However, like *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, and *The Wire*, there is often much debate and confusion about their message. For some, they are glorifications of violence, greed, lust, murder, and crime; for others they are morality tales warning us of the horrors of violence, greed, lust, murder, and crime. Should we be attracted to their lead characters or be repulsed by them? Are they "heroes" or "anti-heroes"? Supermen or villains? Deities or devils? Such matters complicate understanding these narratives in ways that make them more philosophically interesting and socially progressive than mass media series of, say, the previous century or generation.

In the 1960s, a television series like the original *Star Trek* (1966–1969), a perennial philosophical favorite, made it easier for its audience to sort out such matters. Most episodes of *Star Trek* revolved around presenting a distinct philosophical problem and resolving it. Captain Kirk and his crew were the heroes charged with helping the audience sort out the philosophical complexities presented by their voyages. However, the same

cannot be said of the recent generation of series. For example, while there are episodes that stand out as more philosophically rich than others, a series like *The Sopranos* has more in common with a novel than an individual television episode. The unconscious of Tony Soprano and its role in the sociopathic violence in which he participates is the driving force of the series. Much the same could be said of *Mad Men*, though for Don Draper it is sociopathic *lust* rather than violence.

In fact, just as David Simon, who created *The Wire*, pitched it as a “60-hour long ‘visual novel,’” so too should we regard *Breaking Bad*.² Or, more specifically, *Breaking Bad* is more like the serialization of a Dickens or a Dostoevsky novel, than *Star Trek*, where each episode is more like a short story rather than a chapter of a novel.³ These long-form series are one of the more amazing developments of the Golden Age of television—and are in fact a development that has brought a lot of “thinking” people and socio-political critique back to weekly network and cable programming. *Star Trek* is here used as a foil to *Breaking Bad* not to belittle it on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, but rather to distinguish it as one of the two major forms of non-cinematic philosophical visual narrative: episodic versus novelistic visual narrative.

In episodic visual narrative, a philosophical problem can be established, pursued, and resolved in 30 to 60 minutes. In novelistic visual narrative, one or more major philosophical problems is established, pursued, and resolved in 60 *hours* or more. Argument and counter-argument can be developed in novelistic visual narratives such as *Breaking Bad* in ways impossible in episodic—or even cinematic narrative. *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, and *The Wire*, are series that are more philosophically rich considered as a whole as compared to individual episodes. *Star Trek*, however, is just the opposite. As a complete series its philosophical message is less powerful than the distinct philosophical messages of individual episodes, some of which are philosophically stronger and more intriguing than others. In this light, cinematic narrative, which usually varies between 90 minutes and three hours, has more in common with episodic narrative than novelistic narrative.

However, *Breaking Bad* eclipses its kindred series by offering an episodic moment that is arguably the philosophical center of the series. In a way, the episode functions similarly to “The Grand Inquisitor” section of Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* or “The Battle Royale” section of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. In other words, just as “The Grand Inquisitor” and “The Battle Royale” sections of these respective novels are their philosophical

centers, and are often considered as independent philosophical works in themselves, so too can and should one of the episodes of *Breaking Bad*—an episode simply entitled “Fly.”

TWO CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF LATE CAPITAL

By the midpoint of the *Breaking Bad* series, things are seriously starting to break apart for Walt. His marriage is falling apart just when his daughter Holly is born. His partner, Jesse, is in the hospital after nearly being beaten to death by Walt’s brother-in-law, Hank, who came very close to catching Walt “red”-handed with Jesse in their mobile meth lab. But this is just the beginning of Walt’s troubles: the drug cartel has a hit out on him for the murder of Tuco Salamanca (Raymond Cruz), and, to that end, The Cousins (Daniel and Luis Moncada) are aching to be allowed to take out Walt.

However, Walt is not yet aware that The Cousins are after him. Rather, he cooks for fast-food chicken restaurant mogul Gustavo Fring (Giancarlo Esposito), who has provided him with an industrial-quality, state-of-the-art meth lab safely tucked away in the bowels of one of his plants. Gus though is being pressured by The Cousins to be allowed to kill Walt.

In order to protect his investment in his meth cook and interstate distribution system, Gus deceives The Cousins into believing that they are allowed to take out Hank, who as a DEA agent is off-limits to the cartel. The Cousins ambush Hank in a parking lot though he manages to survive after killing one of the cousins and nearly killing the other. Hank is now in the hospital slowly recovering, but Marie refuses to take the treatment offered by her insurance company for her husband. For her, the course of treatment afforded by Hank’s healthcare insurance seems inferior, so she opts to pay out of her own pocket for an alternative and presumably better (albeit more expensive) recovery route. It is at this point in the series that an episode entitled “Fly” appears.⁴

From the opening sequence, it is apparent that this episode is going to be different from the others. “Fly” opens with the sound of a woman singing the children’s lullaby “Hush little baby don’t you cry.” Against the lullaby, a baby is heard crying from time to time. The singing woman is never seen, nor is it clear who is singing the lullaby. However, from Walt’s comments later in the episode, it becomes fair to assume that it is Skylar singing to the newborn Holly.

An almost surreally horrific tension is built by positioning these opening sounds against highly magnified shots of a common housefly. The early

shots are indistinct and fuzzy, but soon one can recognize the detail of a wing and then there is a clear, full-screen close-up of the two red eyes of a fly. The lullaby and surreal fly shots go on for about 30 seconds and then the intro sequence cuts to the *Breaking Bad* theme music and title sequence. After the theme music is played and titles are shown, the episode opens with a full-screen shot of a blinking red light. The circumference of the light's base touches the top and bottom of the screen. It blinks a few times. The camera then pulls back to reveal that the source of the light is the blinking red light of a smoke detector set against vertical shadows that look like prison bars.

It soon becomes apparent that Walt is awake in his bed staring at a flashing smoke detector light on his ceiling. The clock next to his bed reads 2:00 a.m. amidst a dark room. The next shot is of his hand turning off his alarm at 6:00 a.m. in a fully lit room. He rises from his bed and sits on the side to put on his glasses. He is tired and just over his shoulder the blinking red light of the smoke alarm is seen flashing.

So, why, one might ask, does the episode open with a full-screen shot of a blinking red light? What does it mean? On an iconic level, the red of the light mirrors the red eye of the fly viewed earlier. On a symbolic level, the red stands for the red phosphorus that is used in the production of methamphetamine. Walt's whole life is consumed by the production and distribution of methamphetamine, and red phosphorus is one of the key elements in its production. In fact, in one of the earlier episodes of the series, Walt sees a stranger buying materials to set up a clandestine meth lab. The stranger however has the wrong matches in his cart. So, Walt, ever the "teacher," says to the stranger,

Those matches, they're the wrong kind. Red phosphorus is found in the striker strips, not the matches themselves. You need to get the big 200-count case of individual matchbooks. More striker strips, you understand? Those only have the one.

In Walt's world, the flashing red light associated with red phosphorus holds a metonymic relationship with the elements of meth production, if not meth production itself. Using it in the opening shots of the episode sets the stage for the intense psychological drama concerning meth production that occupies the remainder of the episode. Revealing the ominous blinking red light of the smoke detector set against vertical shadows that look like prison bars reminds the viewer of the dangers of meth production

and distribution, namely, prison. But more directly, the blinking red light of the smoke detector set against vertical shadows symbolizes the “prison house of meth” that now dangerously occupies and controls the life and world of Walter White.

The scene now shifts from the inside of Walt’s bedroom to the outside of the laundry that houses Walt’s meth lab. The “prison house” imagery is continued in this scene as it opens with rolling vertical images of the fence bars that surround the laundry/meth lab. The vertical fence bars mirror the vertical shadows from the smoke detector shot—and again recall prison bars. They are seen from the perspective of Jesse, who is arriving at the plant dock where Walt and he cook. Walt has already arrived though he is sitting in his car a bit dazed and out of it when Jesse pulls his car next to him. Atmospheric music à la Brian Eno plays while Jesse gets out of his car and walks over to Walt’s driver-side window. He raps on the window loudly and breaks Walt out of his stupor. So too ends the atmospheric music.

Up to this point of the episode, there has been no dialogue. There has just been a fly, red light, and prison bar imagery. Nevertheless, a lot has been communicated in the prelude to “Fly.” Most notably, Walt is losing sleep with worry about the meth “prison house” that now controls his life and in which he is now incarcerated. Or, more directly, he is losing sleep about the consequences of his conduct and life as an exemplar of the neoliberal man.

By working for Gus in his lab, Walt and Jesse now are laborers in a factory-type atmosphere. They are required to produce 200 lbs. of meth a week, an obligation that Walt, after the near-fatal shooting of Hank on Gus’s order, now worries about. He knows that if the meth is not produced on schedule or if they steal some of the meth that they are producing, then their lives could be in serious danger as Gus will stop providing them with protection. As they walk into the laundry and pass Gus’s workers punching the time clock, Jesse says to Walt, “I’m surprised he doesn’t make us do that!” These are the first words of the episode—ones indicative of their level of resentment toward Gus and the level of control he has over their lives. Jesse’s words also have echoes in the halls of higher education today, where, as we saw earlier, the only thing lacking in university life under neoliberalism *is* a literal time clock.⁵

This line of comment continues by Jesse, when he and Walt get down into the lab and commence cleaning the equipment. Jesse tells Walt about a television show about hyenas that he saw:

The hyenas have a pecking order. The head hyena, he's the man. All of the other ones have to like kiss his ass. I mean literally it is so gross. They have to lick his junk. I can't even believe they showed it on TV.

Jesse, perhaps even more than Walt, resents that they have to cook for Gus, rather than themselves. He had hoped to cook for himself before Walt convinced him to be his partner in fulfilling Gus's "million-dollar" meth order. The hyena story as well as the time-clock comment show Jesse to be not "worried" about what he is doing in the lab and its implications for his life and the life of others, but rather annoyed about the lack of entrepreneurial freedom that cooking for Gus affords him. Working for Gus in this way is "working for the man," rather than being an "entrepreneurial man." Or, more crudely put, working for Gus is akin to having to "lick his junk;" that is, it is degrading. The ignominy of cleaning the meth lab only amplifies his frustration with Gus and the new business situation he shares with Walt. "If this is supposed to be all major league and all," comments Jesse, "we should have equipment maintainer guys and water boys, you know?!"

Up to now, Jesse has been more or less talking to himself. It is a major moment of self-reflectiveness for him in the episode—and one that reveals a lot about his view on things. What has been clearly established is that he is unhappy. However, compared to Walt, he is relatively unworried about his role in the prison house of meth. His main gripe is that he wants to be more like the warden of the prison or even the owner of the prison, rather than just one of the prison house cooks and a prisoner himself. His self-reflection ends when he asks Walt if it is OK to start cooking.

Walt, however, seems to be lost in some heavy calculations. "I don't understand," says Walt. "These numbers, they just don't add up." According to him, they should be producing 0.14% more meth than they have; that is, he and Jesse are about a quarter to half of a pound shy. Though Jesse wants Walt to pass off the discrepancy to spillage, evaporation, or vestiges (gunk left in the tanks), Walt refuses to explain away the calculational difference in this way and keeps on trying to make the numbers work. Jesse though knows that the numbers don't add up because he has been skimming meth off of their output in amounts roughly equivalent to the amounts found in Walt's calculations. He wants Walt to write off the difference to spillage, evaporation, or vestiges—and put the whole thing behind him. But he won't. Jesse asks Walt if he is OK to which Walt replies, "Why?"

Jesse goes home now thinking that Walt is going to do the same after he wraps up his calculations. But Walt continues to ponder why the numbers are not working out. Soon a fly is heard. It briefly breaks Walt's concentration. It then lands on his calculation sheet. He tries to grab it with his hand but misses.

We are now only six minutes into the entire episode. The majority of the remaining time will involve Walt and Jessie trying to capture a fly. Most of the remaining dialogue is from Walt, for whom the episode provides a major outlet for self-examination. Aside from the unknown workers lining up at the time clock both earlier and later in the episode, Jesse and Walt are the only two characters we see or hear in the entire episode.

In a way, the episode is a sort of dark and absurd two-character play. After the fly lands on Walt's calculation sheet, he becomes obsessed with killing it. At first he chases it around the lab with his calculation sheet rolled up into a fly swatter, but when the fly goes to the ceiling, he throws his shoe at it and breaks a bulb. When he goes to retrieve his shoe from the light fixture, he ends up falling from the upper-level lab to the lower level in an effort to swat the fly with a broom. Lying on his back after the fall, the fly then lands on his eyeglasses. The episode then cuts to the next morning with the workers punching in.

When Jesse arrives at the lab the next morning, Walt says that the lab is contaminated. Their absurd and comic dialogue goes like this:

Walt: Something got into the lab.

Jesse: So it's dangerous?

W: Not to us, particularly.

J: So what exactly? What kind of contaminate are we dealing with here?

W: A fly.

J: What do you mean? A fly like?

W: A housefly.

J: Like one fly, singular? What did it do?

W: It got into the lab and I'm trying to get it out. Understand?

J: No.

Walt tries to get Jessie to understand, but he never does. He insists,

This fly or any fly cannot be in our lab. It's a problem. It's a contamination. And that is in no way a misuse of the word. Ok? So in terms of keeping our cook clean and our product unadulterated we need to take this very seriously. Do you understand?...I know this seems unusual for you, a layman. A fly it

seems insignificant. But trust me in a highly controlled environment such as this any pollutant no matter how small could completely...No cooking until this fly is dealt with.

Jesse wants to start cooking, but Walt will have nothing of it. The lab has been contaminated, and until it is decontaminated, viz., the fly is dead, there will be no cooking. In some of the best lines in the episode, Jesse says to Walt,

We make poison for people who do not care. We probably have the most unpicky customers in the world.

As a former meth head and dealer, Jesse knows the market firsthand. However, remember that the meth they are producing is not just any old home-cooked meth. Rather, it is a blue meth so pure that it has come to dominate the Southwest meth market and landed the two of them a million-dollar corporate production gig. But nevertheless, even in the world of corporate, government-sanctioned, production of brand-name trademarked products, there is some room for contamination. After all, says Jesse,

Even the government does not care that much about quality. Know what it is ok to put in hot dogs? Pig lips and assholes. But I say have at it bitches because I love hot dogs.

The political critique here set up by Jesse is outstanding. Whereas the government sanctions the production of contaminated legal goods, Walt (a government outlaw) refuses to sanction the production of contaminated *illegal* ones—even if it is poison (viz., meth).

For Jesse, the notion of contaminated poison is simply absurd as even the government always already sanctions at some level the production of contamination; for Walt, who sets himself and his world outside the control and sphere of the government, and who is governed only by the laws of chemistry and the market that his product dominates, contamination—even if it is only in the poison that he is producing—is unacceptable. This is a hard jab at the state from two individuals who spend the entire series on the run from the government and the state.

So, what about the pesky fly that Walt is so adamant about killing, because it has contaminated his lab? What then does it represent? The next sequence of events suggests the fly represents Jesse. Convinced that Walt is losing it, Jesse decides to start cooking without Walt, who is lost in

pursuing the fly anyway. In preparation for cooking, Jesse dons a ventilation mask on top of his head. The vents on the mask are red so that when the mask is worn on the top of his head, Jesse looks like a fly. The iconic relationship of the two red vents with the two red eyes of the fly that filled the screen in the opening sequence to the episode is unmistakable and brilliant. If there were any doubt that Jesse is the fly, it is put to rest when he tries to put sodium hydroxide into the vat and Walt swats him with his homemade human-fly-sized swatter.

But if Jesse is the fly that is contaminating the lab and is driving Walt to sleeplessness and distraction, how does Walt hope to resolve the situation? Remember Jesse only comes to work in Walt's corporate lab under extreme circumstances. He was nearly beaten to death by Hank though at the time he was no longer in partnership with Walt. He is only brought back into partnership in an attempt to keep him from exposing Walt's true identity to the authorities. Before Jesse drugs him in an effort to get him to cease his manic pursuit of "the fly," Walt says,

This fly is a major problem for us. It will ruin our batch. Now we need to destroy it and every trace of it so we can cook. Failing that we're dead. There is no more room for error. Not with these people.

"These people" are Gus and the cartel that will not take kindly to finding out that Jesse has been stealing some of their meth and dealing it on the side. On one level, this is the "contamination" that Walt is obsessing about. He refuses to confront Jesse about it directly earlier in the episode, but near the end of the episode, when they finally leave the lab and are about to go home, he does. When Jesse then denies skimming meth from the lab, Walt says that he won't be able to protect him from harm if he is skimming it. Responds Jesse, "Who's asking you to?"

In a way, Jesse's response to being the "major problem" and a "contaminant" sets the stage for the rest of the series. Jesse will be Walt's ruin. He was already told this by Gus when he warned him against going into partnership with a junkie. But Walt didn't listen to him and now is worrying about the consequences of "the Jesse contamination." Says Walt to Jessie, "If you are not going to help me, then stay out of my way."

Much of Walt's worry, tinged with guilt, is revealed in this episode, particularly after he is drugged by Jesse, who spikes his coffee with sleeping pills in order to stop his fly swat mania. As the sleeping pills begin to conquer Walt's wakefulness, he starts to get deeply philosophical about his life to date:

I missed it. There was some perfect moment that passed me right by. I had to have enough to leave. That was the whole point. None of this makes any sense if I did not have enough. But it had to be before she found out, Skylar....

I'm saying I've lived too long. You want them to actually miss you. You want their memories of you to be ... but she just won't understand. No matter how well I explain it. These days she just has this... no I truly believe that there exists some combination of words. There must exist certain words in a certain specific order that explain all of this but with her I can't just ever seem to find them....

I was thinking just before the fugue state I didn't have enough money so not then. And plus my daughter was not born yet. Holly was not born yet. Definitely before the surgery. Ah Christ! Damn second cell phone! How could I possibly? I know the moment. It was the night Jane died. I was at home and we needed diapers so I said I would go but it was just an excuse. Actually it was the night I brought you your money, remember?

Walt goes on to tell Jesse about his chance encounter with Jane Margolis's father, Donald, in a bar the night after he (Walt) watched her die of a heroin overdose as she lay by Jesse's side in their bed. Only after the plane crash did he realize that the guy in the bar was the father of Jesse's girlfriend: the father, that is, of the girl he allowed to die. By not attempting to save her, Walt as good as murdered her. All he needed to do was to push her to the side so that she would not suffocate from her vomiting. But he didn't, and she died. While Walt comes close to telling Jesse that he allowed her to die, he doesn't. All he says to Jesse is that he is sorry about Jane. Her death too is part of the contamination that Walt is battling. Murder weighs on his subconscious along with all of the other evil actions he has committed to keep his meth business in operation.

Nonetheless, in Walt's mind it all comes down to numbers and calculations. The numbers and calculations that predict the odds of meeting Donald in the bar that night; the odds of finding Jane dying on the bed that night; of the two planes colliding over Albuquerque; of having terminal lung cancer—and as a result cooking meth to purchase a future for your family. Walt says to Jesse just before he falls to sleep,

Think of the odds. Once I tried to calculate them but they are astronomical. Think of the odds of me going in sitting down that night in that bar next to that man.

This comment on “the odds” is both a highly self-reflexive moment for the series, that is, a commentary on the narrative logic of its neoliberal magical realism, as well as a deep insight into the fundamental way Walt sees life and the world, that is, as a series of numbers and calculations.

Drawing on his alter ego namesake, the German physicist, Werner Heisenberg (1901–1976), best known for discovering and articulating the uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics, Walt goes on to share with Jesse his fundamental beliefs about the nature of the universe:

The universe is random. It is not inevitable. It is simple chaos. It is sub-atomic particles and endless endless collision. That is what science teaches us. What is this saying? What is telling us that on the very night that this man's daughter dies it is me that is having a drink with him. How can that be random? That was the moment, that night, that I should never have left home. Never gone to your house. And maybe things would have.... I was at home watching TV. Some nature program about elephants. And Skylar and Holly were in another room. I could hear them on a baby monitor. She was singing a lullaby. If I have lived up to that moment and not one second more that would have been perfect.

Meanwhile the fly is still flying around and is staring down at them. Walt says that the fly is not going to come down and will stay up there forever. As he finally dozes off—and Jesse finally kills the fly—he tells Jesse that it's time to cook and that everything is contaminated.

The next morning, Walt is in bed, and the sound of a fly is heard. He looks up and sees a flashing red light. There is then a cut to a close-up of the flashing red light similar to the one from the opening sequence. The shot of a flashing red light again fills the screen and then, for less than a second, there is a shot of the red light with a fly on it. The camera then focuses on Walt's face—fearfully looking up at the fly sitting directly on the flashing red light.⁶

At the close of this episode, we too, as educators, fearfully look at Walt when we realize that he is a teacher who regards his former student and business partner as a “contamination” that needs to be eliminated. We may even wonder about our own breaking point under the strain of the neoliberal academic condition. To be sure, there are no happy endings for higher education under neoliberalism—only more pain and suffering. Still, it takes a character such as Walter White to push the potential for this unhappiness to its existential limit.

FLIES IN THE MARKETPLACE

The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) has often been cited as an inspiration for the *Breaking Bad* series. To wit, Walt is held in comparison with Nietzsche’s Übermensch, which is often translated as “Superman.” In his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he writes,

I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man?

....

The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!

I entreat you, my brothers, *remain true to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes! They are the poisoners, whether they know it or not.

....

In truth, man is a polluted river. One must be a sea, to receive a polluted river and not be defiled.

Behold, I teach you the Superman: he is this sea, in him your great contempt can go under.⁷

To draw Walt into dialogue with Nietzsche’s Übermensch thus takes very few steps: (1) The Superman is the meaning of the earth; (2) Chemistry is the science of the fundamental elements of the earth and as such, more than any other science approaches the meaning of the earth; (3) Walt as a chemist deals with the meaning of the earth; (4) Therefore, Walt is the Superman. The work he does in his lab to purify and perfect his meth thus is the work of the Superman. The moment he becomes Heisenberg is the self-same moment that comparisons with the Superman begin. Remember, he dubbed himself Heisenberg in the presence of Tuco and then used fulminated mercury to destroy his stash house. The only thing that would have made this moment more explicitly Nietzschean is if he had quoted this line from *Zarathustra* to Tuco before he did his chemical explosion magic: “Behold, I am a prophet of the lightning and a heavy drop from the cloud: but this lightning is called *Superman*.”⁸

Consequently, there is a very good textual basis upon which to draw comparisons between Walter White and the philosophy of Nietzsche.

However, there are a number of different directions that a Nietzschean reading of the series can take and plenty to disagree about regarding the comparison. For example, Nietzsche also writes in *Zarathustra*, “Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman—a rope over an abyss.”⁹ Some might argue that Walt is “man” struggling over an abyss rather than simply Superman. Others might put him more on the side of “animal” than Superman. Others still might see him as “the Ultimate Man”:

The earth has become small, and upon it hops the Ultimate Man, who makes everything so small. His race is as inexterminable as the flea; the Ultimate Man lives longest.

“We have discovered happiness,” say the Ultimate Men and blink.

They have left places where living was hard; for one needs warmth. One still loves one’s neighbour and rubs oneself against him: for one needs warmth.

Sickness and mistrust count as sins with them: one should go about warily. He is a fool who still stumbles over stones or over men!

A little poison now and then: that produces pleasant dreams. And a lot of poison at last, for a pleasant death.¹⁰

Isn’t Walt after all the man who makes the “poison”?

Regardless of the direction one takes in bringing about a dialogue between the philosophy of Nietzsche and the series, there is an important, and suggestive, connection between the two. And nowhere is this more apparent than the “Fly” episode of *Breaking Bad*.

One of the “Discourses” of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* is entitled “Of the Flies in the Market-place.” It opens as follows:

Flee, my friend, into your solitude! I see you deafened by the uproar of the great men and pricked by the stings of the small ones.

Forest and rock know well to be silent with you. Be like the tree again, the wide-branching tree that you love: calmly and attentively it leans out over the sea.

Where solitude ceases, the market-place begins; and where the market-place begins, there begins the uproar of the great actors and the buzzing of poisonous flies.¹¹

The connections between this “Discourse” and the “Fly” episode are uncanny and richly suggestive. The “solitude” that Walt flees into is his meth lab. It is precisely the place where the voices from the marketplace

have no place and are not welcome. The lab is Walt's sanctuary of solitude where he is safe from the "buzzing of poisonous flies." But somehow, one manages to get in. What then to do?

Nietzsche's response is clear and emphatic:

No longer list your arm against them! They are innumerable and it is not your fate to be a fly-swat.

Innumerable are these small and pitiable men; and raindrops and weeds have already brought about the destruction of many a proud building.

You are no stone, but already these many drops have made you hollow. You will yet break and burst apart through these many drops.

I see you wearied by poisonous flies, I see you bloodily torn in a hundred places; and your pride refuses even to be angry.¹²

But Walt, of course, has not taken Nietzsche's advice about the "flies of the marketplace."

Rather than not listing his arm against them, he tries to swat them—and kill them all.

Yes, my friend, you are a bad conscience to your neighbours: for they are unworthy of you. Thus they hate you and would dearly like to suck your blood.

Your neighbours will always be poisonous flies: that about you which is great, that itself must make them more poisonous and ever more fly-like.

Flee, my friend, into your solitude and to where the raw rough breeze blows! It is not your fate to be a fly-swat.¹³

So, to call Jesse "the fly" is not quite accurate in light of Nietzsche's discourse. While he is representative of the poisonous voices of the marketplace, he is not the only one.

In his commentary on Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, C. G. Jung comments that "swarms of flies are poison in the air, so it [the flies] might mean the thoughts that are flying about, the rumors, the newspapers, or a slogan of the day."¹⁴ In spite of the children's saying that "sticks and stone will break my bones but words will never hurt me," Nietzsche seems to be saying that words *do* hurt. Jung goes so far as to say that "it is an almost mortal danger to expose oneself to the flies of the marketplace."¹⁵ Arguably, this is precisely Walt's fate.

In the final episodes of the series, Walt is holed up in solitude and seclusion in the woods of New Hampshire. He is told that he cannot go into

the neighboring town for his identity could be revealed. After some time in total solitude, he goes to town anyway to mail a box of cash to his son though he finds out in a phone call that his son does not want his money. Sitting at the bar licking his wounds from the hatred his son now has for him, Walt sees Elliott and Gretchen Schwartz on television spreading false rumors about him. This seems to be the tipping point that takes him out of his solitude—and leads him to his death by gunshot a short while later.

A NEOLIBERAL MAN

The parallels between the “Fly” episode and *Zarathustra’s* discourse on “Of the Flies in the Market-place” help draw the series into a rich historical conversation with one of the most important philosophers of the nineteenth century. Arguably, the fly Walt is chasing in this episode is all of those voices in the marketplace that are distracting him from his solitude and his chemistry. Walt’s struggle to free his mind from the rumors and thoughts of others is a key dimension of his ability to think and act on a different level, specifically, the level of “Heisenberg”—and the Superman.

Nietzsche’s “Flies” gives us a historical context in which to situate this somewhat unusual episode of *Breaking Bad*. If followed further into philosophical history, the episode might also be connected with Jean-Paul Sartre’s play *The Flies* (*Les Mouches*; 1943) which both draws on Nietzsche as well as the Electra myth of the ancient Greek playwrights Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles. Another, though somewhat distant philosophical reading, could also take it into a Wittgensteinian direction, after all, the aim of philosophy for Ludwig Wittgenstein is “to shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.”¹⁶ Also, Walt’s admission

I truly believe that there exists some combination of words. There must exist certain words in a certain specific order that explain all of this but with her I can’t just ever seem to find them

is thoroughly Wittgensteinian in its Tractarian *dream* of a language that mirrors reality, if not also the way it recalls the *reality* of language games of his *Philosophical Investigations*.

No doubt, each of these philosophical directions for Walt’s fly are intriguing and illuminating, but ultimately this series is paradigmatically of and about the twenty-first century. Recall, if you will, that the pilot for *Breaking Bad* came out in 2008, the year of the economic collapse.

Couple this with Walt's healthcare woes, his underemployment and low pay as a high school chemistry teacher, and his approach to his family's financial future, and it is easier to see *Breaking Bad* as a series more about finance, rather than flies—more about neoliberalism than Nietzsche.

Though the concern of this book are the changes to identity and conduct in higher education wrought by neoliberalism, it must not be forgotten that neoliberalism is recalibrating more than just academic identity. It is also recalibrating American identity in general and *Breaking Bad* is arguably a commentary on the changes it has brought to our way of life. Again, the story of the decline and fall of Walter White at the hands of neoliberalism might be viewed as the story of the neoliberal man in general, or a parable of the fate of the neoliberal academic. There is room for both in a series tempered by magical neoliberal realism.

The promise (or illusion) of neoliberalism was that it would allow everyone the opportunity to be a shareholder, an owner, and an entrepreneur.¹⁷ The rise of the information and knowledge society over the past 40 years afforded the United States an unprecedented vantage point within this new economy. As knowledge production and information dissemination is an integral part of education, it emerged as a major stakeholder in this new economy.

As a graduate student in chemistry who was responsible for knowledge production with Elliott and Gretchen Schwartz, Walt participated in the promise of neoliberalism. However, when Gretchen chose to be with Elliott over Walt, and Walt abandoned being a shareholder in their knowledge production, the promise of neoliberalism was lost for Walt. But in this way, Walt's fate within the world view of neoliberalism was not unusual because for many in America this new economy quickly faded away and was replaced by a much more vicious one: the debt economy.

Like its predecessor, the knowledge economy, the debt economy is a derivation of neoliberal policies. The "indebted man"¹⁸ that emerges out of the intensification of neoliberalism is a docile subject. Think Walter White strapped with lung cancer and no way to pay for its treatment—let alone provide for the financial future of his family. But the power of the neoliberal vision of *Breaking Bad* is that it provides a commentary on both the fortunes of the "indebted man" (Walter White) and the "entrepreneurial man" (Heisenberg).

Walt is able to break out of the world of neoliberalism's indebted man by becoming again an entrepreneurial one. However, as the knowledge economy is long gone, and the world is strapped with the debt of an

economy gone sour, the re-emergence of neoliberalism's entrepreneurial man is far from a noble one. Pre-2008 images of the entrepreneurial man were of a creative visionary and an independent worker who was proud of being his own boss and aggressively participating in the marketplace of ideas. This illusion ended when the [dot.com](#) bubble burst in 2000, and officially gave way to the debt economy with the financial collapse of 2008. The entrepreneurial man's re-emergence as "Heisenberg" is also one of a creative visionary and an independent worker who is proud of being his own boss and aggressively participating in the marketplace, albeit not of ideas, rather, one of drugs and violence.

Heisenberg shows us the pathway of neoliberalism's sanctioning of a system of values determined only by market forces. The world of neoliberalism is one structured by equations—and Heisenberg is driven by these equations. They range from an equation to determine how much meth is not accounted for as in the "Fly" episode, or, more famously, from much earlier in the series, the precise amount of money he needs to provide for his family's financial future after his death:

a good state college, adjusting for inflation, say \$45,000 a year, say two kids, four years of college, \$360,000. The remaining mortgage on the home, \$107,000, home equity line \$30,000, that's \$137,000. Cost of living, food, clothing, utilities, say two grand a month—I mean that should put a dent in it anyway. 24k a year, provide for, say, ten years, that's \$240,000, plus 360 plus 137. 737. Seven hundred and thirty thousand dollars, that's what I need. You and I both clear about seventy grand a week. That's only ten and a half more weeks. Call it 11. Eleven more drug deals and always in a public space from now on. It's doable. Definitely doable.

At this moment, with this line of contemplation, Walt exemplifies the epitome of neoliberalism's entrepreneurial man. He has calculated the precise amount of money he needs to fulfill his neoliberal fantasies. Moreover, he will use this calculation to justify the lying and violence required to acquire the requisite monies.

What is beautiful about this passage is not just the neoliberal effort to place a financial number on his family's future happiness and welfare, but the comment that their drug deals are "always in a public space from now on." This is the public space of Nietzsche's "market-place"—the space of blood-sucking poisonous flies. It is also the lifeblood of neoliberalism: there is no neoliberalism outside of the marketplace.

CONCLUSION

Neoliberalism only brings despair. *Breaking Bad* does a fine job of revealing this not only for its indebted man, but also for its entrepreneurial man. Heisenberg as neoliberalism's entrepreneurial man ruthlessly pursues the meth marketplace without regard to the lives he is destroying through the "poison" he distributes or the consequences to the people he allegedly loves and cares about, namely, his family.

The "Fly" episode in dialogue with Nietzsche (and perhaps Sartre too) allows us to both give a philosophical context for its somewhat puzzling scenario (Walt chasing a fly) and to draw it into its more contemporary context: neoliberalism. In many ways, the neoliberal man is the return of the existential man who was both responsible for his freedom and—in turn—guilty for his fate. And Nietzsche of course is widely attributed as being one of the first proponents of existentialism.¹⁹ However, unlike the existential man whose "hell" was other people, for example, the flies of the marketplace, the indebted man's hell are his creditors, or more precisely, his debt—and the entrepreneurial man's hell is located in the depths he will go to pursue the wealth of the market. While the entrepreneurial man's entire social existence is defined by economic and/or social exchange, the indebted man's social existence is demarcated by debt, or, alternately, credit. For neoliberalism's entrepreneurial man, equality of exchange was the groundwork of his identity. Economic and symbolic exchange for him was predicated on some notion of equality. Such, however, is not the case for the indebted man—a type of existence wherein equality (and symmetry) of exchange has given way to the inequalities (and asymmetries) of the debt/credit relationship. Whereas neoliberalism's entrepreneurial man held out the promise of profit, *Breaking Bad* does an excellent job at asking "Yes, but at what cost?" In view of this, the perils of debt suffered by the "indebted man" are but only one-half of the human damage of neoliberalism.

Perhaps though, given the role of economics and the marketplace in *Breaking Bad*, it would be better to pursue the series not through the lens of *Zarathustra*, but through that of Nietzsche's economic thought. Though not a topic where he made major contributions, Nietzsche did have "deep insights into why and how man can be a homo oeconomicus."²⁰ In particular, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he connected man's ability to keep promises with economic progress. One commentator summarizes his economic work in *Genealogy* as follows:

Man is defined as that animal which can make and keep promises. He sees this as the basic and most important moral achievement attained by mankind, an achievement that is even more surprising in that man also has a strong tendency to forget. This insight is at the heart of the concept of cognitive dissonance. By being able to make believable promises, man is creating a link between the present and the future through a process of the division of labour. The promise entails an exchange which is not constrained to take place simultaneously and at the same time; this form of barter we can also observe in animal societies. Instead, the promise allows for an exchange of goods or services in the present in return for equivalent goods or services in the future. This is the basis for such economic activities as saving, investment, credit and bequest. If any one of these institutions is lacking, economic progress can hardly take place.²¹

Walt too makes a promise that creates a link between the present and the future when he makes the decision to exchange goods and services now (meth production and distribution) for equivalent goods and services in the future (his family's financial future after his death). After all, he is adamant for most of the series that he is cooking meth only to provide a future for his family. It is only when they all reject this form of *economic progress* that he admits that all of his actions were about him—not his family's future. Perhaps the reason he fails to make economic progress in the series (viz., exchange goods or services in the present in return for equivalent goods or services in the future) is that flies of the marketplace become his undoing.

What then will be the undoing of the neoliberal man and woman of higher education today? Have we decided to exchange goods and services (education production and distribution) for equivalent goods and services in the future? If so, what are those equivalent future goods and services? Are they similar to Walt's? Are they related to a financial future for ourselves or others? To compare cooking meth to the cooking classes of the vocational school telos of the corporate university is brutal. It is even more brutal though to imagine cooking as a substitute for various other corporate education endeavors.

As the university itself and the individuals within it seem to be no better off financially under neoliberalism than under its former models of management, when will we conclude like Walt that we have failed to live up to the dreams of neoliberalism in academe? When will we conclude that under neoliberalism we have failed to make both economic progress *and* educational progress—and that it is time to move beyond the neoliberal

academy? To what extremes of identity shift and conduct depravity do we need to go before the post-neoliberal university becomes a reality? Walter White may not be a hero, but his story helps us to better imagine the neoliberal condition and the fate of identity and conduct under its influence. Neoliberal academe changes identity and conduct—albeit not for the better.

NOTES

1. For a fuller account of the uses of visual media, particularly film, in philosophy, see my *From Socrates to Cinema: An Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007).
2. Reported by Michelle Kuo and Albert Wu in their article, “In Hell, ‘We Shall Be Free’: On ‘Breaking Bad,’” *Los Angeles Review of Books* (12 July 2012). <http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/in-hell-we-shall-be-free-on-breaking-bad#>
3. Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, was published in 16 installments in *The Russian Herald* over a period of almost two years, January 1879 to November 1880. The similarities (and differences) of the poetics of novel print serialization and the poetics of television/cable serialization, particularly for philosophically rich series like *Mad Men* or *The Sopranos*, are great topics for further inquiry though is well beyond the scope of this chapter. For a good introduction to the serial publication and its poetics, see William Mills Todd’s “*The Brothers Karamozov* and the Poetics of Serial Publication,” *Dostoevsky Studies* 7 (1986). <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/DS/07/087.shtml>
4. Season 3, Episode 10. Overall, “Fly” is the 30th episode of 62 in the series.
5. See Chapter 7, “Punch the Clock.”
6. By a wonderful coincidence, almost a decade earlier, Bryan Cranston acted in a similar episode of another series, *Malcolm in the Middle*. In Season 7, Episode 5 (2005), Hal (played by Cranston) battles an angry bee that is attacking him for destroying a beehive. The episode ends with Hal and the bee engaged in a car chase where Hal is trying to run the bee off the road with his car and the bee is attacking the car causing it to swerve. Hal, seeing the bee land on a concrete wall, then smashes his car into the wall in order to kill the bee. This particular episode was the 134th of the long-running, highly successful, series.
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For Everyone and No One*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), Prologue, Section 3; 41.
8. *Ibid.*, Prologue, Section 4; 45.

9. Ibid., Prologue, Section 4; 43.
10. Ibid., Prologue, Section 5; 46.
11. Ibid., “Of the Flies of the Market-place,” 78.
12. Ibid., “Of the Flies of the Market-place,” 79.
13. Ibid., “Of the Flies of the Market-place,” 80–81.
14. C. G. Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar given in 1934–1939*. Volume 1. Ed. C. G. Jung and James L. Jarrett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 607. Jung's lecture on Nietzsche's flies was given to the Zurich Psychological Club on October 16, 1935.
15. Ibid., 607.
16. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), §309; 103c.
17. See Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012), 9.
18. Though the phrase “indebted person” reflects more directly the fact that both men and women are affected by debt culture, I prefer “indebted man” because of its associations with the phrase “existential man.” Debt is the current existential condition of both men and women in the neoliberal academy. Using the phrase “indebted man” helps make a semiotic link to philosophical history's “existential man.” A similar rationale goes for using “entrepreneurial man” in the next paragraph.
19. Though I am primarily thinking here of the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, there are of course a variety of different philosophical senses of the “existential man”—and others may too be apropos. See Walter Kaufmann's *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1956) for an introduction to them.
20. Jürgen G. Backhaus, “The Word of Honour,” in *Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): Economy and Society*, Jürgen G. Backhaus and Wolfgang Drechsler, eds. (New York: Springer, 2006), 87.
21. Ibid., 88.

CODA

Neoliberal academe is no longer a crisis. It is normal academe in the new millennium. Still, how does one measure the measurement that is at the center of higher education under late capitalism? How do we measure, for example, key measures of neoliberalism such as austerity and transparency? We can explore these questions by examining the ways in which the neoliberal condition has altered academic identity and conduct. In examining what the neoliberal academy requires of its participants and what type of identity characterizes those who work for it, a high level of unhappiness is found at its core. The problem though remains that as unpleasant as academic life is under late capitalism, change in higher education is a slow process. Nevertheless, the academy needs to start somewhere.

The neoliberal condition *is* the new normal in American higher education. And, like it or not, the corporate university *is* the measure of higher education run well.

While calling this a “crisis” may help some of our colleagues in the academy to cope with their anger and despair, neoliberal academe has been operational now too long for this to be a fair or meaningful descriptor of the situation. The use of the term “crisis” in conjunction with neoliberalism in higher education may make for good journalism or be a righteous indicator of our opposition to it. Nevertheless, calling it a “crisis” is no substitute for critique and unfortunately in no way helps us

to move beyond neoliberal academe, which is, after all, our ultimate goal. Therefore, we need to stop calling the neoliberal condition in academe a “crisis”—and get down to the hard work of critique and reform.

One way to critique the neoliberal condition is to use its own measures against it. Another is to take measure of its own measures. Or, following Judith Butler, to call for a “measure for measure.”¹ To ask, for instance, how do we measure two of the main measures of neoliberalism, austerity and transparency, is one of the more effective ways to critique the neoliberal condition. To do so involves examining both the way these measures currently function in the academy and how they functioned in the past. By carrying out this measure of measure, we can better separate what is pernicious and painful in these measures from what, if anything, is productive and progressive. But measuring these measures is not always an easy endeavor or straightforward process.

For example, taking measure of the neoliberal mainstay, austerity, is not as simple as just rejecting it. Austerity has a long history with and connection to the academy. Well before the neoliberal academy adopted it as the measure of responsible academic conduct, austerity shaped the conduct of academics through its role as an emotional and moral imperative. Thus, for some, austerity is nothing more or less than a long-standing feature of academic identity and conduct. However, for others, particularly those who directly associate austerity with the neoliberal condition, its use as a measure of higher education run well is highly problematic. For critics of austerity, the moral and emotional effects of it under neoliberalism have been amplified to the point where the consequence is an unhealthy academic environment. Under neoliberalism, economic austerity joins forces with emotional austerity. The result is that higher education’s emotional needs are sacrificed in the pursuit of its new economic demands.

When the neoliberal condition in higher education is viewed from both the perspective of the confluence of emotional and economic austerity, and its failure to promote critical citizenship and democratic education, arguments in favor of its rejection are only bolstered and the need to work toward an alternative educational praxis is heightened. In other words, by measuring one of the key measures of neoliberal academe—austerity—we have turned it into a powerful force to be used *against* neoliberal academe rather than for it. This is part of the critical magic of measuring the measures of neoliberal academe, namely, that by measuring them we can often find ways of turning neoliberal academe against itself.

Like austerity, transparency also exhibits a complex and vexing dynamic. On the positive side, one of the most important measures of shared governance involves transparency. Good administration is often measured by the degree to which it shares important decisions and the rationales for them with students and faculty—and bad administration by the degree to which it *does not* share these decisions and rationales. In short, lack of transparency of administration to faculty is rarely a good thing.

On the negative side, whereas an increase in the transparency of administration to faculty is a good thing, too much transparency of administration to government and other entities outside of higher education is a bad thing. The latter is often viewed as one of the most destructive forces in higher education today. Most notably when academe is reduced to publicly displayed performance measurement driven by governmental mistrust and cynicism regarding higher education in general. As such, like austerity, transparency can be used both in support of neoliberal academe and against it.

Used in its “actual” sense, transparency becomes the watchdog of neoliberal academe by becoming a device that allows increasing levels of economic efficiency within the university by effacing some of its educational functions. However, if we regard transparency in the “hypothetical” sense suggested for it by Immanuel Kant in his remarkable essay, “To Perpetual Peace,” it becomes a vehicle for ensuring that justice regarding the rights of students and faculty with respect to the knowledge contract is ensured.² Again, by simply taking measure of neoliberal academe’s measures, we can turn one of its most destructive forces into a productive one.

But all of this is for naught if the academy refuses to pay attention to the well-being and happiness of its participants. If the neoliberal academy is good at anything, it is good at making its participants miserable. To be sure, academic life under late capitalism is one bereft of pleasure. However, given that pleasure *is* one of academic life’s most appealing dimensions and enduring characteristics, academic life under neoliberalism is for many emotionally challenging and stressful.

Arguably, one of the major reasons that the academy has flourished since its formation in the ancient world is the pleasure it provides its participants. Aside from all of the other goods afforded to us by the academy, it is to and for us a source of pleasure. Nevertheless, the fact that there is no place for “pleasure” in neoliberal academe cannot be a good omen for the academy, especially given all of the other demands it places on our

identity and conduct. Ironically, it may not be the more discussed and criticized instrumental or vocational ends of neoliberal academe that bring it down, but rather the less examined misery it brings to its participants.

Not only do we need to demand a role for pleasure in higher education, but we also need to hold the academy responsible for its production. We need to ask how should we organize the academy such that students, faculty, and administrators can optimize enjoyment, rather than merely pursue operational models such as neoliberalism that strip pleasure from it or ignore its vital role. The pursuit of academic hedonism may seem like an extreme proposal until one realizes how antithetical it is to the ends of neoliberal academe. Why then not pursue it as a way to move beyond the neoliberal academy?

Change in academe can occur only if there are individuals or groups that have the courage and vision to think differently about it, while it is preferable that change in the academy is driven by its own members, that is, those that know it best and have the closest relationship with it. Nonetheless, it may have to be driven by those outside of the academy, particularly if individuals and groups within the academy are fearful or anxious about upsetting the system of academe. The fearfulness or anxiousness of those within academe is not so much a character flaw as it is the fact that they share an academic habitus, which is something that strongly works against the impetus for change. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, widely held social dispositions and cognitive structures that generate perceptions, appreciations, and actions in academe, or *academic habitus*, work to normalize academic life—not to change or critique it.³ This is part of the reason why academic change is much easier to talk about than accomplish.

One of the common characteristics of most who survive, if not also thrive, in academy is that over the long run they share a *habitus*. Again, as Louis Menand has rightly said, “Professors tend increasingly to think alike, because the profession is increasingly self-selecting.”⁴ To test this proposition, just imagine one of your colleagues advocating “academic hedonism” from within the parameters of the neoliberal condition. How long do you think they would be around?

“The university may not explicitly require conformity on more than scholarly matters,” writes Menand, “but the existing system implicitly demands and constructs it.”⁵ To be sure, the easiest path to a short career in higher education is to think and act against the grain of academic habitus. Conversely, adapting to the habitus of academe provides one with

a greater chance of *not* being selected from the group. Not a guarantee for survival, but much greater odds than those who refuse to accept academe's habitus.

Habitus helps us to understand why academic change is so slow; it also gives us a clue as to how to effect change. One of the most effective ways to bring about change in the academy comes from having the courage of conviction to act and think *differently* even though one knows that to do so puts their academic career at risk, that is, puts them at risk of elimination from the system. This is important to recognize because the neoliberal condition is not going to just go away. Change requires acts of resistance from determined and committed agents who refuse to be the docile subjects favored by the neoliberal academy.

But agent-centered resistance may be for naught if data-centered education has its way within the academy. As the handmaiden of neoliberalism, big data has become the tool of choice for neoliberal culture and has contributed greatly to its rise to power. Neoliberal culture benefits directly from the numbers generated through digital devices such as smartphones, bar code scanners, drones, computers, and even fitness trackers. The data generated from these and other devices allows neoliberal culture to have a more commanding sense of the market and firmer hold over politics and society—and now education.

The growth of data sets has led to increasing confidence that this data can be more effectively and efficiently deployed to advance the aims of the neoliberal academy. If the prophets of big data have their way, then the university will become an anachronism replaced by big data educational centers. Imagine, if you will, cloud-based educational centers complete with Google libraries, Google books, and Google scholars. In the eyes of big data, Google U is not a dystopian dream—it is our educational future.

Lost in the operational logic of the neoliberal academic machine are not only the interests of faculty, but also those of students. The most obvious place where character and identity are being affected by the neoliberal condition is with regard to student debt. Though there has been support for debt amnesty and “clean slates” for students, debt refusal has another sense that is less popular among progressive critics. This involves encouraging students to not take on debt in any form, especially educational debt.

While students, for example, who have been subject to predatory lending practices by unscrupulous for-profit institutions must be cared for, so too must students who have not yet descended into the downward spiral

of debt. Debt refusal includes both refusing to take on debt in the first place and pursuing amnesty programs for students that have been subject to predatory practices. Encouraging students to not take on financial responsibility that has the potential to negatively impact their future is to ask them to adopt a more critical position to debt in general and educational debt in particular.

For students from the working class, while higher education has always involved some financial burdens, they were never as extreme as they are today. The compensating value for debt accumulation and financial burden for the working-class student used to be that the world of higher education was supposed to be everything that the world of the working class was not. The university, for the working-class student, was an “ivory tower” that held the potential of freedom from working-class life. But all of this has changed.

One of the unintended consequences of laying bare the conditions of academic life and demystifying the university was ending the working-class dream of college as a way out of the working-class way of life. Parents of working-class students and their parents saw higher education as a way to avoid their own way of life in favor of a better one. Today, however, in spite of graduating from college and thus fulfilling one of the allegedly sufficient conditions for exit from the working class, many working-class college graduates are still part of the working class. Massive debt is the other major difference between today’s working-class college graduates and those from past generations. For today’s working-class students, the prospect of a lack of class ascendancy and the burden of debt makes the pursuit of higher education sadly feel more and more like a discouraging proposition than an encouraging one. Or, for that matter, makes the prospect of the pursuit of higher education more of a *disempowering* one than an empowering one.

Resistance to neoliberal academe must come from all quarters of higher education. As such, while it is important for students and faculty to provide push-back, it is just as important to enlist administration in the resistance. But this will not happen if the perception persists that university administration in the age of neoliberalism is always already co-opted by its protocols and is prohibited from acting in violation of them. Why? Because individuals that have a progressive vision of higher education and activist tendencies will refuse to be recruited into positions where they cannot work to rectify the negative effects of the neoliberal condition. Faculty and students may be able to pull academe out of the neoliberal abyss, but it will be a whole lot easier with the backing of activist administration.

Without the support and solidarity of activist administrators who work in consort with faculty to overcome neoliberalism's destructive academic legacies, there is little hope that education's future will be any different than its recent past. And there is every indication that the neoliberal condition will worsen. While it is painful to imagine how things could get any worse for higher education in America, we know that the road taken by neoliberalism in higher education is not taking us to academic utopia.

There is no question as to whether the neoliberal condition is altering academic identity and conduct. It is and will continue to do so as long as it remains the operational paradigm in higher education. The question though is whether the ways in which it is altering academic conduct are for the better or for the worse? I believe it is for the worse and have presented my case here and elsewhere, but for some the jury may still be out.⁶ For them though the world of imagination may provide more evidence than the lived reality of those who participate in the dog's life of neoliberal academe. When it comes to the fate of the neoliberal man, few imaginative sources are as powerful as the recent one that tells the story of a dying chemistry teacher who turns to crime in an alleged effort to provide for his family after his death.

Walter White's story as portrayed in the recent television series *Breaking Bad* is a dark one about the condition of neoliberal man. It should also be considered as a parable of the fate of the neoliberal academic. Like Walter White, we too are educators living within the neoliberal condition. Though none of us hopefully will descend into his downward spiral of desperation and violence, it is hard not to see in this chemistry teacher and his student a parable of the extremes of our own condition. By all measures, neoliberalism does not improve our identity and conduct. The question remains how much it worsens it. Even though none of us is going to become Walter White, through the magical neoliberal realism of his character, we get an offering of how truly despicable the neoliberal man—or woman—can be.

If nothing else, it is my hope that *Higher Education Under Neoliberalism* opens more eyes to what the neoliberal academy requires of its participants and what type of identity characterizes those who work for it. Academic life under late capitalism is unpleasant. Unfortunately, though, change in higher education is a slow process. Nevertheless, the academy needs to start somewhere. So why not start by demanding a role for pleasure in higher education? Who knows, it may even become our way out of the neoliberal condition.

NOTES

1. Judith Butler, et al., “Concluding Discussion,” *The Humanities and Public Life*, ed. Peter Brooks with Hilary Jewett (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 147.
2. Immanuel Kant, “To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988).
3. For development of this position, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984).
4. Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 155.
5. *Ibid.*, 155.
6. I also present my case against neoliberal academe in *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and along with Henry Giroux, Sophia A. McClennen, and Kenneth J. Saltman in our co-authored *Neoliberalism, Education, and Terrorism: Contemporary Dialogues* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013).

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