UNIVERSITIES AND THE FUTURE OF KNOWLEDGE GOVERNANCE FROM THE STANDPOINT OF SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Steve Fuller

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1. Social Epistemology as Critic of the Knowledge Society and Defender of the University

Social epistemology is a naturalistic approach to the normative questions surrounding the organization of knowledge processes and products. In other words, it seeks to provide guidance on how and what we should know on the basis of how and what we already know. The subject matter corresponds to what the pragmatist philosophers used to call "the conduct of inquiry" and what may appear to today's readers as an abstract form of science policy. Social epistemology advances beyond other theories of knowledge by taking seriously that knowledge is produced by agents who are not merely individually embodied but also collectively embedded in certain specifiable relationships that extend over large chunks of space and time. Moreover, for the social epistemologist, the ends of knowledge need to be established, not taken for granted. Words like 'validity', 'reliability', and even 'truth' itself, do not refer to ends inherent to the conduct of inquiry. Rather, they refer merely to constraints on inquiry that still leave wide open questions concerning the ends of knowledge: what sort of knowledge should be produced, by whom, and for whom? Knowledge policy captures the activity that addresses these questions, which (as discussed below) tend to be neglected by conventional science policy.

The need for social epistemology arises from an interdisciplinary gap between philosophy and sociology: Philosophical theories of knowledge tend to stress normative approaches without considering their empirical realizability or political and economic consequences. Thus, philosophers are much better at providing definitions of knowledge (e.g. 'justified true belief') than telling us which practices provide better and worse access to knowledge so defined. Sociological theories suffer the complementary problem of capturing the empirical and ideological character of knowledge, but typically without offering guidance on how knowledge policy should be conducted. Indeed, the sociological literature often leaves the impression that knowledge is valid only if it serves the knowledge claimant’s interests. In this respect, social epistemology aims to transcend both philosophy's abstract aloofness and sociology’s concrete cynicism.

Social epistemology operates with a generally sceptical attitude toward what many social theorists and science policy gurus celebrate today as our knowledge society. The 'knowledge society' refers mainly to the increasing role that science and technology play in societal governance and economic production. It is a tendency
that has been observed by an ideologically wide range of observers since the 1970s, including Daniel Bell, Alvin Gouldner, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Francis Fukuyama, and Manuel Castells. Knowledge society theorists typically valorize the progress of information technologies, the specialization of scientific knowledge, and the intermediation of expertise in everyday life. These theorists, generally associated with a ‘postmodernist’ or at least post-Marxist political sensibility, tend to draw quite selectively on the history of capitalism to model the emerging social order. On the one hand, they highlight the conversion of knowledge work to ‘intellectual capital’ (or, more generally, ‘human capital’) that can be developed and even accumulated. On the other hand, they downplay the routinization and commodification of knowledge, as epitomized in the reduction of expertise to trainable skills that may be ultimately simulated on advanced computers, which indirectly serves to deprofessionalize the ‘knowledge workers’, perhaps ultimately rendering them redundant. Social epistemology draws attention to these less salutary consequences, which in many respects exacerbate the worst features of capitalism.

In a nutshell, for the social epistemologist, the knowledge society is what advanced capitalism looks like to intellectuals, once they have been assimilated into its mode of production -- a classic case of what economists call the ‘internalization of a negative externality’. After all, the dawn of the knowledge society has been marked by the massification of academia, from the budgets for scientific research to the number of students in search of credentials. At one level, it would seem that in our postmodern political economy, knowledge has become as central as labour in classical political economy. That may well be true -- and the historical precedent should give us pause for thought. However, knowledge society discourse has given rise to a field, knowledge management, whose very name is a piece of Orwellian Newspeak that epitomizes the topsy-turvy political economy of the so-called knowledge society.

In earlier times, the very expression, ‘knowledge management’ (‘KM’ to its friends), would have been heard as an oxymoron, since knowledge has generally been valued as something worth pursuing for its own sake, regardless of its tangible costs or benefits. However, now it would seem that knowledge needs to be ‘managed’ so as not to be left unused or allowed to grow profligate in a ‘wild’ state. Academics may continue to assert that knowledge is produced by hard work that is never fully rewarded, the fruits of which are nevertheless distributed as widely as possible. For economists, this is what marks knowledge as a public good, a distinctive product of the modern university that it manufactured by converting esoteric research into new topics for the curriculum. But for the ‘KM guru’, this public good conception of knowledge merely shows that universities are not very economical in ordinary market terms. Consequently, universities are advised to disaggregate their research and teaching functions so as to acquire the ‘lean and mean’ spirit associated with, on the one hand, a corporate R&D division and, on the other, a vocational training center.

The application of knowledge management to the university results in what, after John Ziman, is sometimes called a ‘post-academic’ conception of knowledge, which in practice levels traditional differences between knowledge and ordinary economic goods. In particular, the public good conception of knowledge is dissolved into intellectual property rights and credentials acquisition. From the standpoint of social epistemology, this signature development of our so-called knowledge society serves to erode the autonomy of knowledge as an ideal. At a sociological level, the development corresponds to the increasing proportion of (especially younger) academics on short-term teaching and research contracts. Under the circumstances, they are more inclined to adopt what might be euphemistically called a ‘flexible’ and ‘adaptive’ attitude toward a wide range of potential employers than defend the integrity of that increasingly fickle employer, the university.
2. How Knowledge Society Newspeak Debases Knowledge

As has been already noted, the demystified – perhaps even debased – conception of knowledge in today’s knowledge society has been accompanied by considerable semantic innovation, a ripe target for social epistemological inquiry. Perhaps the best display of knowledge society Newspeak is found in the glossary of *The New Production of Knowledge*, a multi-national collaboration led by Michael Gibbons and Helga Nowotny that over the past ten years has arguably become the single most influential academic work in European science policy circles since the end of the Cold War. The notoriety of this book rests largely on the distinction between ‘Mode 1’ and ‘Mode 2’ knowledge production as a roughly two-stage process that marks the transition from ‘internal’ to ‘external’ drivers of knowledge production process. In Figure 1, I have listed the major terms in ‘Modespeak’, alongside their prima facie innocent meanings (‘not this…’) and their more sinister practical ones (‘but that…’).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODESPEAK</th>
<th>NOT THIS…</th>
<th>BUT THAT…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Codified/Tacit Knowledge’ (Conversion Principle)</td>
<td>Performance/ Competence (Creativity)</td>
<td>Fixed/Variable Capital (Knowledge Management)</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Context of Application’</td>
<td>Applied Research</td>
<td>Client-Centered Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Globalization’</td>
<td>Universalization</td>
<td>Specialization</td>
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<td>‘Heterogeneity’</td>
<td>Anti-Homogeneity</td>
<td>Anti-Autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Hybrid Agora/Forum’ (University Redefined)</td>
<td>Knowledge Unifier</td>
<td>Knowledge Advertiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Informatization of Society’</td>
<td>Knowledge Mediates Social Relations</td>
<td>Knowledge Alienated from Individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Knowledge Industries’</td>
<td>University Privileged</td>
<td>University De-Privileged</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Massification of Higher Education’</td>
<td>Knowledge Adds Value</td>
<td>Knowledge Devalued</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Pluralization of Elites’</td>
<td>Knowledge Workers Respected</td>
<td>Knowledge Workers Modularized</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Reflexivity’</td>
<td>Critical of Context</td>
<td>Adaptive to Context</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Social Capital’</td>
<td>Public Good</td>
<td>Corporate Property</td>
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<td>‘Social Distribution of Knowledge’</td>
<td>Integrated Unit (Institution)</td>
<td>Dispersed Network (Interaction)</td>
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<td>‘Socially Robust Knowledge’</td>
<td>Universally Resilient Knowledge (Science)</td>
<td>Locally Plastic Knowledge (Culture)</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Technology Transfer’</td>
<td>Academia Legitimizes Industry (19th c.)</td>
<td>Academia Services Industry (21st c.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Transdisciplinarity’</td>
<td>Interdisciplinarity</td>
<td>Antidisciplinarity</td>
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Fig. 1. ‘MODESPEAK’: KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY NEWSPEAK

Modespeak presupposes what might be called a ‘folk history of science policy’ implicitly shared by many scientists and policymakers. It says that ‘in the beginning’ (which may be located in ancient Greece, the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century, or the rise of academic specialisation in the 19th century), knowledge was pursued for its own sake by pure inquirers who decided if and when their knowledge was suitable for public consumption as ideology and technology. Failure to respect the prerogatives of pure inquiry led to the scientific and political enormities associated with Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. This fixation on the epistemic value of pure inquiry is indicative of ‘Mode 1’ knowledge production.
However, so the folk history goes, pure inquiry generates its own kind of dysfunctionality when allowed to operate with impunity. Economists call it ‘diminishing returns on investment’. In other words, as a research programme matures, it costs more – in terms of both time spent and materials used -- to make progress comparable to that made in the past. Problems previously finessed now return to haunt the research community and typically reveal limitations in its fundamental assumptions that ultimately lead to its downfall. This captures the natural trajectory of what Thomas Kuhn called a ‘scientific paradigm’, an amalgam of theoretical vision, methodological principles, and solved problems that set the agenda for subsequent researchers. However, already in the 1970s, German philosophers of science under the influence of both Kuhn and Jürgen Habermas – the so-called finalizationists – began to suggest that a proactive science policy might pre-empt this tendency by channelling research effort toward standing social problems. This was the beginning of ‘Mode 2’ knowledge production in its contemporary guise. (I say ‘contemporary’ because analogous arguments were made by German science policy thinkers at the end of the 19th century, the previous period marked by an ‘end of science’ mentality’. They resulted in the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaften, the forerunners of today’s Max Planck Institutes.)

Over the past quarter century, Mode 2 has migrated across the ideological spectrum from social democracy to neo-liberalism. Thus, the original finalizationist proposal to harness mature science for the public good metamorphosed into an invitation for various interest groups to define more explicitly what is truly ‘useful and beneficial’ about the research they would wish to fund. What Jerome Ravetz originally called ‘post-normal science’ has now turned into ‘science made to order’. In this brave new world, the Achilles Heel of Nazi and Soviet science was merely the prematurity with which science had been applied to policy, not that policymakers ultimately called the shots.

In more general policy terms, the Mode 1–2 distinction captures the difference between inquiry governed by strictly academic interests and by more socially relevant interests. But in practice, the scope of ‘Mode 1’ is much narrower than the university – closer to a discipline or research programme – and ‘Mode 2’ is much more diffuse than ‘relevance’ normally connotes – closer to a ‘market attractor’. Indeed, the university is reduced from an institution with the aim of unifying knowledge to a convenient physical space that enables the ‘communication’ of various knowledge interests. Once again, reflecting the ideological ambivalence of Mode 2, ‘communication’ doubly resonates of a Habermasian ‘ideal speech situation’ for establishing consensus and a Hayekian ‘clearing house’ for setting prices. Not surprisingly, then, the overall impression the reader should receive from the tableau of Modespeak presented in Figure 1 is that Mode 2 discourse conceals some recognizably capitalist, and even pre-capitalist, forms of domination with a pluralist rhetoric that disperses power and responsibility.

Indicative of the workings of Modespeak is the translation effected in the first row of Figure 1: ‘codified/tacit knowledge’. What academics routinely celebrate as our capacity ‘to know more than we can tell’ appears as a nightmare to managers trying to maintain the corporate knowledge base in the face of mobile workers in a flexible economy. When academics advise managers that our competence is not reducible to our performances, managers conclude that they must find ways of replacing that competence with a more reliable source of performances that can be made a permanent feature of corporate memory, or what Marx called ‘fixed capital’. In that case, employees appear as transient sources of knowledge – or ‘variable capital’ — that need to be ‘captured’ while they are still on site. Toward this end, computerized expert systems have offered much promise to a business world that has tended to
model the human mind only on a need-to-know basis. However, business is hardly alone in this regard. In fact, the succession of fashions in artificial intelligence research uncannily tracks the major models of organizational theory, starting from Herbert Simon’s bureaucratically inspired ‘General Problem Solver’ that prevailed during the heyday of the welfare state to Friedrich Hayek’s market-based parallel distributed processor model of the brain that has enjoyed a revival since the ascent of neo-liberalism in the 1980s.

For another example of the occlusions of Modespeak, compare social capital with a concept already raised that captured the imaginations of social scientists and policymakers in the previous generation: public good. The US economist Paul Samuelson invented the concept in the 1950s for goods that the state had to provide because they would never be provided efficiently in a pure market environment. These goods turned out to be the ones that would come to epitomize the welfare state over the next quarter century: healthcare, education, utilities, and transport systems.

The defining feature of a public good is that it would cost more to restrict access to the good to just those who paid for them than to allow everyone access. Several reasons have been given for this feature of public goods. One rather traditional, but ultimately not very persuasive, reason is that some goods naturally flow to fill the available space, which means that concerted effort is needed to arrest it. In this respect, knowledge is sometimes treated as if it were a natural resource like air or water. A more persuasive account of public goods is that they require an infrastructure that is most efficiently implemented and maintained on a mass level, regardless of the capacities of particular individuals. Knowledge can be seen in this light by imagining the amount of police and judicial work that would be needed to restrict, say, access to books on nuclear physics to people who are seen as having ‘paid their dues’ by having acquired the right academic credentials or even the right liberal values.

Moreover, the nature of public goods is such that even free riders may ultimately pay for their consumption by generating private and public goods of their own. For example, the flow of pirated software is both monitored and tolerated because communication among the pirates proves to be the most efficient means to discover bugs in the software. More to the point, however much it may have cost to provide the education, facilities, and salaries for the medical scientists who develop a technique for treating a deadly disease, it would cost society more to restrict access to the treatment to just those who could pay market-driven prices for it than to distribute the cost across the entire society through taxation so that the treatment is free at the point of delivery. Nevertheless, public goods appear highly unattractive as investment opportunities to self-interested economic agents precisely because an investor would not be able to capture, or even regulate, the flow of profits. Of course, it would be in everyone’s interest to pay someone to produce these public goods. That ‘someone’ turns out to be the state, which has the power to extract taxes from the egoists so as to provide the capital required to produce and maintain public goods.

Although the concept of social capital was not developed to replace the idea of public good, it has effectively done just that. The decline of the welfare state and the corresponding rise of neo-liberalism are once again implicated. An intuitive sense of the hidden benefits of free riders has been replaced by a more explicit ‘pay-as-you-go’ sensibility. Social capital may be seen as an attempt to simulate some of the old collectivist sensibility by showing how solidarity can be in one’s self-interest. The concept’s popularity testifies to a profound change in our conception of who and what
matters in the social order. Neo-liberalism has broken with the welfare state assumption that full employment is necessary for efficient economic growth. This, in turn, has diminished the sense of urgency with which new knowledge should be made available to everyone. Thus, the state now assigns a lower priority to the maintenance of the infrastructure for public goods, as evidenced in the decline in schools, hospitals and roads. A society (so it is now thought) may prosper, even if many of its members lag behind the market leaders.

But the impact of the state’s withdrawal from the regulation of civil society does not end there: The market leaders may find it more convenient to pool their resources with people outside their own societies, causing the social fabric to disintegrate still further. This is a perennial source of deep class divisions in the developing world, whose elites identify more with First World elites than the masses of their own countries. The advent of computer-based information and communication technologies has only exacerbated the tendency, serving to further weaken already feeble nation-states. The concept of social capital was designed partly to halt the evacuation of money and talent associated with these transnational networks by fostering a bottom-up form of economic protectionism that does not require a full-blown welfare state, which in poorer countries never existed in the first place.

The exact appeal of social capital depends on where you live. Social capital promises the poor in the developing world an oasis of economic self-determination in a desert of de-regulation or outright lawlessness. In the developed world, however, social capital satisfies a longing for an integrated lifestyle in these centrifugal postmodern times -- the promise of higher profits from deeper socializing, or ‘playmates as workmates’. Nevertheless, in the end, the concept of social capital is crafted with an eye to competitive advantage -- specifically, the return to investors in a suitably dense social network vis-à-vis non-investors. In this respect, social capital is an example of what the economist Fred Hirsch originally called a *positional good*, that is, a good whose value is principally tied to the exclusion of specific consumers -- the exact opposite of a public good. This point has ramifications throughout society. On the one hand, it justifies cooperative businesses that charge preferential prices to investors. On the other, it encourages stronger informal links between academia and industry that result in jointly owned inventions or companies that are protected by intellectual property legislation. The perniciousness of these set-ups may not be immediately apparent but may become so in the long term, if they exacerbate existing social inequalities. (This in the import of Pierre Bourdieu’s related but negatively tinged expression, *cultural capital*.) In more moralistic times, this intimate linking of social and economic interests so valorized by social capital thinking had a special, albeit now unfashionable name: *corruption*.

The social-epistemological slippage between the concepts of public good and social capital casts serious doubt on the following apparent truism: *Knowledge that isn’t private is ipso facto public*. Both philosophers and economists tend to think that knowledge flows so freely that special efforts are required to restrict its movement. These efforts may range from censorship to intellectual property legislation. The tendency is also to believe that these efforts are at most temporary, and that eventually knowledge becomes available to everyone, increasing the general level of freedom and well-being. How exactly this is supposed to happen is never made clear, though some following the US legal theorist Edmund Kitch have suggested, rather metaphysically, that knowledge is inherently ‘self-protecting’, which is to say, that its meaning or power can never be captured in just one form of words or technological medium. There are always other modes of access to the same insights into reality or other ways of achieving the same practical effects. Of course, there is something to be said for this principle of ‘substitutability’, which explains technical
progress as the succession of increasingly efficient substitutes to fill standing needs. However, to acknowledge the difficulties in excluding people from knowledge is not equivalent to an assertion of knowledge's universal inclusiveness. Special efforts need to be taken to make knowledge universally accessible, otherwise – as, in the case of a deregulated market -- only those who had been previously excluded for ideological, but not material, reasons are bound to benefit.

3. From Science Policy to Knowledge Policy: The Place of Rhetoric in Social Epistemology

Ultimately, the two most insidious features of Knowledge Society Newspeak are: (1) The devaluation of ‘knowledge’, such that all organizations are now said to be in the business of producing ‘knowledge’ in the same sense. (2) The assimilation of democratic processes to market processes. The latter feature is symbolized in the Modespeak use of the words ‘agora’ and ‘forum’, the Greek and Latin words for the physical space in ancient cities where both business and politics were conducted. This image of a common space is then used to create a blurred image of the public character of knowledge, leading to the following confusions: free speech is confused with advertising, criticism with ‘niche differentiation’, the public interest with an array of ‘revealed preferences’, voting with trading, power with sales, rationality with efficiency, and progress with profits. What is perhaps most striking about all these elisions is that they happen effortlessly, largely as a by-product of the devolution of the state, as in the gradual replacement of ‘public good’ with ‘social capital’. This brings us to the key practical activity of social epistemology, knowledge policy, which is specifically designed to counteract this default sensibility.

Knowledge policy differs from conventional science policy by recognizing that policy is always being made, even when the status quo is maintained, or, as Karl Popper might say, induction rules. In the case of science, such institutional inertia can have significant consequences. It underlies the self-organizing, self-selecting, and self-stratifying processes associated with the various levels at which ‘peer review’ occurs in science. Originally, peer review was limited to the publication of completed research but in the 20th century, once science was subsumed under the state, peer review spread to cover the funds required even to be eligible to do research. The result is an ever expanding and interlocking system of elites, for which Robert Merton coined the euphemism, ‘the principle of cumulative advantage’. It is tantamount to a providential vision of history of science that would have been familiar to the early modern purveyors of what Max Weber called the ‘Protestant Ethic’: Thus, the dominant strands of scientific research would not be so well-resourced and efficacious if they were not doing something right - even if we cannot as yet specify their target realities. In this context, the maxim that scientific research does not experience diminishing marginal returns on investment acts as an article of faith - that is, any research funded for ‘enough’ time will yield some benefit. As it happens, this maxim is invoked to continue current practices, though it could be just as easily invoked – in the spirit of Paul Feyerabend – to redistribute resources to a wider array of scientific projects. Social epistemology tends to support this redistributionist interpretation of the maxim in the name of epistemic justice.

Conventional science policy tends to be problem-centred without evaluating the discipline-based knowledge relevant to addressing the problems. Indeed, the science policy analyst rarely figures in discovering or constructing problems — they are simply treated as given. In contrast, knowledge policy critically examines the maintenance of institutional inertia: Why don't research priorities change more often and more radically? Why do problems arise in certain contexts and not others, especially why
is there more competition for resources within a discipline than between disciplines? These questions are addressed on the basis of three presumptions that take seriously the normative implications of the social constructivist premises of the interdisciplinary field of science and technology studies:

The Dialectical Presumption: The scientific study of science will probably serve to alter the conduct of science in the long run, insofar as science has reached its current state largely through an absence of such reflexive scrutiny.

The Conventionality Presumption: Research methodologies and disciplinary differences continue to be maintained only because no concerted effort is made to change them — not because they are underwritten by the laws of reason or nature.

The Democratic Presumption: The fact that science can be studied scientifically by people who are themselves not credentialed in the science under study suggests that science can be scrutinized and evaluated by an appropriately informed lay public.

In addressing the problem of institutional inertia, the social epistemologist can begin by identifying the diverse interest groups that derive enough benefits, each in its own way, from the status quo that they have little incentive to change their course of action. The social epistemologist’s strategy, then, would be to periodically restructure the environments in which researchers compete for resources. For example, researchers may be put in direct competition with one another where they previously were not. Moreover, they may be required to incorporate the interests of another discipline, including that discipline's practitioners, in order to receive adequate funding. This is the principle of epistemic fungibility. Finally, researchers may be forced to account for their findings, not only to their own discipline's practitioners, but also to the practitioners of other disciplines and the lay public. (Citizens juries, consensus conferences, and other forms of ‘deliberative democracy’ are relevant in the latter context.) In so manipulating the knowledge production ecology, the social epistemologist can ensure that disciplinary boundaries do not solidify into “natural kinds” and that the scientific community does not acquire rigidly defined class interests that impede communication both between disciplines and with society more generally.

Effective knowledge policy is ultimately an exercise in ‘rhetoric’ in the full classical sense of using words to enable people acquire new collective identities that become the basis of organised social action. This means that social epistemology must overcome 2000-year stereotypes of the philosopher (as Platonist) and the rhetorician (as Sophist) locked in mortal combat. According to this stereotype, the philosopher invokes norms as an excuse for distancing herself from the people, who fail to meet her lofty standards. The rhetorician abandons norms for gimmicks that can secure short-term success for her client. The social epistemologist's way out of this stalemate is to realize that the normative is constitutively rhetorical: that is, no prescription can have force, if the people for whom it is intended refuse to obey it. This raises the question of whether knowledge policy really requires a meeting of minds or simply a confluence of behaviours? Only a philosophical conceit, backed by a dubious mental ontology, makes agreement on meanings, values, and beliefs a necessary condition for coordinated action. Instead, parties to a knowledge policy decision need to realize that they must serve the interests of others in order to serve their own. That is, their diverse perspectives are causally entangled in a common fate, a res publica. Unfortunately, much public policy thinking reifies zero-sum gamesmanship, illicitly presuming that opposing interests require opposing courses of action that result in one side succeeding at the expense of the other. But it is more likely that, in the long term, both sides to a dispute will either win or lose together.
With this point in mind, let us return to that key battleground of knowledge management, *the firm versus the university*.


When KM gurus want to persuade academic administrators to run their institutions more like business firms, they highlight the frustration that pioneering scientists in the 20th century felt within the disciplinary confines of their home universities. General Electric, Bell Telephone, Rockefeller’s Standard Oil, the Ford Motor Company, Eastman Kodak, IBM and Xerox name not only some of the major US-based corporations of the past century but also the sponsors of much of the innovative research that, by the end of World War II, had turned America into the unchallenged global leader in scientific research. The KM gurus recall this history to draw attention to the supposedly reactionary nature of universities, as reproducers of obsolescent knowledge designed to maintain illegitimate elites. It is an image first popularised during the Enlightenment, some of whose champions (e.g. Leibniz, Diderot) proposed ‘academies’ that were the ancestors of the ‘science parks’ favoured by today’s KM gurus. Moreover, academic administrators are inclined to admit openly – out of pride or shame – the inevitably ‘traditional’ character of the university’s approach to knowledge. From the standpoint of social epistemology, such a response is unnecessary, false and counter-productive. The KM gurus can be handled much more assertively.

Notwithstanding today’s fixation on ‘innovation’, novelty isn’t the most important thing when it comes to knowledge production. What happens after the novelty wears off matters more. (This is a lesson worth learning by those who would judge the economic performance of universities by counting patents registered under their names.) It was only the establishment of academic departments and degree programs that ultimately ensured that the 20th century’s flagship interdisciplinary, or even transdisciplinary, fields – say, molecular biology and artificial intelligence -- remained in the public domain as scientific knowledge, and were not parcelled out as trade secrets and other bits of intellectual real estate. The combined commitment to efficiency, systematicity and publicity point to the institutional uniqueness of the university. These virtues are most clearly exemplified in an aspect of academic life that tends to be underrated today, *curriculum design*, the art of translating individual novelty into collective utility.

Even business firms have begun to appreciate the virtues of curriculum design, as they suffer from what knowledge managers call *corporate amnesia*, the negative by-product of quickly formed, flexibly organised associations of providers and clients. While the existence of these nimble networks has enabled the business community to adapt to a changing competitive environment, the only knowledge traces they leave are those embodied in their joint products. For, once its mission is accomplished, a network’s human nodes simply disperse and connect with other nodes to form new networks in pursuit of new projects. The precedent for this diabolical situation is captured by the phrase *market failure*, which is the economist’s way of talking about goods that markets fail to generate because no one finds it in their interest to produce them. This is because the cost of producing the goods can never be completely recovered in profits. In welfare economics, market failure defines the frontier where state provision of public goods begins. Similarly, we may speak of the role of universities in redressing *network failure* by reproducing and extending knowledge that might otherwise be lost through network dispersion.
Knowledge managers have yet to realise the full significance of universities in this capacity because they tend to diagnose network failure much too locally, as mere instances of ‘knowledge hoarding’. The idea here is that companies become dependent on the services of certain employees -- often information technology personnel -- who do not make their knowledge directly available. We are then asked to envisage these human nodes as blocking the flow of information in the network by refusing to share what they know with the other nodes. Thus, the knowledge hoarder appears as a moral failure who needs to be taught greater concern for her colleagues. Little is said about the emergence of knowledge hoarding as a defensive strategy for remaining employed or even employable in the knowledge economy’s volatile labour market.

The targeting of the individual knowledge hoarder by knowledge managers aims to ensure that firms receive an adequate return on their ‘knowledge investments’, as measured by the clients, contacts or web links that employees accumulate. It is very much the point-of-view of managers trying to keep their firms afloat. However, from social epistemology’s more global perspective, the tendency of knowledge to escape from its formative networks may be seen as a positive market mechanism for counteracting the corporate hoarding of knowledge, which could result in that ultimate blockage of free exchange, a monopoly.

In this context, universities are designed to permit knowledge escape, thereby redistributing the advantage accumulated in the staff, databases and intellectual property of corporate entities like firms, states and even academic disciplines themselves. To appreciate this crucial point, let us return to a key point overlooked by Knowledge Society Newspeak: the integrity of the university as a whole greater than the sum of its constituent departments. The key lies in the university’s status as an – perhaps even the original – ‘entrepreneurial’ institution, one perpetually engaged in the creative destruction of social capital. This Schumpeterian turn of phrase speaks to the university’s classical mission of unifying teaching and research.

Research is a natural generator of social capital because those who invest their own capital or labour in its production are the primary beneficiaries. It takes further effort -- often charged to others as rents, royalties and fees -- to make that capital more generally available. This usually involves reducing one’s own market advantage. However, that is precisely what teaching does when it makes previously esoteric research accessible to students, which then enables them to use or contribute to it. Indeed, curriculum design has traditionally involved synthesising disparate cases from their original contexts of knowledge production and inferring larger explanatory principles, which are then subject to further study and ultimately dissemination through pedagogy and publication. In practical and technical settings, the goal of teaching goes beyond contemplating nature’s design to ‘troubleshooting’ and ‘reverse engineering’ products that may lead to their improvement and ultimately even their replacement. And so, precisely because their original advantage is destroyed through teaching, researchers are continually motivated to generate new research that will confer on them a temporary market advantage. That cycle constitutes a socially ‘progressive’ force if each successive generation of researchers is drawn from at least slightly different social class backgrounds. In any case, the cycle is the surest way to secure the integrity of knowledge, yet also the one most clearly under threat in today’s so-called Knowledge Society.

5. What Sense of Academic Freedom is Integral to University Autonomy?
In these postmodern times, there is a tendency to overrate the significance of self-expression as an aim of free inquiry. It reveals the extent to which the limits of our knowledge have come to be identified with -- and hence restricted to -- the nature of our being. Such a sense of 'free inquiry' amounts to an exclusive authorization to pronounce over the domain of reality you happen to inhabit (in your own body or kind of body, in the case of class, race or culture). Thus, just as no one else can speak on your behalf, nor can you speak on anyone else's. The de-colonization of the mind seems to have been accomplished through the provincialisation of thought. As a result, the collective benefit of free inquiry is lost. There are two disadvantages to such a restriction on the concept of free inquiry, which is nowadays often associated with 'identity politics':

(1) It precludes the possibility of 'oppositional consciousness', whereby an outsider can claim a privileged perspective by virtue of not sharing the same interests of those under investigation. Historically, oppositional consciousness has been spawned under both elite and proletarian guises -- each in its own way immune to the retaliatory responses of those criticized: The elite are above reproach and the proletariat beneath contempt. To their credit, 'post-colonial' theorists have tried to preserve this sensibility.

(2) It precludes the possibility of speaking one's mind with impunity -- specifically, speaking against one's own interests if that is where the truth seems to lie. The classic arguments for a property requirement for citizenship were partly based on the idea that people could not authentically participate in the polity if they always had to worry how their votes impinged on their livelihood. Similar reasoning influenced the institution of lifetime tenure for academics and senior judges. In both cases, free inquiry is meant to encourage risk-taking with minimal individual loss and maximal collective benefit. From the standpoint of social epistemology, this is tantamount to institutionalising a sense of 'representation' in which one might turn out to be wrong about the world without thereby invalidating one's capacity for judgement.

In short, 'freedom of inquiry', properly speaking, amounts to the right to be wrong. This is not a right lightly granted, for it entails an obligation to publicize what one has learned, however counter-intuitive or unpopular it turns out to be. Consequently, candidates for tenured academic appointments have had to endure a stiff probationary period, successful passage through which materially safeguards them for fully exercising their right to be wrong. To be sure, limits have been historically placed on how this right may be exercised. They are epitomized by the adage, 'Don't bite the hand that feeds you' -- be it that of the state, the university's administrators, its board of trustees or corporate sponsors. Purported violations of these limits have been often cast as straying beyond one's competence, though interestingly the plaintiffs tend to represent not the competence in question but the potentially affected population, were the knowledge claim treated as true. The problem here, it would seem, is not that academics may speak falsehoods but that those in power may believe them too easily and hence act on them too quickly. This would seem to justify that the state and other policy agents exert a sense of reciprocal autonomy that license them to disregard or contest new knowledge claims that come their way. Given the current fascination for ours being a 'Knowledge Society', this point cannot be stressed too much.

Of course, matters are complicated in cases where academics do not simply produce knowledge that policymakers happen to find useful, but openly offer their services to policymakers. In this context, policymakers are attracted to not simply the provocative and experimental nature of the academic's ideas but also the authority these ideas carry by virtue of the academic's institutional affiliation, prior accomplishments, etc. Wealthy private US universities have substantially influenced
policy around the world in just this fashion. Harvard, by far the world's wealthiest university, has made the largest interventions, which unsurprisingly have resulted in the greatest successes and failures. One recent example follows.

From 1974 to 2000, Harvard's Institute for International Development (IID) seeded programmes in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and post-Soviet Eastern Europe. At its peak, the IID operated in 40 countries with 188 staff and an annual turnover of US$30 million. To enable the IID to function more flexibly on the international stage, Harvard gave it the right to raise its own funds and discretion over how they were spent. However, Harvard has been sued by the US government for failing to monitor how US$50 million was spent on failed Russian economic reforms. (It was on the advice of the IID that the US Agency for International Development had invested in these reforms.) Cases like this argue for universities carrying insurance policies (the cost which may or may not be passed on to prospective clients) in the event that advice given in their name does not go to plan. This would be preferable to universities either prohibiting academics from marketing their knowledge or dissociating themselves from failed advice emanating from their academics. To be sure, universities would vary in the amount of insurance coverage they could reasonably provide, but that itself could become one more factor for potential clients to weigh when considering academic consultancy.

That a university's social science unit should exemplify the excesses to which autonomous academics are prone is not surprising. The legal definition of 'academic freedom' historically emerged from the incorporation of the social sciences into the universities of late 19th and early 20th century for the obvious reason that their research findings would be of most direct relevance to current affairs. Thus, inspired by related German social science debates, the American Association of University Professors was formed in 1915 by a joint resolution of the main professional bodies of economists, sociologists, and political scientists. Originally the main concern was for academics to be free to pursue research that did not dovetail with government policy or (in the case of US universities) boards of trustees. However, as the 20th century progressed, wealthy private US universities led the way in converting this negative sense of freedom into a positive mandate to improve the human condition, with Harvard's IID an extreme case in point. Notwithstanding the problems that befell the IID, this positive mandate is likely to become stronger across the university sector in the 21st century – a point to which I shall return in the final section.

Finally, to foreshadow another issue that will be treated more fully in the conclusion, the strong sense of academic freedom discussed here is not historically associated with work conditions of 'basic' – as opposed to 'applied' or 'mission-oriented' -- research of the natural sciences. Inquiry into the 'nature of things' in the broadest and purest sense has been traditionally tied to a political economy of leisure, specifically the capacity to spend resources with impunity. This is what originally made such inquiry the prerogative of the wealthy – or those fortunate to enjoy their patronage. Until the third quarter of the 19th century, most of this activity occurred outside of the university and hence without the obligation for research findings to be 'publicized' in the widest possible sense – that is, through incorporation in the curriculum. Of course, in exchange for enjoying their freedom, researchers typically had to provide their patrons with privileged, if not exclusive access, to their findings.

The sense of 'free inquiry' to which natural scientists have aspired is animated less by the prospect of a discovery with the potential to disturb the status quo through widespread publicity than simply the luxury to take longer than expected to discover anything of interest at all. Of course, particular natural scientists have wanted freedom in both senses, but the different motivations need to be kept in mind in order
to understand how natural scientists so often seem to have found ‘freedom’ in military and industrial research settings in the 20th century. Often these scientists were trying to escape teaching obligations and hence equated the sense of ‘freedom’ they sought with the bare civil liberty to act as one wants without external interference (i.e. from students and academic administrators). In practice, they simply wanted to be allowed to publish their findings in technical journals of limited circulation, an activity not likely by itself to threaten national security or intellectual property regimes. In contrast, social scientists aspired to a more robust sense of freedom that carried the obligation to teach. This much riskier sense of freedom has typically required collective recognition in a union or professional organization rather than simply a benevolent relationship with those who fund or manage the research environment.

6. Why is Affirmative Action Integral to University Autonomy?

‘Affirmative action policies undermine university autonomy’: This complaint is typically raised by academic leaders who feel restricted by state demands that traditionally disadvantaged groups be allowed relatively easy access to student places and faculty posts. They ask: ‘Why not simply go for the best?’ However, this simple question reveals a university’s lack of autonomy, specifically its failure to control the terms in which the institution is evaluated. After all, left to his own devices, what responsible university leader would reduce his or her institution to a collection point for ‘high achievers’? To do so would shift the role of the university from a producer of knowers and knowledge to an investor in things and people whose cognitive and epistemic virtues had been acquired elsewhere. Under the circumstances, the university is rendered little more than a showcase. To be sure, economists have characteristically had no illusions about the ease with which universities would allow market forces turn them into glorified ‘screens’ and ‘signals’ in the labour market.

One straightforwardly ‘technical’ answer to complaints about affirmative action would be to use performance measures that valorize the outcomes preferred by affirmative action (e.g. the ‘value added’ by university matriculation to prior schooling, whereby the ‘best’ institutions are the ones that raise its students the most). But behind these concerns lies the deeper worry that universities are being asked to achieve goals -- however worthy -- for which they are not suitable vehicles, especially the redress of past injustices. But affirmative action can be justified in terms of the university’s forward-looking, universalistic aspirations, which in economistic terms include improving society’s overall stock of ‘human capital’.

Here it is worth recalling that in medieval Roman law the original status of universities -- along with churches and guilds -- as universitas (normally translated in English as ‘corporation’) rested on their pursuing ends, typically the perpetuation and elaboration of a set of practices whose value extends beyond the interests and lifetimes of current practitioners. The idea was that each new member would undergo a ‘rebirth’ (e.g. a baptism) through examination or election that would confirm their lifelong commitment to the universitas. It is telling that in the United States former students are still called ‘alumni’, whose Latin meaning, ‘foster sons’, captures well the new sense of identity acquired in the process of academic ‘matriculation’, itself Latin for ‘mothering’.

That members of a universitas exchanged their hereditary standing for new identities conferred on the institution a legal right to raise its own funding. Such self-subsidization typically involved past matriculants voluntarily contributing to the mission of spreading the good work done by the universitas, not least by the recruitment of new members. Like church membership, matriculation amounted to a
lifelong commitment to the institution’s spiritual mission beyond whatever transient, job-related skills that students managed to pick up from their coursework. Moreover, the maintenance of a university’s ‘spiritual mission’ was understood to involve ongoing adaptation to environmental changes that could be generally entrusted to the university’s current administrators. In other words, matriculants have understood the university’s autonomy as like that of an organism: *It is more important for the institution to maintain a certain relationship between itself and its environment than simply to maintain a certain sense of itself regardless of its environment.*

This legal framework, and its accompanying sensibility, discussed in this section as ‘affirmative action’ was earlier epitomized as the ‘creative destruction of social capital’. Historically it provided the basis on which cities and later entire states were constituted as legally sanctioned entities, with the ‘naturalization’ of citizens taking the place of matriculation. Indeed, to borrow Max Weber’s terms, we might see national income tax regimes as ‘routinizing’ the ‘charisma’ embodied in alumni endowments to universities. After all, the national university systems that began to emerge in the 19th century were publicly financed not because taxpayers expected that they or even their children would be matriculants. Rather, they thought they might benefit from applications of the knowledge produced and distributed in universities, say, through improved healthcare, living conditions, products and production processes, arts and culture and even civil administration. To be sure, the exact benefits accrued to particular members of a society are bound to vary widely. However, in keeping with the classical conception of knowledge as a public good, it would cost more to allocate benefits in exact proportion to tax payments than simply to admit that it is less personally risky for everyone to contribute what they can afford to support an institution – the university – whose role in social progress is both incontrovertible and indeterminate.

7. Academic Caesarism and Academic Imperialism: The Emerging Shape of University Governance

In the 21st century, universities will become more state-like. They will expand their governance functions across society, with the more ambitious ones taking on global governance functions, ranging from the certification of overseas degree programmes to the establishment of physical campuses on the model of ‘spheres of influence’. At the same time, rank-and-file academics will cede more institutional control to the university’s chief executive, whose own legitimacy will rest on the ability to insulate academics from the day-to-day need to justify their existence. All of these developments will occur against the backdrop of states that encourage virtually everyone to get academic accreditation before entering the labour market, and most to return for more accreditation over their employment history. Moreover, states will depend on universities to provide the intellectual infrastructure for the next wave of wealth production. While the official rhetoric may convey the impression that states will be placing greater burdens on universities, in practice universities will be filling the institutional space evacuated by states. States will continue to encourage universities to become more self-funding, despite the historic role of the public tax base in building up national university systems.

Will universities be able to retain their institutional autonomy through these changes? No doubt, they will appear more powerful, simply by virtue of the personnel and resources concentrated in them – and the role they will play in structuring the labour force and even its products, which in turn will have a greater impact on people’s lives. However, universities may perform all of these functions reasonably well and yet fail to remain autonomous, if they take their marching orders from more dominant
sectors of society. The specific fate of university autonomy depends on the maintenance of the link between research and teaching, in the face of external pressures to prise them apart. This is the only sure way for the university to remain a whole greater than, and even apart from, the sum of the demands increasingly placed upon it by various constituencies. As someone who believes that universities may well retain their autonomy as they increase their power, I shall focus on the Faustian bargains involved. Two phrases resonant of ancient Rome sum up my concerns: Academic Caesarianism and Academic Imperialism. The former points to changes in the internal structure of universities, the latter to changes in the university’s relationship to the rest of society. Both are based on American precedents, since the United States has presented the world’s best testing ground for the possible configurations of institutions of higher education.

‘Caesarism’ was the term Max Weber used in his later writings to characterize the principle of leadership in mass democracies, which he believed would be ascendant in the 20th century. (He was writing at the dawn of the Weimar Republic.) The term alludes to Julius Caesar, who was elected dictator to save – or was it to destroy? – the Roman Republic. Caesar is known to students today as the author of The Gallic Wars, a commentary still read in the original Latin. The book is part historical chronicle, part political philosophy and part inspirational literature. Books of a similar nature have been penned by the ‘Academic Caesars’ who have led American higher education over the past century. That the USA should be the home to such Caesars reflects the anchoring of American conceptions of the university in a strong sense of autonomy inherited from the wealthy Protestant dissenters who established the earliest universities before the country was consolidated as a nation-state. (Indeed, the student ‘fraternities’ provided the crucibles in which the American national identity was originally forged.) Still more ambitiously, Academic Caesars claim to personify the defining values of their institution that they then endeavour to spread throughout the world.

Harvard has been the spiritual home of Academic Caesarism, with such visionary university presidents as Charles William Eliot, A. Lawrence Lowell, James Bryant Conant and Derek Bok leaving a significant mark not only in their home institutions but also primary and secondary schools and even public intellectual culture. The initiatives undertaken by these figures – whom Conant dubbed ‘social inventors’ – were of the sort that would have been associated with adventurous national education ministers in, say, Germany or France. To be sure, like most countries with developed higher education systems, America’s is also primarily in the public sector, but Academic Caesarism flourishes there as well, e.g. University of California’s Clark Kerr and, more recently, University of Michigan’s James Duderstadt.

The following traits constitute an ‘ideal type’ of the Academic Caesar (‘AC’). In other words, no single individual has embodied all of these traits but Academic Caesarism is promoted by people who combine most of them in their governance of universities:

1. The AC is a university president (or rector, vice chancellor) who regards his or her role as comparable to a chief executive officer of a major corporation, i.e., an agent ultimately responsible to a set of principals including academics, students, alumni, the general public and, where relevant, a board of trustees and/or state legislature. In other words, the AC is not a primus inter pares but in a class by him- or herself.

2. The AC believes that only someone in his or her position is competent to take decisions concerning overall university policy. Both positive and negative evidence can be adduced for this conclusion. On the one hand, the AC enjoys an epistemic advantage over more discipline-based academics in a scaled-up competitive environment that forces one to deal with many more non-academics
and even academics not especially motivated by disciplinary imperatives. On the other hand, despite the traditional standing of academic self-governance, divisiveness, if not outright fecklessness, better characterizes academic conduct in matters of university governance, which in turn produces the vacuum of leadership that the AC gladly fills.

3. The AC is inclined to increase his or her distinctiveness from — and hence power over — other academics by expanding the university’s constituency, say, through affirmative action programmes of admitting students and hiring new faculty, philanthropic donations and large industrial contracts. The newly included groups provide an insurance policy against potential complaints from more established academics about the university’s direction.

4. The AC is dedicated to enabling the various principals to pursue their interests freely, on the condition that they do not interfere with the AC’s efforts to maintain the material conditions of their freedom.

5. The AC is not above ‘channelling’ the interests of principals in ways that decrease the likelihood that they will interfere with the AC’s tasks. For example, when alumni demand a greater say in university governance, they are offered surveys whose influence on university policy is indeterminate, or sports teams whose matches serve as a safety valve for expressing their commitment to alma mater. It amounts to a strategy of ‘bread and circuses’.

6. The AC is also not above pitting academics against each other. Done cleverly, this strategy can be presented as having been generated by the academics themselves. For example, if a natural science faculty claims that its social worth is not sufficiently recognized by the university, the AC can propose that all faculties seek external funding and then, once the natural scientists prove their point, subsequently hold the other faculties to a standard that requires external funding.

I must confess to having mixed feelings about the role of Academic Caesarism in future university governance. The AC is the master of grand gestures that can appear to solve many of his or her institution’s problems in one fell swoop, say, by attracting a large donor who then allows many academics to pursue research without the burden of having to seek external funding. However, this is invariably a Faustian bargain, since the AC’s academic constituency – including some who might benefit directly from the donation – may have concerns about the donor’s own use of the research, even if no formal restrictions are placed on its dissemination. This has been increasingly the case when the donor is a biomedical industry like Monsanto, Novartis, Glaxo-Smith Kline or Astra-Zeneca. Moreover, as point (6) above suggests, to maintain power in internal university struggles, the AC may take the fact that the large donor is attracted to only part of his or her institution as an opportunity to undermine the financial policy of cross-subsidization, i.e. that a certain percentage of any department’s external income is redistributed across the entire university to enable all units to carry out their academic mission. This policy, an application of the principle of ‘epistemic fungibility’, is necessary to maintain the university’s autonomy as discussed in the previous section. However, as was also observed with respect to natural vis-à-vis social scientists, not all parts of the university have an equal spiritual investment in this principle. In this respect, the AC bears a special responsibility for not letting an expedient course of action undermine the integrity of his or her institution.

‘Academic imperialism’ refers to the university’s historic tendency to perform state-like functions, again in keeping with its ‘corporate responsibility’ as a universitas. In some cases, universities have performed quasi-legal functions that would be later incorporated into the state apparatus. Perhaps the oldest is the university’s policing of the behaviour of its staff and students, in loco parentis, in the latter case. However,
equally significant has been the university’s role as a second-order regulatory agency that establishes codes of conduct, quality control of products, and site evaluations of professional and vocational schools, as well as primary and secondary schools. In this function, universities complemented, substituted for, and sometime seeded full-blow national research and education ministries. The universities became more directly involved in regulating the flow of knowledge in society in the 19th century partly as a defensive measure, to protect the institution from the changing market for knowledge that had already displayed some of the characteristics nowadays associated with ‘Mode 2’ knowledge production.

In the case of the UK, the Cambridge theologian and geologist, William Whewell realized that universities were not equipped to compete with the mechanics’ institutes that were training the inventors and entrepreneurs who were front-line contributors to the Industrial Revolution. His solution, which was epitomized in his coinage of the word ‘scientist’ in English around 1840, was for the university to reinvent itself as a second-order institution for certifying credible instruction in the new technoscientific arts. This in turn helped to standardize the knowledge needed for industrial growth. At a curricular level, it meant insinuating theoretical subjects at the core of practical training: engineering required physics, medicine required biology, etc. In many cases this resulted in the assimilation of professional schools within the normative structure of the university. Of course, as was just noted with regard to the threat to cross-subsidization, the problem now is the exact opposite -- that the capitalization of professional schools – especially medicine – will come to dominate the university, potentially skewing the institution’s academic mission.

As the state itself grew, universities were created with the express purpose of reaching into areas that, for various reasons, were difficult to govern. In the USA, whose Constitution explicitly refers to the state’s responsibility to foster (though not necessarily dictate) the growth of knowledge as a means of improving the commonwealth, so-called land-grant colleges extended agricultural and industrial techniques into economically backward regions, and sometimes even exert quasi-juridical powers in local disputes. (However, they also had the unintended consequence of enabling ambitious rural natives to succeed in the cities.) At the same time, these institutions also allowed researchers to experiment on a relatively large-scale with the local wildlife and other natural resources, including people. This particular expression of the unity of teaching and research is often overlooked but became increasingly important in the 20th century. For example, local residents might be given routine or even experimental medical treatment at a low cost, or even free, in exchange for allowing themselves to be treated by a student or the details of their case registered in a database for further study. In this respect, knowledge and governance are literally co-produced in university facilities.

As states have become financially overextended, universities have assumed greater governance functions, going beyond the regulation of healthcare quality, as Whewell might have anticipated, to the actual operation of local hospitals and clinics. Moreover, this tendency has a built-in expansionist character that makes the term ‘imperialist’ appropriate. An entire region may come to be remade in the university’s image as it is populated by ever more academics and the natives themselves become academically trained or otherwise incorporated into the university’s business. One of the most striking cases in point must be Cambridge, Massachusetts, an old industrial city of 100,000 people, which also houses Harvard and MIT. The two universities’ security services are larger and more visible than the city police force – an investment that blurs the distinction between the altruistic and the selfish, as the identity of Cambridge comes to merge with that of Harvard and MIT. And, as with other historic empires, academic imperialism simultaneously
generates good will with many natives and conflict with locally elected officials and interest groups.

What most distinguishes Harvard from other universities is not simply its financial capacity (seven times that of all Oxbridge, if endowment and annual income are combined) but also its enthusiasm for academic imperialism. The locus classicus for a sophisticated defence of this enthusiasm is Beyond the Ivory Tower: Social Responsibilities of the Modern University (1982) by Derek Bok, who was Harvard’s President from 1971 to 1991, a period marked, on the world stage, by the eclipse of the welfare state and other socialist inflected political economies by neo-liberal capitalism. This historical point draws attention to the vacuum of leadership that ‘failing states’ – and I realize the polemical import of this phrase in a first world context -- present as an opportunity for universities to fill. Indeed, as the heroic nature of the Institute for International Development suggests, Harvard has had no qualms about seizing the opportunity.

It would be only a slight caricature of Bok’s thesis to put it this way: Universities should boldly go where states fear to tread. His book describes and justifies, inter alia, Harvard’s multiple constructive engagements even with authoritarian regimes, not always with the complete approval of the US government. Bok defends himself in a classic manner, treating the university’s corporate autonomy as an amplified version of each tenured academic’s autonomy: What is the point of universities enjoying a legally and financially protected status, if not to the test the limits by which knowledge can be advanced and the public good be done? Testing these limits requires dealing with issues and people in situations that others in less secure positions cannot or will not do. Moreover, Bok believes that Harvard attracts the financial support it does precisely because of this adventurous but responsible spirit, which can absorb losses and repair damages when things go wrong. (A point of reference is that 50% of Harvard alumni make donations, compared with 20% of other US alumni and 5% of UK alumni.)

A very serious objection to this otherwise endearing defence of academic imperialism concerns just how comprehensive one might imagine the replacement of states by universities could become. In his 2004 book, State Building, Francis Fukuyama revisits Max Weber’s definition of the state as a legally sanctioned entity whose monopoly on force enables its will to be regularly realized. Can and should universities aspire to this full sense of ‘state-ness’ in a time when existing states are shedding more of their responsibilities? Put another way: What enables a university like Harvard to be as effective as it is? Is it merely that people recognize Harvard’s track record of good works (including the works done by its graduates) and honest dealings? Or is it also because Harvard -- however indirectly -- has the backing of the US government and hence subtly trades on the superpower’s ‘monopoly of force’? This latter possibility is obscured in Bok’s presentation. To be sure, these questions are not new to historians, since analogous questions are regularly raised about the source of the authority exercised by the Roman Catholic Church in the heyday of Christendom.

In summary, we have come full circle. At the start, I argued that universities are losing their autonomy because a weakened state exposes them more directly to the market, where they seem to be coping, so to speak, ‘all too well’. The conversion of this liability into a disguised virtue has been the work of Knowledge Society theorists who dominate much of contemporary science policy discourse – to such an extent that they have generated their own Newspeak. However, I have endeavoured to show that this ‘marketization’ of knowledge production amounts to a form of mass disorganization that threatens the status of knowledge as a public good and
universities as autonomous institutions. After elaborating the conceptions of public good and autonomy at risk, and the need for the university to recover its role as the ‘creative destroyer of social capital’, I finally turned to the somewhat ambiguous but generally positive signals of a way forward offered by Academic Caesarism and Academic Imperialism. But do I have any concrete recommendations? Here are four:

1. We need for analytic purposes a category of para-governmental organizations (PGOs) for entities that mimic and assume governance functions traditionally performed by the state. Universities -- and of course many churches -- deserve to be treated this way. They differ from NGOs in terms of the generality of their remit and the specificity of their relationship to existing states.

2. We need to develop metrics that present universities as producers of more than simply paper (i.e. academic publications, patents, and diplomas) in order to capture the full extent of their governance functions. This will require delving more deeply into the political economy of universities, preferably in comparison with relevant states. For example, one would want to follow the flow of private investment away from states and toward universities. (George Soros’s Open Society Foundation is a visible case in point.) In addition, one would need to model the de facto jurisdiction of the wide-ranging activities in which universities are increasingly involved, since the physical presence of the founding campus is rarely a good indicator of a university’s sphere of influence.

3. We need to develop metrics that integrate the university’s teaching and research functions in cycles of creatively destroying social capital. In practical terms, a discipline’s achievement needs to be more closely tied to the enrolments and career trajectories of its students, especially with an eye to the impact of academic knowledge outside of academia. At the moment, teaching and research tends to be judged by standards that pull against each other, thereby destroying the university’s institutional integrity.

4. We need to encourage degree programmes in academic administration that are sensitive to the distinctive nature of universities, along the lines discussed in this paper. The most important concession to make to Academic Caesarism and Academic Imperialism is that simply to be a career academic is not sufficient to run a university. At the same time, however, it does not follow that anyone competent to run a non-academic organization of a comparable scale and scope will also be competent to run a university. The emerging field of ‘research ethics’ provides a promising rubric for navigating between these two extremes in search of a normative sensibility worth imparting to aspiring academic administrators. The most developed national code of research ethics is Norway’s (http://www.etikkom.no).

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