

# Operationalizing Hope: The Neoliberalization of British Universities in Historico-Philosophical Perspective

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**L**YE, NEWFIELD, AND VERNON (2011) have summarized the symptoms of the neoliberal public university:

- replacement of public funding with private tuition
- replacement of in-state/home students, with fees keyed to prior tax payments, by out-of-state/international students, admitted on ability to pay
- redirection of public funds to finance student loans that support the escalation of tuition fees
- explosion of nonacademic administrative activities, personnel, and costs
- replacement of peer review focused on traditional esteem indicators with external audits focused on output metrics
- privileging of the “practical” over the “liberal” arts on the assumption that they will contribute more to economic growth and competition

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- franchising of degrees overseas, or in global hubs or partners
- proliferation of private online providers of educational services
- casualization of academic labor and the erosion of tenure
- creation of “market-driven” inequities in faculty salaries and reduction of service-based pension packages<sup>1</sup>

In the same volume in which that essay appears, Sarah Amsler traces this neoliberalization in the context of English universities from the Warwick affair of the 1960s to the introduction of the first national tuition fee in 1998. She argues that in English universities neoliberalization has been accomplished through the undermining of social, intellectual, and ethical rationalities in favor of economic and technological ones. According to Amsler, the micropractices of neoliberal governmentality create a “slippage” from autonomous agents toward the “neoliberal subject whose morality is intimately muddled with that of the entrepreneurial institution whose project is a pragmatic one of survival within the terms of government.”<sup>2</sup>

What this feels like to most academics who entered the profession under the agenda and values of liberal education is “depressive disorientation.”<sup>3</sup> This change from what most humanists would see as the liberal, critical to the neoliberal, corporate governance of public higher education (HE) has been accompanied by what could appear to be classism in the United Kingdom and racism in the United States. Public support has declined with increasing numbers of working-class students in the United Kingdom and ethnic minorities in the United States, accompanied, however, in both cases by rhetorics of democratization, affirmative action, and widening access. This essay will describe the immediate political situation of HE in the United Kingdom and then situate it in a much longer time period and philosophical context. It will conclude with some tentative answers to the perennial humanistic question, what is to be done?

## **POLITICS**

In England in 1938, there were 50,000 students (1.7 percent of their age cohort) in university. With scholarships and new campuses following on the Education Act of 1944, this rose to 118,000 undergraduates (4 percent of their age cohort) attending thirty-one universities. The Robbins Report of 1963 is typically credited with enabling the golden age of the best publicly funded university system in the world;<sup>4</sup> by 1970 the sector had reached Robbins’s target of 219,000 (9 percent of the

<sup>1</sup> Colleen Lye, Christopher Newfield, and James Vernon, “Humanists and the Public University,” in “The Humanities and the Crisis of the Public University,” special issue, *Representations* 116, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 1–18, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2011.116.1.1>.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Amsler, “Beyond All Reason: Spaces of Hope in the Struggle for England’s Universities,” in “The Humanities and the Crisis of the Public University,” special issue, *Representations* 116, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 67–68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2011.116.1.62>.

<sup>3</sup> Amsler borrows the term from Alain Badiou, “The Communist Hypothesis,” *New Left Review* 49 (2008): 29–42.

<sup>4</sup> The report recommended immediate expansion of universities; that all Colleges of Advanced Technology should be given the status of universities; that university places should be available to all who were qualified for them by ability and attainment; and that the objectives should be instruction in skills; the promotion of the general powers of the mind so as to produce not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women; to maintain research in balance with teaching; and to transmit a common culture and common standards of citizenship. Committee on Higher Education, *Higher Education: Report of the Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins, 1961–63*, Cmnd. 2154 (September 23, 1963), <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins01.html> (accessed February 2, 2013).

age-group). Between 1971 and 1987, the percentage of young people in HE remained at around 14 percent, largely divided between universities and polytechnics.<sup>5</sup> Under the rhetoric of “fairness” and “access,” Thatcherism turned the polytechnics into universities and centralized them all under the government and quangos (quasi nongovernmental organizations to which the government devolves power) such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England, research councils, and teaching quality assurance agencies. These engineered and simulated competitive environments for the distribution of research funds, (post)graduate students, and undergraduates. This transformation from university autonomy to state control was political in the most direct senses: scrappy tugs-of-war between Conservative versus Labour parties, ministers, university managements, and interested groups such as the Russell Group of elite universities,<sup>6</sup> the 1994 Group of smaller research universities, and the Million+ and Modern Universities of largely teaching-led institutions, including many of the former polytechnics. While the change was engineered in the name of social mobility and equality of opportunity in the universities, the great traditional private schools were left alone, and the class system was left basically intact. While it was enacted in the name of liberalization, there was no real market, only that simulated by increasing bureaucracy. Unlike in North America, in the United Kingdom there were virtually no private universities,<sup>7</sup> and this centralization—the fact that universities were entirely accountable for public money—justified the bureaucracy. By 2010, 35 percent of British-domiciled youth were entering 120 universities, and the coalition government said that it could no longer afford to support them.

A Labour government had introduced national fees in September 1998, with students being required to pay up to £1,000 per annum for tuition. By January 2004, fees had risen to £3,000 per annum, and by 2010/11 to £3,290. In November 2010, the coalition chancellor announced a 40 percent budget cut, including all state funding of humanities, arts, and social science subjects. In light of the cuts, the Browne Review deemed that fees would need to rise to £7,000 to make universities sustainable and recommended a free market. The Liberal Democrats reversed their preelection pledge not to raise fees above the current £3,290 per annum, and in December members of Parliament voted to raise fees to £6,000 beginning in 2012 and up to £9,000 in “exceptional cases.” By July 2011, forty-seven English universities declared that they would charge the full £9,000, fifty-four would charge £8,000–£8,999, thirty-one would charge £7,000–£7,999, and six would charge £5,585–£6,999.<sup>8</sup> It appears, rather mind-bogglingly, that the Tory-dominated government was sufficiently elitist to have assumed that only Oxbridge and London would charge the maximum—and that it was caught out when other universities proved to consider themselves competitive.

- With a low threshold of £6,000 and high of £9,000 from 2012, Minister for Universities and Science David Willetts outlined the policy: payment only after graduation and earning above £21,000, rates at 9 percent of salary
- Debt forgiven after thirty years
- Maintenance loans available for students from families with income up to £60,000.

<sup>5</sup> Figures from James Vernon, “Canary in the Coal Mine,” *THE*, December 1, 2011, 45.

<sup>6</sup> The Russell Group, a self-selected body, “represents 24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector.” See <http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/our-universities/> (accessed February 2, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Virtually, because there was one private university, Buckingham, founded in the 1970s, which was, until recently, marginal to the system.

<sup>8</sup> Figures from Jeevan Vasagar, “Universities Given Go-Ahead for £9000 Tuition Fees,” *Guardian*, July 12, 2011, 10.

Throughout the changes, interested parties debated the social utility of HASS (humanities, arts, social science) subjects, which had been entirely defunded, versus STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine), dividing universities between disciplines presumed to add to economic competitiveness from those presumed not, although the HASS subjects in most universities have the advantage in student numbers and frequently subsidize the sciences.<sup>9</sup> In December 2010, the discipline association—the Council for College and University English—wrote to Willetts, “A week, or slightly more, to remodel the entire basis of teaching in Britain’s Universities? It is not clear to us that the market alone is an effective way of managing higher education. . . . Society will be poorer for a lack of public investment in the arts and humanities; but business will be too.”<sup>10</sup> Willetts replied, “The Government is not cutting the income that HASS will receive. Rather, the money will flow through a different route; via the student rather than the funding council. Classroom based teaching is not as costly as laboratory based subjects and that is why the Government has chosen to focus teaching funding [on] these more expensive courses.”<sup>11</sup> The students, who had gone from no fees in 1997 to £9,000 in 2012, had their own perspective—of *résentiment*: “After the vote [on December 9], HE will almost certainly have changed forever. Not only will the cost of tuition treble, but the principles behind education will never be the same again. Cuts of the magnitude proposed by the coalition are not an economic necessity, but a miserly attempt at imposing an ideological agenda on a vulnerable society.”<sup>12</sup>

After Willetts announced the policy, a political tug-of-war ensued, with ministers’ moves being countered by vice-chancellors’ who were themselves divided by the needs and capacities of their different institutions. Costs of US degrees as high as \$330,000 were circulated in the press, admonishing that US debt from student loans in 2010 surpassed credit card debt.<sup>13</sup> In March, ministers determined a base of £6,000 to cover the costs of humanities students, at which point Exeter became the first university outside the Russell Group to announce that it would charge the maximum £9,000 (it was subsequently admitted to the Russell Group). Ministers countered that universities charging £9,000 must double widening participation budgets.<sup>14</sup> They then threatened a Gosplan (after the Soviet Union in the 1920s) if universities did charge £9,000, threatening to cut places, research, and teaching grants. By April, 20 universities were declaring that they would charge the maximum, and by June, 105 would charge an average of £8,765. The Treasury called this a postponed surtax on itself and forecasted one-third of it unrecoverable. Universities were prohibited from taking extra students, which was interpreted by the sector as higher costs for fewer students, during a recession.

In June, the coalition published its white paper proposing that students with AAB or higher at A-levels could be admitted without limit, and these were calculated to be around 65,000 students. Simon Blackburn pointed out that in the name of “student choice” there would be no extra funding, that this “market” was currently regulated by 550 quangos,<sup>15</sup> and that despite a much-publicized “impact” agenda of the research councils, there was no mention of the academic

<sup>9</sup> See Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Linda Anderson to David Willetts, minister for universities and science, December 6, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Private correspondence to Linda Anderson, February 1, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> “2010: A Sad Year for HE,” *Exepose* (University of Exeter student paper), December 6, 2010, editorial.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., *THE*, February 24, 2011, 32–38.

<sup>14</sup> “Unis Charging £9K Must Widen Access Budgets from £400 to £900,” *THE*, March 28, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> As above, quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organizations to which government devolves power.

impact on students anywhere in the white paper. The president of the Oxford Student Union called it “lipstick on the pig.”<sup>16</sup>

The rush for the unregulated fee-payers, largely international students, and institutional privatization was epitomized by the much excoriated private New College founded by the Birkbeck philosopher AC Grayling, who proposed £18,000 per annum with lectures by media dons, duly attacked by Terry Eagleton as “odious.”<sup>17</sup> BPP (in the Apollo Group that runs the commercial University of Phoenix) bid to run ten universities.<sup>18</sup> The registrar at Exeter anticipated the end of national bargaining for faculty.<sup>19</sup>

By July 2011, 47 out of 123 universities declared that they would charge £9,000 per annum.<sup>20</sup> Government countered that universities might attract AAB students with offers of lower fees. Sir Steve Smith, head of Universities UK, now knighted (careers were made in these heady days), noted that AAB students would become “like gold dust for [a university’s] reputation,” while there would be extra places for lower-ability students at cheaper institutions charging £7,500 or less. Willetts was reported to favor a two-tier system with AAB students recruiting at £9,000 and lower-status universities recruiting less privileged at £7,500. Satires in the press were rampant. Poppleton charges £9,000 so that it will not be considered a third-rate university. “Poppleton can become nationally known as the ideal university for all those with both middle-to-low ability and middle-to-high income: Our Logo: Neither Cheap Nor Elite.”<sup>21</sup> Low-status universities may now compete for weak students, with fees as low as £6,545.

Between state-supported education and markets, during the most significant economic crisis since 1929, British universities were “wandering between two worlds, one dead and the

<sup>16</sup> Simon Blackburn, “Pucker Up, Piglets,” *THE*, July 7, 2011, 34–39.

<sup>17</sup> Terry Eagleton, “Nausea Wells to the Throat at the Thought of This Elitism,” *Guardian*, June 7, 2011, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Jessica Shepherd, “Private Firm in Talks to Run 10 Universities for Profit,” *Guardian*, June 22, 2011, front page.

<sup>19</sup> John Morgan, “Exeter Pay Move May Herald National Divide,” *Guardian*, July 28, 2011, 6–8.

<sup>20</sup> Jeevan Vasagar, “Unis May Buy Top A-Level Students with Offers of Lower Fees,” *Guardian*, August 1, 2011, 13. See Business, Industry and Science (BIS) White Paper 11944, “Students at the Heart of the System,” <http://www.scribd.com/doc/58879994/11-944-WP-Students-at-Heart>:

We will make around 85,000 student places contestable between institutions in 2012/13. We will allow unconstrained recruitment of the roughly 65,000 high-achieving students, scoring the equivalent of AAB or above at A-Level and will create a flexible margin of about 20,000 places to reward universities and colleges who combine good quality with value for money and whose average tuition charge (after waivers) is at or below £7,500 per year. We will also expand the flexibility for employers and charities to offer sponsorship for individual places outside of student number controls, provided they do not create a cost liability for Government.

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We will remove the regulatory barriers that are preventing a level playing field for higher education providers of all types, including further education colleges and other alternative providers. This will further improve student choice by supporting a more diverse sector, with more opportunities for part-time or accelerated courses, sandwich courses, distance learning and higher-level vocational study. It will also lead to higher education institutions concentrating on high-quality teaching, and staff earning promotion for teaching ability rather than research alone.

**10**

We will make it easier for new providers to enter the sector. We will simplify the regime for obtaining and renewing degree-awarding powers so that it is proportionate in all cases. We will review the use of the title “university” so there are no artificial barriers against smaller institutions. It used to be possible to set up a new teaching institution teaching to an external degree. Similarly, it was possible to set exams for a degree without teaching for it as well.

<sup>21</sup> “The Poppletonian,” *THE*, August 4, 2011, 68.

other powerless to be born.”<sup>22</sup> As this goes to press, the economic slump that began in 2007 is predicted to last through 2017, with 0 percent growth and the economy of 2017 to be down 13.9 percent from what was originally anticipated. There are currently around 56,000 AAB students predicted to provide the market for British universities. Currently, ten universities take in 40 percent of all AABs. Public funding is currently at 14 percent, with the expectation that it will go down to 10 percent in the near future.<sup>23</sup>

As of summer 2012, the number of United Kingdom–born applicants for autumn 2012 had fallen by 15,000, with a 10 percent drop in England.<sup>24</sup> HASS subjects were down 7 percent with STEM subjects down between 1 and 4 percent. Subjects allied to medicine—degree courses leading to lucrative professional careers—however, were up 2 percent.<sup>25</sup> A squeezed middle of universities, which neither attracted the highest-performing students nor offered low fees (“neither cheap nor elite”), suffered.<sup>26</sup> One week before his 2012 Liberal Democrat party conference, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg publicly apologized for the no rise in fees promise that he had not been able to keep, leading to front-page news and numerous comic animations on Twitter and YouTube.<sup>27</sup>

## HISTORY

*Wandering between two worlds, one dead and the other powerless to be born*  
—Matthew Arnold, school inspector and cultural critic (1855)

The neoliberalization of British universities has deeper roots than the 1970s. In the nineteenth century, education was liberalized through multiple modes and institutions:

- Workhouses, industrial schools
- Self-help
- Bible and Sunday Schools
- Ragged Schools
- Owenite Halls of Science
- Mechanics Institutes
- Adult Night Schools
- Women’s and Men’s Colleges
- University Extension Classes
- Public Schools
- Board Schools

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<sup>22</sup> From Matthew Arnold’s “Lines from the Grand Chartreuse” (1855).

<sup>23</sup> Vice-chancellor’s presentation, December 16, 2011, University of Exeter.

<sup>24</sup> Jeevan Vasagar, “University Applications Slump as Fee Rises Put A-Level Students Off,” *Guardian*, October 24, 2011, 5; Jessica Shepherd, “British-Born University Applicants Down by 15 Percent after Hike in Fees,” *Guardian*, November 29, 2011, 2; Jeevan Vasagar, “Universities Feel Squeeze of Higher Fees as Applications Fall,” *Guardian*, July 10, 2012, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Jeevan Vasagar, “School Leavers Still Keen on University Life but Soaring Tuition Fees Hit Mature Students Hard,” *Guardian*, January 31, 2012, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Jeevan Vasagar, “Slump in UK Student Numbers ‘a Wake-Up Call’ for Universities,” *Guardian*, September 7, 2012, 6.

<sup>27</sup> “This Is Not Easy but I Am Sorry: Clegg’s Apology for Fees Pledge,” *Guardian*, September 20, 2012, 1.



We are accustomed to calling these “advances.” The masses excluded by poverty and gender were increasingly included. The grip of organized religion was relaxed. Fees were standardized. Ages were streamed. Higher education was more ambitious and accessible: new universities were established from 1826 with the University of London; women’s colleges were founded from 1848 (Queens) followed by Oxbridge (1869–93); science and modern languages were introduced after 1870; 1854, 1856, and 1877 Parliamentary acts abolished religious tests and opened Oxbridge scholarships to competition. After 1880, elementary education was compulsory for seven- to ten-year-olds. In 1899, the Board of Education was established and the school-leaving age raised to twelve. By 1890, there was a widespread conviction that public education was the foundation for a democratic society.

This was the first liberalization. The cost of such progress in education, the dialectic of enlightenment, was systematization and centralization. Tony Blair’s “fact” in 1996 that economic success and social cohesion were founded on “education, education, education” was operationalized as policy. Dinah Birch, in *Our Victorian Education*, has critiqued the “quantifiable outcomes” that have ensued. “Young people will not succeed unless they can take risks, and make mistakes,” she writes, and they are now actively prevented from doing so:

It is now widely believed that the quality of our education is guaranteed by competition—pupil must be measured against pupil, school against school, university against university. And yet we all understand that education cannot work entirely in those terms, for it must begin and end within the privacy of the developing mind. . . . Scrutiny through competition was intended to protect children against the complacency of teachers and schools. . . . But this builds defeat of a corrosive kind into the process, for the construction of league tables means that there will always be as many losers as winners, as many below-average schools . . . as better. . . . At the same time, constant assessment of children’s achievement tries to ensure that at no point do they fall away from a trajectory of sustained success. No risks can be taken. Again, the aim is generous, but the result is impoverishing. Children must encounter the possibility and sometimes the reality of failure before they can know what it means to succeed. This . . . is wholly different from the demoralizing effect of attending a school that has been formally labelled . . . inferior . . . in which no pupil or teacher could take pride.<sup>28</sup>

Birch is a well-known scholar of the Victorian sage and critic John Ruskin, who famously said, “You do not educate a man by telling him what he knew not, but by making him what he was not.” So as educators in the neoliberal system, what are we making?

For my book *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920*, I read hundreds of formal and informal, published and unpublished autobiographies from under- and working-class to middle-class and aristocratic writers. In chapter 5, “The Making of Middle-Class Identities: School and Family,” I discussed the very large literature from the British public schools. These memoirs fall largely into two groups: that of the majority of the boys, who matriculated in the system and went on to manage Britain and the empire, and that of a small proportion of artists and writers, who resisted the system and went on to devote themselves to culture (now, under globalization, called “soft power”). What the mass of boys learned, in Foucauldian terms, was discipline, not knowledge; surveillance, not learning; *pouvoir*, not *savoir*. They learned how

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<sup>28</sup> Dinah Birch, *Our Victorian Education* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 9, 128. See also Dinah Birch, “Victorian Values,” *Victoriographies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 36–50.

to maintain power within a hierarchical structure of relationships. These boys internalized the mechanisms of power in the form of wholehearted conformity to the “team” and participated in common discourses of the school and what they called “afterlife.” In the other group, the boys who could not adjust to the system fell into a kind of tragic individualism and isolated antagonism to the status quo; most of them became creative writers.

In understanding this educational dynamic, I employed Roberto Mangabeira Unger’s continuum of social relations, with fixed hierarchies in stable relations on one pole, in which everyone knows his or her place and conforms to expectations, and, on the other, unstable social relations, risk, longing, desire, fear.<sup>29</sup> On the first pole—call it the right—people seek security, stability, and fixed social relations, and on the left, people seek risk and nonhierarchical relations and expose themselves to vulnerability. Birch’s description of the managed school and university, and our experience, suggest that systems currently conspire to prevent risk or vulnerability and rather tend to discipline young people—including young faculty—in the broadest sense into conformity with the status quo, “aligning” their personal desires with the goals of the institution.<sup>30</sup>

## PHILOSOPHY

There is a long philosophical tradition that defines the human in terms of the capacity for self-transformation in a dialectic between nature/biology and culture/technology. Linguist and cognitive scientist George Lakoff has argued in the educational context for the importance of framing, or the neural structures we think with:

All thought is physical, carried by neural circuitry, and the meaning of every word is defined in terms of the frames that structure our thought. All of this matters for politics. The more a neural circuit is activated, the stronger it gets. Because every word we say, hear, or read is defined in terms of some frame-circuit, repetition of those words strengthens those frame-circuits. At some point, those frames become permanent. Those permanent frames constitute a conceptual system, a brain structure necessary for understanding. If the facts don’t fit the frames, they will be ignored. And if you negate a frame, you activate it—as when Nixon said, “I am not a crook.”<sup>31</sup>

Philosophical anthropology, from Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx/Engels, and Nietzsche to Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner in the twentieth century, understood this essentially human dialectic of biology and culture.<sup>32</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder’s *On the Origin of*

<sup>29</sup> Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 171–219. For Unger’s “moral idyll,” see 189–94. For further treatment of the moral idyll, see Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 146–75.

<sup>30</sup> “Alignment” is the technical term with which Human Resources in Personal Development Reviews assess personal career goals in relation to institutional objectives.

<sup>31</sup> George Lakoff, “The Brain, the Mind, and the Threat to Public Universities,” in “The Humanities and the Crisis of the Public University,” special issue, *Representations* 116, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 185, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2011.116.1.185>.

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, trans. and ed. Clement Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1940); Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989); Arnold Gehlen, *Man: His Nature and Place in the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 66–126; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968); Max Scheler, *Man’s Place in Nature*, trans. Hans



*Language* (1772) held that “Man” is by far inferior to other animals in intensity and reliability of instincts and does not have what in many species we regard as innate artifactive skills and drives. The narrower the sphere of the animal, he wrote, the keener its artifactive skills and drives. “The spider weaves with the skill of Minerva, but all its skill is woven into this narrow spider space. That is its world. How marvelous is this insect, and how narrow the sphere of its activity.”<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the more detached a species is from its environment, such as humankind, the weaker the artifactive skills. Unlike the precisely directed and perfectly achieved work of the spider and the bee, there is no single work of humanity in which its actions are determined and faultless. Yet the doctrine of Enlightenment perfectibility held that if humankind’s senses were inferior in acuity, it was precisely this shortcoming that gave human senses the advantage of freedom. Because they are not senses for one spot, they become generalized senses for the universe. Uniquely, humankind enjoys the freedom of exercise in many things and hence the freedom of altering itself indefinitely. “Since humankind does not fall blindly in any particular spot and does not lie blind in it, it learns to stand free, to find for itself a sphere of self-reflection. . . . Call this entire disposition of human forces rationality, reason, or reflection, it is the total arrangement of all human forces in a sensuous, cognitive, volitional nature.”<sup>34</sup>

The developmental niche of nature, culture, and technology defines “human nature.” What is universal is our biological, cultural, and technological evolution and our exceptional ability to transform nature through our use of technology, which in turn transforms us. In contemporary terms of genomic ecology, mutual effects go all the way down into the gene and up to the stratosphere.

Twenty-first-century views of social ontology, from Weber to Lacan to Searle, confirm this same malleability. In Searle’s terms, animals become human when they begin to assign status functions: that is,  $x$  is  $y$  in context  $c$ .<sup>35</sup> Henceforth, reasons for action are not based on brute inclination; rather, language creates powers beyond semantics. A mountain range is a hunk of earth until it becomes a border enclosing a state; a rock is a lump of ore until it is exchanged as money. What follows from these status attributions are property, marriage, political formations, legal and economic institutions—all human social relations.  $X$  is  $Y$  in context  $C$  defines human society.

From these brief sallies into Western philosophy, we may conclude the following. (1) The enhanced use of technology—most recently, web-based and media—in human niche construction distinguishes humans from other animals. (2) Humans are the (most) technological animals. (3) We are determined by both biology and will to make our own histories through interaction with natural, social, and technological environments. (4) We are exceptionally malleable and can be trained to do many things, no matter how worthless or destructive. Yet reflection on this natural history of change and difference tells us that things can and will change. So hope is the natural consequence of the genetic underdetermination of the human phenotype.

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Meyerhoff (New York: Noonday Press, 1961); John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *On the Origin of Language*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (New York: Ungar, 1967), 104.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>35</sup> John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For Lacan, see Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” (1949), in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 1–7.

**FUTURES: OPERATIONALIZING HOPE**

*There is hope, but not for us.*

—Franz Kafka (1937)<sup>36</sup>

What is to be done? The undermining of autonomous, ethical, and political systems in favor of totalizing neoliberal markets is achieved by way of the language of fairness and widening access. To take just one obvious example, in the name of openness and access Web 2.0 is enacting increasing control by blurring boundaries between public education and markets. Digital humanities (DH) is the only way that universities can teach more on less funding. E-learning is commercialized and globalized. Without autonomous universities with their breathing spaces of seminars and critique, online teaching will increasingly operate under the conditions of the market. Under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, electronic courseware became “content” and faculty became consultants or “content experts,” that is, just one member of the DH team.<sup>37</sup> More significant members might be the marketing officers who process students as customers and education as product to be assessed in terms of “like” (as in approval tick boxes on the web). It is not that markets are bad, it is just that, as Raymond Williams said about the Enclosures, people need breathing spaces from them; they should not be totalizing.

As a possible way forward, the sociologist Randy Martin proposes the figure of the Derivative, meaning that which predicts or leverages value before it comes to pass, as in the fragmented, administrative data-massaging, league-table spin that has become so central to HE.<sup>38</sup> Traditional markers of academic distinction—reputation based on research, prestigious appointments, and visitorships, academy membership, teaching awards, service to the profession, and so forth earning the respect of one’s peers—have been overtaken by internally established criteria of worth directly beneficial to the competitive university: research income, league-table criteria, compliance or alignment with the university’s competitive drive in a global HE market. Martin proposes that rather than lament the loss of the liberal values of the humanities, we inside the academy deploy a “Derivative logic,” meaning “the ability to discern how attributes from one thing appear elsewhere, how seemingly modest interventions get leveraged, how future values are registered in the present.”<sup>39</sup> Martin urges academics to stop eschewing administration, but to learn how to leverage our own future values in the present.

Martin’s Derivative logic operationalizes hope: it puts into the present equation of status indicators numerous predictions, calculations, visualizations of future status. It values change not for its own sake but for the predicted status that change will bring.  $X$  is  $Y$  in context  $C$ : if we, as academic-administrators, can “discern how attributes from one thing appear elsewhere, how

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<sup>36</sup> Statement to Max Brod, quoted in Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, trans. G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1960).

<sup>37</sup> See Suzanne Guerlac, “Humanities 2.0: E-Learning in the Digital World,” in “The Humanities and the Crisis of the Public University,” special issue, *Representations* 116, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 102–27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2011.116.1.102>.

<sup>38</sup> Randy Martin, “Taking an Administrative Turn: Derivative Logics for a Recharged Humanities,” in “The Humanities and the Crisis of the Public University,” special issue, *Representations* 116, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 156–76 (definition on 159–60), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2011.116.1.156>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

seemingly modest interventions get leveraged, how future values are registered in the present,” we might be able to affect the system from within.

For example, within the British context, already neoliberal drivers have resulted in enormous increases in research income for the humanities, and, more importantly for us, the raising to consciousness among academics that research should be externally facing as well as engaged in internal disciplinary debates. Collaborative interdisciplinary research programs are now routinely established in Science, Technology, and Culture; Global Uncertainties; Medical Humanities; Sustainability and Environmental Change; Identities and Beliefs; and Societal and Lifestyle Shifts.<sup>40</sup> In teaching, undergraduate courses are now routinely team-taught on global and interdisciplinary topics. The neoliberal PhD is now completed in four to five years: one year master’s plus three years to submission and one year to completion. These are our derivatives, the leveraged but positive ways that we have inserted our own research and teaching goals (collaboration rather than competitive individualism, respect for diversity, environmental sustainability) into a repulsive system. At the very least, all faculty within the university must stop dividing HASS and STEMM subjects lest we be conquered through the division.

To conclude with a critical theorist who understood, as well as anyone, framing as the physical basis of human understanding: “Two things never cease to fill the mind with admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry skies above me and the moral law within me.”<sup>41</sup> For Kant, reflection on the starry skies (nature) reinforced the sublimity of the moral law (culture). As educators, we should act in such a way that our actions can be the basis of general action and neither abandon the sciences to the market nor the humanities to elites. A

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<sup>40</sup> These are typical research themes funded by British and European research councils, now imitated in strategic documents of universities throughout the United Kingdom.

<sup>41</sup> Inscribed on Immanuel Kant’s tombstone, from his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788).