

Afterword: monstrous markets – neo-liberalism, populism and the demise of the public university

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There is a crisis in the idea of the university. It has emerged from the application of neo-liberal policies which have reduced the public values of the university to instrumental purposes. This poses a considerable threat to liberal education (Brown, 2015, Collini, 2012; Ginsberg, 2011; Holmwood, 2011; Nussbaum, 2010). In the UK, government ministers and policy advisers seek a ‘cultural’ change directing academic research and student recruitment towards the market and in service of a global knowledge economy. There are few dissenting voices among those with institutional responsibility for the academy – namely, its vice-chancellors and senior representatives. Vice-chancellors have not spoken out to protect the university’s wider public values, and few learned societies have either. Senior university personnel have mostly been interested in maintaining funding, especially in the context of the politics of austerity after the financial crisis of 2008 (Smith, 2011). Learned societies and research councils have had similar concerns about funding, and have been concerned to establish the utility of research, especially in the context of the impact agenda. Dissent comes mainly from some individual academics and from students. The latter have experienced a dramatic rise in their costs alongside diminishing labour market opportunities, notwithstanding an emphasis on their private investment in human capital as a justification of the reduction in the public funding of undergraduate education.

In part, this quiescence itself derives from a mode of governance specific to neo-liberalism which operates through the co-production of policy objectives. This involves consultation with those affected by

proposed policies and with interests in the outcome, generally called the 'stakeholders'. Consultation might appear to be an *evidence-based* process with consensus as its aim, but, in truth, interests are frequently not reconcilable and what the parties put forward is *interest-based* evidence. In this context, government acts as mediator of such evidence, which it collates and selects according to its own policy objectives while managing alternative views. At the same time, stakeholders also lobby government independently of the consultation process. In this way, consultation operates in the interest of the most powerful stakeholders and requires wider publics (who might bear the consequences of the policies) to be represented by a 'stakeholder' or accept the fiction that it is the government itself that represents their interests (for example, as 'taxpayers', or as the guardian of the interests of students as 'consumers').

In the case of recent university reforms in the UK – which have shifted from direct public funding of undergraduate higher education to what is primarily fee-based funding via a system of publicly supported student loans – the government retains the ability to determine the revenue received by universities and so can maintain compliance from vice-chancellors and representative bodies, while opening the sector to for-profit providers and allowing the title of 'university' to single-subject, teaching-only entities. In this way, despite the UK government proposing the most fundamental changes to higher education, this has occurred with little active debate or challenge to the underlying market logic that guides those changes. The university is under threat, but all universities are busy 'co-producing' these changes and have passed their voices into the dominant neo-liberal discourse.

The problem of populism

The place of the university within public culture is not separate from the fate of public culture itself. To some extent, the crisis in the idea of the university reflects a crisis of public culture, one that has become most evident in the rise of the 'far right' and 'populism'. The UK referendum vote to leave the European Union ('Brexit') and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States are each widely understood as involving a 'populist' rejection of 'élites' and 'economic globalisation'. It is significant that each has taken place in a country

where neo-liberal public policy has been paramount. However, the rise of authoritarian populist regimes elsewhere (for example, in Turkey and India) and of far-right political parties having increasing political influence (for example, the National Front in France, Sweden Democrats, and the Freedom Party of Austria) indicates that ‘populism’ is a more general issue. It has also been reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for intensified ideological control over universities (Philips, 2016), including, presumably, the sixty-four ‘branch’ operations of transnational higher-education institutions currently operating in China, of which Nottingham University Ningbo is one (He, 2016).

Oxford Dictionaries (2016) has marked this new political mood by announcing online that ‘post-truth’ was its ‘word of the year’, ‘denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’. This followed a statement in a television interview by the then British Minister for Justice and Vote Leave campaigner, Michael Gove, that he thought that ‘the British Public have had enough of experts’. Where does this leave the university? The trade magazine of the profession in the UK, *Times Higher Education*, has suggested that the very intellectual character of universities is anti-populist and, thus, that they contribute to a polarisation of politics rather than being able to moderate the effects of such a polarisation (Morgan, 2016). Indeed, the report commented that ‘a *THE* poll before the vote found that 88.5 per cent of university staff intended to vote Remain and 9.5 per cent Leave. That was just a shade out of line with the actual UK result, which saw 48.1 per cent vote Remain and 51.9 per cent vote Leave’ (Morgan, 2016: n.p.).

The article also suggested that universities might ‘reposition themselves as the voices of moderation. In other words, as the populists head off to extremes, some believe that US universities should move more towards the centre politically – or rightwards from where they currently are – in an attempt to “depolarise” their relationship to wider society’ (Morgan, 2016). If universities, including those in the UK, do not do so, the article warned, ‘they will clearly need to tread very carefully lest they portray themselves as part of the global elite resented by populist supporters. Otherwise, they will only intensify the risks to their funding, their culture and their educative missions’ (Morgan, 2016).

However, this is a poor understanding of populism and the problems it poses for universities. As Müller (2016) has recently argued, it is the very nature of populism to represent itself as speaking for the 'people', with pluralism seen as 'bad faith'. There can be no 'de-polarisation' where populism is identified as one of the polar positions, since it admits no compromise. In this way, according to Müller, populism is both a product of representative democracy and, at the same time, a denial of democracy since it depends on 'othering' those it opposes as reflecting the interests of deracinated cosmopolitan 'elites' and without a legitimate voice in 'democratic' debate.¹

In both the USA and the UK, 'populism' is also a form of 'nativism' manifest in calls to 'take back our country', with its hostility both to external powers that might limit the scope of action and to those within the nation who are not seen as properly part of it. In both cases, those who are not part of the 'we' are racialised minorities, immigrants and what Enoch Powell in the UK context once chillingly called the 'immigrant descended'. In the UK, Dame Louise Casey (2016), in a recent review into 'Opportunity and Integration', has called for migrants to 'swear an oath of allegiance' on arrival into the UK, while schools, under the Prevent agenda, are obliged to teach 'British values'.

Danielle Allen (2004) has made a similar argument to Müller's about the problematic idea of popular sovereignty that is frequently represented as a republican ideal. For example, incorporated in the US Declaration of Independence and reproduced daily in US schools is the Pledge of Allegiance to 'one Nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all'. The idea of 'one Nation indivisible' implicitly passes all voices into one, but what would happen, Allen asks, were we to propose instead an allegiance to the '*whole* Nation indivisible'? The *whole* nation would be understood as a nation of parts – that is, as differentiated – and an obligation towards indivisibility would be an obligation towards difference and its recognition.

What does this mean for the nature and culture of the university; that is, for the role of higher education in the public life of a

1 As newly appointed post-Brexit UK Prime Minister Theresa May put it (buying into the populist mood), 'if you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere' (May, 2016).

nation? We shall suggest that one aspect of this role must be the facilitation of inclusive democratic public debate. Nor could this be understood simply as providing the knowledge that might form the evidence base for public policy where the latter is directed at policymakers rather than at wider publics, as argued by the Campaign for Social Science (2015). Morgan suggests that there is a risk that universities will be perceived as aligned with a global elite and that this might cost them their funding. However, part of the problem is that universities have put their cultural and educative mission at risk precisely because of their concern with funding, while ignoring how the conditions of that funding have been tied to a change in their mission.

In this afterword, we will draw on the work of John Dewey, especially his *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), to suggest that populism is a problem of 'publics' and the institutions in the public sphere that support them. In brief, we shall argue that neo-liberalism represents an attempt to replace publics with markets, a process that is facilitated by the privatisation of public institutions, including that of the university itself. This 'hollowing out' of the public sphere is precisely what creates the space for populism. Neo-liberalism requires a strong interventionist state on behalf of markets, but it also requires democratic legitimation. This makes populism an ideology of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) supplementary to that of the market – one that is mobilised against the public sphere, which has come to be characterised as dominated by liberal elites, notwithstanding that the promotion of the market itself operates to widen inequalities.

The neo-liberal knowledge regime

Changing inequalities are particularly significant for universities, but this is something that has been relatively neglected. As Clark Kerr, architect of the California 'Master Plan' (initiated at the same time as the Robbins reforms in the UK in the 1960s), argued, the rise of mass higher education and public funding would make the university increasingly subject to political scrutiny (Committee on Higher Education, 1963; Kerr, 2001 [1963]). The expansion of public higher education was not a simple extension of arguments that had justified public secondary education and its compulsory nature. The latter was

universal in character and, therefore, could be represented as a 'social right' that secured a public benefit; namely, a common education for citizens, a benefit recognised even by Milton Friedman (1962). Participation in public higher education was not intended to be universal, merely to be expanded (in the UK case, closer to the level already attained in the US). In this context, there was potentially the issue that higher education secured a private benefit for those who graduated from it, when compared with those that did not.

At the same time, no matter how much participation might be widened, it would be likely to attract proportionally more of its participants from socially advantaged backgrounds. However, at the time, there was a general expectation of a shift from an industrial to a post-industrial, knowledge-based, economy, where there would be increased demand for educated labour and a general 'adaptive upgrading' of all jobs. Indeed, this was evident in the way in which a secular trend in the reduction of inequalities was regarded as 'institutionalised' across most Western societies, even if the level of inequalities was significantly greater in some (the US) than in others (Sweden, or the UK up until the 1980s). In effect, this was endorsed as 'fact' by Kuznets (1953) and his 'curve' demonstrating how declining income inequality emerged alongside economic growth.

Public spending on higher education, then, could be justified in terms of its wider benefits; even if an individual's educational attainments and preferences did not take him or her to university, there would be a benefit from the greater integration of higher education and the economy. The economic growth to which expanded higher education and research would contribute was understood to be *inclusive*, associated with what was perceived to be a secular decline in inequality. This also included changes in what might be regarded as the 'status order' of employment relations, as the terms of the labour contract became more similar across manual and non-manual work, and rights previously enjoyed by non-manual workers were extended to all employees. This idea of inclusive economic growth was integral to the idea of an emerging 'knowledge society' – as distinct from a 'knowledge economy' – and, in the telling phrase used by Clark Kerr (2001 [1963]), what had emerged was a 'multiversity' meeting multiple functions – direct economic functions, certainly, but also wider social functions, including amelioration and democratisation. In other words,

higher education was part of a wider 'moral economy' underpinned by social rights (Holmwood and Bhambra, 2012).

It is precisely this 'moral economy' that is called into question by neo-liberalism, and not simply in terms of seeking to deny the existence of social rights. Wider neo-liberal policies have given rise to widening inequalities and reductions in taxation, especially progressive taxation. Moreover, the deregulation of labour markets has created new forms of labour contract and a new polarisation between 'good' and 'bad' jobs (Brown et al., 2011; Kalleberg, 2011). The function of higher education to support economic growth remains, but inclusive economic growth is no longer a government objective. In this context, government policies to reduce taxation put pressure on university funding, while widening inequality increased calls for the beneficiaries of higher education to pay. In the UK this was first introduced as a fee contribution by students alongside direct public funding in 1999, following the Dearing Review of 1997, but became wholly fee based for arts, humanities and social sciences in 2010 following the financial crisis of 2008 and cuts to government spending under the mantra of austerity.

The irony is that just as the argument that it is right that students should pay fees because they are private beneficiaries was being put forward, the opposite argument was made with regard to research. The UK Government put forward an 'impact' agenda, where all publicly funded research should be undertaken with specific 'beneficiaries' in mind. Here, the argument was that publicly funded research should show a direct benefit, but the beneficiary *should not pay*. In part, the purpose of the impact agenda was to shorten the time from 'idea to income' or the research-development cycle.

It might seem that this was a simple continuation of the perceived function of research for economic growth that was described by Kerr (2001 [1963]). However, the context is significantly different. First, as we have suggested, economic growth that is publicly funded is no longer inclusive in its benefits (see also Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2015). Second, the neo-liberal policies directed towards wider corporate governance have emphasised share-holder value, which has made companies more concerned with profits in the short term. In consequence, private investment in research and development has fallen, such that the UK has moved from having

one of the largest investments (as a proportion of GDP) among OECD countries in the 1960s to now having one of the smallest (Jones, 2013). Finally, the emphasis on delivering the benefits of research over a shorter time has altered the balance between privately funded and publicly funded research within the research–development ecosystem, and undermined the longer-term and more fundamental benefits that publicly funded research can achieve (see Mazzucato, 2011).

Of course, the UK Government's impact agenda is wider than simple commercial benefits, however pronounced the latter are within it. It also includes impact on public policy and other aspects of social well-being. What is common across commercial and non-commercial impacts, however, is that impact has to be demonstrated with specific beneficiaries and that the strong recommendation of research councils is that this be done through 'co-production' of the research with them (that is, including likely beneficiaries at all stages of the research, including that of its design).

'Co-production' as a term derives from the work of Gibbons and his colleagues (1994), involving a distinction between 'mode 1' knowledge directed at academic audiences and 'mode 2' knowledge directed at non-academic audiences (see also chapter 6). The latter is frequently interdisciplinary applied-problem-solving knowledge, and the idea of co-production is used to capture the 'larger process in which discovery application and use are closely integrated' (Gibbons et al., 1994: 46). Gibbons and his colleagues did not anticipate that mode 2 knowledge would supplant mode 1 knowledge, but it is clear that the impact agenda promotes mode 2 knowledge.² Nor did they consider the wider environment in which co-production took place; that is, from the perspective of its beneficiaries.

It is clear that the beneficiaries are commercial organisations, government bodies (at national or local levels) or civil society actors (non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charities, etc.). We have already suggested that neo-liberal public policy has the effect of hollowing out the public sphere. This takes place in two ways. The first

2 The argument for mode 2 knowledge has been extended by Etzkowitz (2008), and the idea of the 'triple helix' of interdependencies between government, industry and university.

is by the direct privatisation of public bodies, the second by recommending that charitable bodies and NGOs be involved in the provision of services. The latter also includes charities and other voluntary associations operating together with for-profit organisations. The emphasis on the co-production of research is part of a wider neo-liberal project that includes the binding of the beneficiaries into government policy by the fact that they are frequently dependent on government for their own funding.³

Tying civil-society organisations to government objectives involves a deformation of the public sphere that constitutes the context for the rise of populism. It is something in which universities are directly implicated. For example, the Academy of Social Sciences drew up a report under the auspices of its Campaign for Social Science – significantly, entitled *The Business of People* – to campaign for public funding of social science, prior to the 2015 election. This was the election that included a Conservative manifesto commitment to a referendum on membership of the European Union. The report was preceded by the widespread news coverage of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) with its depiction of widening social inequality. Concerns about inequality were also raised in OECD reports.

3 This became particularly evident following new Cabinet Office rules to prevent bodies in receipt of government funding from engaging in lobbying. This followed intense lobbying from a neo-liberal think tank, the Institute for Economic Affairs, against what it called 'sock puppets' (Snowdon, 2012). The action was directed against charities like Save the Children, Action on Smoking and Health, and Alcohol Concern. Universities were alarmed that they might be included and that the proposals were antithetical to the impact agenda. Universities were subsequently declared exempt and the proposals watered down. However, the implications for civil-society organisations and the vulnerability of their funding should they be perceived to be too politically active in pursuing their remit is clear. This is explicitly recognised by a report for the National Coalition of Independent Action: 'The force of entering the welfare market, increasingly as bid candy, has had disastrous consequences for voluntary services and their ability to respond to community needs. The capitulation by many in the voluntary sector, including its national and local leadership bodies, to these government agendas has done much damage to the ability of voluntary organisations to work with and represent the interests of individuals and communities under pressure. Privatisation and co-option into the market is driving down the conditions of staff working in voluntary services, diminishing their role in advocacy and jeopardising the safety of people using such services' (Waterson, 2014: 2).

Yet, structured social inequality is not mentioned at all in the report, nor is race and ethnicity, nor any other research on social structure. These profoundly affect the circumstances of people's lives, yet all the report has to say about them is of their derived consequences in terms of people's attitudes and behaviours and how those may be a problem for policymakers and practitioners in attaining their objectives. The report is overwhelmingly instrumental and designed to appeal to the 'Treasury, ministers, MPs and policy makers' (Campaign for Social Science, 2015: 'Foreword'). Its focus on policymakers and practitioners is unremitting: 'Advancing and applying science depends on profits, policies, markets, organisations and attitudes' (2015: 'Executive summary'). The attitudes of the public, on the other hand, are presented as potential obstacles to policy objectives. For example, it argues that 'study of public values and attitudes is vital, too, especially when innovation prompts uncertainties and concerns, as with genetically modified crops or shale gas extraction' (2015: 6). And it warns that 'without a better grasp of people, technological advances may be frustrated, or blocked, and fail to realise their potential' (2015: 5).

In short, a report on the value of the social sciences produced in the context of a general election made no reference at all to problems of inequality and no reference to their contribution to the facilitation of democratic debate. Instead, it was directed entirely at what populist rhetoric described as the 'political establishment' and its 'experts'.

The problem of democratic knowledge

As we suggested earlier, one of the problems in current understandings of the democratic significance of the university is that its role as an institution in the public sphere is weakly expressed (see also Holmwood, 2016b). In addition, government is allowed to stand as representing the 'public' and, in consequence, its policies constitute a working definition of the public interest. It is precisely these understandings that have been exposed by the rise of populism and are in need of reformulation.

We have also suggested that an alternative formulation can be found in the work of John Dewey, and especially his book on *The*

Public and Its Problems (1927). Significantly, for our purposes, the book was written in a similar context of an intense debate on the nature of the relation between expertise and democracy. Dewey was responding to the argument of Walter Lippmann (1925) that increased social complexity undermines the possibility of democracy being able to approximate the forms endorsed by standard liberal accounts of representative democracy. The public, for Lippmann, was increasingly ill equipped to make the sort of judgements attributed to them within democratic theory.

In consequence, he argues that the public is a 'phantom category' (that is, something that functions only in theories of democracy and has little real substance). For Lippmann, what Dewey came to call the 'eclipse of the public' is a necessary consequence of the complexity of modern societies that increasingly requires organised expertise of various kinds. In consequence, 'expert opinion' would replace 'public opinion' and democracy would necessarily be attenuated. Lippmann anticipated that expert opinion would operate in conjunction with the state and economic corporations and, in effect, would be 'co-produced' by them. However, it is significant that Lippmann also prefigured what would become another part of the neo-liberal solution; namely, the shift of decisions from the political sphere to the economic sphere, or from the state to the market.⁴

Dewey noted that the 'eclipse of the public' is prefigured in the very idea of the market economy, in which decisions by (consumer) sovereign individuals are perceived to be efficiently aggregated through impersonal market exchanges. This is held to be in contrast to their inefficient aggregation by collective political decision making through the agency of the state. In other words, according to Dewey, the idea of a political realm in which the public expresses its democratic will is already severely compromised by the liberal distrust of 'group', or collective, actions, and the idea that it is only the market that can properly express the general interest.

Dewey proposed to rescue the public from its eclipse by market and expert opinion alike by a radical refocusing of political philosophy,

4 He was a participant in the Colloquium Walter Lippmann, which met in 1938 and was named in his honour. It was the first to coin the term 'neo-liberalism' for its position.

not as a *theory of the state* and its forms, but as a *theory of the public* and of the relation of institutional forms to the public, with the university as one crucial institutional form. He did so through an account of the 'social self', which he contrasted with the 'liberal self', as expressed in economics and political theory (in this way, also indicating the normative assumptions in the liberal idea of instrumental knowledge).

Dewey began from the argument that the individual is necessarily a social being involved in 'associative life', and that this is true of what are conventionally regarded as private actions as well as of public actions.⁵ For Dewey, individuals form associations, but they are also formed by associations. At the same time, the multiplicity of associations and their interconnected actions have consequences. In all of this, Dewey's idea of a 'public', and of the several natures of 'publics', is crucial. It contains a strong idea of democracy associated with participation and dialogue, but does not deny that there will be functionally differentiated publics, whose articulation will be at issue. The key to his definition of a public is contained in the idea of action in the world having effects and consequences that are ramified and impact upon others who are not the initiators of the action. Essentially, all action is associative action, but a public is brought into being in consequence of being indirectly and seriously affected by those actions of others. His analysis of the problem of modern democracy, then, was concerned with the imbalance in the development of associations and the proliferation of problems in areas where the public cannot properly defend itself.

This immediately raises the issue of the state as the representative of the 'public'. It is the point at which Dewey shifted gear to argue that the wider idea of a public can achieve a level of generality that requires organisation and personnel to express it. This is the idea of a state understood as a set of public authorities. Thus, Dewey proposed that 'the lasting, extensive and serious consequences of associated activity bring into existence a public. In itself it is unorganized and

5 It is precisely this that Dewey suggested allows the understanding of the changing definition of the boundaries of what are conventionally regarded as private and public. The conventional definition of the 'private' is that of associated life that does not impinge with wider consequences upon others.

formless. By means of officials and their special powers it becomes a state. A public articulated and operating through representative officers is the state; there is no state without a government, but also there is none without the public' (1927: 67).

Dewey by no means suggested that these developments mean that a state necessarily will act in the public interest – power can be accrued, authority exercised despotically, and, indeed, the personnel of government can act on their own private or other special interests. The fundamental point, however, is that the state takes its meaning from the idea of a public and its interests, and that this is conceived as a dynamic thing. This means that, for Dewey, not only associations external to the state, but the state itself and its modes of organisation, are subject to change and revision in the light of other changes in the development of associative life. In other words, although the state exists in relation to the problems of associative, social life that create a public, its own forms and modes of organisation may come to constitute a problem for the expression of that public, although, paradoxically, that is its *raison d'être*.

Dewey had as his target two pathologies. The first *sets the state against the public* and is attributed to liberal individualism and its argument for the minimum state. The second is attributed to the conditions of modern corporate capitalism, in which there appears to be an '*eclipse of the public*' brought about by the dominance of corporate interests over the state. Dewey argued that the first undermines the individual as surely as it seeks to set the individual free. This is because the ruling idea of liberalism is that of the individual free of associations, which is linked with the idea of the 'naturalness' of economic laws (embodied in market exchanges). It is precisely the ideology of liberal individualism, according to Dewey, that suggests that the market can replace the state as the regulator of social life, but leaves the individual vulnerable to the outcomes of the market.

However, according to Dewey, this doctrine emerged just as the idea of an 'individual' free of associations was being rendered untenable by the very developments of corporate capitalism with which it was linked. Thus, Dewey said that "the individual", about which the new philosophy centred itself, was in process of complete submergence in fact at the very time in which he was being elevated on high in theory'

(1927: 96). The ideology which operates in the name of the individual, then, serves to undermine the very protection of the individual from egoistic, corporate associations that are themselves the very antithesis of the doctrine being espoused.

For Dewey, what is necessary for the proper expression of the public and for democracy is a 'Great Community'. Without it, there would be nothing more than state-supported corporate interests, together with partial and ad hoc responses. In contrast, Dewey wrote of democracy in the 'Great Community' that, 'from the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are in common. Since every individual is a member of many groups this specification cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibly and fully in connections with other groups' (1927: 147).⁶

Reclaiming the public university

Dewey was also writing at the birth of the 'multiversity'. Knowledge production and professional services were coming increasingly to be university based, and, at the same time, the university was becoming increasingly involved in the corporate economy with the commodification of research. As I have argued, these are all aspects of our current impact agenda. Yet, Dewey wished to argue that the university has a role for democracy and in facilitating the Great Community. The final issue I want to address is whether the complexity attributed to contemporary society and the problems it poses for a democratic public can be answered by the role of 'experts'.

Quite apart from the undemocratic implications of Lippmann's claim that experts can represent publics, Dewey also challenged it on sociological grounds. Co-production takes the structure of associations

6 The transformation of university decision making from collegial to hierarchical, managerial modes of organisation is significant in the context of this quotation (see Holmwood, 2016a).

as given, when the issue of publics is always how they are to be brought into a responsible share in the direction of activities. 'Co-production' is necessarily based upon forms of inclusion and exclusion. Finally, while the operation of economic interests can be unseen, precisely because of the formal separation of economic and political institutions typical of modern capitalism, the application of expert knowledge must necessarily take place in front of the public.

While the argument about the role of experts depends upon the idea that the public is unable to judge complex matters, it remains the case that it will be able to judge the pretensions of experts. Moreover, it is likely to be vulnerable to populist mobilisations by the very interests that expert opinion is being called upon to moderate. Thus, Dewey wrote that 'rule by an economic class may be disguised from the masses; rule by experts could not be covered up. It could only be made to work only if the intellectuals became the willing tools of big economic interests. Otherwise they would have to ally themselves with the masses, and that implies, once more, a share in government by the latter' (1927: 206). As soon as 'expertise' is defined in terms of the instrumentalisation of knowledge, there arises the problem that it is aligned with interests and, thereby, a problem of trust.

Dewey's concern with the problem of experts and their relation to wider publics speaks directly to our own circumstances. As expertise is increasingly co-produced, what seems to be attenuated is the role of the wider public. In a context where risks of concentrated activities – whether of nuclear power production or carbon-hungry economic profit seeking, to give just two examples – are also seen to be widely (indeed, globally) distributed, those that are affected are displaced from participation in decisions about them. At the same time, the nature of democracy is that wider public opinions can be made to count in elections and are subject to populist influence by advertising and by mass media, precisely as Dewey set out.

For Dewey, however, the significance of expert knowledge is how it can facilitate public debate, not government and corporate decision making independent of the participation of the wider public. The character of expert knowledge increasingly embedded within corporations and government serves to delegitimize expertise precisely by these forms of associations. It is necessarily part of the 'eclipse of the public'. As Dewey put it, 'the essential need ... is the improvement

of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is the problem of the public' (1927: 208).

If the improvement of debate, discussion and persuasion is the problem, then the university is necessarily part of the answer. But it is only part of the answer if it is at the service of the public. A university at the service of the public, in Dewey's sense, is a university that should properly be regarded as a public university. This would not be the only function of a university, but it is a necessary function and it is one that would place social justice at the heart of community engagement. Anything less and the university is just another private corporation in which a corporate economy has become a corporate society. The neo-liberal university would finally have given up any pretension to a social mission other than being at service to whoever paid.⁷

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7 This chapter was written as the Higher Education and Research Bill 2016–2017 was passing through Parliament and had reached its final committee stage in the House of Lords. The Bill would provide separate regulatory arrangements for teaching and research, allow the use of university title by single-subject, teaching-only, for-profit providers, and facilitate the entry of new providers and 'exit' from the 'market' and place. Regulatory arrangements would be under the direct administration of the Minister of State without Privy Council oversight. For a critique, see Holmwood et al. (2016).

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