

**Universities' Research Imperative:**  
**Paying the Price for Perverse Incentives<sup>1</sup>**

**Susan Haack**

[A serious inquirer] must be honest and sincere with himself. Otherwise, his love of truth will melt away at once.

[When it is] no longer the reasoning that determines what the conclusion shall be, but the conclusion that determines what the reasoning shall be[,] this is sham reasoning. ... The result of this shamming is that men come to look upon reasoning as mainly decorative... The result is... a rapid deterioration of intellectual vigor.

[Serious inquiry] consists in actually drawing to bow upon truth, with intentness in the eye, with energy in the arm.—C.S. Peirce<sup>2</sup>

As I started work on this paper, I found myself recalling something I heard, many decades ago, in a class on Comparative Political Systems:<sup>3</sup> the UK, the US, and the USSR. Under the first Soviet Five Year Plan, production targets were set in terms of weight; which might have been reasonable (though it might have compromised quality) for wheat or steel or coal, but was obviously quite unsuitable for other goods. As a result, if I remember correctly, was that an enterprising chandelier manufacturer realized that the easiest way to meet his target was to make heavier chandeliers—in consequence of which

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<sup>1</sup> This is the latest in a series of papers reflecting on the state of our profession: “Preposterism and Its Consequences” (1996) in Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 188-208; “Out of Step: Academic Ethics in a Preposterous Environment,” in Susan Haack; *Putting Philosophy to Work: Inquiry and Its Place in Culture* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008, second ed, 2013), 251-68, 313-17; “Expediting Inquiry: Peirce’s Social Economy of Research,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 54, no.2 (2018): 208-30.; “The Academic Publication Racket: Whatever Happened to Authors’ Rights?” *Borderless Philosophy* 2 (2019): 1-21; “Not One of the Boys: Memoir of an Academic Misfit,” *Cosmos + Taxis* 8, no.5 (2020): 92-106; “Philosophy as a Profession, and as a Calling,” *ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΙΣ*, VIII, N.S. (2021): 33-53.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*, eds. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and (vols. 7 and 8) Arthur Wiles (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-58), 1.49 (1896); 1.57-58 (1896); 1.236 (1903). References are by volume and paragraph number, followed by the original date. Peirce actually writes: “The man of science”; but it is quite clear that he refers to serious inquirers generally.

<sup>3</sup> I was an undergraduate in Oxford, reading Politics, Philosophy and Economics, from 1963-66. Of course, I can’t be sure that my memory is correct, or that the story isn’t apocryphal; but in the present context that hardly matters,

several fashionable Moscow ceilings collapsed. I found myself imagining what other distortions might have resulted: boots too heavy for soldiers to march in, saucepans too heavy for cooks to lift, gold-plated lead tiaras too heavy to raise to your head...

But my point here is, of course, about universities here and now, and the perverse incentives that cause no less bizarre, but even more costly, distortions. I used to think that the problem was that quantity is simply inappropriate as a measure of academics' productivity; but I have come to believe it is worse than that, in fact that *the whole idea of incentives for certain kinds of intellectual work is misconceived and inevitably self-defeating*. It's not exactly as if the Soviets had imposed "targets" on novelists and playwrights as well as on farmers, manufacturers, etc.; but as we'll see, it is disturbingly similar.

I'll begin (§I) by articulating the array of incentives to productivity in research that universities have gradually introduced over the years, and the elaborate layers of surrogate measures of quality control they have by now added; I'll continue (§II) by explaining why those incentives are perverse, counter-productive, and wasteful of time, spirit, and money; and I'll conclude (§III) by trying to describe what a better situation would be.

## I

In the sense at issue here, "research" essentially refers to good-faith efforts to discover new knowledge. We value research, presumably, because we value new knowledge. Or rather, since not all new knowledge is equally valuable, we rightly value new, significant knowledge.

There are, however, important questions to be raised about the value of new knowledge: If all new knowledge isn't equally valuable, how do we assess what's more, and what's less, worth having? Is some knowledge, perhaps, too dangerous for us to handle, better not known? How can we weigh the worth of new knowledge against the value of other goods into which we might put resources? Etc., etc. For the most part, I set these issues aside; not because they aren't crucial, but simply because I have so little idea how to go about answering them—except that this would require a whole other paper of its own.

Certainly some bits of new knowledge are more substantial than others: it's hard to see that, e.g., a careful count of the number of typos in each edition of *A la recherche du temps perdu* would be worth a great deal—although, in some instances, as with the famous typo in a post-*Edwards*<sup>4</sup> draft of *Of Pandas and People*, revealing that it was really a thinly-disguised creationist text,<sup>5</sup> the particular nature of the typo might be significant.. And I'm reluctant to say, in general, as some might, that new knowledge in the humanities is necessarily worth less than new knowledge in the sciences. Moreover, while some scientific work will produce practical benefits, I'm sure that, in the basic sciences at least, it is just about impossible to say *what* work will produce such benefits; this is simply unpredictable.

However, when I write of “universities’ research imperative” I refer, not to their long-standing and admirable aspiration not only to pass on existing knowledge to young people, but also to find out, or figure out, *new* and significant knowledge, but to the much more recent,<sup>6</sup> and ever-increasing, ever-more insistent pressure on all professors to be “productive,” “research-active,” all the time. This, I shall argue, has produced a whole raft of perverse incentives, incentives as inappropriate to the real goal as weight was to the goal of efficient production of chandeliers, boots, etc. In brief, it pulls against that honesty of which Peirce speaks; it distracts that “intentness in the eye,” and sometimes saps that “energy in the arm”; and it encourages precisely the sham reasoning we should shun.

The pressure is different in different institutions, of course, and different in different parts of the world than in the US. In Europe, for example, the pressure often comes more directly from government than from university administrators,<sup>7</sup> and there is more emphasis on grants, even in the humanities, than there is in the U.S. In some

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<sup>4</sup> *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578 (1987).

<sup>5</sup> *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial*, directed by Gary Johnstone and Joseph McMaster (NOVA, WGBH Educational Foundation, and Vulcan Productions, Inc., 2008), DVD. *Edwards* had dealt the final blow to efforts to introduce creation science in public-school biology classes; Prof. Barbara Forrest discovered, in a post-*Edwards* draft of *Pandas*, the wonderful typo, “cdesign proponents”—a botched attempt at replacing “creationists” by “design proponents.”

<sup>6</sup> Since when? I'm not sure. But already in 1968 Jacques Barzun was writing of the pre-posterism that requires everyone to publish written research, and then deems this a “knowledge explosion.” Jacques Barzun, *The American University* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p.221.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, even private universities in the U.S., since almost all take federal money, are thereby bound by a whole elaborate mesh of federal regulations.

Chinese universities, I hear, faculty members are actually paid a cash bonus for publishing an article in an “approved” journal—i.e. one that appears in the “right” electronic index.

In the humanities, in the US “productivity” usually means publishing enough; and perhaps in some institutions, also, as it does everywhere in the sciences, especially in the medical sciences, getting enough external research grant money. To be sure, universities try to ensure quality as well as encourage quantity: they demand peer-reviewed publications; look for publication in “prestigious,” journals and with “prestigious” presses; celebrate “prestigious” grants, and so forth. Some may stress citation counts, taken to be an indication of the importance of a work, or rejection rates, taken to be an indication of the quality of journals. And all rely to some extent on “rankings”—of universities, of departments, of programs, of journals, etc.

All this is encapsulated in the tyranny of the annual report: we are all expected to report every year not only what we have taught, but also what research we have done. This means, in effect, what we have published, and where; and what “prizes, honors and awards” we have received in the last twelve months (yes, really). Even in these crude terms it’s a tall order, because, for one thing, papers can take a year or more to appear after they are accepted. (Still, it’s not quite so tall an order as the rather peremptory request I last year received from an administrative minion to report on my research *between May 15 and August 15*. Somehow I knew that “I thought really hard about \_\_\_\_, so far without really remarkable results” wouldn’t cut it; so I reported all my academic busywork, which apparently did the trick

The personal price of failure to meet these demands can be steep. In the US, failure to be adequately research active has doubtless led many young professors to be denied tenure, and probably has led many more to be quietly encouraged to go elsewhere before this happens. True, insufficiently productive but tenured faculty are only very, very rarely fired; but they are often made well aware of their second-class status, and—unless they save their careers by tireless “service” on those endless university committees for sifting sawdust,<sup>8</sup> or “going into administration”—are not so rarely encouraged to

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<sup>8</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1918), p.221.

retire at the first opportunity. In the elite institutions that seem to land the lion's share of major grants, failure to get grant money probably makes you a second-class citizen; elsewhere, in philosophy at least, it's rather a matter of getting grant money bringing you big plaudits and other perks. I'll not soon forget the friend who told me, sadly, that in her department you "couldn't say 'no'" to Sandra Harding, because "she brings in so much money"—National Science Foundation (NSF) grants for work on *soi-disant* "feminist philosophy of science."

The rewards for success in "productivity" are rich: promotions, raises, "prestige," invitations to speak, all expenses paid, in exotic places or with generous honoraria, offers of better jobs, prizes, awards, and honors, and, of course, an easier path to more publication, more grants, even the chance of academic stardom, fame, public speaking. And the trade-off might be worth it, if the result was more, and better work, and if the *other* costs were modest enough. Unfortunately, neither is true. Granted, there has been an explosion of publication, a torrent of new journals, ever-fatter publishers' catalogues, and, doubtless, an explosion of grant applications, etc. Do I think that this means that more excellent philosophy has been produced (or better understanding of important works of literature, or even a truly deeper knowledge of history)? Honestly, no.

But now we get close to the heart of the matter. It is possible to incentivize hard work; and hard work will, eventually, not only get better editions of major texts in literature or philosophy produced, more details of historical events and their aftermath recorded, etc., but also get many details of our scientific understanding filled in—and perhaps thereby pave the way for new and important ideas. But no amount of encouragement, no carrots and no sticks either, can guarantee that we'll come up with new and fruitful ideas.

"Surely," you may say, "it's different in the sciences." Don't we at least have a better understanding of society, or our own psyches than we did before? What about the "hard" sciences, or the medical sciences? Hasn't the pace of scientific advance increased? Well, here at least there is valuable work filling in details of already-established theories. But has there been an explosion of new Big Ideas? I have my doubts.

Part of the trouble is that universities' forms of quality control all depend on surrogate measures, essentially on calling on the opinion of others in the field; which

guarantees a depressing conventionalism, and invites some obvious forms of cronyism and corruption. Moreover, grants especially invite preposterism—the announcement of dramatic expected results way ahead of the work, work that might, or might not, produce them. Feminism obliges us “to reinvent science and theorizing,” Harding preposterously announced; but asked, decades later, what had actually been discovered, she replied that thanks to feminist philosophy of science, we now know that menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause aren’t diseases.<sup>9</sup> Well, duh. But of course Harding is by no means the only philosopher whose career has been given a big boost by the infusion of grant money, just one of the earlier examples.

While the pressure to publish remains everywhere in the humanities, in some areas other than philosophy the pressure to obtain grants may be somewhat stronger, but also, arguably, less absurd: a historian or a literary scholar may, after all, really need to travel to look at original documents, to interview survivors, witnesses, authors, etc. In the social sciences there is more justification, in terms of the costs of doing experiments or surveys, for the culture of grants and research projects; nonetheless, I have an uneasy feeling that too much of the “research” done is really political advocacy, and too much is quite banal. In the other sciences, yes, research costs money, sometimes big money—though not, I suspect, more money than Harvard, Yale, or etc. could easily afford; and in any case I’m not persuaded that it’s always the most deserving projects that get funded, or that the costs aren’t exaggerated. (The clique-ism and cronyism that affect my profession is surely not unique to philosophy; and the recent stress of the NSF on “diversity”<sup>10</sup> raises other issues, too.)

In much of Europe, it seems, pressure to get grants is just as severe in the humanities as elsewhere, and grants are the standard way graduate work is funded. This has horrible consequences; but of course different countries have different systems, different academic structures, etc. It is beyond my competence to write in detail about them. I’ll focus here on the U.S. and on philosophy.

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<sup>9</sup> Colleen Cordes, “2 Scholars Examine the ‘Bizarre War’ Against Science They Say is Being Waged by the Academic Left,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 40, no. 34 (April 27, 1994): A15.

<sup>10</sup> “Major Initiatives / Broadening Participation in STEM,” National Science Foundation, accessed August 2, 2022, <https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/initiatives/broadening-participation>.

Here at least, much of the work done in the humanities, the social sciences, and some of the work done even in the sciences, isn't really research at all. Rather, it is an attempt to find evidence for some conclusion already determined in advance—what Peirce called “sham reasoning”<sup>11</sup>—or trying to make a case for some thesis to the truth of which you are indifferent, but advocating which you hope will make you known, or even famous—what I call “fake reasoning.”<sup>12</sup> But part of the trouble is much deeper: the whole idea that every professor could have a good new idea every year, or every several years, is grossly unrealistic. And so what we get is not just a lot of REALLY heavy academic chandeliers—bloated, overblown, and grossly oversold articles and books, grotesquely inflated grants, and such—but an enormous waste of resources, for far too little benefit.

## II

What are those other costs that we systematically fail to take into account? My list might begin like this:

- A shift in universities' priorities away from teaching and onto research, with resulting deterioration both of undergraduate and graduate education.
- Wholesale reliance on surrogate measures of quality.
- Collateral damage to faculty morale.
- The vast expenditure of time, energy, and money on grant applications and reviewing.
- The vast expenditure of time, energy, and money on editing, peer-review, and revision, often repeated revision, of papers and book manuscripts.
- The ever-increasing difficulty of finding the good stuff amid the torrent of the banal, the mediocre, and the hopeless that fills all those journals and publishers' catalogues.
- The enormous costs of grants and grant administration for too little result.

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<sup>11</sup> C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 1.56 (c.1896).

<sup>12</sup> Susan Haack, “Preposterism and Its Consequences” (1996), in Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 188-208, pp.189-90.

*The shift in universities' priorities.* Undergraduate teaching is less and less valued, and more and more delegated to (usually untrained) teaching assistants and casually hired temporary adjuncts—who are cheap, fungible, and disposable when necessary. True, universities give awards for excellence in teaching—though the prize may be, as at my university, summer research money. But we rely far too much on student evaluations, which are readily manipulated if you're willing to grade easily;<sup>13</sup> and we all know that the most stellar teaching record won't get you tenure if you don't publish.

Graduate teaching—now often called “training”—is more and more treated as way to help faculty in the “important research” on which they give their seminars; and the students are both indulged with inflated grades, and exploited with heavy-duty teaching- and research-assistant tasks. Indeed, where grants are the big thing, graduate students are simply employed and paid to help the senior guy with his “project.”

And here the culture of grants and research projects plays a particularly insidious role, subtly conveying the impression that it's not possible to do important philosophical work without a team of research assistants and buckets of cash. This is nonsense: all the best work in the history of philosophy has been done without such support; and here the argument for grants on the sciences—that ever-fancier equipment must be bought and maintained to stay at the cutting edge—is simply inapplicable, since philosophy needs no such equipment.

“Ah,” you say, “but what about experimental philosophy, or neurophilosophy?” I'm tempted to reply: “Phooey.” But I will say, briefly, that even when experimental philosophy is anything more than analytic philosophy by other means, the relatively piddling surveys involved hardly require vast sums of money; and that even if neurophilosophy really requires borrowing time with an fMRI machine, it doesn't require vast sums either; and that, in any case, and as I have argued in detail elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> both these fashionable “movements” largely sidestep philosophical questions altogether.

What serious philosophy requires is time and peace of mind; which are better achieved by our relatively modest teaching loads than by a life occupied with the “management” of research teams and projects. In most research universities, after all,

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<sup>13</sup> Just *once*, in more than 30 years at the University of Miami, I saw a brilliant teacher of physics given a teaching award *because his students respected him even if he gave them Cs*.

<sup>14</sup> I refer readers to the second lecture of my *Scientism and Its Discontents* (e-book: Rounded Globe, 2017).



professors teach only four courses a year—and often less, since more and more departmental administrative positions (chair, graduate director, undergraduate director, officer in charge of the speakers’ program, etc., etc.) bring teaching-load reductions. Moreover, we forget how much intellectual stimulus we owe to teaching: to students’ often naïve but sometimes productively unsettling questions, and to preparing classes—at least, when there’s a proper program of classes, not just a smorgasbord.

Research, in short, has come to be much more highly valued than teaching; even, sometimes, to the point of absurdity, as with my university’s giving some otherwise unpromotable associate professors a year’s light teaching duty on full salary, and a publication subsidy, to finally get a book out.

*Reliance on surrogate measures.* All those quality controls listed earlier are matters of deferred judgment. Rather than a chairman or a Dean actually reading someone’s work, they rely on the judgment of unknown and unanswerable peer-reviewers, unknown and unanswerable grant committees, unknown and unanswerable “rankers,” and so forth. Letters of recommendation for job applicants and tenure letters for junior faculty tell us how much the person has published in what venues, what grants and awards they have received, who has written favorably on their behalf; but, in my experience at least, usually tell us nothing about what they actually found out or figured out, what new ideas they introduced, etc.

Yet we all know that even competent reviewers acting in good faith make mistakes. And we all know that peer reviewers may be very junior, even only graduate students themselves; that they may have their own agendas; that they can be motivated by envy or plain malice; and that even when they are acting in good faith, they too often hold back good stuff, and let bad stuff pass.

As a young academic, I went through the peer-review process many times; but I don’t recall ever getting even *one* genuinely helpful referee’s report. I do, however, remember many that said, in effect, “the author should refer to *my* [the referee’s] work on this subject,” and the stunningly unhelpful report I got from *J. Phil.*, after *nine months’* delay: “clever, but not clever enough.” (The paper subsequently appeared in *Mind*,<sup>15</sup> has

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Haack, “The Justification of Deduction,” *Mind* 85 (1976), pp.112-19.

since been reprinted numerous times, and has appeared in Chinese and Spanish as well as English. Was the reviewer jealous, I wonder, or was he just showing off, or what?)

And in the subsequent decades, though I had decided that the peer-review process was such a waste of time and spirit that I would publish only by invitation, I have had much more evidence of its failure as a quality-control mechanism. I think, for example, of that pitiful paper of Peter Tramel's criticizing my foundherentism, which somehow must have made it past two referees for *Synthese*—neither of whom, apparently, bothered to check a simple factual claim of his: that I don't discuss the infinite regress argument for foundationalism,<sup>16</sup> a claim that is, of course, readily verifiable as flat-out false.<sup>17</sup> I also think of Anil Gupta's 2006 book on empiricism,<sup>18</sup> concluding that we need an epistemological theory between foundationalism and coherentism, which apparently made it past Oxford's referees without anyone noticing that it makes no reference whatever to my 1993 *Evidence and Inquiry*, which offers just such a theory.

More importantly, though: I often decline invitations to referee papers and books way beyond my competence; which suggests that the selection process is crude in the extreme; and I often have to refuse to referee papers whose author is known to me, which suggests that cartel reviewing is commonplace. And recently I went through two full years seeing not one single paper that could conceivably be made publishable, which suggests that editors no longer bother with initial triage. Indeed, one editor actually told me, apparently without embarrassment, he *couldn't* do triage, because he had no graduate students to whom he could delegate this (crucial) task..

Philosophy professors hold certain journals in high esteem, apparently unaware that almost all papers in *Phil. Review* are invited, as are many of those in *J. Phil.*, where many of the other authors have Columbia connections. And we have an almost superstitious regard for Harvard University Press, Princeton University Press, and even for Oxford University Press—even though Oxford publishes *so many* books: some good, most mediocre, and not a few, frankly, execrable.

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Tramel, "Haack's Foundherentism is a Foundationalism," *Synthese* 160., no.2 (2008): 215-28, p.220.

<sup>17</sup> As even a cursory glance at the first chapter of Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry* (1993: expanded edition, Amherst, NY, Prometheus Books, 2009) would have revealed.

<sup>18</sup> Anil Gupta, *Empiricism and Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

And then there are those terrible, corrupt and corrupting “rankings” of graduate programs—or rather, of faculties—in philosophy: the Philosophical Gourmet Report, now published by Wiley.<sup>19</sup> You might think these are of interest only to the “top” few departments, busily hiring away each other’s faculty and star Ph.D.s; but, sadly, they actually infect much of the profession, down to modest four-year colleges competing to get their best students into the “good” programs. It’s pathetic; as a bizarre conversation I had with Larry Laudan at a 2015 conference in Girona illustrates<sup>20</sup> (I paraphrase roughly from my of course fallible memory). I was groaning about the damage those rankings had done; Laudan thought they were really useful: “otherwise, how would potential graduate students know, for example, that Rutgers, though only a third-tier university, had a great philosophy department?”:

SH: Does anyone really think Rutgers is such a great department?

LL: Sure it is! Rutgers just appointed X [I don’t remember the name], who has a book with Oxford University Press.

SH: Oh, come off it! OUP publishes plenty of boring stuff, and a lot of junk. Have you actually *read* the book?

LL: Well, no; but anyway, Rutgers has the world’s most important epistemologist, Alvin Goldman. Granted, his second book was garbage, but the first was really important.

SH: Sorry; but if you’d read chapter 7 of my *Evidence and Inquiry*, you’d know that the first book was an obviously failed attempt to rescue a theory that had already collapsed in Goldman’s article of a decade earlier, accompanied by great chunks of second-hand cognitive science that didn’t engage with the first, analytic part of the book at all.

LL: Well, he’s the world’s most-*cited* epistemologist, at any rate.

SH: Doubtless. But that’s in part because he’s at Rutgers, which is highly rated because he’s there...!<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The Philosophical Gourmet Report initiated by Brain Leiter, who was still in charge at the time of the conversation reported below. In late 2015 Leiter was forced out, and the report taken over by Britt Brogaard (Miami) and Christopher Pynes (Western Illinois). In 2021 Brogaard resigned as co-editor, forced out for also serving on the board of a rival ranking. Justin Weinberg, “Ignored Editor Departs PGR, Raising Questions about its Leadership and How to Best Guide Prospective Philosophy Grad Students,” *Daily Nous*, available at [dailynous.com/2020/01/10/ignored-editor-departs-pgr-raising-questions-leadership-guide-prospective-philosophy-grads/](https://dailynous.com/2020/01/10/ignored-editor-departs-pgr-raising-questions-leadership-guide-prospective-philosophy-grads/).

<sup>20</sup> I regret to say that Laudan died in the summer of 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Had I been quicker-witted, I might have pointed out that the book of Goldman’s that Laudan admitted was terrible was published by—yes, you guessed it, Oxford University Press. Not entirely by the way: in 2015 Rutgers was ranked #2 out of 50; in 2018 Goldman retired; in 2021 Rutgers was still ranked #2. (Inertia seems to play a large role in these rankings.)

Luckily, at this point the waiter arrived with the next course, before I actually raised my voice.

Exactly how Leiter arrived at his rankings I don't know; but we are now told that the PGR relies on around 220 evaluators, described as "leading philosophers," senior and junior; 20 are members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British Academy, or the Canadian Royal Society; and some from continental Europe. (I don't know who chooses these evaluators, or how; or what role Wiley, a hugely profitable and in my opinion predatory academic publisher, plays in all this.) These people evaluate all graduate programs in philosophy in "the English-speaking world," which, however, doesn't seem to include Ireland or South Africa.

Evaluators are not told which departments are which, only who is in each of them; but I doubt the assessment is really blind—those from, e.g., Yale can easily guess which department is Princeton, NYU, or whatever. They are told not to evaluate their own program, or the program from which they got their highest degree—which suggests that they can easily guess the latter even if they graduated decades ago. They have no information about any of the programs, or their teaching;<sup>22</sup> the ranking is of faculties, not as potential students may imagine, programs. The PGR uses fancy mathematics, and talks a good line about "methodology"; but the fact is that *this is a purely reputational survey apparently by the well-connected and those connected to the well-connected*—to the benefit primarily of a quite narrow neo-analytic establishment.

*Collateral damage to faculty morale.* Undergraduate teaching, done right, is honorable and useful work, giving us more informed, more thoughtful young people, better citizens, and more responsible adults. Moreover, done right, it is also rewarding: emotionally demanding, time-consuming, requiring intelligence and commitment, but truly satisfying.

It can be gratifying to see students' vocabulary improving as you teach them new words (refute vs. deny, credulous, tendentious, etc., etc.); to see a student who had no idea how to construct a paper gradually learn to do so, to teach students how to discriminate better and worse internet sources, what exactly constitutes plagiarism and why it's a bad thing..., and so on; and what the difference is between a matter of fact and

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22

a matter of opinion—and why “a matter of opinion” doesn’t mean that any and every opinion is equally defensible. When a student grasps what Plato was saying, or why some philosophers denigrate metaphors in science and others rely on them, or why Tarski impose such severe restrictions on his definition of truth, or why it’s a question whether intentions or consequences matter more morally, etc., it is truly an achievement to be proud of. And so is meeting former students who are now grown up and branching out: like the young attorney I met in the airport, off to take a deposition in Gainesville, or the devout Muslim student of whom, on class, I had seen only the eyes, now in modest western dress, but with a hijab, off to Cairo to study Arabic.

Undergraduate teaching is less rewarding, however, the more emphasis students put on grades, and the more one has to watch oneself to avoid any possible offense to those who have learned that taking offense can pay off, or simply saying something too out of line with the institution. And it’s no fun at all if you are obliged to skimp the work and the time required by pressure to do research you might do happily and usefully enough every few years when an idea hit you *all* the time. Even those who succeed in the tenure process can be psychologically damaged by the sense that their contribution is not really much valued, or else become, not depressed and low-energy, but manic, unable to stop producing the barely publishable work that got them that far.

There was a time within living memory when graduate-student teaching was very hard work but also enormously rewarding: perhaps brighter students, surely students with a real interest in the subject, the scope to go broader and deeper. (But it was always, also, a bit fraught, because some students were always a bit psychologically unstable.) Still, programs were designed to cover all the key areas of the subject and its history, and comprehensive exams to test students’ mastery before they proceeded to their dissertations. But in many departments, mine included, this is long gone, perhaps as the result of their imitating the “elite” programs, those high in those wretched rankings—where faculty are FAR too busy with their Important Research for this kind of work.

And now most faculty in departments with graduate programs are only too eager to teach graduate seminars; which is no longer such hard work, but also no longer so rewarding. For too many graduate students these days are all too often horridly pre-professional: anxious, not to learn, but to show off how brilliant they are, and to write

term papers on fashionable topics that they can publish right away so as to get that desirable job they have been (mis)led to expect. It's made worse by the fact that they will probably have been flown in and talked into joining this department, a kind of false flattery that leaves them over-confident and lazy. Some even format their term papers as if they were already published, and write an abstract before they write the paper.

But faculty anxious to get on with their own work are too often delighted to be able to set the stage and then sit back and listen to student papers for the rest of the semester; and don't mind at all that everyone must get an A.<sup>23</sup> But, honestly, this is soul-destroying work, corrupt and dishonorable. (No wonder there's a kind of conspiracy of silence over how many graduate students never finish, and how many, even if they do, actually ever get a permanent position.) Even on those faculty members who carefully look away from the corruption, it takes a toll, and eats subtly at their integrity. Indeed, even those who are most successful by these perverse measures seem to pay a price: some are chronically anxious and hyper about staying on their perch; some are well-padded by self-esteem, but seem, at some level, in need of constant reassurance of their importance.

*The vast expenditure of time, energy, and money on editing, peer-review, and revision, often repeated revision, of papers.* Every time a paper is submitted, an editor (or his delegate) will spend time selecting at least two reviewers, who will spend time reading it and writing reports, and the author will spend time reading these, and perhaps rewriting his paper in accordance with their advice; and that's before we even consider papers submitted multiple times, to several journals, before the *Journal for People Desperate to Publish Something to Get Tenure* finally accepts it. Then there are those misleading "invitations" apparently sent to everyone who ever published on the subject to write a paper for an upcoming special issue—most of whom will find their paper has been rejected, and perhaps was solicited so that the journal can boast of its rejection rate.

It's even worse because, these days, referees are expected to write reports that tell even the authors of hopeless papers how to revise them so as to make them acceptable:

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<sup>23</sup> Indeed, I had to give up teaching graduate students several years ago after one student complained and whined and whinged for a week when I gave her a well-served B+, and I was then informed by the then chair that graduate students "usually all get As." How can one teach if one can't discriminate excellent work from the adequate, the weak, and the hopeless?

more wasted work. And that's before we even consider the time and work involved in copy-editing, checking copy-editing, typesetting, checking proofs, etc.—all of which carries real costs, often for no benefit, or very little.

*The ever-increasing difficulty of finding the good stuff amid the torrent of the banal, the mediocre, and the hopeless.* Because so much is published, and so much of what's published is either hopelessly flawed or else utterly banal, the good stuff that's out there gets harder and harder to find amidst the dreck. “But there are abstracts, and indexes,” you may say; “don't they help?” Not much, I reply; abstracts almost always exaggerate—“I will show that such-and-such,” they say, when all they do is *claim* such-and-such; and indexes rely on abstracts.

I should also mention that scientific papers are often the work of a team of people—part of the rationale for asking to a humungous grant—and have multiple authors; moreover, these papers are often sliced into tiny pieces published separately, a practice known as “salami publishing.” While the culture of grants and research projects is not (yet) so dominant in philosophy, some practitioners of self-styled “experimental philosophy” have already evidently realized that joint authorship is a cheap and easy way to pump up their publication lists and raise their citation counts.

*The enormous costs of grants and grant administration for too little result.* The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) reports that for fiscal years 2019 and 2020 the net cost of its operations was \$147.7 million and \$178 million;<sup>24</sup> and that in 2020 it received “more than 10,828 applications” of which “more than 1398” were successful.<sup>25</sup> I can't guess what the significance of “more than” is here; but I will assume we know that less than 10% of applications were funded. Another NEH document tells us that applications are peer reviewed by a panel of 3-6 experts in the field.<sup>26</sup> Another document again—the NEH puts out an enormous quantify of material, but digging out information isn't easy!—reports that for 2022 it was requesting \$32 million-plus for salaries and other expenses, and \$15 million for research grants; which isn't, however, as

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<sup>24</sup> National Endowment for the Humanities, *Performance & Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2020*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Jon Parrish Peede, “Message from the Chairman,” in *Performance & Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2020*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> “NEH's Application Review Process,” National Endowment for the Humanities, accessed August 2, 2022, <https://www.neh.gov/grants/application-process>.

horrendous as it sounds: the NEH supports numerous other educational, archival, etc., projects, besides funding research.<sup>27</sup>

Sampling a few summaries of successful applications in philosophy, I noticed that one wasn't really philosophical research at all, but a teaching project, and the others all seemed to be asking for money to write up research that was either already done or, more likely, was more or less prospective—with the conclusions already pre-determined. At any rate, there was a kind of confidence about what the work would show that I found just bizarre; for, by my lights, it's part of the meaning of the word "research" that *you don't know how it will turn out*.

The agenda of the Templeton Foundation—seeking a reconciliation of religion and science—is well-known. The sheer size of some of its grants, however, astonished me. In 2010 Alfred Mele, who previously held several NEH grants on related topics, was awarded \$4.4 million by Templeton, and in 2014, at the request of someone at the Foundation, another \$4.52 million,<sup>28</sup> for research on free will. My mind boggled. Looking more closely, however, I found that he is really acting as a kind of agent for the fund, running competitions to give away much of this largesse to other academics, funding conferences, prizes, post-doctoral fellowships, etc.<sup>29</sup> But then my mind boggled again: how many people, and how person-hours of work, are involved in organizing those conferences, judging those competitions, etc, and how many professors spend time and energy applying unsuccessfully?<sup>30</sup> Dean Zimmerman, with a \$9 million Templeton grant for a center on philosophy and theology at Rutgers, is apparently a person of genuine religious conviction.” Stephen Stich, with his somewhat more modest \$2 million grant for research on wisdom,<sup>31</sup> may just be an opportunist.<sup>32</sup> Well, it's Templeton's money; but

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<sup>27</sup> National Endowment for the Humanities, *Appropriations Request for Fiscal Year 2022* (2021), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Templeton database 2011-21.

<sup>29</sup> Nathan Schneider, “Spending Freely on Free Will,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 3, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Mele certainly works hard: he has written a great many books and umpteen articles, all on closely related topics. Al Mele Full Publication List, Dept. of Philosophy, Florida State University. (Looking more closely, I noticed that he has a dozen books with Oxford University Press, but that—despite the press's excellent connections—not one of them appears to have been translated; indeed, despite his aspiring to fund projects worldwide, all his publications are in English.) My impression, for what it's worth, is that while Mele is a remarkably successful academic entrepreneur, he's not a first-rate philosophical thinker.

<sup>31</sup> Templeton Database 2022-21.

<sup>32</sup> In the 1980s Stich published two abominable books: *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science*, arguing that there are no beliefs; and *The Fragmentation of Reason*, admitting that there are beliefs, after all, but now arguing that it's mere superstition to care whether one's beliefs are true. (Honestly, I am not



honestly, to me they seem to be throwing away vast sums that could surely be put to better use.<sup>33</sup>

Of late, there has been much criticism of Templeton: some fear an evangelical takeover of philosophy departments (unlikely, in my view, given the aggressive atheism of many philosophers in the scientistic camp); some suspect cronyism in the assignment of grants (quite likely, it seems, but unsurprising). I wondered about the Foundation's apparently cozy relationship with Oxford University Press.<sup>34</sup>

I was no less disturbed, however, to see how party-political NEH priorities for upcoming grants were, with their strong and repeated stress on “systemic racism” and “the climate emergency,” a “functioning constitutional democracy,” “Covid-19”<sup>35</sup> —a stress the NEH explicitly attributes to “the Biden-Harris administration.”<sup>36</sup> I fantasized briefly about a possible comparative study of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*<sup>37</sup> and Alex Haley's *Roots* on the consequences of learning one's ethnic heritage;<sup>38</sup> or Camus' *The Plague*<sup>39</sup> and Lewis's *Arrowsmith*, with its failed vaccine experiment on the fictional island of Saint Hubert;<sup>40</sup> and then about exploring the epistemological significance of scientific consensus. But I doubt these would fly. In any case, it is unwise in the extreme

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making this up.) Both these books are roundly criticized in my *Evidence and Inquiry*, chapters 8 and 9, where Stich is a footnote to the Churchlands and to Richard Rorty, respectively. Subsequently, Stich published *Deconstructing the Mind* (OUP 1996); but I didn't read this, or subsequent volumes of his papers, or his series of co-edited anthologies on experimental philosophy. His CV also lists 202 articles; but after the first hundred or so almost all are jointly authored pieces of experimental philosophy—two, I noticed, with three named authors and “43 co-authors.” Gosh. *Perhaps* Stich underwent a miraculous conversion to epistemological sanity; but I confess I find it hard to take him seriously as an expert on wisdom. Stephen P. Stich, *Curriculum Vitae* (updated March 2018).

<sup>33</sup> In the interests of full disclosure, I should say that I once spoke at a Templeton conference in Italy; Nancy Cartwright and I were the two token atheists among a large number of Catholic priests working in nuclear physics. Nobody told me, or even hinted, what I should say. I would have declined if they had.

<sup>34</sup> For example, according to John Weaver, “Big Questions About Templeton: How the Philanthropic Giant Legitimizes Faith Healing,” *The Public Eye*, Summer 2015, 14-18, [https://politicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/PE\\_Summer2015-FINAL-AGv2.pdf](https://politicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/PE_Summer2015-FINAL-AGv2.pdf), in one year participants in a Templeton project on the “Flame of Love” (!) published *seven* books with OUP. But apart from a one-time \$5,000 “general donation” to the press on the Foundation's 2019 tax return, I could find nothing explicit about publication subventions. But see generally Sunny Bains, “Questioning the Integrity of the John Templeton Foundation,” *Evolutionary Psychology* 9, no. 1 (2011): 92-115, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/147470491100900111>.

<sup>35</sup> National Endowment for the Humanities, *Appropriations Request*, 9-10 and *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (1876; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982).

<sup>38</sup> Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday., 1976).

<sup>39</sup> *Albert Camus, The Plague* (1947; New York, Vintage International Edition, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith*, (1925; New York: Signet Classics, 1961).

to seek projects so focused on current political concerns—heaven knows, good new ideas are hard enough to come by without such restrictions.<sup>41</sup>

I'm no fonder of "seminary philosophy" than Peirce was. Let me stress, though, that the problem isn't so much the nature of the NEH's or Templeton's agendas; it's the fact that they *have* agendas at all.<sup>42</sup> I have no enthusiasm for either agenda; but the real objection is to sham reasoning, where the desired conclusion determines what the argument will be—which is indeed as deadly to serious intellectual work as Peirce said.

Some suspect cronyism at Templeton; it's hard to get information about their selection process,<sup>43</sup> so all I can say is that—given that Mele acknowledges that his project was initiated by Michael J. Murray, Vice President for philosophy and theology at the Templeton Foundation—I wouldn't be at all surprised. But I *was* surprised to see how much opportunity for cronyism, and for malice, NEH procedures allow. You can apply to be a reviewer; and their "peer-review" *is not blind*; reviewers are told applicants' names, their ranks, and their institutions. They are also told: "you will recuse yourself" if an applicant is from your institution, or you were an advisor on his or her dissertation, or you are a joint applicant; but I couldn't find out whether, or how, this rule was enforced. And apparently it's OK to review the work of someone who was your classmate, or a co-author—or who has criticized you severely in print!<sup>44</sup>

And the administration of all these grants is costly, to say the least. Moreover, the cost in terms of faculty members' time and energy of attending seminars on "writing grants," writing grant applications, and reading others' applications, is incalculable. Suppose that (as NEH documentation suggests) one in ten of such applications is

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<sup>41</sup> Grants in the sciences and in medicine are, doubtless, vastly more costly than these in the humanities; but there, at least, the expense is probably *somewhat* more justified.

<sup>42</sup> So, unsurprisingly, do other foundations, though those I looked at were less crude either than Templeton or the NEH. The Mellon Foundation's Mission Statement reads like an archeological dig through fashionable EdSpeak about the humanities: "beauty, transcendence, freedom"; and building "just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking." The Guggenheim Foundation avers, more straightforwardly but with extraordinary ambition, that it aims to "add to the educational, literary, artistic, and scientific power of this country, and also to provide for the cause of better international understanding." And, according to Jonathon Marks, "Why Philosophers Need Not Shun the Templeton Foundation," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 28, 2013), the Ford Foundation favors applicants whose project promote "reproductive rights, social justice," etc.

<sup>43</sup> You can, however, learn something about it from Sunny Bains, "Questioning the Integrity of the John Templeton Foundation."

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Miller, *Excellence and Equity: The National Endowment for the Humanities* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central.

approved; it's far fewer), that's an enormous amount of work on the part not only of faculty members and those administrators involved, but also of staff at the grant-giving agencies, and of all those referees. How many are involved at Templeton I can't guess; but one source suggests that as many as 8 referees may read an NEH application, as well as the panel that then finally decides which projects to support. And that's before we even consider the work put in by those who, in the end, don't actually submit the application they have tried to put together—more wasted effort.

### III

With good intentions, in short, we have created a whole raft of perverse incentives—incentives to publish, to capture grant money, to seek the “prestigious”—incentives which, sadly, often not only distract people from their teaching mission, but also get in the way of real research. They can attract the wrong people into the academy, and they tend to reward energetic go-getters while discouraging the slower, less confident, more modest, but perhaps more serious thinkers. How can you keep your eye on the target, truth, when you're preoccupied with what you can report to the Dean for the past year? How can you be honest with yourself and not believe your own hype about what your project will show? These perverse incentives have created a horrible “atmosphere of lying and self-laudatory hallucination”<sup>45</sup> that is deadly to real work.

It's an object lesson in unintended consequences, rather like the student-loan crisis created by liberal government funding of students regardless of need, regardless of the institutions attended, regardless of their ability to repay: which is now a \$1.7 trillion mess that has left millions of graduates with debts they can never repay, and encouraged universities to raise fees 800% since 1980, five times the rate of inflation.<sup>46</sup>

“Well,” you may say, “and what's your solution?” That's a tough question. I'm tempted to say, simply: *hire good people who are serious about philosophy, and don't get in the way of their doing the work they see within their grasp*. Period. But how on earth could we get there from here? We didn't get in this mess in a year; and we won't get out

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<sup>45</sup> Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (1903; New York: Random House Modern Library Edition, 1988), p. 291.

<sup>46</sup> See Daniel Akst, “Penury by Degrees,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 2021, A15 (reviewing Josh Mitchell, *The Debt Trap* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021] and Jessica Tandy Shermer, *Indentured Students* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 2021]).

of it with any quick, simple fix. Moreover, at present universities are in such disarray because of the Covid-19 pandemic that it's hard to guess *where* they will be in a year, or two, or even five or ten.

With the transformation of teaching into “online instruction,” an important part of or mission is lost, perhaps irretrievably. Schoolchildren, we know, have lost ground in both math and reading over a year of remote learning; what university students have lost is incalculable. Yes, some things can be well taught electronically: Rosetta Stone®, for example, does a fine job of language instruction that way; but this is the result of huge investment in custom-designed software, not of a few panic-stations lessons to faculty on how to use Zoom.<sup>47</sup> *Maybe* the University of Phoenix has mastered the art of remote instruction where that's possible; but in my opinion it's not always possible—for some things, including inculcating a real sense of what it is to do philosophy, real, in-person interaction is essential. This too, sadly, has weakened our commitment to real, serious teaching.

But, assuming that universities (those that survive) return to something like their pre-Covid state, what would be a better state of affairs? Here is what I'd like to see:

Philosophy departments move away from smorgasbord undergraduate offerings towards real, thought-out programs. Faculty members remember that their goal should be to contribute to producing well-educated, thoughtful young people, not to act as feeder sources for those “prestigious” graduate programs. Yes, we help the occasional student with real talent who wants to do more; but we don't neglect the majority, whom we can educate very usefully even though they never become professors. We remember that it's part of our job not only to teach philosophy, but also to help students read, write, and communicate better—that none of us is too important, for example, to teach students words which seem ordinary to us, but are unfamiliar to them.

Philosophy professors give realistic grades, resisting the temptation to inflation, remembering that a course it's impossible to flunk is a course worth nothing at all. We keep good records of what happens to our majors after graduation, if possible including

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<sup>47</sup> A recent press report tells me that 550 colleges now buy courses designed by for-profit outfit like 2U and Trilogy, but for 20% of the fees market them to students as if they were “real” university courses. Lisa Bannon and Rebecca Smith, “University Course Sometimes Come from a Company,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 2022, A1, A12.

salaries a year out, five years out, ten years out; and we make these readily available. We tell the few students who want to go on to graduate work the truth about what the prospects really are.

We return to hiring according to teaching needs, not current philosophical fashion. We avoid falling for those who claim to be able to teach Kant, but are really Kripke specialists, those who claim to do continental philosophy but speak neither French nor German, those who claim to be experts on Descartes but are really experts on recent experts on Descartes, and, etc. We ask short-listed candidates to conduct classes, one introductory, one more advanced, observed by current faculty alert to the candidates' responsiveness to students' puzzlement and questions and their ability to deal kindly but clearly and firmly with misconceptions.

We don't allow graduate students to teach undergraduates without first giving them proper training and supervision. This includes, if necessary, requiring them to take EFL courses, since one problem is that undergraduates may be unable to understand overseas graduate-student teachers. It also includes giving TAs realistic advice about grading, course coverage, etc.—and making a faculty member responsible for helping them if they encounter problems. A policy of “sink or swim” is unfair both to the TAs, and to those they teach. Yes, this means more engagement of faculty with elementary courses; but that would be all to the good.

We make full disclosure of the success/failure of graduate programs mandatory. (Maybe the APA, as well as individual departments and individual Deans, could insist on this.) How many students who begin a Ph.D. program ever finish within 4 years? Within 5-6 years? Within 7-8 years? Ever? How many of those who finish get tenure-track positions at research universities? At four-year colleges? How many get permanent positions at community colleges? How many end up doing *ad hoc* teaching with no prospect of advancement? Every potential student should be given this information when they apply; every Dean should be given this information annually. A simple website where students could find the raw data on what kinds of job how many graduates of the programs they were considering obtained could be very useful.<sup>48</sup> Programs that do

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<sup>48</sup> Does this mean that I'm endorsing the rival ranking, the APDA (Academic Philosophy Data Analysis), that Brogaard was forced out of the PGR for supporting? No: ranking programs by these very complex and

poorly—I don’t mean those that don’t get everyone jobs at Princeton, but where too many never finish or, when they finish, never get even a decent community-college job—should be trimmed until they improve; or, if they can’t be improved, cut entirely.

Since, realistically, there’s no way to get rid of the PGR (*if only!*), which is now firmly entrenched—though I suppose there’s a possibility it will eventually collapse because of the “leadership” issues—should we consider starting other rankings, more factually based,<sup>49</sup> and less encouraging to “elite” departments’ disgraceful and embarrassing efforts to out-hire each other? I don’t think so. A serious evaluation of even one department’s program would take weeks of work, looking at the courses taught, the syllabi, the quality of teaching, the rigor of qualifying exams, faculty CVs and publications, etc. “Ranking” is misconceived; we want, instead, to encourage potential graduate students to investigate what might best suit them, perhaps consulting people whose books or articles interested them, using the information about which students get decent jobs, and checking which departments have real, structured programs, and serious comprehensive exams: in short, to do what they did before Leiter began the PGR .

We restore some sense to graduate curricula, so that they regularly cover the main areas Ph.D.s will likely need to teach if they find decent-but-not-prestigious academic employment. Make “qualifying” exams comprehensive again, so Ph.D.s can provide evidence of reasonably broad competence. We treat graduate students *as students*, not junior colleagues, and their term papers as work-in-progress, a learning experience. We don’t suggest that they should be already writing for publication; and discourage that awful habit of formatting papers as if they were already published, and of writing an abstract before you’ve even written the paper.

We insist on proper documentation: footnotes (no-one reads endnotes), and Chicago style references including original dates of material cited. Avoid that hideous in-text name-date-page number referencing system; don’t tell students it’s “APA style.” It is, indeed, American Psychological Association style; but the American *Philosophical* Association, I’m glad to say, recommends Chicago!

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subtle standards strikes me as more misleading than helpful; and the last thing needed is fancy mathematics to make it look “scientific.” Moreover, the PGR has proven so toxic that, in my view, none of those involved should be involved with other rankings.

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.philosophicalgourmet.com.overall-rankings/>.

We cut back on those burgeoning teaching-load reductions for faculty. Four courses a year in a research department is hardly excessive; and only a very few departmental administrative positions really require any course reduction. And make sure these course reductions (and their sometimes whopping salary bumps and slush funds) end when the administrative duties do; don't let them become permanent.

We set reasonable, realistic expectations for faculty members. Their teaching should be competent and conscientious; if it's also inspiring, that's great. Don't judge it by student evaluations, at least not unless you also take account of whether the person's grades are inflated, or their courses mere pandering. Their research? If we must have targets, I'd say one capable, substantial, and useful article every couple of years is fine; not, however, a bazillion versions of the same article, or numerous picayune papers criticizing X's criticism of Y' interpretation of Z, or their article on W in response to his article on himself and their previous article on him. One brilliant article in a career is sufficient, for that matter—and we must not forget that it may take years before its brilliance is appreciated. What we want is *serious* work; not a lot of blown-up, over-sold make-work.

We judge the work that faculty do *by reading it*, not by where it is published. (A chairman or woman should be abreast of faulty interests, and able and willing to read their work intelligently.) We don't do anything that unnecessarily encourages those horrible, predatory academic presses that extort authors to give them all rights to their work, and then restrict its readership—all on the pretext that their journals are peer-reviewed: by whom, and how competently, one never knows. We combine with other universities rather than spending ten of millions of dollars on bundled subscriptions to useless journals. And we *read* faculty members' books; and don't assume they're wonderful because Oxford (or, etc.) published them.

We make sure editorial work is serious and scholarly: not merely slapping a paperclip on a bunch of papers by eight or nine of your friends; not putting together an anthology you will use for your own large classes, not making textbooks out of snippets of work by others who aren't even informed, let alone consulted. Don't feather-bed those who work as editors for those horribly-expensive journals with teaching-load reductions and assistants: after all, universities are already paying their "content-providers," *and* their

huge subscription charges. The *publishers* should pay them if they won't do it for free. Instead, seed efforts to start new, independent journals; but of course make sure these aren't editor-and-friends scams.

The bloated cadres of administrative staff universities now employ, all those vice-deans, sub-deans, associate deans, assistant deans, etc., and their many, many assistants are severely cut.<sup>50</sup> These are not only partly responsible for the huge increase in tuition fees, but also responsible for the ever-increasing burden of bureaucratic make-work that keeps professors from their real job of thinking things through, and eats up the time of chairs and deans so they have an excuse for not keeping up seriously with the work faculty do.

We trim (or at least don't expand) the lavish research grants that some faculty enjoy. They are often spent on travel and self-promotion, when the assumption should be that no genuinely distinguished faculty member should be giving papers at his or her own university's expense. (Yes, a starting assistant professor may need a subsidy to get started; but a senior professor should not.) Doesn't that mean there will be fewer conferences and meetings? Maybe; but my feeling is that would be no great loss. And now there's Zoom, after all.

Sometimes these faculty budgets are used to pay graduate-student research assistants—often under the pretext of mentorship; but this imposes one more burden on already-overwhelmed TAs. And in the fairly unlikely event that a graduate student really could help a faulty member with their research, they'd be better off putting the time into their own work.

We report *the results achieved* with the help of grants, not winning the grants *per se*. We insist that chairs' recommendations for hires/for raises be based on their, or trusted and competent colleagues' (not cronies'), actually reading the work, not on where it's published, and that they not rely, instead, on unanswerable third parties. Almost all professors would admit that it's irresponsible to grade student papers without reading them; and the same goes for candidates' or colleagues' work.

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<sup>50</sup> According to one report, between 1998 and 2009, while student enrollment rose 33% and tenure-track faculty 25%, the number of senior administrators rose 125%. Heather Mac Donald, *The Diversity Delusion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), p.183. This has been the pattern everywhere; and over the last decade, I suspect, the growth of administration has been even faster; and the Covid pandemic has made matters even worse.



We don't expand the NEH budgets or the budgets of other grant-giving bodies *ad libitum*, which contribute to the illusion that you can't do serious philosophical research without buckets of money and time off teaching; try to spread grants more evenly across a variety of institutions, and not to keep subsidizing the same people.

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"That would be great," some of you may say now, but how do we get *those people* to agree? The "lucky" few who land the grants and publish only in prestigious places won't give up their privileges easily; nor will those obsessed by the PGR get over the obsession in a hurry. It's hard not to be infuriated, or depressed, by their antics; but it's better to try to think through how we might gradually move toward the better situation I described. "Those people" might, I believe, be sobered somewhat if the demand for their Ph.D.s slowed significantly. And if we think of all those who teach philosophy—not just those who train graduate students in the "prestigious" places—I believe there's significant silent majority who would welcome a return to sanity and realism. I think, now, of the two different departments where the same Big Noise had recently visited: "he had no paper," one department complained, "he just babbled about his Important Project"; "he had no conversation," another department told me, "except who had been hired where."<sup>51</sup>

If these sensible people, and those sensible departments, stick to their realism and common sense, hire people who will help them do a solid job (not people who will resent being stuck in such a place, and want to teach only what they are working on), there will be a market for the decent products of more realistic programs, and encouragement to those who run them,. . . and so on, in a healthy kind of bottom-up effect.

None of this, of course, even on the most optimistic scenario, would soon change the behavior of those "elite" departments and those who aspire to join their ranks; nor would it change the behavior of grant-giving institutions, or curb universities' administrative bloat. Indeed, from where I sit it looks as if—rather than the "financial exigency" we keep hearing about leading to cutbacks—the pandemic has made that

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<sup>51</sup> I struggled with whether to name this person, but decided, in the end, while acknowledging that what I report is hearsay, that it was best to do so: Jason Stanley. (I don't know its provenance, but the first few minutes of this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAi8mCgG3Q0> certainly suggest that the first hearsay report may not be entirely false, and indeed may be something of an understatement). Probably no one else is quite like Prof. Stanley; but the preening self-regard and the casual condescension to the hoi polloi of our profession seem, sadly, all too common among "those people." And obsession with "who's where" is also, sadly, ubiquitous among those whom the PGR most benefits. .

administrative bloat even worse, and the bureaucratic overreach worse yet. I wish I knew how we could do better; but I can say only that we should each do what we can.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Thanks to Mark Migotti for comments on a draft, and to Pamela Lucken for tracking down details of the NEH, the Templeton Foundation, etc.