Chapter 10
Going Public: Higher Education and the Democratization of Knowledge

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The Public Is Not Invited (and Never Has Been)[1]

The notion of 'the public' has seen a shift from the high-modern postwar period of being associated foremost with formal institutions to a more postmodern, less clearly defined array of heterogeneous spheres of social interactions between sectors and individuals. Indeed, the idea of the public has been, in a sense, 'individualized' in terms of contractual arrangements and consumer rights (Novak 2017, 2020). An important element of this individualization has been decentralization and deregulation in the aftermath of the introduction and implementation, since the late 1970s, of market mechanisms into areas, such as education, that were previously seen as public goods (Waluszewski 2017). At the same time, there is a continuing struggle over the conceptualization and constitution of education and its institutions, public and private, that is far from settled (Börjesson 2017; Börjesson and Cea 2020). This tension, however, is hardly new. Our current ideas about the relationship between education, especially higher education, and democratic values and institutions, have been discussed since at least the Enlightenment, when Humboldt sketched his plan for the revitalization of the university on the basis of the liberal principles of autonomy and productivity: the university would now be a place where the community of scholars—students and teachers—would together produce new knowledge for the benefit of humanity, and reproduce solid scientific understanding and sound judgment in the minds of citizens and civil servants, for the good of the state.

[1]The title of this chapter is borrowed from Tom Wolfe's *The Painted Word* (New York: Bantam 1975), a critique of the insularity of the world of art critics, wealthy collectors and museum curators.

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This paper concerns the conceptualization of the idea of the public university today, that is, a university that is in state ownership or receives significant public funds through a national or subnational government, as opposed to a private university, regardless of whether the latter is for-profit or non-profit.[2] I will focus primarily on the nexus between the notion of 'the public' and the responsibility that this public aspect is thought to entail, especially given the transformation of public universities and colleges since the 1980s. While I will make reference to historical or present conditions, the emphasis will be on a conceptual analysis of the notion of 'public' as a kind of prolegomenon to further investigation. In the first section, the problematic character of the relationship between the university and the public it is said to serve is laid out in terms of the precarious legitimacy of institutions of higher learning in contemporary calls for radical democratization. In the second section, I analyze, as an exemplary case, the most cogent and nuanced theoretical framework for such a project of which I am aware (Steve Fuller), in light of a Wittgensteinian examination of the public nature of knowledge and its implications. The third section focuses on the sociopolitical economics of knowledge in the broadest sense, while the fourth and final sections introduce a proposal, inspired by Simone Weil, for how we might conceive of the project of radical democratization as knowledge socialism, rather than in terms of individual liberties or group interests.

To start, we should note that there is some ambiguity in the way the term is used. On the one hand, there is the specific sense of the term as defined above. A state-funded or state-owned university is subject to legislation and government directives, the latter increasingly result-oriented and combining appropriations with political objectives. But the discourse of accountability and responsibility accompanying the use of the term public also rides on a number of connotations of the term. The relevant undertones that I have in mind are:

1. Civic, governmental, official: 'the public sector';
2. Influential, important, eminent: 'a public 'figure';
3. Common, communal, shared: 'public affairs';
4. Open, accessible, available: 'a public library';
5. Exposed, in circulation, publicized: 'a public apology';
6. Belonging to citizens, society and/or taxpayers: 'public spending'.

Now, of course, there is a great deal of overlap: A public library, as a rule, is both open to the community *and* financed by the taxpayers, and has as well some sort of formal or official status, in contrast to a private enterprise such as a book store. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to keep in mind these slightly different senses of the term when holding the public university accountable in various ways. So, for instance, as opposed to a private university, a public university is one that is in state ownership or receives significant public funding through a national or state government. But whether a state university is considered public will depend upon the specific education landscape in the state or country in question.

[2]The HE-landscape differs between countries, which means that a national university may or may not be considered public, depending upon the system in question.

The aspect of 'public' that I will be addressing here is not in the first instance a matter of ownership (i.e., a matter of legal status and economic structures), that is, I will not be stressing (1) in the list above. Nor will I primarily be discussing issues related to the regional aspect of the university or its de facto global standing or its position with regard to the local community (2). Rather, at the intersection of (3)–(6) above, I am concerned with the idea of an institution that, by its very nature, involves something that, in principle if not in fact, belongs to *everyone* (6), and therefore, in a very particular sense, *anyone*, i.e., (3)—whether or not the institution in question is financed from the state coffers. One of my main arguments is that a proper understanding of this idea requires some reflection on what it means for such an institution to be 'open' (4) and 'public' in the sense of 'exposed' (5). Thus, the topic of this paper is not the public university as a reality, an agenda, a project or a prescription. Rather, I will consider the modern university as the formal and material institutionalization of an idea that incurs a very particular sort of social responsibility.

Leaving aside the legal and economic aspects of institutionalization aside, one might ask what kind of institution a public university is in terms of its ultimate purpose, its distinctive characteristic as an institution open to anyone (4), something shared (3), exposed (5) and belonging to all (6). One suggestion that has been proposed, and which I will discuss at some length in this chapter, is that the main purpose of the university as such (and, I infer, all the more so of one that is characterized as 'public') is the democratization of knowledge. Most notably, Steve Fuller has called for the university to

> relaunch its Enlightenment vision by stop privileging research activity, which arguably lays the groundwork for rent-seeking through priority claims made in the scholarly literature and the patent office. The academic capacity for countering expertization is expressed in the classroom, as teaching provides access to knowledge to those who otherwise would not acquire it because they have not been part of the contexts in which such knowledge is produced and distributed. Thus universities manufacture knowledge as a public good through the creative destruction of the social capital formed by research networks. (Fuller 2018a: 2)

In *Post-Truth*, Fuller not only rejects the production and maintenance of expertise as the *raison d'être* of the university, but also levels a sustained argument against the academy and its allied institutions as a kind of epistemic protection racket. He contends that on the basis of the sort of knowledge that a scientific consensus (allegedly) bestows, what Kuhn called 'normal science', 'universities can extract the form of rent known as "tuition," in return for which "credentials" are dispensed' (Fuller 2018a: 185).

Fuller is critical of the notion, increasingly embraced by politicians, professionals and the intelligentsia, that we are today witnessing a popular revolt against expertise waged by anti-intellectuals who privilege ignorance over knowledge and treat all ideas and opinions as equally valid and worthy of consideration. This picture, Fuller says, is a 'big canard'. To the contrary, he suggests, leaving important matters to the 'experts' to decide encourages a blind trust in authority that weakens the scaffolding of democratic institutions, which depend on the active exercise of judgment

to flourish.[3] Our 'culture of intellectual deference', as he calls it, is actually counter-Enlightenment (Fuller 2018a: 13). Fuller emphasizes repeatedly that being prepared to take responsibility for our own ideas and actions and to acknowledge ownership of their consequences is a matter of ethics, not epistemology. Rather than see the debate as being between the cognoscenti, on the one hand, and an unruly mob, on the other, Fuller portrays the struggle as one between two forms for political discussion and decision-making: technocracy and rhetoric. His point is that the attitude of the rhetorician is more democratic—the idea is to convince someone of something by engaging her interests and desires, and to see demands for evidence and justification as a two-way street.

The gist of Fuller's argument is that for the university to be genuinely democratic, that is, for it to serve the public, the expertise 'protection racket' run by universities and professional bodies must be dismantled. This is not to say that there shouldn't be people who are trained to know things and who are recognized as knowing them, but rather that acknowledging the weight of data or the importance of rigor should entail a stance toward knowledge as something that is perpetually mediated, arbitrated, achieved and, from time to time, reconceived. What Fuller calls for is simply the admission that the plausibility of a claim can only be assessed within the rules of hypothesis testing set within a given scientific context, the space in which a certain kind of expertise is formed and exercised. In Fullerian terms, training and accreditation are the cost of entry into the 'high-rent epistemic district' called expertise (Fuller 2018a: 21). The activities of academic institutions and disciplines, professional bodies and accreditation agencies, he suggests, amount to different kinds of gatekeeping and boundary work, all of which, under the rubrics of selectivity and excellence, exists for the purposes of excluding people and expelling ideas. Thus, if universities are earnest in their claims to serve the public by producing and disseminating knowledge for the common good, then, rather than jealously guarding their journals, admissions policies and systems for research funding, they should lend a hand in tearing down the ramparts and bringing down the barricades that keep the public out, and aid in the redistribution of the epistemic wealth and social capital garrisoned within.

The insurrectionary metaphors are quite intentional, for what Fuller is aiming at is a revolution: he is essentially advocating epistemic socialism, i.e. the idea that the liberation of humanity will require that the means of production, distribution and exchange of knowledge be owned and regulated by the community as a whole. The academy cannot claim to be working for the public good without being prepared to prove it by committing itself to this revolution. Resting on the authority of expertise amounts to dismissively expecting hoi polloi to sit quietly with their hands folded on

[3]Fuller (2018b) reminds us that concept of 'expert' is a late nineteenth-century juridical innovation that extended the idea of first-hand experience to include people with a specific training which puts them in a position to generalize over a variety of cases based on prior knowledge. In this respect, experts came to be licensed to speak as authorities, a caste of politically sanctioned and economically underpinned secular clerics, the edicts of whom cannot be questioned by the laity.

their laps and have ‘trust in science’ (i.e., bow to authority) in perpetuity in virtue of the inherited legitimacy endowed by titles and institutions. I take Fuller’s challenge quite seriously, as I think we all should. But there is a philosophical conflict at the root of Fuller’s vision. In the next section, I discuss what the public nature of higher education might entail if I am right about the nature of that problem.

Public Knowledge: A Matter of Gaining Exposure

The philosophical issue for the problem that I want to address is illustrated by Fuller’s reading of the late Wittgenstein: He sees the latter as holding the position that our most basic frames of reference are ‘utterly arbitrary’.[4] In his discussion of the view that he attributes to Wittgenstein, he writes: ‘the knowledge game is not determined by the rules; rather determining the rules is what the knowledge game is about’ (Fuller 2018b), a position that would seem to assume an unproblematic dichotomy between necessity and contingency. I take Wittgenstein to reject such a division. On another interpretation, what we learn from *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein 1969), for instance, is rather that while the arbitrariness of the rules for making knowledge claims may hold in theory, in fact, we can hardly make sense of what it would mean in concrete situations in which we have a need to know something. Any attempt to capture such a situation of radical transfiguration under prevailing epistemic conditions would not be a description of anything, strictly speaking, but a conjecture (or a poem).

Let us take as an example Wittgenstein’s consideration of the truisms offered by Moore, which are supposed to show that we have knowledge of a kind such that it cannot be doubted, and on which science can be firmly anchored, since we can then know for certain that we do know that which we take ourselves to know. When Wittgenstein says that the sense of a remark such as ‘I am here’ is only in its use, we can take him literally, as noting quite simply that we would be hard pressed to find a meaning without a use: for example, as an answer to the questions ‘Where are you?’, or to notify one’s partner that one has come home, or to offer solace to a grieving friend. Similarly, in the absence of a context, we don’t have the means by which to ‘make sense’ of a statement such as ‘Physical objects exists’ (or its negation for that matter). We *can* meaningfully say that a chair is a physical object to someone who doesn’t know what a chair is, or who doesn’t understand what ‘physical object’ means. We can use the term ‘physical object’ to distinguish some things from other things.

Let us say, for instance, that I want to check the exact phrasing of a line from a play. I say to my friend, ‘I want to see *Romeo and Juliette* ’, and he replies, ‘I don’t think there are any productions on just now’. I might then say, ‘No, no. I want to see

[4]Wittgenstein never makes such a claim. In what follows, I will attempt to say something about why he does not, and why that fact is relevant for understanding what he does say.

the physical object', meaning that I want to check the script for the play lying on my desk rather than to see the play performed. In so doing, I need not tacitly embrace an ontological position or theory when I use the word 'physical'. Now, within the terms of the metaphysical game, say the competition between constructivists and realists in academic philosophy, the claim that physical objects exist or don't exist is not entirely unintelligible, since the context is clear: a kind of epistemic game such as Fuller describes. The question remains, however, if it has any sense outside of that kind of game (in the same way, we can ask if the moves in a game of chess have any sense without reference to the rules of chess). Much of Wittgenstein's later work can be described as an assemblage of reminders about what happens when words or signs are no longer doing their jobs (when they go 'on holiday'). One might say that when they are decontextualized, they become dysfunctional (which in turn gives rise to the sorts of paradoxes that vex professional philosophers).

Rules, in contrast to metaphysical principles, apply to the doings of the people who are going to apply them (say, by playing a game of chess). Two crucial features of rule-following are (i) that for something to be a rule, it must *apply*, i.e., it says something about how we generally do things; and (ii) a rule must be practically *applicable* for someone in the case at hand, in some respect. Our arithmetic, for instance, has developed for a use in a world where if you give me an apple when I already have one, I have two apples. In a world in which apples regularly dissolve into thin air, or spontaneously multiply, another way of counting might be in order. But that does not render the truth or correctness of $1 + 1 = 2$ *contingent* for us, as if we might, not in exceptional cases, but at any given moment, in fact not know what to do if someone asks us for two apples (Wittgenstein 1978: §157). On the other hand, there are cases in which $1 + 1 = 2$ is not applicable (if I add one small drop of water to another, I get a bigger drop of water, not two little ones). But should the equation have no application, i.e., become *generally* useless for anyone, 'that would be the end of all sums' (Wittgenstein 1978: §37). At the same time, it might still hold for a certain calculus, even if that calculus itself then had no direct application beyond itself. In that case, the equation *is* applicable for someone, namely for someone trying to solve a problem within that calculus. Naturally, deviant or perverse ways of adding are entirely possible even where and when a certain rule, say of addition, applies, but then, such ways of figuring are usually impractical, which is to say that they lack application or use. The best way of seeing what someone believes or understands, in mathematics as in life, is to see what they do, that is, in the former case, how they calculate. If someone is using our everyday arithmetic such as we learn in kindergarten to calculate something of our world (say, adding a liter of milk to two liters of milk), then we can judge if the mathematical rule is being properly applied (which is the same as to say that it is correct).

The important point to bear in mind when thinking about academic disciplines such as mathematics, or medicine, or history, or French, is that the relevant terms designate both an intellectual inheritance, i.e., a body of knowledge (knowing *that*), *and* certain kinds of activities, something that someone does (knowing *how* or *being able to* count apples, perform a coronary bypass, scour newspaper archives in order to understand the inertia of the League of Nations after Mussolini's invasion of

Abyssinia, read *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* in the original language). The question for higher education is at what point different elements of *the body of knowledge* are to be introduced, and how they are related to established practices of calculating and measuring (or surgery, or source criticism, or French grammar, etc.). That canon, however, is entirely dependent on the form of life in which it *matters* or has a use for someone, i.e., has a meaning and purpose.[5] Knowledge and the education contributing to and emanating from it are in this respect intrinsically public in the sense that I suggested was most relevant: open, exposed and dispersed among those for whom it applies or might apply, which is to say, for those who can use it in their activities.

To calculate is not *to play at* calculating. This inward dimension, what one is aiming at, or doing 'on the inside', is not separable from the act of calculating, or trying to understand a book written in French, but is part and parcel of what it is to calculate and to learn a foreign language.[6] In that respect, all calculation and all learning are at once public and private, social and individual, for the one(s) doing or learning how to do something. Both calculation and opinion are public in the relevant sense, but meeting the requirements of, or most apt approaches to, a particular situation or activity (the correct application of a rule, such as of addition, for instance, a knowing *how* or being *able* to) is not the same kind of 'rightness' as that of political opinion or conformity to religious doctrine (a knowing *that*, or orthodoxy). Stating or affirming a belief is not the same activity for the person doing it as actually performing a mathematical operation or trying to figure something out: 'That's why following a rule is a practice. And to *think* one is following a rule is not to follow a rule. And that's why it's not possible to follow a rule 'privately'; otherwise, thinking one was following a rule would be the same thing as following it (Wittgenstein 1958: §202). When we observe the metamorphoses of rules and how they are applied, that is, when we study the body of knowledge, we perform a kind of history or sociology. But what Wittgenstein is getting at in pointing to knowing or understanding as an activity, he is doing something else. One might call it conceptual autoethnography, except that the 'auto' is the first-person plural of a community of practice.

In the academy, we are inclined to think that *all* statements having to do with the world ('truth claims') have the character of statements or beliefs, hypotheses to be tested, so that just as I might entertain an hypothesis about the existence of a planet, I entertain the hypothesis about the existence of my hand as I hold it up. That being the case, the game is that of justification: to provide sufficient evidence to render conviction, or certainty that a given judgment has been made properly and correctly.

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[5]See also Wittgenstein (1969: §38): 'Knowledge in mathematics. [One has to ask]: "Why should it be important? What does it matter to me?" What is interesting is how we use mathematical propositions.'

[6]A useful way of understanding the distinction between the canon and the activity is Vincent Decombes' (2014) distinction between 'objectified mind' and 'objective mind,' respectively (see especially the discussion on pages 292–295).

This involves, then, that an element of doubt has been introduced, which calls for a meta-reflection, an assessment that the judgment itself is not based on a mistake or a retrospective attestation that the evidence was in order and that adequate procedures were followed. The latter, in turn, involve implicit or explicit public standards of evidence and deliberation for determining the likelihood that a given judgment is correct. But Wittgenstein wants us to notice is that it is not the case that a mistake is merely *less probable* when we move from a conjecture about the existence of a planet to my raised hand. It is not a matter of weighing evidence or haggling over interests or perspectives. Rather, we come to a point where it becomes impossible in practice to think that one might be mistaken; to take that thought seriously would entail lacking any ground to stand on with regard to any statement about the world, and even any interaction with it. 'The grammar of the word 'knows' is evidently closely related to that of 'can', 'is able to'. But also closely related to that of 'understands'. ('Mastery' of a technique); "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say 'This is simply what I do'" (Wittgenstein 1958: §150 and §217). Now, in theory, again, we can play with that idea (skepticism), but in the end, it would leave us nothing to think about or with, since that kind of radical doubt means not being able to do anything at all: 'we got to know the *nature* of calculating by learning to calculate'; '[c]hildren do not learn that books exist, that armchairs exist, etc., etc.,—they learn to fetch books, sit in armchairs, etc.' (Wittgenstein 1969: §476)

Fuller and Wittgenstein agree on two points: (i) However firmly philosophers hold on to their preferred methods and principles, they have no authority over how language and thought actually go about their business; (ii) knowledge is primarily a matter of being able to do something, or what Fuller calls 'modal power'. Where they differ is on the role of rhetoric. Wittgenstein is conservative. He thinks that we can continue taking for granted most of what we generally do and must take for granted, theoretical arguments based on philosophical or scientific concepts notwithstanding. Even if a prominent physicist were to assert, on the grounds of his expertise, say, that since all physical properties of an electron can be described mathematically, an electron (as well as everything else) is itself a mathematical structure (a pattern in space-time), it would have no direct consequences for how we conduct science or our lives (Frenkel 2014).[7] It makes no difference, for instance, when we count apples to make a pie. The pie is a mathematical structure in theory, not in fact. Indeed, as a metaphysical speculation, it makes no difference for the doing of physics, since the claim has no bearing on the application of the rules for calculation in physics or higher

[7] I refer here to MIT physicist Max Tegmark's (2014) popular *Our Mathematical Universe. My Quest for the Ultimate Nature of Reality*, which makes this argument. In his review of the book for the New York Times, UC Berkeley mathematician Edward Frenkel (2014) applauds Tegmark's capacity to make recent developments in astrophysics and quantum theory accessible to nonspecialists, but is critical of the metaphysical claims he makes in the name of science. Responding to Tegmark's speculations of the multiplicity of selves in his theory of the mathematical multiverse—'When the number of yous increases, you perceive subjective randomness. When the number of yous decreases, you perceive subjective immortality.'—Frenkel responds, 'The real question, however, might be, What is the number of yous who can understand what this means?'

mathematics. In that respect, the world as mathematical structure is a concept that most of us at present can neither picture nor utilize. It's rather a kind of conceptual poem, an allegory for the actual work of astrophysics: 'as if everything solid and real is a mathematical pattern in time-space'. If I understand him correctly, the renegade Fuller thinks that pictures of this kind wield sophistical power and can function as epistemic game-changers.

Fuller and Wittgenstein agree that knowledge is not a purely or even primarily conceptual matter, that is, merely a question of the logical form of justification. We can show how concepts are established, contested and refined historically and socially. As a matter of fact, knowledge (scientific consensus) lives on continuous communal manufacture and maintenance in the sense that expertise that is no longer in use is in fact not 'known' in practice; and what counts as competence and expertise at any juncture is determined by a specific concatenation of institutions, priorities and aims. In this sense, knowledge is always already potentially public and inherently social. An incommunicable discovery or invention cannot become an innovation, precisely because it can't be realized, put to work in the service of expanding, deepening, applying or distributing knowledge. But, as a matter of principle, Fuller discerns the germ of democratized knowledge in the idea of a logic of justification (what was described above in terms of a 'meta-reflection') as central to the scientific spirit of inquiry. By allowing, at least in principle, anyone to examine the argument and weigh the evidence offered for himself, institutionalized methods of research can break the ties with the idiosyncratic origins of knowledge claims. In Fuller's terms, the positivist ideal of the unity of science removes trade barriers and reduces epistemic rent-seeking and thus opens up knowledge for general public ownership, which means that we, the public, must all take responsibility for knowing what we want or need to know or be able to do, that is, for what we valorize as knowledge, and accept the consequences of the actions taken or not taken and their success or failure as a consequence of the value so ascribed.

This stance invites the following questions: Is all insight, apprehension and understanding amenable to demands for justification, standards of evidence and procedures for ratiocination? Evidence and justification belong to cases in which there is reason to doubt, or at least where doubt has been introduced. But do we, or can we even, make and meet such demands everywhere and always? What kind of responsibility is this, that is to be borne by everyone and thus no one in particular? On the other hand, can we even speak of some insight or determination as knowledge if it has not been subjected to rigorous vetting? And, if so, what kind of duty could such insight possibly entail?

Higher Education: Modal Power to the People

For the purposes of epistemic sedition, whatever is established in the academic 'lamestream' can and ought to be made available to public scrutiny and challenged. And even from a pragmatic point of view, however seemingly stable our hierarchies

of norms and our methods, techniques and standards for assessing claims may seem to be, if they are at all viable to begin with, they will be all the more resilient if they are exposed to attack, much as the body's resistance to disease is strengthened by exposure to germs and viruses. In this regard, the busting of the knowledge cartels of traditional media and academia might be seen as the singularly most important step in the democratization of knowledge in the last century. On this account, the fiscal precarity of the journalism industry and the diminished authority of cultural and scientific institutions are salutary developments that inject vitality in the marketplace of ideas, while professional axioms about neutrality in reporting or teaching as universal goods inhibit free exchange and silence dissent. Such claims to objectivity are also rhetorical—and always have been. Schumpeter's (1994 [1942]: 82–83) 'gale of creative destruction', denoting the ceaseless process of mutation that revolutionizes structures from within, has become the emblematic phrase for this intuition. As Mark Zuckerberg famously declared, 'Move fast and break things. Unless you are breaking stuff, you are not moving fast enough.'

Thanks largely to digitalization, the public's consumer preferences now decide what kinds of knowledge are desirable, indeed, they determine the very process of creation, valorization and dissemination of knowledge. Any qualms about this trajectory of perpetual technological disruption appear, not entirely without cause, as Luddite, fogeyish and undemocratic. If we formerly entrusted elites to do the right thing, can we not just as well trust the public at large? If virality makes the body more resilient, is this not at least as true of the mind? Perhaps it is time to acknowledge that all knowledge has always been user-generated and unvetted content that either managed to go viral among those with the power to apply, share and use it, or it has simply got buried in the long thread of epistemic history. Major news outlets and universities seemed to have taken the message to heart that if they have any role to play further down the road, they will simply have to improve their products: They will have to create excitement and enthusiasm, engage people's attention and take their potential customers' proclivities and tastes into account in selling their wares (if needs be, by consulting Cambridge Analytica). The name of the game is impact and growth, and these ultimate aims presuppose giving the people, individually and collectively, what they want.

Notice here that the boundaries between the media, techno-science and business are envisioned as fluid. Very soon, there will be no gates to keep or breach. If the effects on how people think, speak and interact can't be fathomed, that's because they are spontaneously produced and reproduced. Knowledge is finally free, or at least has loosened its shackles.

Fuller's campaign of 'modal power to the people', the proliferation of the ability to determine what is and is not possible to think, eschews the distinction between politics and science or facts and values as being grounded in some inviolable partition between spheres of human activity. The basic idea is that facts, i.e., assertions about states of affairs, are not descriptions but decisions: risky hypotheses that can be falsified by subsequent events and revised accordingly (Fuller 2018a: 141). In order

for this picture to hold, there cannot be any strict boundaries between the political, the economic and what one might call the 'ethico-epistemological', that is, Fuller's own conception of epistemic responsibility as discussed earlier.

In what remains of this paper, I want to suggest that we need to consider knowledge, not in the first instance as a body of knowledge or canon ('knowing that'), but as an activity ('knowing how'), which I take to be a Fullerian position. But I want to consider 'knowledge as activity' in a slightly different light, not so much as a matter of opening up for public decision-making in the construction of facts as a matter of sharing, and at times negotiating and revising, certain shared *habits and procedures for reckoning with* 'facts' or what is the case. I choose 'reckoning' because it is broader than 'calculating', without carrying the philosophical baggage of 'judging'. Let us take the example of 'reckoning with the existence of Sweden'. One way of reckoning with the state of affairs that 'Sweden exists' is to formally recognize its sovereignty and its borders, say, by refraining from violating them by deploying submarines into Swedish territorial waters; another would be to work politically to dissolve national economic or juridical barriers, say, by running for a seat in the EU parliament; a third might be to forge passports and help smuggle immigrants into the country. In each case, one is reckoning with a state of affairs as 'real' in the sense of 'something to be reckoned with'; indeed any of these actions or the deliberations involved necessarily takes the 'reality' of the state (the state of affairs abbreviated in the name Sweden) into account, but in no case must some ontological theory or position on the essence of statehood be assumed. The political 'truth' about the existence of borders can be hammered out in different military or diplomatic contexts; that is what politics is about. But those negotiations about what is or is not possible still and all recognize a given matter, what we do (develop microprocessors for biometric identification, sell weapons to India, etc.) or what is the case, to get started.

Similarly, the economic domain of exchange value (leaving use-value aside for the moment), the market, is something that must be reckoned with. Now, this is particularly difficult today, when financial derivative instruments such as futures and options play such an important role in the market. Since the value or price is derived from some underlying asset, which, it turns out, can be just about anything that one can speculate on, there is something especially intangible about this 'reality' that has such concrete effects on us all. Since derivatives can take many forms, it can be difficult even for regulators to maintain oversight of the market for derivatives. Yet, insofar as we save money for our children or our retirements, we are all part of the mass of 'uninformed investors' who blindly grope in the dark, which is to say, rely entirely on the authority of economic expertise. But however tricky it is to assign market value to something such as the weather,[8] it can apparently be done. There is a tendency to think that the same must apply to any 'asset', even ones considered by someone or some group to be 'priceless'. Here, we can see an analogy with the

[8] A weather derivative is a financial instrument used by companies or individuals to hedge against the risk of weather-related losses. The seller of a weather derivative agrees to bear the risk of disasters in return for a premium. If no damages occur before the expiration of the contract, the seller will make a profit.

idea that the 'hypothesis' about existence of my raised hand is 'more probable' than one concerning a distant planet; on this view, the value of, say, a subprime loan for a house in Los Angeles is perhaps easier to fix a price for than, say, the risk for drought in northern Sweden, which in turn may be more tangible than the 'value' of Ayer's rock for the aboriginal people of the Northern Territory in central Australia. Still, the argument runs, in the end, it's a matter of degree (probability), not of kind. But as with the case of the raised hand discussed earlier, it can be argued that it is not a matter of probability at all, but of where one's spade turns: what I can in principle exchange for or replace with something else (knowing a certain way of ascertaining probability, for instance) and what I cannot (knowing that this is my hand).

Here there might be limits or bounds that some of us are inclined to respect. 'Chesterton's fence' is the principle that that we shouldn't breach gates before we have a satisfactory understanding of why they were put up in the first place:

> In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, 'I don't see the use of this; let us clear it away.' To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: 'If you don't see the use of it, I certainly won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it [...] But the truth is that nobody has any business to destroy a social institution until he has really seen it as an historical institution. If he knows how it arose, and what purposes it was supposed to serve, he may really be able to say that they were bad purposes, or that they have since become bad purposes, or that they are purposes which are no longer served [...] This principle applies to a thousand things, to trifles as well as true institutions, to convention as well as to conviction. (Chesterton 1929: 35)

One might think this a traditionalist stance, but then one should keep in mind another popular quote from Chesterton:

> The whole modern world has divided itself into Conservatives and Progressives. The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of Conservatives is to prevent mistakes from being corrected. Even when the revolutionist might himself repent of his revolution, the traditionalist is already defending it as part of his tradition. Thus we have two great types – the advanced person who rushes us into ruin, and the retrospective person who admires the ruins.[9]

There is thus a position that holds that the tension between the destruction and preservation of certain fences, gates, limits, borders and boundaries is what makes possible and necessary public discourse, the lifeblood of which is the education of the people. Knowledge of any kind must be in circulation, in practice, before it congeals into thing-like facts or theories, much less disciplines and institutions. But this solidifying has arisen for reasons, some of which are good, some of which are bad; some have served their purpose well and still do, others are obsolete. From the point of view of the reasoner, determining what to think in each case is by and large a matter of reckoning, together and individually, rather than theorizing.

[9]Illustrated London News, April 19, 1924 (Chesterton 1924).

Epistemic Radicalization: A Bonfire of the Vanities?

The idea that certain ideas, norms or ways of reckoning are not transferable, malleable or reduceable to something else is connected to the very topical issue of identity: the question of who the public who share knowledge in common, among whom this knowledge is disseminated and to whom it is or should be exposed, is. Fuller views the popularity of 'trans'-phenomena (transgender, transracial, transhuman discourses) as the logical conclusion of the insight that the rules of the game can be changed, even at the level of personal identity. He suggests that trans arguments can and should be enlisted to nuance arguments made in the name of 'epistemic justice' (Fuller 2018a: 58). Fuller makes the case that epistemic justice would seem to entail justice toward knowledge itself, which would mean putting different theories of justice on the table for arbitration (with regard to merit, fairness, cost, benefit, etc.) when producing and disseminating knowledge, rather than fixating on some axiomatic criterion of truth, facticity, or equity. Fuller's complaint about the fashionable use of the notion of epistemic justice is that it assumes in advance an unproblematic conception of social justice with the normative agenda of identifying and correcting 'violations'. By contrast, he endorses public ownership of knowledge itself, which requires a general acknowledgment that scientific facts can only be judged by their effects, how they are taken up and used 'post-publication'. If we recognize that the knowledge that forms the basis of claims to expertise is established institutionally, not conceptually, that scientific consensus requires manufacture and maintenance, and that what counts as competence is determined by specific interests and alignments, then, working backward, a consensus based on a given set of specific interests and alignments can be manufactured and maintained by a group or community in order to constitute knowledge claims that can and should be admitted for consideration in a public negotiation with respect to their real and potential consequences.

Wittgenstein would presumably grant a number of Fuller's points as a correct critique of various forms of implicit realism and rationalism (including its dominant empiricist variety) as rhetorical devices for ensuring compliance and shutting out dissident, but would likely hesitate to underwrite a 'post-truth' doctrine about what knowledge is and has always been for the reasoner/reckoner. The general thesis is explicitly normative, assuming in advance of the formulation of a specific problem that it can and ought to be addressed in terms of its potential effects. But this occludes the question of why we want to know something in the first place. As soon as we say anything about knowledge as such, we are moving from a modus operandi for a specific analysis to an ontological claim. But we can accept the MO for analyzing a certain kind of knowledge production (say, its public or social character) without taking any theoretical stance whatsoever on what it 'really' is that we ourselves are doing. The first gives us science and scholarship, subject matter that can be taught, learned and applied, as the best we have for the time being (the body of knowledge in the field in question), together with a kind of grammar or instructions for use (rules) of the techniques employed for rendering the answers that constitute that knowledge.

The latter is an example of what gives knowledge claims their powers of persuasion, rather than reckoning, i.e., their 'rhetorical' character. My suggestion is that an alternative to this rhetorical characterization is what I have called Wittgenstein's 'conceptual autoethnography'.

A thinker who wanted to democratize knowledge, on not altogether dissimilar grounds as Fuller's, was Simone Weil. One might question the relevance of the visions of a Platonist communist mystic such as Weil for the bold, pragmatic social epistemology of Steve Fuller with regard to higher education, but, as a matter of fact, while their starting points and conclusions are profoundly different, there is a kinship in their respective accounts of a number of issues related to education, knowledge, certainty and understanding. Where Fuller wants us to see the fictive character of truth and the truth of fiction, for instance, Weil urges us to see truth in 'unreason', for instance, in the ramblings of a King Lear or a fool, someone without titles or dignities, that is, those to whom we don't think we need to *pay attention.* Weil distinguishes between truths such as '$2 + 2 = 4$' or 'here's my pen', the facticity of which depends upon reciprocal acknowledgement of what is the case and which rules apply, on the one hand, and moral or spiritual truths, on the other. We need not head the fool's ranting that $2 + 2 = 13$, but that doesn't mean that we can simply disregard what he has to say about the human condition, which has to do with truths of a different order: 'Under the name of truth,' she writes, 'I also include beauty, virtues and every kind of goodness' (Weil 1951: 23–24 in Miles 2005). *Paying attention* is then for Weil a form of radical passivity or receptivity; it entails a stepping back from all roles, including that of the doer or 'knower'. It involves a distancing of oneself, not only from the things observed, but also from one's own faculty of observation. Attention consists in suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object:

> […] above all, our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive it in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it. All wrong translations, all absurdities in geometric problems, all clumsiness of style and all faulty connection of ideas […] all such things are due to the fact that thought has seized upon some idea too hastily and being thus permanently blocked, is not open to the truth. The cause is that we have wanted to be too active; we have wanted to carry out a search. (Weil 1951: 62 in Miles 2005)

The problem with both correspondence and coherence theories of truth, Weil might say, is that they are too pro-active, too hasty to make the world fit our plans and purposes. This is not to say that the methods of the sciences need correction, or should not be taught; rather, our philosophy, our attempts at understanding the human activity that constitutes thinking and knowing, is faulty. In that respect, Weil agrees with Fuller. The difference is that Fuller thinks that it makes sense to give a discursive account of truth, even while admitting its 'fictive' character. For Weil, the truth of truth can't be said, but only shown.

Similarly, Fuller and Weil share the same negative view of all forms of governance that take the form of an administrative class of highly empowered technocrats. Weil calls this modern hierarchical arrangement 'functional oppression'; true democracy, she thinks, is nothing other than the subordination of society (a reification of the people who constitute the public) to the individual—which, in turn, is also her

definition of true socialism. Like forces of nature, society and its institutions must be tamed so as not to pose a danger to the human being. For Weil, freedom is not merely the absence of constraint, nor a relationship between desire and its satisfaction (Fuller's 'modal power'), but a relationship between thought and action. Someone is free whose every action proceeds from a preliminary judgment concerning the end that she has set herself and the sequence of means suitable for attaining this end. As capable of thought, the individual will either respond to the necessities of life as if she were merely an organic or mechanical system reacting to the stimuli acting upon her from the outside, or, by developing a relation to those necessities from the point of view of conscience, be vigilantly aware that something in the world is real and of endless value aside from herself and her projects: that there is right and wrong, true and false, good and bad. The ability to distance oneself from such prompts determines whether or not one is free. Such an act of separation is not a matter of construction or persuasion, but, to borrow an Augustinian notion, a will to not to will.

It is precisely here that Fuller's vision clashes with Weil's. Fuller celebrates the heady enterprise of achieving goals. Weil emphasizes that anxiety about failure and missing targets set by others, the apprehension of being sacked for not meeting one's prescribed quota, or a pupil's fear of being castigated by the teacher for getting her sums wrong, for instance, impairs thought, which, above all, requires patience. The very possibility of thought, invention and the exercise of judgment is conditioned on having a time and a place to step back and consider what we're doing: 'And just as danger, exposure to suffering are healthy and necessary elements in the sphere of action, so are they unhealthy influences in the exercise of the intelligence. A fear, even a passing one, always provokes either a weakening of a tautening, depending on the degree of courage, and that is all that is required to damage the extremely delicate and fragile instrument of precision which constitutes our intelligence.' (Weil 1952: 27) To be deprived of the conditions for the exercise of the intellect is the very definition of enslavement: the necessity for speed and efficiency, and unthinking obedience to orders, prompts or protocols. We need only consider the current discussions concerning censorship through noise, and the worry that a referendum on reality is not a plebiscite but a riot. The clamor distracts us from what she calls 'methodological thinking' (Weil 2001: 62), which bears some resemblance in certain respects to what I have described as Wittgenstein's 'conceptual autoethnography'.

On this account, the democratization of knowledge as it is mediated by digitalization and monetization can very well lead to its opposite. In the never-ending competition to exercise the power to determine what is or is not thinkable, for others as well as for oneself, higher education will become faster, more focused and more efficient. But teachers and students will be anxious. They will persuade and be persuaded, but they will not have time to think. They will be unfree.

This point is directly related to Weil's notion of the 'sacred', which, for her is quite simply that which is what is good. What is sacred in the human being is not his person, but what is impersonal in him: 'Gregorian chant, Romanesque architecture, the *Iliad*, the invention of geometry were not, for the people through whom they were brought into being and made available to us, occasions for the manifestation of personality.'

(Weil 2005: 74–75) Nor moves in a power game, one might add. Observing manifest behavior, as it were, from the outside in, it may well be impossible for an observer to see the difference between reverence for the good, the true, and the beautiful (or even the correct), on the one hand, and attempts to win an argument or mold the world after one's own preferences and designs, on the other. But what it means to be doing something for its own sake, as a matter of principle, is what, for the one doing it, gives it the meaning it has, not due to their idiosyncratic inclinations, but as the very attempt to free oneself from them:

> Truth and beauty dwell on this level of the impersonal and anonymous. This is the realm of the sacred. On the other level, nothing is sacred [. . .] What is sacred in science is truth; what is sacred in art is beauty. Truth and beauty are impersonal [. . .] If a child is doing a sum and does it wrong, the mistake bears the stamp of his personality. If he does the sum exactly right, his personality does not enter into it at all. (Weil 2005: 75)

It should be acknowledged that most of what we today call art, Weil would likely consider unbeautiful, and the substance of what we do at universities, both in research and instruction, untrue. I do not mean to say that any of this amounts to some kind of demonstration that the economistic view of truth as a relative good, the value of which can be negotiated, is wrong, but simply that it misses the mark insofar as many of us, if not most, have an experience of the 'sacred' (the true, the right, the real) that is, seen from the inside, not as a matter of power or politics. To repeat an earlier formulation, to play at calculating is not to calculate. Similarly, winning an argument is not the same as getting clear on things. For Weil, there is an ever-present risk that our sense of reality can be conflated with existent institutions and practices; for this reason, we should pay all the more attention to conscience, not less. The problem with the liberation theology of contemporary liberalism is that it entreats us, even trains us, to see thinking, learning and knowing from the outside in, and ourselves as players on a field. There is much to be said for this approach, perhaps as a first step toward the decréation that Weil describes as a route to insight. One might even take Fuller's riotous debunking of academic pontificating about academic meritocracy and scientific method as a form of it. But he thinks that the show must go on, just under different direction. Weil, on the other hand, describing the need for rootedness from the inside, sees Plato's quest for something more permanent and more real as a fundamental orientation of being human. The feeling for the sacred, the priceless and non-negotiable, might seem nonsensical from an economic point of view, but that just says something about the limitations of a perspective in which the political, the commercial and the ethical cannot be disentangled.

Power, in Weil's account, is a problem for, not a solution to, the challenges of culture, education and politics, because power, insofar as it is conceivable, is something that 'can extend the foundations on which it rests up to a certain point only, after which it comes up, as it were, against an impassable wall. But even so, it is not in a position to stop; the spur of competition forces it to go even farther, to go beyond the limits within which it can be effectively exercised.' (Weil 1958: 72) In a word, power, any power, will have more, which invariably leads to confrontation and oppositions which can neither be comprehended, nor controlled or contained.

These confrontations give rise to a fictive language revolving around victory and winning that covers up its own impermanence, and the suffering of the losers and the vanquished. The game occupies all of our attention. Our thoughts are colonized by the discourse of competition, and we lose the capacity to take in the world.

In Weil's view, all error and all suffering stem from a lack of attention, an inability to grasp the world's contradiction as a means to understanding and insight. Moral 'truths', for instance, are ordinary, concrete experiences arising out of a rootedness in a common humanity. They are neither concepts nor language games, but a part of everyday life that gets buried under accretions of ideology, ambition and narcissism. To be able to pay attention means then to strip down these layers of false consciousness, what Weil calls 'décreation', in order to be able to perceive and bear an undistorted truth. This exercise requires a radical reassessment and recreation of one's own life and is in that respect ultimately individual. But it is not the autonomous individual of modern liberal democracy; it is the human being in her fullest humanity.

There is an important sense in which Fuller's enterprise is to take the liberal project of giving knowledge back to the people as far as it can go. On the assumption that liberalism is the promise of ever-forward moving liberation from ties that bind, such as tradition creates, then the name of the game is to unravel the knots. He is quite clear that his own aim is to be an agent of change, rather than a purveyor of truth. But while the theoretical position of standing outside the game to show how the rules can be fiddled with can have an effect on some players, it relies on our recognizing those rules as applying, but not quite taking them seriously. One *can* re-describe moral principles and venerated traditions of thought in playful terms as tactics, devices and stratagems for enhancing, empowering or entrenching a position. And there's abundant evidence, historically speaking, that the major players in science as well as politics have often done just that. But, on a homelier, more quotidian level, one which is the starting point for presidents as well as baristas, knowing or not knowing what time it is, getting our sums right or wrong, and having to make difficult moral decisions that will determine what kind of people we are, are all part of basic, ordinary human experience. From the *inside* of the shared habits, routines and practices that are open to everyone and to which everyone is exposed, which is to say always already *public*, the common predispositions that make possible such experiences (i.e., real life), knowledge and actions are not moves in a game, but constitute, inside and out, who we are, individually and collectively. The bedrock of knowledge is always already publicly owned, i.e. 'socialist'.

Now, as 'global thinkers', we are all inclined today to scoff at references to the authority of tradition; in so doing, we fail to take seriously the thought that our cosmopolitanism, seen from the outside, hangs on deference to one such 'tradition', albeit vast, among others. But the manifest experience of real uncertainty about the ideals of, say, universalism, tolerance and the rule of law would mean a total loss of orientation in society, i.e., anomie. The authority of tradition, both ethically and epistemically, is what gives us our bearings to begin with.

With regard to moral principles, the authority of tradition need not be treated as something threatening our freedom or hostile to the individual, but as intimately belonging to those who honor it. The rules of a tradition ought to be sufficiently stable

and common and so few such that they need not be reconsidered every time a decision has to be made. Simone Weil compares the strength of tradition with the practice of not eating poisonous or repellent things; what was once learned became second nature to every adult, for whom the restriction is not experienced as inhibiting her freedom to eat what she chooses. Only a child would feel it as an external limitation (Weil 1952: 13).

To learn something and know it is to develop one's ability to recognize and, when necessary, examine the common roots of one's own thinking. True, the conditions of our thinking are contingent, seen from the outside: the language that I learned as an infant, the social and economic factors of my childhood, the natural and manufactured environment in which I was raised, my schooling, etc., all might have been otherwise. Consequently, the most basic points of reference for my experience of the world, everything that I reckon with, can be seen as arbitrary and replaceable, in principle. But they are constitutive for the individual as much as for a society. They are the soil out of which all our ideas, hopes, inclinations and assumptions grew. While we cannot think outside them, our attempts at self-correction in our interactions with the world and other people are not experienced in our daily actions of telling time, buying a loaf of bread or waiting for the red light to turn green as some kind of arbitrary limitations set by tradition, but as the very conditions of possibility for autonomy for the individual.

Generating 'Publicity'

The preceding essay is a case in support of the point I want to make: I have not argued for or against a given position in order to persuade the reader to take a certain stance on the role of the public university. All that I have done is to suggest that it's a very complicated question. It has to do with which aspect of the 'public' we have in mind; it is related to the degree to which we see higher education in terms of an edifice of institutions, theories, concepts, facts, and techniques, or instead views these as common 'goods' that are developed in our shared efforts to understand, build and preserve a world that we share in common; it is intimately bound up with the everyday ways in which we make ordinary distinctions between what is the case and what we want to be the case (i.e., facts and values); and ultimately, it has to do with the recognition that we are all at once 'the public' and ourselves. The consequence that one might draw is not that teaching, research and scholarship rest on the assumption and exercise of expertise and the privileges that accompany it, nor that rationality and truth, however defined, are just euphemisms for successful disputation and forceful demonstration, but that science and society both would benefit from an ideal of attentive humility and hospitality in our epistemic ventures. In an age of hyper-commercialization, distractedness and rocketing oligarchy, there may be good reasons for fortifying our walls; but that shouldn't prevent us from building bridges over the moat and opening the portals.

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