

OXFORD

MAGAZINE

No. 305 Fifth Week Michaelmas Term 2010

Most readers will already be aware of the current proposals to reform USS (Universities Superannuation Scheme). The proposals would potentially have effects across the board, including current pensioners, present employees now paying 6.35% of their salaries to USS and future employees of the University. As Susan Cooper and Stephen Cowley show here, the effects will almost all be negative; they involve increased contributions and significantly reduced prospective benefits. Some

of the possible implications are pretty frightening. For example, inflation is now rising and, if it returns to the levels seen in the 1970s, the combined effects of the proposals could cut the pension received over 20 years by well over 50% compared to present entitlements. The proposals are now out for “consultation” with a deadline of 22nd December. The consultation with USS members is tightly delimited in scope and form since responses are restricted to the answering of specific questions.

Cutting pensions affects us all

Moreover, USS is open to the charge of not having provided adequate information for members to come to reasonable conclusions. As Cooper and Cowley make clear, many of the possible implications need still to be spelt out.

But how are decisions about the future of USS being made? USS members in each pre-1992 university across the UK are, as far as USS is concerned, represented by the UCU (University and College Union). The review of the pension scheme started,

amidst the banking meltdown, two years ago. The review was conducted by the Joint Negotiating Committee of USS which consists of five UCU representatives (Oxford’s Terry Hoad is one) and five from the employers side (i.e. primarily consisting of university registrars, among them the Registry of Cambridge University). The Committee ended up deadlocked on the reforms, but these were adopted on the casting vote of the independent Chairman, Sir Andrew Cubie, a specialist in Corporate law and Chairman of the Committee of University Chairmen for all UK Universities. The Board of Trustees accepted the recommendations and initiated the present consultation.

There are particular implications for Oxbridge. In both universities the proportion of UCU members is remarkably small—in Oxford some 15% of eligible academics and academic-related staff. The UCU is an officially recognised union at Oxford; through the Joint Consultative Committee, the UCU represents its views to the employer side, including on matters of salaries (although by convention the University in effect follows national guidelines on pay). In Cambridge the union is not recognised and has no formal status underwriting communication with the employer side. The bizarre situ-

Two issues back there was a notice seeking expressions of interest from members of the University who might be willing to lend editorial assistance to the Magazine. I did not receive a single name! Among the many likely explanations for readers’ inaction is the possibility that they assumed that plenty of other people would be stepping forward. This notice repeats the call. The Board of the Magazine is seeking expressions of potential interest in helping the Magazine, without specific commitment entailed. If you value the Magazine and might be willing to assist in the editorial process please let me know (tim.horder@dpag.ox.ac.uk). Tell your friends.

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- ...and much more

ation therefore arises that the great majority of staff have no democratically constituted channel by which to make formal representations to their employers, in whose name USS is established. One of the less-than-helpful consequences of all this is that the additional information on the reform proposals and a set of alternative proposals prepared by UCU* have not been made available to the majority of USS members—the convention is that Wellington Square will not assist distribution of UCU material beyond the UCU membership. The end result is that USS members have only been given the USS version of the story.

However, Oxford and Cambridge are both democratic institutions, and there are other ways in which USS members can make their views known. Cambridge (in the person of the Vice-Chancellor) has expressed some of the concerns in writing to the USS Trustees. It is understood that the supplementary information requested from USS has not been provided. In Oxford a motion has been tabled for Congregation. It should not be forgotten that Oxford and Cambridge Colleges are also USS employers and it might be hoped that they can independently petition on our behalf. Other UK universities are not so fortunate.

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Whatever the merits of the intended reforms, it is intolerable that the processes by which these proposals are being presented to us are so blatantly inadequate. As Cooper and Cowley explain, we are embroiled here with complex calculations and predictions. Almost every dimension of the current USS scheme would change if the reform proposals are put into practice. The implications for every individual will be quite different, depending on age, grade, career path, etc. However, the following general points stand out:

- current employees would contribute more; 7.5% of salary instead of 6.35%.
- future pensioners would experience pension reductions due to a cap on inflation protection.
- existing pensioners would experience pension reductions due to application of the CPI rather than RPI as inflation proofing.
- the defined age of retirement is to be increased; incoming (anti-ageism) legislation will make the point of retirement flexible (and therefore open to management appraisal); early redundancies are increasingly likely due to government spending cuts. The reforms will adversely affect some employees caught up in these trends.
- mobility between jobs, countries or institutions are (desirable) defining features of the career paths of most academics, especially in the sciences and for contract staff: under the reforms most breaks of membership of USS of more than 6 months will entail several new forms of re-

ductions in predicted pensions. Most post-1992 universities are not in USS: transfers between the two parts of the university sector will not be made any easier.

- support staff at Oxford have an Oxford-only, and in one or two respects more generous, pension scheme, which is currently also being reviewed; but they are affected by USS because above a certain grade they become “academic-related”.

- perhaps most importantly of all, one should not forget the future of the universities. A less favourable pension scheme will be just one of the current changes (notably the Browne reforms) that will threaten the attraction of the best possible recruits to an academic career.

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Not only is there a dearth of adequate information about our individual pensions prospects; there is also little available evidence that reforms are necessary at all. A convincing case, with numbers, is yet to be produced. Cooper and Cowley point out how conditional judgements about the health of a pension fund are on timing, the date of valuation exercises, investment policies, etc. The stock market is at present storming ahead; it is quite possible that the fund is currently in surplus. As the recent USS Annual Report put it: “The Board is confident that its long-term funding plan remains appropriate..... the fund continues to have a positive cash flow (because the fund receives more in contributions in a year than it pays out in benefits), which leaves it in a much stronger position relative to many other schemes in the UK.” USS is the second largest pension fund in the UK. It is seen as a model of its kind. Just as UK universities are independent, non-governmental institutions, so with the pension fund they created; USS is under no obligation to follow the pension trends elsewhere. All of which begs the question of exactly how urgent these reforms really are. We have the right to be told and to understand much more about the assessment of risks and the basis of the conservative investment policies of the fund.

“Significant cuts in Government spending on universities have just been announced. These seem certain to have serious consequences for Oxford: it seems highly unlikely that the University will be able to sustain current staffing levels...The University....wants everyone to be aware...of the fact that those who part company with the University after January 2011 will do so on very much less generous terms.” This is the message contained in a recent (UMIS) circular sent from the Head of Personnel Services inviting early retirements. Now is hardly the time for a reasoned consideration of far-reaching changes in pensions. By definition, pensions are matters of and for the long-term, and the present moment is exceptional in so many ways. We need more time and more information.

T.J.H.

* <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4598>

The next issue of Oxford Magazine will appear in eighth week

Higher education: striving for excellence in changing times

SIR ALAN LANGLANDS

This article is an abbreviated version of the Hands Lecture delivered by Sir Alan Langlands, Chief Executive of HEFCE, at Mansfield College on 25th October, shortly after the publication of the Browne Review and the Government Spending Review, and the lecture cites figures from these Reviews. Details subsequently announced in the Government's statements of 3 and 9 November are provided in footnotes. The editor thanks Sir Alan and Mansfield College for permission to publish this text - ed.

In recent weeks higher education has been dominated by Lord Browne's review of 'higher education funding and student finance' and the coalition Government's spending review. Both have become linked in a way that will see much more of the burden of funding higher education placed on graduates and their families from 2012 and a 40 per cent (or £2.9 billion) reduction in the public contribution to higher education funding, excluding research, between now and 2014-15.

There are many forces at work in higher education but the pursuit of knowledge for its own ends has to be a given, albeit one that can stand proud alongside the contribution that knowledge makes to society as a whole and the intellectual development of individuals. It is important that we do not lose sight of these wider considerations and – as we plunge into a much more prosaic, workaday discussion about 'higher education funding and student finance' and the likely effects of the Government's spending review – that we remain committed to the underlying values of higher education informed by an understanding of the fundamentals, idiosyncrasies and natural rhythm of our universities and colleges.

The substance of what I want to say focuses on three things:

- Firstly, the need to balance responsibility for funding higher education between graduates and their families and the state – the issue at the heart of the Browne review
- Secondly, the three key aims of increasing participation, improving quality and ensuring a sustainable long term future for higher education in England – considerations that are said to have guided the Browne review more than any others, and
- Thirdly, the process of change – or if you like, the challenge of agreeing and implementing the new funding settlement and establishing the new regulatory arrangements for higher education.

* * *

The essence of the Browne Review

The Browne review was set up by the previous (Labour) Government with support from the Conservatives to:

analyse the challenges and opportunities facing higher education and their implications for student financing and support. It was expected to examine the balance of contributions to higher education funding by taxpayers, students, graduates and employers. Its primary task (was) to make recommendations to Government on the future of fees policy and financial support for full and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The essence of Browne's response is clear:

- We have a world-class higher education sector, derived from a progressively reformed 'public-private' funding mix – but one that faces growing international competition
- There is an imperative for change based on questions of affordability to the state, benefits to individuals and the need for greater market dynamism to drive up quality and performance, sustaining future economic growth in an increasingly competitive global economy
- Key aspects of particular public value – for example, fair access and strategically important and vulnerable subjects – should be protected.

Browne's prescription for the student finance system is also clear, consistent and well argued. It is divided into four areas: learning; living; earning and paying; and giving.

- Learning – students choose where they want to study and what they want to study, and Government pays the costs of learning upfront. Higher education institutions that charge above £6,000 would contribute to the costs of student finance by paying an increasing levy on that income, from 40 per cent at £7,000 to 75 per cent per additional £1,000 at £12,000. There is no upper limit to fees.¹
- Living – there would be support for living costs available to all through an annual loan of £3,750, with no means testing. In addition there would be further support of up to £3,250 in grants for students from families with an income below £60,000 per year.²
- Earning and paying – graduates will begin to make payments of nine per cent of their income when they are earning about £21,000 a year. The repayment

threshold will be reviewed regularly and increased in line with average earnings.³ The interest rate is the Government's cost of borrowing. This is stated in the report as inflation plus 2.2 per cent. Students earning below the repayment threshold will pay no real interest rate – their loan balance will increase only in line with inflation. Any balance after 30 years is written off. It is expected that this will lead to the top 40 per cent of earners paying off the entire debt, and the lowest 20 per cent paying less than under the current system.

- Giving – graduates can choose to make optional tax deductible payments to support their chosen university. This will use the same system as the repayment mechanisms.

The Browne report goes on to propose how the student finance plan will be administered and promotes the idea of a single online portal for applications for university entry and student finance, the idea being that the allocation of places will ultimately follow trends in student demand, albeit within a national control total for student numbers. It also tackles the important question of balancing university autonomy and market dynamism with a fair and proportionate system of regulation, designed to protect the interests of students and taxpayers.

As you can see, Lord Browne's analysis concentrates on funding for undergraduate education and, whilst this is a key component of university funding, it is only part of the story. There is significant public investment in postgraduate study and whilst Browne sees no change to this, he talks of targeting investment on courses that are a 'public interest priority'. He also acknowledges that students facing the prospect of repaying substantial loans for their undergraduate education may be less likely to participate in postgraduate study and makes the point that future trends in postgraduate education need to be carefully monitored.

The Browne review does not tackle the question of science and research funding but the outcome of the spending review in this area is not as bad as we had feared with flat cash protection for science and research (a nine per cent real terms reduction) and generous protection for NHS research funding. This outcome was achieved at the eleventh hour in the spending review negotiations with the Treasury and all that remains now is to ensure a fair balance in the distribution of HEFCE QR funding (money used to support research infrastructure in universities) and Research Council funding (money used to support specific research institutes, programmes and projects). This so called dual support system is key to the success and international competitiveness of UK research.

Neither does the Browne report take account of other public funding cuts on university income. We will therefore need to examine the small print of departmental budgets in the coming weeks – for example, budgets for the education of the health professions and initial teacher training, the volume of research to be commissioned by government departments and the effects of abolishing the Regional Development Agencies will all have effects on university income.

According to the Browne team's calculations, the system proposed is progressive – it will provide generous support for learners from low-income backgrounds who are qualified to take part in higher education, through increased grants and maintenance loans, and it provides significant protection for graduates with low initial or lifetime earnings. The Government has not declared its position on the Browne report and, whilst it appears to accept the overall direction of travel, it clearly wants discretion to vary some of Browne's recommendations. We will need to know the outcome of these ongoing deliberations, understand the small print of the spending review and know in much more detail how the spending review numbers are likely to affect the key variables in the Browne review before we can judge the full impact of these changes on HEFCE funding, the burden to be placed on graduates and their families and the likely effects on the academic and financial sustainability of universities and colleges.

* * *

Before leaving the Browne proposals (and the spending review), let me just return to the central question of shifting the balance of contributions to higher education funding away from the taxpayer and towards graduates and their families. This manoeuvre is to be achieved by large-scale substitution, which requires universities and colleges to become much less dependent on public funding for teaching (in the form of *non-repayable* HEFCE grants) and much more dependent on graduate contributions (supported by *repayable* loans funded by the state). This may appear to be trading one form of public funding for another but the first is a permanent investment in future generations made by society as a whole and the second is a loan focused on an individual which attracts a real rate of interest and a long-term repayment schedule.

The exceptional economic circumstances we face as a result of the banking crisis and high levels of public debt mean that the very high level of public funding for teaching which is currently administered by HEFCE will be withdrawn between now and 2014-15. If the Browne recommendations are followed, the funding that remains will be targeted on courses 'that deliver significant social returns (and) provide skills and knowledge currently in shortage or predicted to be in the future'. As examples Browne cites clinical programmes; science, technology, engineering and mathematics (the so called STEM subjects) and strategically important language courses. The aim of this public investment is to ensure that there is an incentive for universities to continue to provide these courses and to reduce the charges for students to a level broadly equivalent to other courses they may choose instead.

The (unintended) implication is that Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences subjects are not considered to be priority areas for public investment. In the British Academy's paper, 'Past, Present and Future: the Public Value of the Humanities and Social Sciences', published prior to the spending review, the case for continued investment in these areas is made in a compelling way. In his introduction to the report Sir Adam Roberts acknowledges the contribution of those working in the

arts, humanities and social sciences to our shared public life, as he says:

'...analysing the human and ethical implications of scientific and medical advances, exploring the social and economic impact of global issues such as climate change or international security, influencing new kinds of business innovation, uncovering new perspectives on our cultural heritage or undertaking reviews and enquiries which often lead to the revision or refocusing of public policy... contributions that extend beyond the immediate needs of the economy, underpinning the culture of open and informed debate essential to any civilised, democratic society...'

This argument also plays to the crucial importance of sustaining universities with a broad disciplinary mix, universities that value the social and cultural contributions of the arts and humanities and the contribution of social sciences in helping us think about how we live.

So to complete this part of my talk: the Browne report makes a compelling case for change and the politicians in the coalition Government constrained by possible political differences and the imperatives of the spending review need to find a balanced position. Whilst acknowledging the exceptional economic circumstances that have brought us to this point, we must not accept that the decision to reduce public investment in higher education is fixed for all time.

Most other developed nations are investing in higher education, science and research to drive economic growth and recovery. The excellence and diversity of our higher education sector is still respected around the world. And it is also worth remembering that when the banks were being bailed out to the tune of £117 billion, higher education was generating £59 billion (or almost five per cent of GDP) in jobs, exports, innovation and added value. Higher education also acted quickly to support the business community through the recession, helping 50,000 people and nearly 12,000 businesses. As the economy improves the question of public investment in higher education must be revisited.

As I said earlier, the work of the Browne review was guided by three aims – increasing participation in higher education, improving the quality of learning and teaching and ensuring a sustainable long term future for higher education. HEFCE is already active in all three areas and will continue to be so throughout the period of transition to the new arrangements.

Participation

There has been a strong commitment to increasing participation in recent years with key initiatives in schools and colleges to boost demand and to protect and expand provision in universities. In its response to Browne, the Government appears to reinforce its commitment to social mobility, fair access and the needs of adult learners and of course there has been unprecedented demand for university places over the past few years and a strong likelihood of a further surge in demand in 2011-12 as applicants aim to secure a place ahead of the increase in fees. The pattern of demand may

of course be less predictable in the medium and long term as the new funding arrangements are implemented and there is at least the possibility that the uptake of places in some institutions will fall as the increased costs of higher education become apparent.

HEFCE's overarching aim in this area has been to ensure that all those with the potential to benefit from successful participation in higher education have the opportunity to do so and that they are able to access the programmes and institutions that best meet their needs and aspirations regardless of background and social class. Despite the complexities of tackling this issue, higher education can be proud of its achievements, particularly a recent study which shows that the proportion of young people recruited from the most disadvantaged areas of the country has increased by around 30 per cent in the last five years.

The Browne team argue that their proposals create the financial headroom for higher education to expand the number of places by a further 10 per cent, with new support for the costs of learning for part-time students and improved guidance and support in schools. This ambition is laudable but can only be properly evaluated when the Government has clarified its overall policy on the Browne review and the exact quantum and profiling of the spending review cuts.

Quality

The Browne team believes that creating genuine competition for students between universities and colleges will drive up quality and that this new dynamic can be achieved by providing students with high-quality information to help them choose the institution and the course that best suits their aspirations. It is against this background and also wider public and parliamentary concerns about the quality of the student experience that HEFCE (with others) has put development work in hand in four key areas:

- The development of a new institutional audit method to support quality assurance; this will apply from 2011-12
- A review of the key information sets required by students and prospective students; consultation will take place shortly
- A review of the 'academic infrastructure' – a series of national reference points used to underpin academic standards; and
- Consideration of how the UCAS tariff admissions system might be developed to deal with the Browne recommendations.

The external examining system is also being reviewed as part of this overall programme of collaboration between HEFCE, QAA, UUK and GuildHE.

Sustainability

We have seen earlier that the Browne report envisages increased graduate contributions and much reduced

but more targeted public investment to support high-quality provision and some growth to meet 'qualified' demand. The higher education sector and HEFCE have a proud record of ensuring the effective stewardship of public funds with a consistent improvement in financial performance since 2005-6 and this is acknowledged in the capital markets and by the main credit rating agencies. The sector generated 61 per cent of its income from public sources in 2007-8 and the general reductions in public spending – both revenue and capital – expected in the wake of the spending review will impact on sustainability across the sector as a whole with the possibility of immediate and acute problems in certain institutions. There is clearly a case for synchronising the run down of HEFCE grant funding with the increases in student fees from 2012-13 onwards as this has important operational and cash flow implications. Ministers have pledged to limit the financial pressure on the sector in 2011-12 (the key preparatory year before the introduction of the new arrangements) but it is not yet clear that this can be delivered within the constraints of the spending review outcome.

Faced with a shortfall across the sector and with students and their families already shouldering much of the burden of these changes, it is essential that universities do not get into the mindset that student finance can be some sort of balancing figure which absorbs the whole effect of the reductions in non-repayable HEFCE grant and other Government cuts. On the contrary students will expect much more from universities in the future: - the efficiency of universities and the pattern (and the cost structure) of existing provision will therefore have to be examined in great detail if we are to live with the new financial constraints. Universities will also have to look closely at the effects of the new arrangements on other *income* lines – particularly the postgraduate economy and overseas student recruitment. Again, these effects will play differently in different sorts of institutions; and maintaining the current quality and volume of activity over the next four or five years is going to be a real challenge.

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Managing transition

The implementation of the Browne review – or the coalition Government's variant of it – is a skilled task requiring cooperation across Government and between Government agencies and the higher education sector, made doubly difficult by the spending review decisions. This involves:

- Legislative change – Removing or changing the fee cap; establishing the new interest rate; and reworking of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act.
- System change – Introducing a new paradigm for higher education funding – a rapid move to an (as yet) untested model and one that will be starved of public funding for teaching from the outset.

- Organisational change – Developing the new 'Student Finance' arrangements and a new regulatory regime.

and

- The aim is to make these changes to an exacting timetable which achieves:
 - The effective management of the (key) preparatory period, 2010-11 and 2011-12.
 - The introduction of the new funding settlement by August 2012, and therefore a need in universities to determine new business models and prices quickly in planning the 2012 intake.
 - The possible introduction of new constitutional arrangements by August 2013.

This timetable is of course at risk from the possibility of political or parliamentary delays, the loss of financial flexibility to deal with the unintended consequences of change (and there will be some) and administrative failure. HEFCE has already identified many of these risks and will work with the Government and universities and colleges to achieve as much clarity as quickly as possible, to mitigate the risks and to ensure an effective process of transition. There are many angles to this and a great deal of hard work is needed to ensure that the higher education sector can successfully tackle these changes without breaking stride.

* * *

Let me draw to a close with three clear messages:

- (i) Higher education is a success story and vital to the economic, social and cultural development of the country. There is an economic imperative to change but we must do so without compromising the excellence, diversity and international competitiveness that define the sector at present and we must be prepared to revisit the question of public investment when the economy improves.
- (ii) HEFCE will work with Government and higher education to ensure an orderly transition to the new arrangements – informing legislative change, leading the implementation of the new funding settlement, ensuring the continued effectiveness of the dual support system and working with others to establish regulatory arrangements that are transparent, fair and proportionate and that protect the interests of students and taxpayers.
- (iii) Finally and most importantly the interests of students must be paramount. We should not value our students for what we can get out of them or what they might earn in the future – there is much more to higher education than this; society and individuals benefit from the broad disciplinary mix in higher education and we must stay true to our purpose of building effective communities of learning; and our higher education sector must be fair and accessible, with no compromises on the quality of

learning and teaching and no surprises in relation to the financial sustainability of universities and colleges.

In one of his memorable addresses, Arthur Hadley, who was the President of Yale in the early part of the twentieth century told his students:

'If you value the world simply for what you can get out of it, be assured that the world will in turn estimate your value by what it can get out of you...'

Let me just turn this on its head:

'If we value our students simply for what we can get out of them or what they might earn in the future, be assured that they will in turn estimate our value by what they can get out of us...'

This would be a betrayal of what higher education stands for; it would undermine all that we do. We must therefore handle this change with sensitivity, professionalism and skill and we must use all our experience to maintain a line of sight with all that is good from the past whilst recognising the imperatives and also the opportunities for change.

In dealing with the ideological, political, financial and technical commentary and debate that will take place about higher education in the coming weeks and

months, we cannot take a blinkered view – we must continue to advance and diffuse knowledge and understanding by teaching and research and by reaching into the local, national and international community; and we must always look for the wider truth in higher education. By focusing on ends not means we can continue to make progress, even in more difficult times.

¹ On 3 November the Government announced that it proposes a basic threshold of £6,000 per annum. In exceptional circumstances there would be an absolute limit of £9,000 for undergraduate courses at publicly-funded universities: this cap precludes the need for a levy.

² The Government announced: a non-repayable maintenance grant of £3,250 for students from families with incomes up to £25,000; a partial grant for students from families with incomes up to £42,000; and some increases in maintenance loans for students from families with incomes from £42,000 to £60,000. The higher maintenance loan for those studying in London will be retained.

³ The Government proposes: the real rate of interest will remain at zero for graduates earning below £21,000; a real interest rate on a progressive taper for graduates earning between £21,000 and around £41,000, to reach a maximum of inflation plus 3%; when graduates are earning above £41,000 they will be making a full contribution to the costs of the system but still incurring interest below commercial rates. The Government will consult on potential early repayment mechanisms.

The full text of the Hands lecture is available at: http://www.befce.ac.uk/news/befce/2010/ALHands_lecture.pdf

The Tipped Balance

Madness is an only thing:
no one knows your path.
From the cemetery as you watch
The Broad collapse,
passers notice, but alarmed
draw their children closer.

And when you count out pills
no voice says, stop – your sums
are wrong; nor when all the reds
and blues have gone
in the closed maze of your
black-on-black, black world.

Yet, but yet, even as you sit
slumped in a tranquillized haze,
a dream window can open –
a parcel from Cornwall:
a tiny moss garden.

OLIVIA BYARD

Olivia Byard is a tutor in Creative Writing at the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education. She had just completed a new book of poems.

A Victorian Dreams of Heaven

Let Heaven be a great sweet thaw
Of love gone cold in time or the grave;
The taking of hands
Never thought to be taken again;
The old light in the eyes;

Let Heaven be a great sweet thaw
Of love made numb by jealousy,
Love that dared not act because
Acting would scald and scar like fire.
Let Heaven be an utter release from fear.

KIERON WINN

'A Victorian Dreams of Heaven' is taken from Joining Music With Reason (Waywiser Press, 2010), a collection chosen by Christopher Ricks of 34 poets, British and American, who were featured in a series of readings at Balliol College introduced by Professor Ricks to coincide with his lectures as Professor of Poetry 2004-2009.

What do the USS pension changes mean?

SUSAN COOPER and STEPHEN J. COWLEY

Background

MOST academic and academic-related staff in the pre-1992 Universities are members of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). The employers are of the opinion that reforms are necessary in order to “safeguard the long-term sustainability of the scheme”. Following 18 months of negotiations, involving the representatives of Universities UK and the University and College Union (UCU, representing all members of USS), deadlock was reached. By the casting vote of the independent Chairman the proposals put forward by the employers were recommended to the Trustees of USS. On 22 July 2010, the USS Trustee Board agreed to take steps to implement these proposals. One of these steps is a mandatory consultation with members.

The Consultation

This is taking place from 20 October to 22 December, and is being conducted by each USS employer. Prior to 20 October, an information pack from USS was circulated to members, and there is a website, www.usssconsultation.co.uk, that provides a feedback form¹ for USS members to comment on the significant changes being proposed to the scheme, namely:

- (i) to introduce caps on pension increases and on the revaluation of deferred benefits, at the same time as moving from the retail price index (RPI) to the historically lower consumer price index (CPI);
- (ii) to put new members and most members re-joining USS after a break of more than 6 months into a “CARE” (career average revalued earning) scheme instead of the current final-salary scheme;
- (iii) to increase employee contributions and to introduce cost sharing arrangements;
- (iv) to increase the “normal pension age”² to 65;
- (v) to actuarially reduce retirement benefits, unless retirement is at age 65 or later;
- (vi) to introduce flexible retirement arrangements.

Our Aim

The USS website, plus the information pack, only includes information provided by USS and by the Employers Pensions Forum (EPF), even though both the EPF and the UCU were equal partners in the negotiations. The USS and EPF documents describe the proposals in bare terms, but provide little information on their effect and only minimal examples. For instance, the illustration of the CARE scheme only gives results for three years, which does little to indicate how a CARE pension after

a typical 40-year career would differ from that of the current final-salary pension. In response the UCU has posted information on <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4598> including a ‘riposte’ to the distributed EPF document, but that also lacks numbers. Searching further on the UCU web site, one can find a statement that “their first proposals, now slightly amended, would mean a lecturer who retired now at the top of the Lecturer B scale with 35 years’ service would receive a pension of only £15,704 compared [to] a final salary pension of £22,962, a difference of more than 30%”. That sounds alarming but not knowing anything of how the calculation was done leaves one wondering.³ Furthermore, little information is given on the cost reduction to the employer, which would be needed to allow us to judge the balance the proposals make between the needs of employee and employer.

We believe members need a range of example calculations to give them a feel for the effect of the proposals before they can understand them and meaningfully respond to the consultation. Indeed the University of Cambridge wrote to USS requesting that supplementary information be provided to members in terms of illustrations. USS declined and referred Cambridge to the EPF (who, at the time of writing, have yet to respond). Calculations by experts would certainly be preferred and we can provide no guarantee for our own, but to move things along while we are waiting, we provide in this article some simple example calculations with an outline description of our method so that readers can better decide for themselves, or even calculate their own variations.⁴ While some existing USS members may only care about the effect on their own pensions, we take the point of view that a full comparison should be made of how the changes will affect new members.

Although we are both members of UCU and are respectively elected members of the Oxford and Cambridge Councils, we do not write as representatives of any of these but as individuals trying to evaluate the proposals objectively.

RPI, CPI, Official Pensions, and the Cap in Pension Increases

At present, once a member has retired, pensions in payment are increased annually in line with the RPI. In the June 2010 budget, the Government announced that it intended to change increases in, and revaluation of, “official pensions” from being based on the RPI to the CPI. USS is *not* an official pension, but through USS rule 15.1, the Trustees have chosen historically to mirror official pensions as regards both pension increases and the revaluation of deferred benefits.⁵ Hence, if HMG’s legislation is passed, USS pension increases will in future be uprated with the CPI unless rule 15.1 is changed.

Over the 21-year period since 1989, the period for which both RPI and CPI have been available, the annual

increase in CPI has usually been lower than that in RPI, on average 0.68% a year lower (with the gap forecast to be bigger in each of the next five years⁶). We can use that period as an example to illustrate the effect: the 2009 pension of a person who had retired in 1988 with a pension uprated by CPI would have been 87% of what RPI would have brought (others have predicted lower ratios in future of 75%⁷). The USS consultative documents present this as a done deal, and one might argue that using CPI is more reasonable. However, it is important to recognise the effect of the change. Members should appreciate that there is nothing to stop the USS Trustees changing rule 15.1 to refer to RPI (as six other USS Rules already do⁸). In the negotiations UCU requested this change, but it was rejected by the employers.

In addition to the change from RPI to CPI, there is also a proposal to cap the annual increase in pensions at 5%.⁹ No illustration is provided of this in the USS documents. Our calculations show that if this cap is applied to the aforementioned 21-year period, it results in a 2009 pension that is 83% of a pension uprated by RPI.

The effect of the cap would be significantly larger if there was a period of sustained high inflation similar to that in the 1970s. In order to model such a period we need an estimate of CPI prior to 1989. As noted above, for the period when CPI and RPI have both been calculated, on average CPI inflation has been 0.68% lower than RPI. Hence for the period before 1989 we have used this average difference to estimate CPI from the known RPI. If we cap this estimated CPI at 5% and investigate various 21-year periods into the past, the result gets progressively worse and reaches 36% if a 5% cap is applied to the 21-year period starting in 1969. That means someone who in the 21st year after retirement would have received £25,000 using RPI would get only £9,000 with capped CPI.

Particularly the last example demonstrates that a 'defined benefit' scheme that is not protected against inflation does not really give a defined benefit.

While the savings to the pension fund of changing from RPI to CPI are somewhat easier to estimate, the additional savings by capping CPI are highly unpredictable. What capping does is move the risk of high inflation from the pension fund, which has the ability to average out peaks and valleys and beat inflation with a wise long-term investment strategy, and put the risk onto the pensioner, who does not.

The Revaluation of Deferred Pensions

The world is sometimes an oyster for academics, with many academics having periods of employment outside the UK. Hence consider an academic who spends the first part of his or her career in the UK, and then moves abroad until retirement, leaving their first pension in USS. This is called a 'deferred pension'. At present the deferred pension is uprated each year by RPI while awaiting retirement. Under the proposals the pension will be uprated by CPI *capped at 2.5%*. There are at least two issues here.

First, it has been argued that the CPI is a more appropriate index with which to uprate pensions in payment because of its exclusion of mortgage payments (but CPI also excludes council tax, vehicle excise duty and tel-

evision licenses, and includes the spending in the UK by foreign residents). However, for someone still in employment and probably still paying a mortgage, surely RPI is the more appropriate index (also because academic salaries have more closely tracked RPI than CPI). Further, the President of the Royal Statistical Society recently wrote to the UK Statistics Authority noting that he did "not feel that CPI should have sole star billing", that "both indices [i.e. the RPI and CPI] have drawbacks", and that the CPI "is not necessarily the best index for all purposes".¹⁰ In the case of deferred pensions we agree.

Second, the capping of CPI at 2.5% is close to immoral. Since April 2008, CPI has been above 2.5% for all except 8 months. The long term average of CPI over its existence is 2.69%¹¹ (i.e. above the cap) and would surely have been much higher in the 1970s if it had been calculated back then. Anyone with a deferred pension is almost guaranteed to get a bad deal, with their pension likely to shrink rapidly in real terms. For instance, a deferred pension uprated over the period 1988-2009 with CPI capped at 2.5% would be worth only 75% of a deferred pension uprated with RPI (as at present). Going back to earlier periods as above, the pension uprated with capped CPI would only be worth 23% of a pension uprated by RPI after a 21-year period starting in 1969: what would have been £10,000 with RPI turns into only £2,300. Moreover this change is being introduced at a time when more staff may find themselves in forced deferment as a result of redundancy, and it may affect women disproportionately (for example if they give up work to look after children and then have a career change).

The CARE Scheme

The current pension scheme gives members a pension of 1/80th of final salary for each year of contributions, or 50% of final salary for a typical career of 40 years (plus a lump sum of three times the pension). From April Fool's Day 2011 it is proposed that all new entrants to USS, or most members who rejoin after a break of 6 months or more (e.g. as a result of a period abroad), will no longer be in the final-salary scheme, but in a CARE scheme. It may be that this change is needed in order to make USS viable for employers, and it is claimed that "all the other benefits associated with the scheme would be similar to those in the final salary section of USS, except that the CARE-like formula of benefits would be used as the basis rather than final salary benefits". However, how similar is similar?

One of the difficulties in constructing an illustration is how to include inflation, annual national pay settlements, promotions, etc. Since we cannot know what the future will bring, as in our earlier illustrations we use the historical RPI and the CPI as an example. We compare the pensions of people retiring now in the current final-salary scheme with what they would get if the proposed new CARE scheme had been in operation for their whole career. Although modelling the past, for simplicity we use the *current* Oxford salary scale structure for the entire period.

We have constructed three example career paths. The first is an academic who started in October 1970 at age 25 as a post-doc at the bottom of grade 7, was awarded

the available automatic annual increments on that grade, and moved at age 35 to a University Lectureship with a £5000 pensionable college housing allowance, starting at the bottom of that scale and being awarded the available automatic annual increments. The second is a researcher who started the same, but was gradually promoted through grades 7-10 getting annual increments until reaching the top of the normal scale of grade 10. The results for this path turn out to be very similar to the academic path so are not discussed further. Our third very different example is a 'constant' person who was recruited at the top of grade 7 and stayed there for his or her full career. All are assumed to retire at age 65 in September 2010.

We start by considering a model *without inflation* to show the simplest difference between final salary and CARE. In this case we find that while the constant person would still get a pension of 50% of final salary, the academic would get only 41%, a significant change.

Next we need to include inflation, in which case the details of the 'revaluation' part of the CARE scheme become crucial. We do not have detailed salary information for past years and for simplicity we assume that salaries have scaled with RPI.¹² If the annual pension revaluation was also based on RPI, the results would be the same as the calculation above that ignored inflation. However the USS proposal is to use a capped version of CPI.

The CPI has only been calculated since 1989, so for earlier years we use (as in our earlier calculations) RPI inflation minus 0.68%. The result in this model is a starting¹³ CARE pension of 37% of final salary for the academic and 44% for the constant person. However, because the economic pattern in the future may be different from the past, other possible scenarios should be explored to test the sensitivity. One variation is to run time backwards, using the 1970 RPI value for 2009, the 1971 value for 2008, etc. This puts the period of higher inflation in the more recent past where it affects more of the career average, but since our estimated CPI for that period tracks the RPI, the result is almost the same. This version of CARE would give less, but at least it would be fairly predictable as a period of high inflation would be likely to affect both RPI and CPI.

However the USS proposal is *not* simply to use CPI, but a capped version: CPI up to 5% a year, plus one half of any excess of the increase in the CPI above 5% a year, subject to a hard cap of 7.5% a year. This strongly affects much of the 1970-1985 period, a period that may have been one of particular financial stress but who would dare say that is not going to happen again! The effect of the cap is to reduce the academic's starting pension to 35% and the constant person's to 41% of final salary in the forward time scenario.¹⁴ In the reversed time scenario the effect is much stronger, giving the academic only 24% and the constant person 28% of final salary. Capped CPI leaves members very exposed to the vagaries of inflation with the academic possibly getting 1/3 or only 1/4 of final salary, a very significant change compared with the current final-salary scheme which uses uncapped RPI. The above results including pension amounts are summarised in the table.

In the lower part of the table we combine our results for the pension earned during a 40-year career and the loss due to inflation after 20 years of retirement. The results are given in "today's money" (i.e. adjusted for RPI),

Starting Pension:	Academic Career Path		Constant Pay Grade	
	pension	% of final salary	pension	% of final salary
Final-salary scheme	£33,753	50%	£17,823	50%
CARE, no inflation	£27,580	41%	£17,823	50%
CARE with CPI	£24,784	37%	£15,737	44%
time reversed	£24,871	37%	£15,781	44%
CARE with capped CPI	£23,578	35%	£14,471	41%
time reversed	£16,313	24%	£10,047	28%
Pension after 20 years:	pension	% of final salary	pension	% of final salary
Final-salary scheme:				
RPI	£33,753	50%	£17,823	50%
CPI, low	£29,295	43%	£15,469	43%
CPI, high	£28,625	42%	£15,115	42%
capped CPI, low	£28,026	42%	£14,799	42%
capped CPI, high	£12,221	18%	£6,453	18%
CARE with capped CPI:				
normal time, low	£19,577	29%	£12,015	34%
reversed time, low	£13,545	20%	£8,342	23%
normal time, high	£8,537	13%	£5,240	15%
reversed time, high	£5,907	9%	£3,638	10%

so in the current final-salary scheme the pension would remain the same as its starting value.

The proposals would affect current members who stay in the final-salary scheme by changing from RPI to CPI to uprate their pensions after retirement and by capping it at 5% for that part of the pension earned from April 2011. A member who retires very soon would get full CPI for almost all of the pension, while a member just starting a 40-year career would get almost entirely capped CPI. For each, the effect is shown for a low-inflation scenario as in the last 21 years and for a high inflation scenario as in 1970-1991. The result is a pension in the 21st year of retirement that is about 42% of final salary, except for the case of capped CPI in the high-inflation scenario, where it is only 18% of final salary.

For the proposed CARE with capped CPI we also show the results for four different scenarios. The first uses the inflation values of the normal time sequence 1970-2009 during employment and a repeat of the last 21 years after retirement; this has a period of high inflation during the first half of the career and then low inflation after that, so is fairly optimistic but still brings the academic's pension down to 29% of final salary. The second uses the same low inflation during retirement but the reversed time sequence 2009-1970 during employment, so the overall pattern is low - high - low; this is a more moderate scenario and gives 20%. The third returns to the normal time sequence during employment but follows it with a repeat of the high inflation of the 1970-91 period during retirement, so the pattern is high - low - high. This is more pessimistic but still not unreasonable; the pension comes down to only 13%. The fourth is the most pessimistic, with a pattern of low - high - high, and

brings the academic's pension down to a very low 9% of final salary after 21 years. None of these is a prediction of the future; all are possible. The differences between them certainly don't allow one to look forward to a reliable pension.

As these examples again demonstrate, a 'defined benefit' scheme that is not protected against inflation does not really give a defined benefit.

Better CARE

This is not to say that a move to a fair CARE scheme, possibly even for current members, would not be a good idea. As Lord Hutton has observed, with a final-salary scheme promotion effects, particularly those late in a career, "could mean that high flyers can receive almost twice as much in pension payments per pound of employee contributions than do low flyers".¹⁵ Hence, using a career average is arguably a fairer scheme as you get what you pay for.

However, the CARE scheme being advocated is a very poor deal. In addition to the use of capped CPI, the proposed accrual rate, i.e. the fraction of salary added to a member's pension pot each year is the same as for the current final-salary scheme at 1/80th, which if the 3/80th lump sum is converted into pension is equivalent to about 1/68th. This compares very unfavourably with 1/46th in the Civil Service CARE scheme. Given increasing life expectancies, some reduction in benefit may be needed, as USS claims, to keep the scheme "viable for employers" (although this need may be offset somewhat by the government's intention to remove the default retirement age so people can keep working past the normal pension age). But what might be viable for employers, may not, as claimed, be "attractive for members". Indeed we expect the changes may make it difficult to recruit outstanding staff, especially from overseas.

Is USS sustainable?

A key question is whether USS in its current form is sustainable. The employers claim not. However, UCU's actuary¹⁶ notes that "while it might appear from the actuarial advice given to the employers that the ability of the Scheme to earn higher returns is being called into question, it appears that this is unlikely to be an issue in practice, so long as the present approach to investing the Scheme's assets is maintained". He further notes that USS can take a longer-term investment strategy than a corporate pension scheme that has to reckon with the possibility that the corporation could go bankrupt at any time.

On this basis one would really expect the expert investors who work for USS to be able to get returns that beat inflation in the long term and be able to provide us with pension provision that at least scales with uncapped CPI.

The next full valuation of USS will be done using the financial situation on 31 March 2011, but an 'annual report' is produced each year to give an approximate update.¹⁷ The March 2010 report estimates that USS was 91% funded at that time, up from 75% in March 2009. Since financial markets have improved since then, it seems reasonable to expect that it will be even closer

to the 103% in hand at the last full valuation in March 2008, and thus be close to break-even or even in surplus again. Those valuations 'on a technical basis' assume that the USS investments get a better return than the safest bonds ('gilts'), as one would hope. The Trustees have historically chosen to use the much more conservative assumption that their investments will only do as well as gilts, which naturally leads to a larger deficit, but that does not mean it is a reasonable approach. In fact the recent investment performance has been so good that bonuses were paid to the fund managers totalling nearly £3 million.¹⁸ It has also become clear that the high pay rise of 2008 is being eroded by at least 2 years of very low increases, further reducing pressure on the fund.

Further, UCU *alleges* that during the negotiations the employers admitted that their real agenda was to reduce their costs from 16% to around 10%. If this is so then the employers should be upfront, especially since one of the questions on the USS website is to "summarise on the form below where you believe that those objectives would be more effectively achieved by a different method". How can one answer this question if no details of the objectives are given, and if members are given almost no information about the cost savings of the proposed changes?

Of the information we are given, the sums do not seem to add up. We are told the employee contributions for current USS members continuing in the final-salary pension scheme will be 7.5%, and that for members in CARE will be 6.5%, with the employers apparently continuing to contribute 16% of salary for both. This small difference in total contribution cost stands in stark contrast to the large difference in pension. Looking at the difference in the employee contribution alone still does not match even the pure reduction of going to CARE, never mind the additional reduction of revaluing by CPI. Perhaps it somehow does all makes sense, but that is not evident to us from the limited information provided. In such conditions, the consultation is not meaningful. Worse, it makes it difficult to have trust in the people who run our pension scheme.

It is also instructive to recall historical contribution rates. From April 1983 through December 1996 the employer and employee contribution rates were 18.55% and 6.35% respectively. During the boom years of the late 1990s the employers reduced their contributions to 14%, apparently believing the boom-and-bust cycle had been abolished. In retrospect this appears to be an unwarranted underpayment. If the employer rate had remained steady at 18.55%, USS would have been in a much better position to ride out the recent bust without changing benefits. Indeed there may now be a case that before employee rates are raised to the proposed 7.5% the employers should pay in the additional 4.55% (with interest) which they took as a "pension holiday" between 1997 and 2009.

The period 1983-96 is also concrete evidence that it is possible for USS to recover from a time of high inflation and low returns without reducing benefits. The 18.55% rate achieved (actually over-achieved) this, and was sustained for nearly 14 years.

In Conclusion

USS has sought responses on six significant changes (five of which are detrimental to USS members). The lack of illustrations means many members are likely to be unaware of the significance of some of the changes, a situation we have attempted to remedy with the calculations presented here. However, without access to USS's actuarial data (indicating the cost reductions to USS of the change to CARE, the change to CPI, the introduction of the caps, the change to the normal pension age, etc.) it is impossible for members to meet USS's request for alternative methods by which the objective of sustainability and viability could be "more effectively achieved by a different method". The information provided by USS is inadequate to make an informed response. USS was also not willing to provide supplementary information requested by the University of Cambridge (acting as employer). Such behaviour hardly inspires confidence.

Our simple calculations indicate that moving to CARE while keeping the accrual rate at 1/80th and revaluing by CPI and RPI lead to significant decreases in pensions. The lack of a crystal ball prevents anyone from predicting the future effects of capping, but it's clear that it shifts the risk from employer to employee. We believe that the need for such capping is questionable, assuming the competence of the USS investment team and the conventional wisdom that investment return beats RPI, let alone CPI, in the long term. Indeed the 1970-96 period shows that USS can recover from a period of high inflation. As far as we can tell, there is no proposal to cap official pension increases. Moreover, we do not believe that there is any justification for using progressively tighter caps for revaluation during employment, during retirement, and for someone who leaves before retirement (e.g. as a result of redundancy); such a regime means that the most vulnerable members are given the least protection from inflation.

The USS has given us no concrete evidence for the need to make these serious reductions in benefits. The next full valuation is not due until March 2011 but the March 2010 update already showed a reassuring recovery compared to 2009, so one can reasonably hope it will return to the surplus it had in 2008. The USS fund seems to be in much better shape than many others. We should not allow ourselves to be confused by the general news on pension difficulties.

It is to be hoped that USS, or at least the independent chairman of the negotiating committee, will listen to reasonable concerns of its members and return to the negotiating table to try again. A reasonable outcome might be:

- moving to a uniform normal retirement age of 65 with reduced benefits for those who retire earlier;
- CARE with revaluation by uncapped RPI (or better, in line with uncapped HE professional salaries) until retirement (including deferred pensions); the CARE accrual rate should be adjusted to bring only the savings needed to compensate for the increase in longevity since 1996 (when the fund was healthy enough to reduce the employer contributions from 18.55% to 14%);¹⁹

- retention of the possibility to make additional voluntary contributions (AVCs)
- a requirement that USS provide members with clear annual updates of their pension earned to date and what it is likely to be upon retirement (in current real terms and including any AVCs), so they can make informed decisions on the need to make additional provision.
- use of an uncapped index (with expert advice sought from the Royal Statistical Society as to the relative merits of RPI, CPI or another index) to uplift pensions during retirement.

Comments on this article are welcomed on <https://sharepoint.physics.ox.ac.uk/sites/congregation>. SJC hopes to provide updated information, including graphics, at <http://tinyurl.com/35vkmaq>.

¹ A copy of the response form that you can inspect without needing to log in is provided on <http://tinyurl.com/2646a63>.

² The "normal pension age" is the earliest age at which a member has the right to draw benefits from the scheme without actuarial reduction.

³ Some further useful analysis, which we have made use of, has been provided by the Leeds UCU on <http://leedsucu.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/ussucu1.pdf>.

⁴ Our spreadsheet on <http://www.physics.ox.ac.uk/users/scooper/uss> may provide a starting point for those wanting to make their own calculations, although it is a working document and not a user-friendly calculator.

⁵ USS rule 15.1: see <http://www.uss.co.uk/SCHEMAGUIDE/PUBLICATIONSPRESENTATIONS/SCHEMERULES/>.

⁶ Mark Duke of Towers Watson: see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-10701442>.

⁷ Laith Khalaf of Hargreaves Lansdown: see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/pensions/7880179/Millions-to-see-private-sector-pensions-reduced.html>.

⁸ The six explicit references to the RPI in the USS Rules concern *Supplementary Benefits*, *Adjustments to Pensionable Salary*, and *Death in Receipt of an Incapacity Pension*. It is not clear from the consultation documents whether these references to RPI will be changed to CPI.

⁹ This change would only apply to increases to pensions in payment for future service after 31 March 2011.

¹⁰ See http://www.rss.org.uk/pdf/Letter_RSSPresident_ChairUKStatisticiansAuthority_CPI_RPI.pdf.

¹¹ The average we use is the geometric mean. See also the aforementioned letter from the President of the Royal Statistical Society.

¹² If academic salaries increase faster than RPI, the difference between the current final-salary scheme and the proposed CARE scheme becomes even larger. Data are available for the annual salary of full-time higher education teaching professionals for the period 1999-2009 (see AHSE Table 14.7a from the Office of National Statistics). In this period academic salaries increased by 45.7%, RPI increased by 29.4% and CPI by 20.1%. However that period may have been unusual.

¹³ Later in retirement the pension will be further affected by inflation, as described earlier.

¹⁴ This result for the academic is very similar to the UCU result quoted above, so it may have been calculated with similar assumptions.

¹⁵ See http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/hutton_pensionsinterim_071010.pdf.

¹⁶ See <http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/sf/fuc0411.pdf>.

¹⁷ The reports are available on <http://www.uss.co.uk/UssInvestments/Publications/Pages/ActuarialValuation.aspx>.

¹⁸ John Gill, *Times Higher Education*, 23 August 2010.

¹⁹ In principle it could be reasonable to use CARE uniformly, i.e. also for the service of existing members from April 2011, but it has been suggested to us that it might be difficult to do this in a way that does not result in new members subsidizing the already-earned final-salary pension of existing members

The Next Four Years at the Bodleian

BRYAN WARD-PERKINS

USERS of the Bodleian will already be aware that big changes are underway, with the official opening of the Swindon 'Book Storage Facility' (BSF), work begun emptying the 'Underground Bookstore' (UBS) in Radcliffe Square and on installing a lift in the Old Bodleian, and the transfer earlier this year of the most precious manuscripts and printed books, out of the New Bodleian and into the Radcliffe Science Library (RSL). But readers may not be aware of the full scale of the developments that will occur between now and early 2015, of which these are just the tip of a mighty iceberg.

The biggest project, with a budget of £80 million, is of course the demolition, rebuilding and refurbishment of the core of the New Bodleian. However, before demolition can even begin, the building has to be emptied of people and books. Readers using the New Bodleian will be most aware of its reading-rooms, but the building's primary function is as a huge bookstore (with three floors of books underground and eight above ground), and as workspaces, offices and canteen for library staff. A large part of the 'Special Collections', some 12 km of shelving, was moved to the RSL earlier this year – but over the next fourteen months a staggering 6.5 million books will be on the move to Swindon. Of these, 3.5 million are currently in the New Bodleian and must leave Broad Street by August 2011, when the work of demolition starts. Of the remaining 3 million books, some 2 million are currently in the saltmines of Cheshire (stored there at considerable expense), and 1 million in the Bodleian's off-site store at Nuneham Courtney. Before they can travel to Swindon and their new home, every one of these books has to be bar-coded. This project began in January, with 35 to 40 barcoders working at any one time, coding up to 13,000 books a day and very recently clocking up their 2,000,000th item. At full swing, 30,000 items will be moving to Swindon every day, including a daily delivery of over 1,000 boxes of books from Cheshire. Meanwhile, in the BSF at Swindon, staff are being trained to operate a wholly new shelving and retrieval system, widely used in the States (for instance at Harvard, Yale and Princeton), but never before in Britain by a major academic library.

The New Bodleian has been the workplace for just under 200 library staff. At considerable inconvenience and difficulty to themselves, they too are being moved, partly to the existing library offices on the Osney Industrial Estate, where the buildings have had to be modified and equipped to accommodate them. In August 2011 the process of gutting and rebuilding the New Bodleian will begin, a complex building-operation which will involve leaving the outer shell in place while rebuilding and reshaping almost the whole of the interior. Finally, in March 2015, a resplendent Weston Library will be opened within the preserved shell of the New Bodleian, with a new spacious entrance onto Broad Street, renewed reading-rooms and study-spaces, and a Blackwell Hall, with café, exhibition galleries and auditorium. Below ground some 1 million books (including the greater part

of the Special Collections) will be stored, now in the correct atmospheric and fire-resistant conditions.

Meanwhile the Radcliffe Square Underground Bookstore (UBS) will have been emptied of around 600,000 low-usage volumes (amongst which were the 'Official Papers', already rehoused in a new home next to the Law Library), and will have been completely revamped. It will serve as a reading-room, as the link between the Camera and the Old Bodleian, and as an open-shelf home for almost 300,000 books. The plan is to place some three-years-worth of the most recent accessions on open shelves, to monitor their use by swiping them at the moment of reshelving, and to keep those found to be in greatest demand on open shelves in the Bodleian (while sending the majority of the rest to Swindon). When the UBS is reopened as the 'Gladstone Link' (named after the Prime Minister who designed some of the UBS's original moveable shelving), it will enable the Lower Camera (now with a disabled lift), and all the reading rooms of the Old Bodleian, to become one interlinked reading area (with full disabled access), within which readers will be able to move books freely.

These substantial structural developments are taking place against a background of massive change in IT provision. More or less the whole library IT system is currently being replaced to keep up with modern requirements. Over half of the data is already transferred onto the new system, in a process that is currently on schedule for near completion in January. Librarians (including those in college libraries) will then need to be trained to use the new system, which should go live in July 2011 (after Finals!).

I am one of the Library 'Curators', a member of the university board that is responsible for our libraries. I am writing this article, because I am aware that most users do not realise quite what a challenging four years lie ahead for the staff of our libraries, and that this is happening within a context of painful financial stringency. The libraries are required to cut 8.4% of the circa £21 million per annum that they receive from the University, with the full reduction to be in place by August 2013. Furthermore, the current climate makes it imperative that all the building and IT developments come in on time and on budget, requiring very careful management and a continuous fund-raising effort.

All the movement of books, the building-works, the changes in IT and the fund-raising are taking place with full services still operating, for undergraduates, graduates and senior researchers alike (whereas the Vatican Library closed for three years during its recent refurbishment). There will be noise, there will be some delays in accessing books while they are on the move, and – almost certainly – there will be some rather frazzled library staff. I hope that readers will recognise that the end result is well worth a degree of hardship, and that they will be understanding and patient. Our library staff deserve this.

Towards an English (or UK) Ivy League

PETER OPPENHEIMER

THE Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and the report of the Browne Committee on Higher Education Funding and Student Finance signify no fundamental changes in the position of Oxford and other leading English universities. They merely highlight a rational necessity that has been blatant for a decade, and was gradually building up for a good while before that. Oxford and a limited number of other English universities (certainly Cambridge, probably Imperial College, University College London and the London School of Economics, possibly a few others) need to opt out of the existing system of HEFCE financing and control of higher education, and to constitute an updated private sector analogous to the US Ivy League.

The move is urgently desirable not merely for the sake of the institutions able to opt out (if they were the only beneficiaries, the case would be a lot weaker), but for UK universities as a body. The case has four aspects: finance, morale, efficiency and fairness.

Finance

The institutions named above are five out of a total of 130. But they account for more than 10 percent of HEFCE's allocations. With the CSR trimming HEFCE's total resources by at least 40 percent, a voluntary reduction of over 10 percent in demands upon HEFCE will help significantly to ease financial pressures upon the remaining 125 universities and colleges. By the same token, the government's implementation of its retrenchment programme will be assisted. So too will be its declared determination to maintain (at least in nominal terms) the country's science budget. And research groups in the universities best placed to opt out from HEFCE are leading players in the fulfilment of that policy. The fear, therefore, that the government might logically view opting out as a reason for "punishing" these universities by excluding them from other government funding is the opposite of the truth, and cannot be taken seriously.

Spending cuts are generally being brought in over a four- or five-year period, and a similar timetable should apply to voluntary opt-outs. Oxford's recurrent grant from HEFCE in the year 2010-11 totals £188 million, divided about one-third/two-thirds between "teaching" and "research". The two headings refer to the criteria on which the funds are awarded, not the uses to which they are put. The total sum is about 20 percent of the University's income – and less than that if one allows for the autonomous contribution from college endowments. Half of the other 80 percent comprises research grants and contracts; the remainder consists of academic fees, investment income (a mere 4 percent of the overall total) and miscellaneous (including transfers from OUP among other things).

Adjustments to the financial subtraction involved must be sought on both sides of the ledger. On the income side – higher fees, and drawing on endowment (i.e.

investment income) or donations. On the expenditure side – reductions and rearrangements. In the immediate future, higher fees will be the most prominent and contentious item. So consider others first.

As regards endowment, the Campaign for Oxford ("Oxford Thinking" – if only) was launched in May 2008 with an initial target of £1.25 billion. So far £1 billion has reportedly been pledged. Applying to this billion the University's standard 4% drawdown ("total return") criterion provides for additional spending of £40 million per annum. A warning is in order, to the effect that it is unclear how the figure of £1 billion was arrived at, and there are doubts about the quality or availability of some of the donations publicised, particularly those directed towards the central University rather than to colleges. The most conspicuous examples are the James Martin Fund (of initially £50 million) and the Leonard Blavatnik commitment of £75 million for his eponymous School of Government. These items contribute nothing to help meet University priorities; indeed, they impose additional burdens on the University by requiring the diversion of complementary resources, both human and material.

Turning next to the expenditure side, a reduction of £20 million per annum in overhead costs can be achieved by slimming down the central administration from its present total of around 1100 persons to an efficient size of 600-650. This was the figure obtaining as recently as 1999, which is to say, not predating any present-day requirements for central administrative services. In 2007, two years before my own detailed head-count ("Confronting Executive Hypertrophy", *Oxford Magazine*, No. 283, Noughth Week, Hilary Term 2009), the unwarranted mushrooming of Oxford's central bureaucracy was deplored by Anthony and Robert Kenny in their paperback *Can Oxford Be Improved?* (Imprint Academic, 2007), p. 118:

"Looking back, from an Oxford viewpoint, over the history of government intervention during the last three decades, it is difficult to say that its overall impact has been beneficial. Most initiatives have had as their most obvious effect an increase in layers of bureaucracy or new institutes regarded by many in the university as surplus to requirements. A prime example is the foundation of an Institute of Learning and Teaching to issue certificates to lecturers....."

This is far from being the only prime example. It is a matter not simply of numbers but of attitudes. The fifteen years preceding 1999 had themselves witnessed major expansion of the central administrative apparatus, an approximate trebling in fact from the level of around 200 in the mid-1980s. This reflected a part-explicit, part-implicit consensus in the academic community that additional structures were required to handle new developments in the University's affairs, such as research grant applications, a much increased graduate student establishment, and fundraising. There has been no such

consensus behind the unremitting growth of administrative numbers since the turn of the century.

It may be asked whether there should not be reductions in academic staffing as well as administrative. The answer is surely yes, even though neither the principle nor the appropriate magnitudes are as clear-cut as in the case of administrative overheads. The main complicating factors are outlined below under the “Efficiency” heading. In the meantime, recall the instructive precedent of the 1980s. During that decade, Oxford (like other universities) had to cope with a cut in total funding enforced by the Thatcher Government of roughly 10 percent in real terms. That this retrenchment would have to fall on academic personnel was accepted without question, because everyone could see that there was no scope for worthwhile economies in the lean central administration then obtaining.

Accordingly, academic staff numbers were reduced by building up a queue of vacant academic positions and filling them as and when the overall budgetary situation permitted. The typical waiting period was three-to-four years. Exceptions were made for numerically small areas where delay might put the viability of the subject at risk, especially from a teaching point of view (“minimum kit”, in the jargon of the time). Attention was also paid to burden-sharing across colleges. The scheme was managed at near-zero administrative cost by the General Board of the Faculties, a committee of academics whose composition and rules of procedure ensured it the confidence of the University community at large. Abolition of the General Board, and its replacement by Divisions, without considering how any future retrenchment exercise might be conducted, was one glaring blunder of the North Report of 1996 (implemented three years later).

In today’s circumstances it is incumbent upon the central University authorities to consider the lessons of this recent historical episode and to achieve a perceptible saving in the core academic staff budget, arguably of not less than £10 million. Together with the previous sums of £40 million (new endowment income) and £20 million (from administrative pruning), this leaves a further £118 million to find to replace the recurrent HEFCE funds. Most of it has to come from higher undergraduate fees.

Undergraduate numbers in recent years have been around 11,500. So an addition averaging £10,000 per head to fees – increasing them from the present £3,290 a year to £13,290 – will roughly balance the books. However, maintaining the “needs-blind” principle of admission to Oxford on academic merit alone requires that many students continue to be charged far less than £13K per year. The point is of critical importance, not because Oxford is intended to be a provider of some kind of social service, but because its academic standing as a “world-class” university stems overwhelmingly from the calibre of its student body, together with the structure and intensity of pupil-teacher contact.

As it happens, close to 40 percent of UK and EU undergraduates at Oxford – some 4,000 individuals at any one time – previously attended fee-paying schools, with tuition fees averaging £12,000 per annum in today’s prices, i.e. in line with the per capita figure suggested here for Oxford. (The typical boarding school fee of around £24,000 includes maintenance. This is outside the present discussion, although adding considerably to the provision required for student financial support).

Some students or their families can obviously afford to pay more than the average. The Oxford fee scale should allow for this by going up to, say, £18,000 – £20,000. (The full Harvard tuition fee in 2009-10 was \$33,696). If 20 percent of Oxford undergraduates – i.e. half of the above-mentioned 40 percent – were to pay an additional £5,000 a year above the average, this would bring in a further £11.5 million a year, on top of the £40 million already being assumed from the entire population of undergraduates previously at fee-paying schools.

Minimisation of financial burdens has to focus primarily on the 60 percent of Oxford undergraduates – around 7,000 individuals – who attended state schools. The presumption must be that few of these should be asked to pay anything like an additional £10,000 a year of tuition fees. One can say only that every additional £1,000 on average paid by them will raise the University’s income by £7 million. Means-testing will be indispensable. Harvard now charges neither fees nor maintenance where family income is below \$60,000.

On the other hand, the only remaining source of substitute funds not so far considered is the University’s research income, totalling £340 million in 2009-10. A 10 percent levy on research income will make available £34 million for student support. With two-thirds of research money accruing to clinical medicine, there is anyhow a good case for ensuring a contribution of this kind to the University’s wider purposes. Nonetheless, it is a matter of balancing unpalatable alternatives. And the longer-term strategic lesson is that, if Oxford is to maintain its principles and its standing in the university world, it needs over the next five years and beyond to put overwhelming priority in its fundraising upon monies dedicated to student support (bursaries etc) or, failing that, to mainstream teaching positions whose cost will otherwise be a charge on student fees. So-called benefactions which cannot be adapted to this requirement are a Trojan horse, or possibly just a poisoned chalice.

Morale

In the matter of regulation, the benefits of opt-out, this time to morale, will once again be system-wide. A private university sector will not (and will not expect to) escape periodic regulatory scrutiny any more than do private schools – not least because the 2006 Charities Act removed the previous regulation-exempt status as charities both of Oxford and Cambridge (and one or two other) Universities and of their separate constituent colleges. That, incidentally, is yet another reason for giving absolute priority in fundraising to student support, and to funding the core teaching activities of the collegiate University.

Oxford Magazine, No. 304 drew attention to the Browne Report’s recommended creation of a Higher Education Council amalgamating the Four existing Horsemen of the higher education Apocalypse – HEFCE, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, the Quality Assurance Agency and the Office for Fair Access.

The regulatory Horsemen, however, whether singly or after amalgamation will have to rethink their responsibilities vis-à-vis not only the contracted-out institutions but also the majority remaining in the public sector. The rethinking process will itself act as a useful if temporary

brake upon regulatory activity. And the longer-term result is bound to be some net loosening of the regulatory stranglehold, with associated benefits to morale and to institutional decision-taking across the university network.

In the first place, regulators of contracted-out institutions will no longer be able to justify sweeping inquiries or interference on grounds of accountability to the taxpayer. Funding of scientific and other research projects will continue to come from the taxpayer (mostly through the Research Councils) but no more so than from private commercial enterprises and charities; and in any case such funding is awarded to individual researchers or groups, not—as with HEFCE—to the university as an institution. Secondly, regulatory standards or expectations cannot in practice differ too widely as between the private and public sectors. With private Ivy League institutions furnishing a benchmark or standard of comparison, power relations between universities generally and their regulators will no longer be so asymmetrically weighted in favour of the latter.

Efficiency

The reference here is to economic efficiency. In other words, the optimality (or otherwise) of the mix of activities generated by society to meet its preferences - rather than the technical effectiveness with which each individual activity is conducted. Unsurprisingly, despite some issues at Oxford which are *sui generis*, the misallocations whose correction will be facilitated by going private are mostly representative of those found in the university system as a whole. The main headings are as follows:

(i) The RAE etc. has led to over-emphasis on research as against teaching. In the words of Sir Anthony Kenny (*op. cit.* p.116) it “caused people who had nothing much to say to rush into print in the hope of winning stars, and therefore funds, for their department.” Departments in their turn have encouraged both minimisation and skimping of teaching duties (to the point of occasionally hiring postgraduate students to deliver formal lecture courses to other postgraduate students). The phenomenon applies across the board, but is probably most damaging in the social sciences and the humanities, where the bulk of research does not add to the sum of permanent knowledge and obtains social utility chiefly by sustaining the quality of education and enhancing public debate on cultural and political matters. In any case, the incentives in question will fade once student fees occupy their due place in the University’s income stream.

(ii) A particular Oxford twist in this context is that the colleges have understandably sought to make good the teaching shortfall through employment of low-cost college lecturers. It will as a general rule be desirable to revert to the pre-RAE position, with more teaching duties for core University post-holders and a larger fraction of their total salaries paid by colleges. The outcome should be a reduction in combined academic staff numbers and some uplift in remuneration scales (including research expenses).

(iii) There are too many graduates on one-year, and per-

haps also two-year, taught courses. The increase in their numbers by several thousand since 2000, even as teaching efforts were being reduced (point (i) above), was encouraged by the central authorities as a revenue-raising exercise to compensate for the inflated cost of central administration, in the face of the cap on undergraduate fees and undergraduate numbers.

The position regarding doctoral student numbers is less clear. The many recent academic appointments going to non-British applicants may partly reflect the lack of UK public funding for postgraduate study. But they also testify to the attractions of an academic position at Oxford (and at other UK universities), notwithstanding modest-looking salaries. They correspondingly diminish any case for paying over the odds to attract to Oxford big names whose best work may be behind them. Anthony and Robert Kenny (*op. cit.* pp. 76-7) concede some of this, but still worry that:

“average pay for academic staff at Oxford was estimated to be 34% below Princeton and 44% below Harvard in 2002-03. Admittedly there is a general wealth difference between the US and the UK – in 2003 GDP per capita was 19% lower in the UK – but even allowing for this, there is an appreciable pay difference.”

Actually, this position was not very different forty or fifty years ago.

With undergraduates paying realistic fees, the special revenue-generating role of graduate students will automatically disappear. In principle, all graduates should be eligible for financial assistance in the same way as undergraduates. But with the artificial motivation for their recruitment no longer operative, their total numbers should be reduced from its present level of over 8,000 to perhaps 5,000.

(iv) As a matter of national policy, the Government will wish still to subsidise courses in science and technology (“STEM” subjects) including (probably) medicine, in the reasonable belief that the social benefits of having more scientifically trained citizens exceed the private benefits to the persons in question. The costs of providing most of such courses are of course appreciably higher than those in the arts.

Oxford and other opted-out universities will be grateful for any funds coming to them under this heading, whether directly or indirectly through fee support to students. This special case will ease some financial concerns, and does not invalidate the reality of opting out of the system of close control by HEFCE or other government agencies.

Fairness

Central to the Coalition Government’s higher education policy is a huge expansion of lending by the Student Loan Company, with future repayments conditional on the debtor’s income. The facility is doubly welcome. In the first place, private credit markets are in general reluctant to make any kind of long-term loans on the sole security of the borrower’s future earning prospects (the fact that they prefer sub-prime mortgages tells you a good deal about bankers).

Secondly, the income-conditional nature of the repayment obligation (a) greatly diminishes the risk taken on by student borrowers, and therefore the deterrent effect of having to borrow to attend university; and (b) contributes significantly to fairness, i.e. redistribution of income towards the less well-off.

Nonetheless, this method of redistribution is second-best to relieving less prosperous students (or their families) from fee and/or maintenance payments in the first place, thus diminishing or obviating the need to borrow at all. By comparison with its American peers, Oxford's present scope in this domain is very restricted. As I have previously pointed out (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 295, Noughth Week, Hilary Term 2010), total student numbers at Princeton are less than half those at Oxford, while its endowment is double Oxford's. Harvard has the same number of students as Oxford and about five times the endowment. Substitute arrangements, noted in the section above on Finance, can go only a little way towards filling the gap.

Building up Oxford's endowment is bound to be a long haul. In the meantime Oxford needs to keep an open mind on the possible strategic case for some further

interim reduction in student numbers (beside the 3,000 postgraduates already mentioned), in order to safeguard the principle of needs-blind admission and hence the quality of the Oxford student body.

Conclusion

The Coalition Government's approval of an undergraduate fee of £9,000 a year in public universities puts Oxford and other potential Ivy League institutions in a strong position to go their own way along the lines sketched in this article. It is almost as if members of the Government (fronted by David Willetts, the Minister for Universities) were inviting such an initiative, without feeling able to say so expressly. "Going private" does not involve taking extraordinary risks, nor does it require fantastic new cash injections from fairy-tale sources. We face a rare, perhaps unique, opportunity for Oxford and others to reassert the values of self-government and independence in higher education, to whose erosion we have mistakenly consented over the past half-century.

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Tainted money and the pursuit of knowledge

MICHAEL PINTO-DUSCHINSKY

THE honourable project of bringing British and German scholars and students closer together has been an important part of Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann's life.¹ The emeritus professor of history demonstrated in his *Oxford Magazine* (No. 302) article of June 2010 the significance of the Hanseatic Scholarships. They have enabled dozens of Oxford graduates to study in Germany, especially in Hamburg. Pogge has been the key figure in Oxford in promoting and administering the scholarships over the past forty years.

However, his article highlights too that reconciliation after the Holocaust needs to be based on frankness and openness about what actually happened. In the case of the scholarships, their donor, the late Alfred Toepfer (1894-1984), had a shameful record and did not hesitate to employ lawyers to combat any attempt to reveal it. Those promoting his scholarships and prizes – understandably – have been loath to criticise him. Pogge's article is most notable for glossing over Toepfer's actions and sympathies during and after the Nazi period and for its wholly unjustified attack on my article in *Standpoint*² in which I summarised that history. It is noteworthy that, while Pogge characterised my piece as “invective”, the Toepfer Foundation have admitted to the Oxford authorities that the facts presented in it “should and will not be disputed”.³

Whether Oxford should accept money from legal but morally dirty sources is a complex matter. More narrowly, the University is still considering the issues I raised privately two years ago about the funds for study in Germany supplied by the Alfred Toepfer Foundation of Hamburg directly to Oxford and Cambridge graduates under the scholarship scheme.

Coinciding with Pogge's defence of the Hanseatic Scholarships in the *Oxford Magazine*, the Alfred Toepfer Foundation submitted a dossier of over 300 pages, including 57 attachments, to the University authorities. Oxford's Committee to Review Donations is considering my reply. In the present article, written in response to Pogge's attack against me, my concern is the danger that accepting tainted money poses to the fundamental mission of any university: the pursuit of knowledge.

When individuals or institutions receive donations, they naturally become inclined to think well of the donor. Few care to look a gift horse in the mouth by scrutinising the actions and morality of their benefactors.

In Toepfer's case, his early post-World War Two grantees included a smattering of Jews such as the famed Austrian-born philosopher Martin Buber, who accepted the Hamburg businessman's generous Goethe Prize in 1951. If Buber was prepared to take Toepfer's money, did that not prove that others could decently do the same? In 1972, while the first post war Hanseatic Scholars were in Hamburg,⁴ Prime Minister Edward Heath accepted a sum of money from Toepfer designated as

a prize for statesmanship equivalent to his salary as a Member of Parliament for eight years.

Over the succeeding decades, while the Toepfer Foundation continued to fund Hanseatic Scholars from Oxford (and later from Cambridge too), there were numerous protests on the Continent against similar gifts on the ground of Toepfer's disgraceful past. Universities in Vienna and Strasbourg abandoned Toepfer prizes. A leading French theatre producer, Ariane Mnouchkine, rejected a Toepfer prize in 2005. There is an ongoing dispute at the University of Basel in Switzerland about the propriety of the honorary degree awarded to the late German businessman in response to his largesse.

The Toepfer Foundation now admits that the founder concealed his shameful deeds during his lifetime. Despite qualified and belated admissions, the foundation and its sponsored historians still are spinning Toepfer's history and acknowledge that some of the unfavourable facts revealed for the first time in my *Standpoint* article had been known to them but had not been published.⁵

Yet in the *Oxford Magazine*, Pogge not only glossed over Toepfer's participation in high-level Nazi subversion and his dealings in the 1930s with SS generals and political leaders, he told its readers that “old Toepfer”, as he affectionately called him, “was not a member of the Nazi Party nor a member of the SS.” The former claim is misleading,⁶ the latter incorrect.

Toepfer was a sponsoring member of the SS. The evidence for this comes both from a statement by Toepfer written in 1937 and found among Toepfer's papers by British investigators after the War⁷ and from Toepfer's “*fragebogen*” – a declaration made to the British occupation forces in 1947 as part of his denazification.⁸ According to a statement on the Toepfer Foundation's website, “[t]he fact that Toepfer was a “sponsoring member” of the SS was well-established during the work of the [foundation's Independent Academic] Commission [of 1997-2000].” Nevertheless, the foundation's sponsored historians omitted to publish this information, partly on the ground that it was a “detail”.⁹ Toepfer courted, financed and worked with some of the highest SS officers such as SS Lieutenant Generals Werner Best and Werner Lorenz. He funded the leader of the Sudeten Nazis, Konrad Henlein, among other things to visit London before the Munich Agreement. He hosted deputy Fuehrer Rudolf Hess at one of his country properties. He won the admiration of Joseph Goebbels. There is ample proof of his prominent role in Nazi subversion in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, France and The Netherlands.

However, Pogge states that Toepfer was “not a perpetrator”. To the author that is an untenable statement. Much has yet to be discovered about Toepfer's activities during the Second World War. However, the official Toepfer history acknowledges that his profitable office in Poznan (Posen) traded with the German ghetto

administration in Lodz (the second largest in Poland). Documents show that the foundation's Independent Academic Commission included the information reluctantly and only after the author of the relevant chapter had refused to bow to pressure to exclude it.¹⁰

The Toepfer firm's supplies included quicklime. This was being used, among other things, to process cadavers of Jews who died of starvation or disease in the ghetto or were deported to the nearby death camp of Chelmno. Some quicklime was destined for pits into which Jews were thrown. Water then was hosed into the pits and the resulting slaked lime boiled them alive.¹¹ Toepfer may have been unaware of all of the details concerning the treatment of Jews within the ghetto and their deportation to death camps. But Adolf Hitler had made no secret of his deadly intentions and of the anti-Semitic aims of the ghettoisation policy.

Yet, the Toepfer Foundation still argues that Toepfer "did not participate directly or indirectly in the Holocaust."¹² Pogge's article appears to support this extraordinary interpretation.

Pogge's account of Toepfer's activities after the War is also misleading by its omissions. "The fact," he writes, "that old Toepfer employed some convicted Nazis after the war does not make him a war criminal, however much his association with these men is difficult to understand." This sentence is all that Pogge has to say about the fact that all three of Toepfer's closest post-war employees had been parties to mass murder. His senior business manager, H-J Riecke, had been responsible for the death by starvation of hundreds of thousands of Soviet prisoners of war. He had been a Nazi member of the Reichstag as well as a State Secretary with the rank of Major General in the SS. Toepfer's personal secretary had been personal secretary throughout the War to SS Brigadier Edmund Veessenmayer, Adolf Eichmann's superior during the Holocaust in Hungary. Veessenmayer himself was on the Toepfer payroll for a time. Toepfer's corporate counsel had been responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest in 1944.

As if this were not enough, I showed in *Standpoint* – and the foundation accepted the finding – that Toepfer helped former Gauleiter and SS Major General Lauterbacher to establish a clandestine life in Buenos Aires for himself and for his "large circle of friends". This "circle of friends" was the real life version of the organisation portrayed in Frederick Forsyth's novel as "ODESSA". Toepfer offered a job to SS Colonel Bickler while he was on the run from a death sentence for war crimes. The list of Toepfer's acts of post war assistance to leading Nazis is almost endless. Toepfer performed these acts at the very time he was regaining respectability by giving prizes to Western statesmen, artists and scholars.

Pogge concluded his article with the argument that any refusal by Oxford to continue the Hanseatic Scholarships would raise the question of continuing the Rhodes Scholarships too. After all, Cecil Rhodes also had been guilty of what he calls "brutal deeds and policies". In my opinion this is a wholly unsuitable comparison.

So that there can be no mistake, I must stress that this response to Pogge's piece in no way intends to undermine his high scholarly reputation. The point is that association – for the best of motives – with morally tainted funds having a negative effect, even if it is designated for good purposes. Even if there are no explicit

strings attached to funding, there is a risk that beneficiaries underplay or turn a blind eye to donors' disgraceful actions. Reconciliation between Germany and its old enemies and between Jewish Holocaust survivors and the new generations of Germans is a noble project. But it can never succeed unless the historical truth – the whole unvarnished truth – is acknowledged.

¹ See Geoffrey Eley and James Retallack, editors (2003). *Wilhelmism and Its Legacies. German Modernities, Imperialism and the Meanings of Reform, 1890-1930: essays for Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann*. Oxford: Berghahn, page 11.

² "The prize lies of a Nazi tycoon." *Standpoint*, April 2010, <http://standpointmag.co.uk/node/2878>.

³ Memorandum of June 2010 titled "To be unambiguously clear," page 15, www.toepfer-fus.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Geschichte/Comprehensive_Statement.pdf

⁴ The scholarships had been established in 1936 with Joachim von Ribbentrop as their patron.

⁵ See, for example, footnote 97 of the German language version of my *Standpoint* article, "Der Kampf um Geschichte: Der Fall Alfred C. Toepfer und der Nationalsozialismus." In *Völkische Wissenschaften und Politikerberatung im 20. Jahrhundert*. Edited by Michael Fahlbusch and Ingo Haar, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2010.

⁶ Concerning his non-membership of the Nazi Party, the official Toepfer history of 2000 gives a thoroughly misleading account – since there is written evidence that Toepfer actually filled in a membership questionnaire in 1937 but was not asked to join the party by his local branch. At the time, he had been arrested and was in detention for suspected tax evasion. One of the foundation's sponsored historians, Jan Zimmermann, had been aware of the actual story at the time the official history appeared. He had already scripted a different version, which remained unpublished for reasons he explained in 2010. See Jan Zimmermann, *Volltext mit Anmerkungen, Quellenbelegen und Literaturverweisen*, 12.4. 2010, Appendix 1: http://toepfer-fus.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Geschichte/Artikel_von_M._Pinto-Duschinsky_Kommentar_on_J._Zimmermann.pdf.

⁷ Alfred Toepfer Archiv, Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv, Hamburg, ATA VIII, 15a

⁸ This is to be found in his answer to Question 103. For a copy of the document, see ATA VIII, 5. See also, Lionel Boissou, "Stiftung FVS Hamburg und Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Stiftung Vaduz." In *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften*. Edited by Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch, Munich: Sauer Verlag, 2008.

⁹ Zimmermann, "Volltext" Note I.

¹⁰ In a letter written to the Toepfer foundation in January 2010 and later forwarded by the foundation to the Oxford authorities, Professor Christian Gerlach, now of the University of Bern, wrote regarding "the pressure which had been put on me" and of "massive efforts to influence me" as well as the demand "that my contribution should go unpublished". Gerlach wrote that he succeeded in resisting the pressures "to render my text harmless (in particular by cutting it)" by "my admonishment that if it couldn't be published in the [official Toepfer history], I would publish it elsewhere. Even at the proof-reading stage there were efforts, as far as I remember, to make unauthorized changes." Gerlach also wrote that "at the meeting of the commission at which I was present, I got the - for me, at that time, amazing - impression that, for part of the meeting, a thoroughly defensive attitude reigned among quite a few of the full-time members ... This related above all to basic interpretations of the role of Toepfer, which were reflected in the end in central passages of the [official history]." By contrast to this view of a participating historian, Pogge referred uncritically in his article to the Toepfer Foundation's claim to its "openness, transparency and objectivity when dealing with its founder."

¹¹ I am grateful to Roman Halter, a survivor of the Lodz ghetto for this information. In 1945, Mieczyslaw Sekiewicz, a Polish veterinarian, gave legal testimony that quicklime had been used in the manner described to murder Jews from Konin. See Western Institute in Poznan, Doc III-42, Konin County.

¹² www.toepfer-fus.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Gechichte/Brief_von_Ansгар_Wimmer_an_Dr._Michael_Pinto-Duschinsky.pdf

Waismann in Oxford

JOHN LUCAS

Waismann was good for Oxford, but Oxford was not good for Waismann. Although Oxford gave Friedrich Waismann a job, a position, an income, a haven from Hitler, it did not give him a home. Waismann always gave a sense of needing to be back in Vienna, able to walk along to a coffee shop, read a newspaper on a wooden framework, be greeted by a colleague who had dropped in, and discuss perhaps just the news, but often some philosophical issue, and having argued enough, wander off to do the day's business. Oxford to the outsider presented an unfriendly face and seemed inaccessible. The Colleges were surrounded by high walls, the only entrance being closely guarded by a porter's lodge. Each College was a separate society, governed by arcane principles and etiquette, living its own life in seeming isolation from the rest of the world. Although made a member of New College, Waismann never felt he really belonged. Once or twice I took him to dine in Merton with one or two of his admirers, but the ceremonial of High Table in College Hall with Latin grace, followed by port and dessert in Common Room, did not appeal to him. He was a diabetic, so port was definitely out, and college food generally not to his taste. And although there were several philosophers ready to welcome him, Oxford dons are always busy. Opportunities for casual contact outside college are rare, and when occasion does offer for serious argument, the time available is limited by the next engagement. It was not only Waismann who found Oxford difficult to talk to—Michael Polanyi found it almost impossible to establish lines of communication. The social set-up combined with the dominance of the tutorial resulted in an unconscious impenetrability to any argument that could not be fitted into a tutorial hour.

Although Oxford was not good for Waismann, Waismann was good for Oxford. He brought to an innumerate and unscientific philosophical tradition a first-hand understanding of the advances in mathematics and physics that were of key importance in forming a twentieth-century world-view. He gave regular lectures in the philosophy of mathematics and the philosophy of physics to an undergraduate audience with very little knowledge of either. In spite of their inadequate background, he was able to convey the elements of Cantorian Set Theory, and Felix Klein's *Erlanger* Program with an easily understood proof that if Euclidean geometry was consistent, so also was Riemann's geometry, in which the axiom of parallels did not hold. Similarly in physics he was able to convey some of the key ideas of quantum mechanics. These were undergraduate lectures, and did not go into great detail or discuss the impact of modern developments. As far as I can remember, he did not give a proof of Gödel's theorem, although he was aware of it, and I cannot remember his ever mentioning von Neumann's argument for the incompleteness of quantum mechanics, nor the Einstein-Posolski-Rosen argument. But in conveying to undergraduates some understanding of what they needed to know, he succeeded magnificently, and Oxford had good reason to be grateful.

Waismann played a part in the development of Oxford philosophy. He was one of those who led the way from an austere verificationist Logical Empiricism to a greater sensitivity to actual linguistic usage. In this he was not alone. Wittgenstein, although much cited later, was only just beginning to be known. Much more influential was J.L. Austin, who was giving the lectures later published as *Sense and Sensibilia*. But Waismann's contribution, although less influential at the time, was more profound. Austin was criticizing from the outside; he made good points that failed to convince those who were committed supporters of Logical Empiricism: Waismann criticized from the inside, and his criticisms told with the true believers. Austin's target was Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* and *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*, and argued that Ayer had simply misconstrued words like 'know', and that if we attended to actual linguistic usage, we should avoid confusion and muddle. Waismann was similarly sensitive to linguistic usage, and coming on English as a foreign language in mid-life, took great pains to note revealing idiosyncrasies. But he did not rest there. He never claimed that ordinary language is all right just as it is. It was always possible to criticize ordinary usage. It was right to recognise that there were different language games, but one wanted to make sure that they meshed together in a coherent way. He was developing a view of his own, which though influenced by Russell, Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, was often unsaying what he had previously been saying, and almost always going beyond his previous views.

Waismann was a clear thinker, and sought clarification, but clarification was not the be-all and end-all of philosophy. His view of philosophical method fitted naturally with the prevailing practice in Oxford, based on a Socratic technique against a background of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. One worried away at a problem, arguing and counter-arguing, dispelling false analogies and rejecting invalid arguments, until the problem resolved itself, seen in a new light with a fresh insight. Certainly this applied to Waismann's graduate seminars, which he gave in room 303 in the New Bodleian on Tuesdays from 5.15 to 7pm. He would start by reading from a carefully crafted manuscript, which, I think, had been written specially for that session. Then there would be a discussion with Waismann dealing with difficulties and objections, and often making new points. At 7pm we would disperse, still arguing, but with eyes opened to new ways of looking at things. On one occasion some one said to me that Waismann had more philosophy in his little finger than the whole of the rest of Oxford put together,

Insight was a pervasive aim of Waismann's teaching, and a key element in the position he was beginning to articulate for himself. As against the reductionist tenor of Russell and Logical Positivism, he argued that the clarity they offered was spurious, being obtained by ignoring important features. If you cut things down to size, you

might think you had got on top of all the problems, but really you were missing significant insights. There was a strong anti-reductionist tone to much of his teaching. On one occasion he was implicitly criticizing his earlier contention that one should not opine that the series 0,1,4,9,16, . . . was generated by the formula $x = n^2$ because there were denumerably many other formulae that would generate a sequence beginning like that. Against this, he used to point out that we could often recognise a person's style from a limited basis – indeed even in mathematical proofs one could sometimes recognise the handiwork of a particular mathematician. But in stressing the importance of insight, he was not following in the steps of the post-Kantian thinkers of the Romantic movement. Insight for Waismann was not opposed to reason, but was a further form of it. Reason was not exhaustively defined in terms of rule-following, but sometimes went be-

yond what was prescribed in rules. Much of this can be argued for by reference to Gödel's theorem, but I cannot remember Waismann calling Gödel in aid to support this view. As opposed to the thinkers of the Romantic movement, Waismann never espoused any form of irrationalism in his emphasis on insight.

But perhaps in another way he was a Romantic. He once told me that when he went up to university, he had intended to read classics, and went to a lecture on the *Odes* of Horace. But the lecturer did not mention Horace's poetry once, and only talked of texts and textual criticism. So Waismann switched from classics to mathematics. But in his Oxford years, as he freed himself from his previous mentors, we can see that in the mathematical philosopher the once would-be poet was beginning to get the upper hand.

A Note from New York

MARY ANN CAWS

BIZARRE things here in New York, along with some wonderful things.... At the Met, for the *Das Rheingold* opening Gala, the elaborate Lepage machinery somehow didn't work altogether. However, given the enormous enthusiasm for James Levine reappearing after his recent surgery, occasioning a very long ovation, followed by the national anthem – almost nothing could go wrong. What is a glitch in the spectacle compared to such an outpouring of audience affection?

Mahler is still going and going on, and the famous "Tragic" symphony, the 6th with the two or three hammer blows – Alan Gilbert, whose rendering we heard last week, chose three hammer blows. Mahler, superstitious about the significance of three, finally opted, it seems, for two. He didn't want the final blow to be struck. (That reminds me of Picasso so very superstitious that he would not make a likeness of his pal Apollinaire for the little square behind the church of St. Germain des Prés, but put instead the head of Dora Maar, beneath whose features it is very odd to read "Guillaume Apollinaire: Prince des poètes.") Another choice had to be made also, about the order of the Andante and the Scherzo, Mahler having wavered over that also: Gilbert chose the Andante first, finding it the better bridge. As for the hammer and loudness. It seems that various percussion groups are scouting about in back yards in Brooklyn to find things that will make a pleasingly large sound. Of course, percussion groups Big noise.

On the far quieter side, the exhibition of *Jon Schueler: the Castelli Years 1955-1959* has a loveliness and yet an excitement to it that are rare. Magda Salvesen, his widow, has put together his work (as she did his life) with a grace and stillness that speak as loudly as those percussion instruments. Her edition of *The Sound of Sleat: A Painter's Life* (edited by Magda Salvesen and Diane Cousineau, Picador, 1999) has his writings about the fishing town Mallaig, in the more than remote Scottish Highlands, and about his life: "I am a bad father, a bad stepfather, a bad husband, an indifferent friend, a

confused and disloyal lover. Only one thing: I am a good painter. And I had damn well become a far better one to make up for all the rest." And he did.. His paintings, which I loved when I first saw them years ago, are somewhat miraculously resonant in his writings. These are as sensitive as his vision. His paintings are often compared to Turner's seascapes, and they certainly hold their own. I hadn't realized he had been a student of the irascible and brilliant Clyfford Still, one of my alltime favorite painters, but now I am not surprised.

I am especially taken by his way of looking – and his representations of landscapes and seascapes and cloudscapes with the depth of fog, and have just ordered his *To the North*, full of the subtlety of meditation, thought, and hauntings. Here I am thinking of Glenn Gould's *Idea of North*, and all sorts of northern things, from my southern point of view. In the Castelli years one of my fondest paintings is a study called simply: *Snow Cloud and Blue Sea* of 1958. It shows an impassioned crimson sky swallowing up a small stretch of bluish land in the lower left corner: unforgettable. *Storm*, of 1955, an extraordinary bluish-greenish memory of Scotland, painted with thin palette knives, has a scumbled surface of tiny flicks of darker blue, red, orange – a storm to dream about, even in New York, where it was painted. My other favorites are his *Summer: Martha's Vineyard* of 1957, with its lavender, blue, and yellow, and *The Mountain near the Sea*, painted in his beloved Mallaig Vaig in 1958, which reminds me of Wallace Stevens' "The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain."

Other galleries, in the art center that Chelsea has become, are doing just what New York galleries should do, in my view, an obviously partisan one: the Marvelli Gallery is featuring *minima moralia*, an homage to Beckett and others, with the title coming from Theodor Adorno's aphorisms representing "moments of a common philosophy from the standpoint of subjective experience," (*Minima moralia: reflections on a damaged life*), and the Loretta Howard Gallery is celebrating *Artists at Max's*

Kansas City, 1965-1974: Hetero-Holics and Some Women Too, curated by Maurice Tuchman. *Max's Kansas City* was that legendary restaurant which played the latter-day role of the Cedar Tavern in Abstract Expressionist time, that "drinkhole" where everyone loved arguing. So too at Max's Kansas City, where Mickey Ruskin stood at the door to guarantee no really dull types would enter. Everyone was there: de Kooning, Judd, Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Smithson, Lydia Benglis, the whole kit and caboodle of them, and Warhol and his groupies in the back room. And the art: a Frank Stella on the side wall, a John Chamberlain sculpture to greet you, Dan Flavin's red lighting sculpture glowing all over the back room, Joseph Kosuth doing some think stuff, what to say?

I love reading about the fashion of the place, the fashions in the place, as well as the art. The wall texts at the new gallery of "the redoubtable dealer Loretta Howard" (I am quoting Charlie Finch, in *Artnet*) are a particular delight, saying just enough about the works displayed by the Max's Kansas City regulars. Everybody is on the walls: the Larrys Poons and Rivers, the Rauschenberg and Rosenquist, and, yes, Lydia Benglis and Alice Aycock and Adrian Piper and Dorothea Rockburne. I had forgotten, if I ever knew, that Larry Poons gave up his dot paintings in the 1960's for the throw and pour from a bucket paintings, for which he often climbed on ladders. The eye gravitates, like the mind, to Kosuth's neon lights in his *Three Adjectives Described and Certificate of Authenticity* (so where is the certificate, I asked an assistant? Oh, in the files, I was told.) Since I am especially attracted to invisible things (like the Invisible Dog Gallery in Brooklyn), I liked it all the more. On the floor upstairs is the wonderfully witty Lawrence Weiner's 1969 *An Amount of Bleach Poured Upon a Rug and Allowed to Bleach*. It is of course a newly made THING (think Thing Theory) and is, says Weiner, of no value as art nor is its removal: it "functions as a vehicle for information." I was tickled pink by the information that when a collector wanted to purchase it, the creator simply cut off a part of the collector's own rug. Very nice. Reminds me of Wittgenstein's cutting off a button on his hostess's coat which he found displeasing. The artistic/philosophical life, what?

Quite remarkable, the long-lasting spectacles we are so addicted to here. I well remember reading the *Iliad* for days in a row, and also Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*: marathons, both of them. Now, miraculously, there is a *very very* long representation (seven hours, seems long to me) of the encounter of a reader and *The Great Gatsby*. This *Gatz* is thanks to the Elevator Repair Service, a company that has put on, already, *The Sound and the Fury*, as well as *The Sun Also Rises*. The chemistry here, as the review in the *New York Times* puts it, is the variation on the formula: Boy meets book. Boy gets book. Boy becomes lost in book.

Last night, my husband and I went to the most extraordinary representation of contemporary music-making mixed with (a mashup!) Cocteau film of 1930, *Blood of a Poet*. The Peter B. Lewis Theatre at the Guggenheim was filled with the beautiful people of diverse colors, for this *Coup de Foudre*, like a lightning flash descending on us all. The music was provided by Paul Miller (aka D.J. Spooky that Subliminal Kid,) and the direction was by Melvin Van Peebles, his presence occasioning an outburst of applause. The recital of Cocteau poems was well-nigh ununderstandable, and the music covered over the intricate verbal exchange; however the superb dancer Corey Baker, who loped and twirled around the screen, made up for it all.

Now this reminds me of the live presentation of *Brief Encounter*, which uses film clips and a lot of inventiveness. I saw another live presentation of it in London last year, no less inventive and moving. Trevor Howard would break any sensitive soul up, and does, no matter how we get to see him.

One of the oddest at-the-moment offers in this Big Apple is the "Black Umbrella," a company which will help anyone prepare for something catastrophic: the basic fee is \$750, and that includes wallet cards with useful addresses. For upper levels, such as that with a \$1450, the preparedness plan provides scanning of passports and birth certificates, and stores the numbers away from your home so you won't lose them in case of emergency. The idea arose after the horrors of Katrina in New Orleans, about which we all read on and on. And now there is the outbreak of cholera in Haiti. How can art hold its own against starvation, asked Matisse?

The *Oxford Magazine* is edited by

Tim Horder

The *Magazine* normally appears in Noughth, Second, Fifth and Eighth Weeks each Term. Submissions (preferably by e-mail to: tim.horder@dpag.ox.ac.uk) should be received by the Thursday of the previous week.

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Bernard O'Donoghue at Wadham.

Not the *Gazette*

NB The *Oxford Magazine* is not an official publication of the University. It is a forum for the free expression of opinion within the University.

The Group Scheme

You carry these things. I knew the cottage in question was the home of a lad drowned in the Moy, in the sixties, and that his mother had not eaten fish since that day; they never found a body, the divers, and I knew she lived alone, though I couldn't think of her name. But you carry these things. 'I'm two days without water,' Mrs Burke told me. Burke, that's it. I apologised. I said pipes elsewhere were giving hassle and that I'd have a look, tide her over for the weekend, whatever the problem. She was firm but chatty, and intrigued that Callow Lake fed this village and more. 'A farty enough source, for the whole district to be washing and drinking and the rest, cattle and cars and windows and what have you.' 'And is it filtered?' she wanted to know. 'There'll be a brand new system going in.' Her quick reply was cool: 'Ours is not modern so. Is it even good to drink?' 'It's grand for tea,' I said, invoking tea as blesser of our nerves, and to eclipse with wryness the two days she'd been without. But then I spoke of the purifying sand and stone system that we had at the *point of extraction* for years, sliding here to terms that might downplay the blackness, the volume of the lake. And now the hole I'd dug at her door was like my own mind's eye. It needed work. I strove for greater tact and less discomfort welling in my brain. She watched me strike the pipes. I thought the son was beneath us then, sinking or waiting, disturbed and now dislodged. 'Do I know your people?' she asked. 'Aren't you Doherty?' 'I am,' I said, fiercer then with the hammer. 'Your father did the search and recovery for years,' she said. 'He did,' I said. 'God bless him,' she said. And I couldn't get over her warmth, because the gut is like a house where strange half-enmities we carry thrive.

MARTIN DYAR

Martin Dyar won the Patrick Kavanagh Award for poetry in 2009.

The Foot–Southern Debate: some reflections on Jim Reed’s letter

Sir — In many ways I agree with Jim Reed’s critique of the ‘Foot–Southern Debate’ (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 303), but where I must take issue is in his statement – ostensibly shared with Michael Foot – that ‘Social progress and fundamental freedoms have largely had to be wrested from the Church by the Enlightenment and its successors.’

This argument certainly won’t wash in the case of Great Britain, where both the Church of England and the Dissenting Churches warmly backed the scientific movement from the early seventeenth century onwards: just look, for example, at how many Fellows of the Royal Society were also Reverends, including quite a few Bishops. What about the eighteenth-century Methodist movement, spearheaded by John Wesley and George Whitefield, with its radical Gospel message that energised and empowered tin miners, farm labourers, and working women? And were the abolition of the slave trade and child labour, mine, factory, and prison reform, campaigns against extreme judicial punishments, and outreach to and practical help for society’s poorest and most alienated (the Salvation Army) the results of wresting power from the Church? Were they heck! They were the work of Christian Evangelicals of all denominations working very much within the wider Church community.

Perhaps the idea of wresting power from the Church might work a little better in the context of eighteenth-century France and certain other European countries, for here there was a level of ecclesiastical absolutism that one never found in Britain. Yet when ‘Enlightenment’ ideas finally entered French public life in July 1789, they didn’t stay for long, as the Revolution spiralled downwards into an orgy of spying, executions, terror, bureaucratic mayhem, and ideologically-driven courts (such as the one that sentenced to death the great French chemist Lavoisier, because the Revolution did not need men of science!), only to be stabilised by Bonaparte after 1799. And the price of his rescue package was a Europe-wide military dictatorship and total war extending from Lisbon to Moscow against all who opposed him, that lasted until 1815. And what any of this has to do with supposed ‘enlightened’ values rather eludes me!

It may perhaps be ascribed to my own naive sociological blindness, but I have never really been able to see what was so big about the ‘Enlightenment’. Yes, it was a wonderful talking shop (the *philosophes* discussed freedom, equality, and the Rights of Man – usually when the servants had gone to bed or were otherwise out of earshot – and aired all kinds of grand ideas). And of course the Rights of Man were very

TO THE EDITOR

much in evidence in America in 1776 – so long as you weren’t a slave!

On the other hand, Enlightenment advocates not infrequently re-cast in a secular garb ideas that were long familiar to readers of the *New Testament*, such as the innate worth of every individual human being, irrespective of race or gender; a radical human equality; the centrality of women as witnesses of great events; the primacy of love and compassion; and that (in Christ) we are all free. The real source of Liberté, Égalité, and Fraternité, in fact! In our own time, we tend to speak of these values as secular ‘Human Rights’, but let us not forget where they came from, and how they have helped mould history from the first century AD onwards.

Yet what did the Enlightenment actually achieve, beyond the realms of the purely intellectual? Yes, science progressed rapidly between 1650 and 1800. But it did so just as rapidly in Roman Catholic Bologna, Calvinist Leiden, Anglican London, Presbyterian Edinburgh, or Quaker Philadelphia as it did in the radical salons of Paris. And while the French Revolutionaries made grand speeches about freedom, it was a spectacularly well-organised campaign by British Evangelicals – embracing Peers of the realm and Manchester factory hands within its active participants – that led to the abolition of the slave trade in March 1807. Enlightenment intellectuals were undoubtedly good at talking about rights and freedom and exploring ideas, but I would argue that it was active Christian campaigners that achieved the practical results that actually helped to make the world a better place. And I would humbly suggest that this might, perhaps, have been an aspect of what Sir Richard Southern was driving at in the Debate when he spoke of the historical primacy of Christian values.

What did surprise me, however, was Southern’s failure to pounce on the Achilles’ Heel in Foot’s roseate vision of a post-Christian secular world: namely, secularism’s failure to make the world a fairer, more just place once it acquired the political wherewithal to do so. For Revolutionary France, Soviet Russia, Mao’s China, the Third Reich (plus some post-1960 dictatorships), all of which poured withering contempt upon the Christian ethic and did their best to destroy it, hardly became ‘enlightened’ havens of peace and toleration. Instead, they unfailingly spawned regimes of totalitarian brutality and oppression,

with complete disregard for the rights of real, individual human beings (as opposed to ‘the People’ as a mass concept) across their dominions. What is more, that much-fêted truth-revealing instrument called ‘Reason’ invariably became no more than the bully’s justification for getting his own way. Such regimes, indeed, to my way of thinking made the Spanish Inquisition look like a Friendly Society, for the Inquisition – no matter how misguided in its thinking and actions – at least wanted to *save* its victims rather than merely annihilate them!

So when ‘the undergraduate faltering to the last sentence of his essay’ comes to me looking for advice, I always put him on his guard against modern academic myths: such as the world-changing nature of the 1860 Wilberforce *vs.* Huxley ‘debate’, and the actively propagated but evidentially unprovable myth that ‘social progress and fundamental freedoms’ only came into existence after they had been ‘wrested from the Church by the Enlightenment and its successors’.

Yours sincerely

ALLAN CHAPMAN

Wadham College

An Open Letter

The following open letter is a slightly revised version of a letter sent by Denis Noble to the General Secretary of the University and Colleges Union.

Dear Sally — I joined the AUT nearly 50 years ago as a young assistant lecturer at University College London. When I retired from my Oxford professorship in 2004 I chose to retain my membership – although I no longer stood to gain from the union’s negotiating any improvements in salary or conditions of service – because I believe in trade unions and thought that by remaining a member I would, in some small measure, help colleagues. But the behaviour of UCU over the past several years has made it impossible for me to continue, and I now resign my membership.

In a letter I wrote to you over a year ago, which has remained unanswered and unacknowledged, I said that I found UCU’s repeated conference decisions to discriminate against certain colleagues (Israelis) on the grounds of their nationality were unacceptable.

Such discrimination is contrary to the universally recognised norms of academic practice, as set out (for example) in the Statutes of the International Council of Science (ICSU). I also sent a letter as President of IUPS, which adheres to ICSU. Nobody in the world of learning can take seriously a professional organisation that purports to represent academic staff but which entertains proposals to discriminate whether it be on grounds of sex, race, national origin or other characteristics

that are irrelevant to academic excellence. Nonetheless our union has voted repeatedly in favour of discrimination, and those who have been discriminated against are always Israelis. The wording of the discriminatory resolutions has sometimes been contorted for legal reasons, but the intention has been transparent: to hold Israeli colleagues responsible for, and punish them for, the actions of their government via a type of reasoning (guilt by association) that is never applied to the academics of any other country. Of course, I accept that the Israeli government is guilty of human rights violations, and I accept that the union is entitled to criticise it. But many other governments in the world are also guilty of human-rights violations, often far more egregious than those committed by Israel, and yet Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) have never been endorsed by the Annual Congress of UCU against any other country.

It is instructive to compare the motion about China adopted by Congress at its 2010 meeting with one of those about Israel. (I choose these examples because both countries have been in occupation of the territories of a different ethnic group for many years and both have encouraged their citizens to settle in the territories thus occupied). The motion on China, while asserting that UCU “will continue to condemn abuses of human rights of trade unionists and others”, recognised “the need to encourage collegial dialogue” with Chinese institutions. By contrast, a motion on Israel approved in the same session of Congress reaffirmed its support for BDS, sought to establish an annual international conference on BDS and a BDS website, and severed all relations with the Histadrut, the Israeli counterpart to the TUC. There are many countries in the world whose governments are guilty of atrocities: there is no other country in the world whose national trade union organisation is boycotted by UCU.

I find it impossible not to ask myself why UCU exhibits this obsession with Israel. The obvious explanation – that the union is institutionally anti-semitic – is so unpleasant that I have till recently been unwilling to accept it, but I changed my mind after witnessing the fate at the 2010 Congress of the motion of my local branch (University of Oxford) about Bon-gani Masuku. As you know, Masuku was invited to a meeting on BDS hosted by the union in London last December. Some

months earlier, he had made a speech during a rally at the University of the Witwatersrand. This speech has been described by the South African Human Rights Commission (the body set up by the Constitution to promote inter-racial harmony after the end of apartheid) as including “numerous anti-semitic remarks which were seen to have incited violence and hatred”. The Oxford motion debated at Congress did not allege that the union invited Masuku despite knowing his views; instead it merely invited Congress to dissociate itself from Masuku’s views. This was the minimum that UCU could be expected to do to reassure members like me that we still belong. That this motion was rejected by a large majority makes it clear to me that the union either regards anti-semitic views as acceptable or, at least, has no objection to their being expressed in public by the national official of a fraternal trade union organisation. I do not wish to remain a member of such a union.

Yours sincerely
DENIS NOBLE
Balliol College

Sir — Like Denis Noble, we have been a member of UCU, and its predecessor AUT, for more than 40 years. Like him, we remained a member after retiring a few years ago from our University posts.

The facts set out in Denis’s letter to Sally Hunt show beyond dispute that UCU is now institutionally anti-semitic. We too have resigned our membership of the union.

Yours sincerely
MICHAEL YUDKIN
Kellogg College

DAVID SMITH
Department of Pharmacology

By way of right of reply to the above letters of Drs Noble, Yudkin and Smith, the following letter was received from the General Secretary of the University and College Union - ed.

Sir — UCU has always encouraged robust debate amongst members and will continue to do so. As defenders of academic freedom all members’ opinions are welcome and their views are always treated fairly and with respect.

With regards to motions debated at our conference, it is members who propose motions and delegates who debate them and pass policy. It is the job of the union to deliver the policy members decide.

A resignation is always a cause of concern for any organisation, even in a union like UCU which is among the fastest growing in the UK. Our growth is a result of the current uncertain times, and it is vital that all academic and related staff have the protection of their union. As would be expected of an academic union, members have a broad range of views on many issues including of course Israel/Palestine.

However for the avoidance of doubt let me use this opportunity to confirm that UCU does not endorse an academic boycott of Israel and that our position of opposition to the occupation is, far from being extreme, in line with that of the TUC and most other UK trade unions.

Yours sincerely
SALLY HUNT
UCU

The new *Gazette*

Sir — I wonder if I am alone in finding the new-style *Gazette* a miserable affair. The new typeface may be a matter of taste, and not all will find the print tiresomely small, but the greatest deprivation is surely the disappearance of the diary of events. The online Events page of the Staff Gateway is a very imperfect substitute for the old print version, where one could take in at a glance the time, place and subject of the lectures for the forthcoming week, irrespective of Faculty and conveniently grouped by date. A reversion to the printed diary would not preclude the retention of the online version, which can always be checked for last-minute additions and changes.

Yours sincerely
JOHN ELLIOTT
Oriel College

NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author’s name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.

REVIEWS

Not good enough

Modest Mussorgsky: *Boris Godunov*, Met Opera in HD, Phoenix Picturehouse, 24 October 2010.



ATTENDANCE at the 9th Oxford Lieder Festival, to be reported in the next issue, was interrupted for one day for *Boris Godunov*, the second of the season's transmissions from the New York Met, seen at the Sunday repeat. We were grateful that we had not secured tickets for the live transmission which clashed with the second half of the complete *Mörrike Lieder* of Hugo Wolf. Seen only once previously in a heavily truncated version by WNO in 1998 with Willard White, this was an opportunity to experience a full version of this long opera, with a largely Russian cast under the baton of Valery Gergiev not to be missed.

The opera, based on Alexander Pushkin's version of Russian history, tells the story of Tsar Boris' remorseful decline and death over his guilt for the murder of Dimitri, the previous heir, and his succession by a false Dimitri in the shape of Grigori, a novice under the instruction of Pimen, a chronicler; Grigori has taken refuge at the Polish court, where the princess Marina encourages his ambition, egged on by a Jesuit Rangoni whose aim is to convert Russia to Catholicism. This is a great rambling flawed masterpiece of an opera of three distinct elements. The first element comprises the Prologue (1598) and the final Act IV (1605), dominated by the chorus, representing the Russian people under the control of the police, initially persuading Boris to accept the crown and finally turning on the old regime to welcome the false Dmitri. The second element consists of the context-setting Act I (1603), firstly showing Grigori learning of the truth about Dmitri from Pimen followed by his escape from the police into Lithuania. Thirdly, Acts II and III follow Boris' increasing sense of guilt and anguish and then events in Poland where Grigori gains in confidence as the Pretender under the seductive influence of Marina.

In the Met production by Stephen Wadsworth, the chorus is augmented by forty to a strength of one hundred and twenty. Dressed as the Russian populace they look far too well fed. This represents a fatal flaw with the cinematic presentation of TV Director Brian Large. This is an opera with operatic conventions; to

have the camera exploring the faces and detail of incident in the crowd does not create an illusion but distracts from what matters: the singing of the chorus (albeit missing a genuine Russian sound). The cinema audience is there to experience the opera, not to see a second rate movie musical. The beginning of Act I is not interesting, the second scene at the Lithuanian border is played with plodding gallows humour. By its end I was beginning to be thoroughly bored.

But then, in Act II, with the singing of René Pape as Boris in the first of three great monologues, beginning to give way to terror, the opera comes to life. Pape's singing and acting, even to the camera, are superb; he transforms himself into a Russian Tsar and we share Boris' anguish and grief. But more is to come in the singing in Act III, first with a scene between the Marina of Ekaterina Semenchuk and the Jesuit Rangoni (Evgeny Nikitin) where he bends her to his will, followed by the scene of seduction between Marina and Grigory (Aleksandrs Antonenko). This Act is brilliantly sung and acted against a background of the Polish Court, given a dreamlike quality by the elegant Polish ladies being dressed two hundred years ahead of the fashion of 1600.

The opera ends with a Holy Fool 'lamenting Russia's bleak uncertain future'. In this production this character appears throughout, weaving his way in and out of the crowd, presumably for symbolic purpose.

There was much to enjoy in this production but this was one occasion on which one longed to be present in the auditorium, listening to some glorious singing and orchestral playing, undistracted by unsubtle HD editing.

PETER SCHOFIELD

Light-bulb moments

Andrew Robinson, *Sudden Genius? The Gradual Path to Creative Breakthroughs*. Oxford University Press, 2010.



EPIPHANIC revelations (or 'light-bulb moments' as Audrey Roberts calls them in *Coronation Street*) are essentially sudden, and it

is significant that the word has often been used in these contexts. The concept of the sudden, transfiguring light is in fact found in Chapter 14 of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, when he mentions 'the sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunset diffuse over a known and familiar landscape,' and which, by analogy, is like sudden light in the mind. Later in the century Dante Gabriel Rossetti experienced epiphanies which were sudden and unexpected, and on the borderline of the secular and religious. The classic poem is 'Sudden Light'. Pater in *The Renaissance* speaks of something similar: 'A sudden light transfigures some trivial thing, a weather-vane, a wind-mill, a winnowing fan, the dust in the barn door.' The element of perceptual suddenness is frequent in epiphanic experience. A typical example is MacNeice's 'Snow' of January 1935:

*The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
Spawning snow and pink roses against it
Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:
World is suddener than we fancy it.*

However, epiphanies don't come from nowhere, and they need to impinge on a consciousness that has been prepared, or is inherently responsive, and, if something is to grow from them, a special faculty to recognise and make use of them. Why some people should have this preparedness and sensitivity and not others is more or less impossible to explain. The preparedness is not confined to individuals; wider cultural systems, often stretching back centuries, make their contribution, and helps to establish the fertile ground. Although habit is often regarded as deadening it is also, as has been noticed in Auden's career (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 296), central to creative instincts.

Andrew Robinson explores similar themes in *Sudden Genius?* The reason for the question mark is that when one looks into it deeper, genius and its products are not quite as sudden as one might imagine. He considers artists and scientists, and it emerges that there is a 'habit of science' as well as of art – apparent in Edison's 1,093 patents (were all of them 'light-bulb experiences'?) and Einstein's 240 publications. We have to be a bit careful in accepting the accounts geniuses give of their decisive moments. Robinson is rightly sceptical about the dream in which August Kekulé cracked the secret of the benzene molecule (reported about twenty-five years later).

When Wordsworth attempted to identify the origins of his vocation he lighted on an apparently insignificant incident; his poem 'An Evening Walk' contains the following lines:

*And fronting the bright west, yon oak entwines
Its darkening boughs and leaves in stronger lines.*

In the poem itself the trees are not accorded any particular significance, but years later he emphasised their importance in a letter to Isabella Fenwick:

This is feebly and imperfectly expressed, but I recollect distinctly the very spot where this first struck me. It was in the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure. The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country... and I made a resolution to supply, in some degree, the deficiency.

One would think that so important a 'moment' would have been celebrated in *The Prelude*, but curiously, it is not!

Robinson considers ten key figures, from Leonardo da Vinci to Satyajit Ray and provides thumb-nail biographies which provide outlines of their lives and achievements. There is an attempt to draw conclusions, but he is cautious. Patterns emerge, but one would not want to make them into hard and fast rules. Previous studies have considered more persons. An early attempt to survey the phenomenon was Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius* (1869). Many of the geniuses lost parents at an early age. They all have a tendency to be tough, determined and even cold. Leigh Hunt noted that Keats's mouth 'was not without something of a character of pugnacity' (something that does not show up in the more sentimental portraits). When Henry James saw Dickens he noticed 'a straight inscrutability, a merciless *military* eye, I might have pronounced it, an automatic hardness.' A capacity for solitude is an important element. They are determined, concentrated and persistent, and there are a certain number of them who continue their work on actual death-beds. Proust is a case in point. Wittgenstein wrote a book in the trenches, and Bertrand Russell observed: 'He was the kind of man who would never have noticed such small matters as bursting shells when he was thinking about logic.' A sense of wonder is a common feature. There is a tendency for geniuses to be chameleon-like and exhibit what Keats identified as 'negative capability' – which Shakespeare superlatively possessed. Some of them are late in speaking. One is reminded of the anecdote about Macaulay, who said *nothing* until he was about six; boiling coffee was spilt on his leg, but when a woman fussed over him he said, 'Do not trouble yourself Madam, the

agony is abated.' Many of them did not do well in school or university, and there does not seem to be a correlation between IQ scores and genius.

There is a mystery at the heart of this subject. Why didn't the other children in Dickens's blacking-factory go on to write the immortal novels? D.H. Lawrence wasn't the brightest child in the class at Eastwood; why didn't the others produce *Lady Chatterley*? Geniuses often come from nowhere, and do not have brilliant ancestors. Henry James was told by Trollope (*Notebooks*, 22 January 1879) about the possibility of training one's children to be writers, and Anne Thackeray Ritchie (Leslie Stephen's sister-in-law and one of Noel Annan's 'intellectual aristocrats') made a similar point, which was transformed after years of gestation into the beautiful little short story 'Greville Fane' (*Illustrated London News*, September 1892). All that one could hope with this system would be to produce or nurture talent; genius would be out of the question. Analysis of personality has made strides in recent years, but it does not necessarily help much when it comes to genius. It's not always easy to draw the line between genius and talent. Was Mendelssohn a genius? Some people think he could have been. Was Andy Warhol a genius?

I think if I had written the book I would have concentrated more on the products than the producers: how do we recognise and identify a work of genius? The much reviled *Amadeus* (1984) has gross faults in its presentation of Mozart, as Robinson notes, but there is an excellent analysis in it by Salieri of the particular mastery of the third movement of *Serenade for Winds* (K 361) which is superior to anything in Robinson. A critic described it as 'virtually an "operatic" ensemble of passionate feeling and sensuous warmth.' Salieri said of it, 'It seemed to me that I was hearing the voice of God.' Salieri was 'Composer of the Week' on Radio 3 earlier this year (12-16 July), and it was immediately apparent that although he was adequate he could not hold a candle to Mozart. In music it's not the fabrication of tunes which is the central element. Any fool can invent a tune; Scarlatti even writes a fugue on a theme provided by his cat walking across the keyboard. Scarlatti's cat: sounds like the title of some pretentious book.

There are accounts in Robinson of the rich cultural resources which made the products possible. So that, for instance, Einstein built on the advances made by James Clerk Maxwell, and his whole theory does not emerge from an intellectual vacuum, or, indeed, an actual vacuum. In all the arts and sciences such preparations are found. Shakespeare relied on the splendid blank-verse machine which his predecessors fabricated, and the elaborate structures of theatrical illusion. All subsequent musicians have a debt to Bach. Virginia Woolf's central conception of the

moment owes a good deal to Walter Pater – as Perry Meisel recognised in *The Absent Father* (1980). A lot of modern pop music is no more than a series of warbled footnotes to the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix.

As I suggested in *Oxford Magazine*, No. 294, there is a phenomenon we could identify as 'pictorial intertextuality,' whereby painters self-consciously engage with their predecessors. The book would have been more interesting with this approach perhaps. There is something perfunctory about Robinson's mini-biographies, and one has the impression that the real work has been done elsewhere in other studies. It's odd that in the chapter on Woolf *The Waves* is not dealt with. Montaigne puts the picture of broad debt very well: 'the one who has climbed highest often has more honour than he deserves, since he has only climbed one speck higher on the shoulders of his predecessors.'

These considerations relate to the debate going at the moment about the relation between teaching and research in universities. If Einstein's case is anything to go by it's best for teachers also to be *au fait* with the latest research (which will usually mean actually engaging in it). He was taught by people whose theories were years out of date. Clearly not a satisfactory situation. Researchers are not necessarily the best teachers, but undergraduates and graduates need to be in contact with academics who know what the coal-face is like. That it's older than 6,014 years to start with. Books on genius always appeal to those interested in educational theory and practice, because they hope to find the recipe that can be put in a bottle and sold. Fat chance. I've met a fair number of literary figures. The one who gave the greatest impression of genius was the poet Tony Harrison.

The book is depressing for ordinary folk to read, because they fall so far short in achievement. To rephrase Tom Lehrer, 'When Keats was my age he had been dead for forty-four years.' It's not a bad read, but I'd much preferred to have seen reproductions of Cartier Bresson's paintings, which readers (me included) will be uniformly unfamiliar with, than the portraits of Leonardo, Wren, Darwin, etc. Everyone knows what they look like.

At school a highly aestheticized friend reluctantly conceded that Grieg's Piano Concerto was 'a work of genius'. I used to make him almost literally froth at the mouth by telling him (I lied) that I quite liked Eric Coates – although I did not go so far as to claim he was a genius. 'Eric Coates, what do you mean, Eric Coates!' Schoolboys can be terribly cruel.

BERNARD RICHARDS

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The next issue of Oxford Magazine will appear in eighth week

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