

Dehumanizing the Humanities: Neoliberalism and the Unethical Dimension of the Market Ethic

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Abstract

Neoliberalism is a philosophical theory that uses market value as the primary method of evaluating all aspects of life. Thus, the market is seen as the template for all other activities within a society, even those that involve an ethical dimension. This paper explores the ethical impact of neoliberalism on several aspects of the social structure, focusing on the effects that the neoliberal, market-oriented evaluation process has had on education in general, and on the humanities in particular. The paper also explores the origin of this theory and argues that the emergence of neoliberal values was made possible by nineteenth century philosophers who eliminated absolute moral values in order to establish an ethical system based solely on human ideals. Finally, the paper suggests that neoliberalism is fundamentally flawed and recommends that the use of market values as an ethical template be tempered by a qualitative perspective that provides a unified, coherent, and normative description of human nature based on absolute values.

Introduction: The Neoliberal Paradigm

Neoliberalism is a philosophical movement that sees market values as permeating all aspects of life, including not only the economic, but also religious, ethical, political, personal, and educational dimensions. The neoliberal sees all reality as a series of market transactions and places a value on all human endeavors, from philosophy to health care, from religion to law, in terms of quantifiable deals that can be assessed objectively. Neoliberalism assumes that the marketplace is the most effective, most efficient, and most useful structure upon which to build all other necessary cultural, political and educational structures within a social construct. Thus, the market is seen as the template for all other activities of significance within a society.

For a more detailed explanation of neoliberalism we can turn to Jeff Faux, the founder and former president of the Economic Policy Institute, and editor of *American Prospect*, who defines neoliberalism in his book, *The Global Class War*, in the following way, “Neoliberalism is a vision of society in which competition for wealth is the only recognized value and virtually all social decisions are left to unregulated markets. . . It is a world in which, in the words of a title to a 1996 book by Robert Kuttner, ‘everything [is] for sale.’”¹ Paul Treanor, the Dutch political philosopher and economist, and author of *Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition*, says essentially the same thing when he writes, “Neoliberalism is not simply economic structure, it is a philosophy. This is most visible in attitudes to society, the individual and employment. Neo-liberals tend to see the world in terms of market metaphors.”²

¹ Jeff Faux, *The Global Class War: How America’s Bipartisan Elite Lost Our Future and What It Will Take to Win It Back* (New York: Wiley, 2006), 5.

² Paul Treanor, *Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition*, <http://www.web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/neoliberalism.html>, 9 (accessed April 1, 2009).

Neoliberalism, then, is more than an economic theory or a political philosophy; it is a way of seeing reality that envisions all things in terms of quantifiable transactions. Once neoliberalism becomes part of the unspoken paradigm of a culture, then all activities are seen in terms of producing and selling “widgets.” All activities then become easily “quantified” in terms of profits and losses. The neoliberal would describe the process in the following way:

Market forces are also intensified by intensifying assessment, a development especially visible on the labour market. Even within a contract period, an employee will be subject to continuous assessment. The use of specialised software in call centres has provided some extreme examples: the time employees spend at the toilet is measured in seconds: this information is used to pressure the employee to spend less time away from the terminal. Firms with contracts are also increasingly subject to continuous assessment procedures, made possible by information technology.³

The neoliberal doctrine emphasizes competition over cooperation and in doing so encourages each individual to pursue his or her own well being, thus effectively creating "companies of one" who will sell whatever they possess (talents, property, abilities, education, and so on) in order to accumulate "points," in whatever way those points may be defined within a given system.⁴ Neoliberal theorists argue that, if each individual seeks to maximize his or her own potential by gathering those much coveted "points" (generally money, but also, in some systems, grades, promotions, titles, votes, or power) then the entire system will benefit.

In his history of neoliberal philosophy, David Harvey of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, uses the word “commodification” to describe this process. According to Harvey, while the practice of assigning a market value to everything is a fictitious process (labor, land, money are not, after all, really “commodities”) the ritual is itself a necessary element within the neoliberal system. If things are not assigned a value within the market, they cannot be bargained for, bought, sold, saved, spent, or traded. The problem, however, is not in the assignment process itself. Rather, the problem exists within the character of any society that is willing to embrace the market as the sole arbitrator of value. The neoliberal subtext imbedded within market exclusivity is the notion that any system not based on the market is “value-less.”⁵ This one dimensional, quantitative assessment of value not only destroys the individual’s self worth, but also weakens the entire community by marginalizing the individual and, thus, destroying the community’s cohesiveness. Individuals who are assessed (judged, evaluated, and, thus, “known”) only in quantifiable terms become easily replaced by other individuals. Harvey refers to this

³ Ibid., 7.

⁴ Jason Read, “Homo Economicus: The Market as Utopia and Anti-Utopia” (keynote address, annual meeting of the Society for Utopian Studies, Portland, Maine, October 2008).

⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165-169.

tendency as the phenomenon of “the disposable worker.”⁶ Moreover, and more to the point, when the “data-lust fallacy”⁷ drives the evaluation processes, the *unquantifiable* elements of human existence, things such as loyalty, trust, integrity, duty, and so on, are first marginalized, then ignored, and eventually labeled subversive, before becoming completely forgotten. As a result, the social fabric of a market-based culture begins to unravel.

Ironically, the neoliberals manage to fool almost everyone, including themselves, about the true nature of their philosophy because they camouflage that philosophy by speaking in terms of human rights and universal values. The originators of neoliberalism speak and write about protecting people from the onslaught of governmental interference, which is, of course, an admirable goal. However, when they eliminate absolute loyalty to the state, they replace it with blind obedience to the corporation; when they abolish nationalistic pride, they replace it with an addiction to the almighty buck; and when they eliminate habitual adherence to the law, they replace it with an inescapable enslavement to market values and quantified judgments. Individual human worth disappears and is replaced by quantifiable market driven profit and loss margins. Judgments based on absolute moral values are replaced by the sliding scale of material values that are dictated by a fickle and unpredictable market. *Who you are* and *what you do* are replaced with *what you earn* and *how much you own*.

Neoliberalism: The Cultural Suicide of the West

Despite its length and apparent complexity, the foregoing narrative really explains very little about the actual source of the neoliberal obsession with market values. Certainly, it describes the problem, but it does not explain the root cause of that problem. Perhaps this is because the cause is itself obscured by a paradigm which insists on evaluating everything, even itself, in quantitative terms. To escape this cycle, the analysis must focus on socio-cultural causes rather than financial or political ones. Examining socio-cultural causes, however, suggests that the problem is more deeply rooted than previously imagined. In fact, it may be that neoliberalism is itself nothing more than a symptom of a more deeply ingrained danger, a danger that threatens the existence of the West, perhaps even of the existence of civilization itself. It could even be that we are facing the end of the world as we know it. This is, in fact, what the Roman Catholic theologian and philosopher, George Weigel suggests in an essay entitled, “Is Europe Dying? Notes on a Crisis of Civilizational Morale.”⁸ In this essay, Weigel addresses a critical question

⁶ Ibid., 169.

⁷ Michael J. Strada, “Assessing the Assessment Decade,” *Liberal Education* 87, no. 4 (Fall 2001) 2, <http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-fa01/le-fa01feature2cfm> (accessed January 23, 2006). Strada, a professor of political science at West Liberty State College, defines the “data lust fallacy” as the habit that assessment champions develop which leads them to see only quantifiable data as having value.

⁸ George Weigel, “Is Europe Dying? Notes on a Crisis of Civilizational Morale,” *National History Center* <http://hnn.us/articles/12295.html>. 2 (accessed February 5, 2009).

that focuses on the fundamental nature of the current crisis. Why, he asks, did Western Civilization begin the 20th century with a faith in progress, yet end up nearly destroying itself in a series of global wars?⁹

Weigel answers the question by calling upon the work of Jesuit theologian, Henri de Lubac who, in a study entitled *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, explains the crisis by pointing to the fact that Western Civilization has rejected, or is embarrassed to admit to, its fundamental roots. Those roots, Weigel says, are found in the Judeo-Christian belief in the absolute values of an absolute God, a biblical God, who is both personal and powerful, and who offers human beings a chance to control their own destinies.¹⁰ In his analysis of Lubac's work, Weigel explains:

Biblical man had perceived his relationship to the God of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as a liberation: liberation from the terrors of gods who demanded extortionate sacrifice, liberation from the whims of gods who played games with human lives (remember the Iliad and the Odyssey), liberation from the vagaries of Fate. The God of the Bible was different. And because biblical man believed that he could have access to the one true God through prayer and worship, he believed that he could bend history in a human direction. Indeed, biblical man believed that he was obliged to work toward the humanization of the world. One of European civilization's deepest and most distinctive cultural characteristics is the conviction that life is not just one damned thing after another; Europe learned that from its faith in the God of the Bible.¹¹

Western civilization's belief in absolute values and its faith in the ability of human beings to control their own destinies found its source in the Judeo-Christian belief in a personal God who spoke to humanity through the scriptures and who gave humans free will and, along with that free will, personal responsibility for their own actions. It was a faith that turned a fatalistic universe into one in which, as Weigel puts it, "life is not just one damn thing after another."¹²

Nor is Weigel alone in this interpretation. He is joined by the noted sociologist Rodney Stark, who makes the same point in his book, *The Victory of Reason*. Stark, however, points out that it was the method of Christianity as much as the substance of its message that empowered the West in its drive to dominate the planet. In fact, the rise of science, Stark argues, was achieved by religious scholars who had a deeply rooted faith in the absolute laws of a created universe. These scholars knew that a productive investigation of nature requires a finely tuned balance between observation and explanation. Christian theology inspired a balanced exploration of nature because Christian theology posits the existence of a rational God who created a universe that operates according to absolute, reasonable rules that make sense.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

True, those rules may be hidden, but they are discoverable, precisely because they are reasonable.¹³ Of course, this observation makes sense because the absolute Judeo-Christian God is a combination of Greek reason, Hebrew free will, and Christian faith.¹⁴ As Stark points out:

Newton, Kepler, and Galileo regarded the creation itself as a *book* that was to be read and comprehended. The sixteenth-century French scientific genius Rene Descartes justified his search for natural “laws” on grounds that such laws must exist because God is perfect and therefore “acts in a manner as constant and immutable as possible,” except for the rare exceptions of miracles. In contrast, these critical religious concepts and motivations were lacking in those societies that seem otherwise to have had the potential to develop science but did not.”¹⁵

Ironically, this belief in the partnership of faith, reason, and progress began to fade precisely at the point in time when science could be used to manipulate those hidden laws in order to make progress a reality. That point in time was the nineteenth century when scientists and engineers were beginning to discover how to manipulate the universe for the betterment of humanity. The peculiarity of this situation is not lost on Weigel or Lubac. However, it is Weigel who explains how nineteenth century thinkers:

turned this inside out and upside down. Human freedom, they argued, could not coexist with the God of the Jews and Christians. Human greatness required rejecting the biblical God, according to such avatars of atheistic humanism as Auguste Comte, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche. And here, Father de Lubac argued, were ideas with consequences—lethal consequences, as it turned out. For when you marry modern technology to the ideas of atheistic humanism, what you get are the great mid-twentieth century tyrannies—communism, fascism, Nazism. Let loose in history, Father de Lubac concluded, those tyrannies had taught a bitter lesson: “It is not true, as is sometimes said, that man cannot organize the world without God. What is true is that, without God, he can only organize it against man.” Atheistic humanism,—ultramundane humanism, if you will—is inevitably inhuman humanism.¹⁶

Of course, none of this actually spells out why those nineteenth century thinkers—Comte, Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche, among others—found it necessary to turn against the absolute value system of the biblical God of the Judeo-Christian culture with such intensity. Certainly, one can sympathize with those thinkers, and can observe, as A. N. Wilson does in his book, *God’s Funeral*, that the impasse that they had reached was, at best, confusing and, at worst, debilitating. As Wilson notes, the dilemma consisted of

¹³ Ibid., 12-16.

¹⁴ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason* (New York: Random House, 2005), 5-16. (Note: This tendency to interpret scripture was also inherited from Christianity’s parent religion, Judaism, which had developed a healthy tendency to interpret scripture, and had as a result by the first century A.D. developed an extensive oral tradition. This development is examined at length by Morton Scott Enslin in his study *Christian Beginnings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1938, 1956), 111-128.)

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶ Weigel, 3, quoting de Lubac at 14. See: Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1949, 1995), 14.

determining, “how to maintain religion without sacrifice of intellectual integrity, or, to put it another way, how to reconcile Modern knowledge with the Old faith.”¹⁷

Many nineteenth century thinkers, notably Comte, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche, resolved the dilemma on the side of “Modern knowledge” and against the “Old faith.” When it came to choosing which of the three factors, faith, reason, or progress, had to be sacrificed, faith was judged expendable. Even this observation, however, does not explain the zeal with which they embraced that rejection. To Comte, for example, religions of the past became an impediment to the progressive development of humanity, which was the focal point of his new religion--positivism.¹⁸ Comte’s position, however, pales in comparison to the passion expressed by Nietzsche and Feuerbach. It is Nietzsche, of course, who in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, declares that “God is dead” and who adds that it is only with the death of God that human beings can leap to the level of the Superman.¹⁹ Finally, it is Feuerbach who declares that the very sanctity of life disintegrates in the face of religion.²⁰

This, then, is more than a mere choice between two philosophies. These words demand that the old ways be utterly destroyed. Eric Voegelin describes this Western crusade against the Judeo-Christian culture as the “murder of God.”²¹ According to Voegelin, the absolute God of the Judeo-Christian culture is needed to establish order in the universe. This means that, no matter what this order looks like, no matter how beneficial or logical, it remains an order that is imposed on humanity by an outside power, a God, who is beyond human control. Furthermore, this belief implies that, because God is beyond human control, the universe is likewise. It is this lack of control, Voegelin suggests, that nineteenth century thinkers, and their modern European counterparts, cannot abide.²² To bestow omnipotence upon humanity and to ensure continued human progress, any human creation that suggested, even accidentally, that humans had limits had to be destroyed. Clearly, then God could not merely be set aside as a relic of the past. He must, instead, be completely erased from existence. He must, as Voegelin says, be murdered.²³ Of course, as is usually the case, once the murder has been committed, an emptiness follows that must be filled by human effort. Those left behind must build a new standard by which purpose is to be measured.

I am aware, of course, of the profound irony hidden within the attempt to seek value within the humanities by demanding that we return to the Judeo-Christian culture and to the absolute God of the

¹⁷ A. N. Wilson, *God’s Funeral* (New York: Norton, 1999), 340.

¹⁸ Auguste Comte, “A General View of Positivism” in *The Great Political Theories: From the French Revolution to Modern Times*, ed. Michael Curtis (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), 154.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “*Beyond Good and Evil and Thus Spake Zarathustra*,” in *The Great Political Theories* (see note 18), 297.

²⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 272.

²¹ Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 1968), 39-40.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

biblical tradition. The proponents of atheistic humanism would almost certainly see this agenda as illogical and self-defeating. However, this is only because, as Weigel has argued, modern thinkers have turned Western culture “inside out and upside down.”²⁴ They envision human value as dependent upon human impulses rather than on absolute normative principles. This takes away the foundation that had been established by the Judeo-Christian belief system, a system predicated upon the assumption that human history could be guided in a human direction based on universal rights and duties. As Weigel points out, the absolute God of biblical tradition shifted the direction of human activity from fate and fortune to free will and foresight.²⁵ This is what made Comte’s belief in positivism possible in the first place. There is more to it than this, however. If we focus only on volition and the possibility of progress we ignore an essential element of the human value system. The missing element is found only when we acknowledge the fact that human beings, despite good intentions and ambitious plans, cannot initiate this progress toward universal rights and values by themselves. The history of the 20th century alone demonstrates the validity of that assertion. Reason, as powerful as it may be, is incapable of establishing an absolute standard by which human behavior can be judged.

This is not to say that human beings have not made well-intentioned attempts over the course of history to write documents and to set up governmental systems based on absolute human rights. The French attempted to construct a governmental system based on “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” after their revolution in the eighteenth century.²⁶ The Germans constructed the Weimar Republic in the wake of the Great War, and, in the modern age, the United Nations has led the way by sponsoring such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Universal Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, among others. Often, however, both types of efforts, those aimed at establishing state-based democratic governmental systems founded on human rights and those aimed at writing international documents that will enforce such rights globally, have been imperfect at best. Jurgen Habermas explores this idea in an essay entitled, “Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?” In this article, Habermas notes that human governmental systems are self-generating networks that emerge from within the interactions of their constituents.²⁷

According to Habermas, the legitimacy of the modern democratic state, wherein power emerges from the people, can be established only in a self-referential way. A democratic state cannot resort to an

²⁴ Weigel, 3.

²⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

²⁶ The French also wrote their own self-referential document creating human rights. The document which was entitled, *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, was approved in 1789 by the National Assembly. Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization* (New York: West Publishing, 1994), 683.

²⁷ Jurgen Habermas, “Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?” in *The Dialectics of Secularization*, ed, Florian Sculler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 24-28. Habermas hints at his own doubts about the ability of human beings to create self-referential systems based on universal rights when he formulates his title as a question.

absolute standard of legitimacy imposed from “above” (read God here), without marginalizing the alleged source of this power, the people. Habermas cites Immanuel Kant who builds a political system on the basis of human rationality. The application of reason, according to Habermas and Kant, will establish a set of laws and a constitutionally created governmental structure that will be understood as a self-validating system, within which there will be no challenges that cannot be met from within the four corners of the constitution.²⁸ “(S)ystems of law,” Habermas writes, “can be legitimated only in a self-referential manner, that is, on the basis of legal procedures born of democratic procedures.”²⁹ In other words, once the people create a democratic system based on democratic principles, the democratic system becomes self-perpetuating and self-validating. The people write a constitution in order to create a better, more participatory life under that constitution. In writing the constitution, the framers of that constitution guarantee its durability and consistency by establishing that the rule of law represented by the provisions within that constitution cannot be violated. The political power structure in the state must be subservient to the law and, once that legal system is recognized, the need for an outside authority vanishes. The law becomes its own rational self-justification. Habermas believes that this self-validation process is natural, autonomous, and inevitable and is, therefore, accepted instinctively by the constituency.³⁰

Nevertheless, Habermas is wrong. His explanation fails to clarify how the framers of the constitution manage to create a constitution that guarantees individual human rights in the first place. The answer seems to lie within the collective memory of the people. The people will recall (either consciously or subconsciously, this is never made clear) those “pre-political ethical considerations of religious or national communities,”³¹ and then, in applying those pre-political considerations, will ensure a fair and just constitution that will then perpetuate itself.³² What this narrative seems to lack is an explanation as to why, if the self-validating process works so well, so many initially democratic systems collapse. Neither the French Revolution nor the Weimer Republic can be held up as sterling examples of the self-referential guarantee of human rights. In both cases, the self-referential state defended by Habermas failed. Moreover, these are only two examples extracted from history. There are many others that demonstrate that political systems that attempt to create their own self-referential legal systems without resorting to an outside authority frequently fail.³³

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 27.

³⁰ Ibid., 27-31.

³¹ Ibid., 27.

³² Ibid., 27-33.

³³ To name a few of these we can look at the transformation of the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire; the alteration of the Russian Revolution into the dictatorship of Stalin; the modification of the Chinese Revolution into the autocratic People’s Republic of China; the change in the Cuban revolution from a popular uprising to the dictatorship of Fidel Castro, and so on.

Moreover, even when such systems survive, they frequently do so by subverting the very ideals they claim to represent. This transformation occurs because these systems find themselves promoting value structures that contradict the absolute standards that are guaranteed by the Western tradition. In his book *The Fragile Absolute*, Slavoj Zizek, a senior researcher at the Institute for Social Studies, makes this point in a rather startling way by revealing that, when human beings construct their own value systems in such documents as the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, or the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen those efforts establish nothing other than temporary standards that are honored only so long as it is convenient to do so.³⁴ Zizek explains this phenomenon by noting that most declarations of human rights are actually systems that tell people how to escape the prohibitions placed upon them by the absolute law of the Ten Commandments.³⁵ In other words, such systems simply tell people how to justify their own selfish tendencies. For example, Zizek argues that the right to privacy, which is frequently found in such documents, is really nothing more than the right to hide one's sins from others. Why would people demand privacy, in other words, unless they have something to hide? Similarly, the right to the free expression of ideas is the right to lie; the right to bear arms is the right to kill; the right to the free exercise of religion is the right to worship whatever god might be fashionable at the moment, and the right to private property is the right to steal, misuse, pollute, and ultimately devastate that "private" property.³⁶

This revelation, however, comes as no surprise to Zizek, who points to the fallacy of the self-referential system. A self-referential system, he argues, will always, by definition and inclination, focus on the self and, when asked to generate law, will invent selfish laws that protect its selfish nature. To counteract this tendency, Zizek argues, the Judeo-Christian culture promotes a belief in an absolute God who imposes morality from the outside. For a system to provide rules that actually bind people, morality must be imposed by an authoritative figure that can see beyond the limits of the self-referential system. Morality that comes from within a self-referential system will always be a morality of selfishness. How could it be otherwise? For morality to be effective, self-reference is never enough because the self always

³⁴ Slavoj Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), 101-102. Zizek does not refer to these documents explicitly. Instead, he cites an article entitled "The Subject of Religion: Lucan and the Ten Commandments" by Julia Reinhard Lupton and Kenneth Reinhard as the source of his arguments here.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. Of course, Zizek is careful to point out that these statements of rights never expressly promote a willful, premeditated violation of absolute Judeo-Christian law (read the Ten Commandments here). However, these statements of human rights invariably provide the loopholes that permit, even encourage, a wide variety of creative violations of the Decalogue without actually approving of them. This is, however, the essence of a relativistic system.

protects the self.³⁷ Something additional is needed, something with the authority to *demand* that humans make moral decisions even when the self is threatened.

According to Zizek, that authority must come from outside of the human system. Without the solid foundation provided by an outside absolute standard, such as the Divine Mosaic Law suggested by Zizek, people have no authentic motivation to be fair, understanding, or charitable, let alone law abiding.³⁸ Once the absolute morality of an outside source is abandoned, the standard becomes completely arbitrary. Once morality depends upon the whim of the majority, or a powerful plurality, there is no justification for any decision, other than simply restating that it is the will of the majority or of a powerful plurality, both of which have no motive higher than self preservation. The majority, in whatever way it may be identified at the moment, or the plurality with the power, defines “right” by default. Moreover, there is no way to determine when the majority or the powerful plurality has violated human rights because the parameters protecting those rights are established and maintained by those with the power to violate those rights. Inevitably, those in power will have a single agenda in mind and that is to protect themselves. This, however, cannot be admitted up front, because to do so undermines the basic principle of human rights, that is, that they ought to extend equally to all. What happens as a result is either open tyranny or, perhaps even worse, rule by hypocrisy.³⁹

It is for this reason, Weigel points out, that Europeans have had so much difficulty incorporating a mere reference to the Christian tradition in the European Union’s new constitution.⁴⁰ As Weigel explains:

The debate was sometimes silly and not infrequently bitter. Partisans of European secularism argued that mentioning Christianity as a source of European democracy would “exclude” Jews, Muslims, and those of no religious faith from the new Europe; yet these same partisans insisted on underscoring the

³⁷ Ibid., 100-101. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen which was penned during the French Revolution offers the most vivid example of this self-referential selfishness and its destructive subtext. The Declaration claims to protect the right of free expression. However, when Olympe de Gouges (the pen name of a woman writer named Marie Gouze) pointed out that the Declaration did not mention nor seem to apply to women and when she wrote her own Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen, she was rewarded for her trouble by being guillotined in November of 1793. Spielvogel, 685; Donald Kagan, Steven Ozment, and Frank M. Turner, *The Western Heritage* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2007), 450.

³⁸ Ibid., 100.

³⁹ Again, the most vivid example of this self-referential, selfishness is French Revolution and The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. As part of the reform system the French Republic’s National Convention engineered and carried out a De-Christianization Campaign. Under this campaign, Notre Dame Cathedral was renamed the Temple of Reason, the calendar was revised to eliminate the Christian-based year, churches were closed down, and Catholic priests were forced to marry. Some of the achievements of this de-Christianized nation were the Reign of Terror, the execution of Louis XVI, the murder of 1,800 citizens of Lyons, the execution of Marie Antoinette, the September Massacres of 1,200 people in 1792, the execution of Marie Gouze, and the execution of Robespierre, one of the architects of the Revolution itself. All of this was, of course, followed by the Reign of the Emperor Napoleon and a decade and a half of war throughout all of Europe. Kagan, Ozment, and Turner, 436-451; Spielvogel 676-695.

⁴⁰ Weigel, 4.

Enlightenment as the principal source of contemporary European civilization, which would seem to “exclude” all those—including avant-garde European “postmodernists”—who think that Enlightenment rationalism got it wrong.⁴¹

At first blush, this may seem a minor point. After all, can it really matter that the European Union’s new constitution ignores the Judeo-Christian tradition? Without hesitation, Weigel argues that it does, indeed, matter. In fact, it matters a great deal. To prove his point he calls upon a political commentator, J. H. H. Weiler, professor of international law at New York University. According to Weigel:

Weiler argued that European “Christophobia”...was the root of the refusal of so many Europeans to acknowledge...that Christian ideas and values were one of the principal sources of European civilization and of Europe’s contemporary commitment to human rights and democracy. This deliberate historical amnesia . . . was not only ignorant; it was constitutionally disabling. For in addition to defining the relationship between citizens and the state, and the relations among the various branches of government, constitutions are the repository, the safe-deposit box, of the ideas, values, and symbols that make a society what it is. Constitutions embody . . . the “ethos” and the “telos,” the cultural foundations and moral aspirations, of a political community. To cut those aspirations out of the process of “constituting” Europe was to do grave damage to the entire project.⁴²

The damage of which Weigel and Weiler speak is the absence of an absolute standard by which to make moral and value-based judgments. Without that standard, moral judgments are shaped by those elements of society that have the power and the resources to take control of the entire process. In such a world, data, dollars, statistics, sales, dividends, promotions, bank accounts, titles, and so on can become the currency of modern morality. Can it produce? Will it add value to the monetary system? Can it be measured by a machine? Will it produce a profit? These are the only questions that become important.

It is this profound disconnect between Judeo-Christian values and day-to-day social activities, that permits the replacement of those values with the neoliberal values of the market-place. As noted above, market values reduce all human activity to quantifiable results. Without the content of the Judeo-Christian tradition to anchor progress to a core of absolute values, humans themselves have no way to measure either the value or the ethical content of that progress or their fellow humans. As a result, progress does not halt. On the contrary it accelerates, under the simple demand that the results of that progress have market value. Never mind the effects on the global environment, forget the consequences in relation to the development of weapons, ignore the toll that such progress takes on human health and the human spirit. As long as the products of that progress can be quantified and the quantification ends up on the positive side of the ledger, then they are “good.”

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 5.

This is how we end up with concentration camps in Europe, genocide in Africa and the Balkans, preventative war in the Middle East; terror attacks in New York, Washington, and London; the rapid extinction of whole species; the collapse of an economic system once based on trust, and the disintegration of the ecosystem. We place our decisions on the scales of the market, figure out their quantitative value, and then we act. We make products that poison our children; we produce weapons that will cause our own extinction; we weigh human lives based on longevity and actuarial tables, and then we wonder why our lives seem worthless. The answer is simple. Based on quantifiable projections, they really are, quite simply, worthless.⁴³

Neoliberalism: Advancing the Quantitative Evaluation Process in Education

Nowhere should such quantifiable projections be seen less than in education but, ironically, this is where they are seen more than anywhere else. The most insidious dimension of neoliberalism is the data-driven total quality management (TQM) assessment program used in education today. Educators at all levels are compelled to administer evaluation systems that measure learning in quantifiable terms. For institutions, this means measuring student success based on graduation rates, enrollment, tuition, retention, and transfer agreements. In the classroom it means treating students like customers and products. The knowledge that the instructors have in their heads is “sold” to the students who become “educated” citizens because they can pass tests that have been designed to provide “quantifiable” results. This process sounds harmless enough. However, as Scott Boyd of the College of DuPage in Chicago explains, this type of assessment:

seeks to measure student success...by students' ability to attain certain measurable and demonstrable outcomes of which it is the facilitator's (formerly "teacher's") responsibility to see that the customer (formerly "student") achieves. Much of this theory, developed primarily by William Spady in the 1990's, focuses on "the end product of a clearly defined process that students carry out" that is applicable in the real world (Spady. We Need...82). His "real world," I assume based on his use of language, since Spady doesn't define it, lacks any shade of grey or any unquantifiable, subjective process, thought, emotion or action that a "customer" needs to be prepared to encounter.⁴⁴

Those disciplines that suffer the most as a result of this “quantifying mania” are the humanities. This is because, unlike math and science, the humanities help students appreciate, understand, respect, and

⁴³ Again, it is enlightening to draw a parallel between the Christophobia of the European Union and its paralysis over the attempt to make reference to Christianity in its Constitution, and the de-Christianization of France during the French Revolution, a revolution which produced the atrocities outlined in a previous footnote above, despite its high sounding Declaration of the Rights of Man and The Citizen.

⁴⁴ Scott H. Boyd, “Neoliberalism: The Ghost Editor in Community Colleges,” (paper presented at the annual CCHA National Conference, Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 11, 2005), 4-5.

esteem the role that the humanities (philosophy, theology, art, and so on) have on culture, in general, and on the individual in particular. As such, the humanities produce (if “produce” is even the correct word in this context) unquantifiable results.

The original idea of using a quantitative approach to measure the success of corporate institutions was instituted by an American mathematician named W. Edwards Deming who, in the years following the Second World War, used TQM to restructure the culture of the Japanese corporate world. His work was also mimicked by other influential neoliberals such as Joseph Juran, Armand Feigenbaum,⁴⁵ and by Michael Hammer, co-author of *Re-Engineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for Business Revolution*. This influential book is a detailed neoliberal treatise that is generally credited (although some would say blamed) for providing a comprehensive blueprint for the down-sizing mania of the 1990’s.⁴⁶

The apparent success of TQM, as hailed by neoliberal thinkers like Deming, Juran, Feigenbaum, and Hammer, persuaded educational leaders, who were under the gun to produce results, to copy the techniques used in K-12 Outcome-Based Assessment programs and apply them to higher education. Evidence for this can be found in a white paper issued by The Public Strategies Group, entitled, *A Model for the Reinvented Higher Education System*.⁴⁷ The white paper asserts that the old system of education, the one based on, well, teaching and learning, must be scrapped in favor the neoliberal “enterprise model,”⁴⁸ which sees the college as a “corporation.”⁴⁹ The enterprise model emphasizes that the student is nothing more than a “customer,”⁵⁰ and values only those results that are “measurable.”⁵¹ In fact, the paper goes so far as to suggest replacing “colleges” and “universities” with neoliberal institutions referred to as “educational enterprises.”⁵² Divisions and departments would be replaced by “teaching enterprises.”⁵³

The enterprise model and other models that reflect the neoliberal market value system are seen as necessary, based on the “evidence” of educational failure provided by a series of reports that were commissioned by various governmental agencies. Most of these reports were produced by committees that were dominated by business leaders, bureaucrats, and administrators rather than teachers. The reports can be traced back to the national panic about the alleged poor quality of the American educational

⁴⁵ Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter, “Beware TQM is Coming to Your Campus,” National Education Association, Higher Education, *Thought and Action* (Spring 1994): 2 <http://www2.nea.org/he/tqm.html> (accesses April 1, 2009).

⁴⁶ Frank Edler, “How Accreditation Agencies in Higher Education Are Pushing Total Quality Management: A Faculty Review of Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP),” (Omaha, NE: Metropolitan Community College, 2003): 3 <http://commhum.mccneb.edu/PHILOS/AQIP.htm> (accessed April 1, 2009).

⁴⁷ The Public Strategies Group, *A Model for the Reinvented Higher Education System* (The Public Strategies Group, 2008) <http://www.psg.us/resources/amodelfor.html> (accessed February 23, 2009).

⁴⁸ The Public Strategies Group, 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, 2, 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

system that immediately followed the Soviet Union's launch of the Earth's first artificial satellite, Sputnik I, in 1957. These reports started with a white paper commonly referred to as the *Eisenhower Report* in 1957⁵⁴ and continued with *A Nation at Risk* in 1983,⁵⁵ *the Governors' Task Force* in 1991,⁵⁶ and *The Spellings' Report* in 2006.⁵⁷

The Education Committee of the National Academy of Sciences joined the campaign to restructure the educational system according to a quantitative model in 1959 when it held a series of meetings at a forum that came to be known as the Woods Hole Conference. The symposium, which was jointly supported by the United States Office of Education, the RAND Corporation, and the National Science Foundation, was held in the aftermath of the Sputnik crisis with the explicit goal of readjusting educational methodology by making it "scientific," "positivistic," and, above all, "measurable."⁵⁸ The overall result of the conference was a readjustment in educational practices at every level, from K through 12 to the post-secondary level, aimed at introducing "measurable outcomes, minimum proficiencies, and standardized tests."⁵⁹ In a similar vein, one year earlier, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was initiated by Congress. The NDEA furnished \$1 billion for education. Funding provided under provisions of the NDEA focused on the development of programs in mathematics and science, leaving the unquantifiable (and by implication, less worthy) humanities with no additional funding.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, very few people challenged the evidence presented by these reports, conferences, and legislative initiatives. If they had, they might have discovered that the so-called "education crisis" was little better than a myth manufactured to fuel the neoliberal agenda. The motivation behind the neoliberal agenda is not difficult to imagine or document. The motivation is simple: corporate profit. A case in point is the organization EDUCAUSE, which sponsors the adoption of technology-based educational equipment. To promote its agenda in 2005, EDUCAUSE published a booklet online entitled, *Educating the NET Generation*. Boyd explains that:

⁵⁴ Boyd, *The Eisenhower Report*, which was actually entitled *Education Beyond High School*, suggested that colleges and universities shift from an academic model of education to a market-oriented, neoliberal model. The committee which produced the report was run by Wall Street lawyer, Devereux Josephs.

⁵⁵ U. S. Department of Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington D.C., 1983).

⁵⁶ American Association of University Professors, "Mandated Assessment of Educational Outcomes: A Report of Committee C on College and University Teaching, Research, and Publication," *The Montana Professor* 1.3 (Fall 1991), <http://mtprof.msun.edu> 1-2 (accessed October 12, 2006) previously published in *Academe* 77.4 (July-August 1991): 49-50.

⁵⁷ U. S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* (Washington, D.C., 2006), iii.

⁵⁸ Howard Besser, "Education as Marketplace," *Computers in Education: Social Historical, and Political Perspectives*, ed. R. Muffoletto and N. Knupfer (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1993) <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/~howard/Papers/Tmp/edu-mkplc.html> (accessed October 12, 2006), 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

(w)hat is disturbing about EDUCAUSE is its membership list: Dozens of the most powerful and influential technology companies in America including 5G Wireless, Adobe, Apple, Blackboard, Dell, eCollege, Epson, Follett, Gateway, HP, IBM, Microsoft, SBC, and Toshiba. As students are sold more and more technological devices, they demand those devices be used in their education, colleges have been somewhat resistant, so a non-profit organization backed by the manufacturers of these devices lobbies institutions and accrediting agencies to make process and technology more central in academic institutions.⁶¹

Moreover, and perhaps more to the point, Boyd also testifies that EDUCAUSE is only one of many examples demonstrating how corporations have surreptitiously hijacked the educational system, while cleverly hiding behind the false front of educational benevolence. Another example is the League for Innovation in the Community College, a non-profit enterprise founded by the author of *The Learning College*, Terry O'Banion, and supported by a list of technology companies that is very similar to the list of corporations that fund EDUCAUSE.⁶²

The ironic part of this entire crisis is that the educational system was never really broken in the first place. Jay P. Greene makes this observation, especially in relation to the *A Nation at Risk* report, in his book, *Education Myths*.⁶³ In a chapter, entitled, "The Myth of Decline," Greene points out that a close examination of the evidence will demonstrate that schools, especially at the K through 12 level, are performing today, as well as they performed for decades in the past.⁶⁴ Greene sites evidence presented by SAT and ACT scores to show that student performance levels are as high today as they were in the past. He reports:

the nation's average scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) have remained relatively flat over the last three decades. While the nation's average score on the SAT verbal assessment did drop by 26 points between 1972 and 2002, scores on the math test rose by 7 points over the same thirty-year period.

Student performance on the American College Test (ACT) has also remained steady since 1990, the earliest year for which we have comparable information. National average test scores on the ACT remained the same in English and increased by 0.8 points in math. The story is much the same for scores in reading and science, which increased by 0.1 and 0.3 points, respectively.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Boyd, 9-10.

⁶² Ibid., 10.

⁶³ Jay P. Greene, *Education Myths: What Special-Interest Groups Want You to Believe about Our Schools – and Why It Isn't So* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Greene also testifies that results reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) demonstrate that there is no educational crisis.⁶⁶ In fact, test scores have actually gone up in many cases over the last three decades. Greene points out that reading scores climbed 4 points for fourth and eighth graders, and by 3 points for twelfth graders between 1971 and 1999. He also notes that math scores climbed for each grade between 1973 and 1999, and that science grades also shot up for each grade between 1977 and 1999.⁶⁷ He also adds that the percentage of learners in fourth, eighth and twelfth grades reaching proficiency levels has gone up in both reading and math.

The percentage of students reaching the highest reading proficiency levels (a score of 250 or higher for fourth graders and of 300 or higher for eighth and twelfth graders) increased by 0.3 percentage points for fourth graders, 4.7 percentage points for eighth graders and 0.6 points for twelfth graders. The math scores tell much the same story.⁶⁸

Despite this evidence, the picture that persists is that of an educational network that is extravagant, ineffective, and mismanaged. Nor has this image been limited to the K through 12 system. Many people have begun pointing fingers at higher education, arguing that much of the blame lay at the doorstep of the nation's colleges and universities. As a result, many state governments, feeling the pressure, have begun to overhaul their educational systems based on a neoliberal template that demands quantifiable results. A case in point is the state of Ohio. The present governor of the state of Ohio in partnership with the Board of Regents, recently unveiled a plan to channel the state's resources toward the development of a "a high-quality, flexible system of higher education that offers a wide range of educational options, while driving down the average amount that students pay to among the lowest in the nation."⁶⁹ This project was initiated despite the fact that, in terms of bachelor degrees in the workforce, Ohio outranks Canada, Australia, Korea, Japan, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Spain, New Zealand, and Switzerland, and in terms of associate degrees, leads Norway, Australia, Korea, Belgium, Iceland, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Ireland.⁷⁰ The decision to overhaul a fairly effective educational system would not be so disturbing were the state not in the middle of an economic crisis so severe that the governor has already cut almost 2 billion dollars out of the state's operational budget.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 88. The National Assessment of Educational Progress is usually referred to as the Nation's Report Card.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 88-89.

⁶⁹ Eric D. Fingerhut, "Executive Summary," *Strategic Plan for Higher Education* (Columbus: Ohio Board of Regents, 2008), 3. One is struck immediately by the subconscious tendency of the chancellor and his team to quantify education even in the Executive Summary, a document that ought to be fairly innocuous.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁷¹ Mark Naymik, "Ohio Faces Major Budget Cuts and More Deficits," *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 1, 2008, <http://blog.cleveland.com> (accessed February 25, 2009).

Still, even that might be understandable, even forgivable, were it not for the way that the governor, the chancellor, and the regents plan to measure the success of their “high-quality, flexible system.” They expect to gauge the system’s accomplishments by plotting enrollment figures, counting the number of degrees awarded, monitoring graduation rates, reporting on the physical condition of the facilities (read buildings here), determining the sum total of dollars received from endowments, totaling the number of research dollars poured into the system, and listing the number of students engaged in internship programs.⁷² The neoliberal flavor of the entire scheme is unmistakable, and as a result, these accountability measures are only remotely related to the actual educational process.

Nor is Ohio alone in this neoliberal campaign. Many states have mandated that their state institutions adopt accountability measures that can be used to quantify their rate of improvement, their level of student satisfaction, and their overall effectiveness. In order to respond to these demands, many institutions surrendered to TQM. As noted above, the higher education, neoliberal guru for TQM is Terry O'Banion, who in 1997 wrote *A Learning College for the 21st Century*. This work, which is described by Boyd as “a neoliberal Bible for turning public, non-profit community colleges into chaotic, inefficient, systems driven companies,”⁷³ was timed perfectly to feed upon the growing TQM mentality in higher education. As early as 1989, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association (NCA), without actually naming it, toyed with the concept of neoliberalism⁷⁴ and gradually capitulated to the seductive nature of TQM, adopted it, and refashioned it into the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP).⁷⁵ This neoliberal platform eventually became the official party line of the NCA when the Higher Learning Commission (HLC)⁷⁶ of the NCA formally implemented the neoliberal AQIP process. In 2001, Steven Crow, the Executive Director of the Higher Learning Commission, placed the NCA’s imprimatur on the concept of higher education as a business. Institutions of higher education, Crow said, must abandon their mission as preservers of culture and seekers of truth and must, instead, recognize that they are “a multi-billion dollar business.”⁷⁷ AQIP is perhaps the most dangerous manifestation of this mentality, that is, the neoliberal mentality that declares that institutions of higher education must recognize that they are nothing more than “manufacturers of ‘learners.’”⁷⁸

⁷² Fingerhut, 81. This is only a partial list of twenty quantified “measurements of success.”

⁷³ Boyd, 5.

⁷⁴ American Association of University Professors, 2.

⁷⁵ Boyd, 4-7.

⁷⁶ At some point in time, the North Central Association changed the name of their Commission on Institutions of Higher Education to the Higher Learning Commission. In most of the literature, the Higher Learning Commission is referred to as the HLC and the North Central Association is labeled the NCA.

⁷⁷ Boyd, 6-7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

Neoliberalism: The Final Problem

This unfortunate emphasis on quantifiable data has contributed to the loss of prestige, attention, and funds that the humanities and the fine arts have experienced over the last two decades. Consequently, the humanities and the arts are, at the very least, marginalized and are often penalized because such disciplines cannot be easily quantified. In some cases, in the struggle to develop rigid outcome statements and quantifiable assessment techniques, an institution will pay more attention and spend more money on mathematics and science, and less on the humanities and the fine arts. Thus, the humanities and the fine arts have become second-class citizens. The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) has reported that, under pressure to produce quantifiable results, especially in the wake of NCLB, school systems have manufactured a list of core subjects that all students must master. The important thing about these lists is that they invariably include the subjects that are easily quantifiable. Thus, core subjects generally include reading, math, and science but do not contain the arts.⁷⁹ The association's report, entitled *The Complete Curriculum: Ensuring a Place for the Arts in America's Schools*, states in part:

while virtually every state has adopted standards in the arts, only a few have incorporated the subject into their state accountability systems. Perhaps most alarming are current education reforms, which have inadvertently placed the arts at risk as policy-makers and administrators, as they comply with new federal requirements, choose to narrow the curriculum in order to reach higher student achievement results in a few subjects.⁸⁰

The results of the NASBE report have been seconded by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) which has reported that most school districts in the United States (the number of which seems to be approximately 15,000) have reduced class time spent on the unquantifiable disciplines such as art, music, social studies, and the humanities in order to devote more time to the quantifiable subjects, especially those subjects like math which are measured by standardized tests.⁸¹ Other studies conducted by CEP and by other education policy study groups such as the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University have revealed some hidden, unintended consequences that spin from the neoliberal, data-driven, standardized test procedures that have become the mainstay of education today. These unintended consequences include the fact that many teachers tend to teach test taking techniques as often, if not more often, than they teach the actual subject matter of a class, a tendency to focus on teacher-led classes rather

⁷⁹ Lori Meyer, "The Complete Curriculum Ensuring a Place for the Arts and Foreign Languages in American Schools," *The State Education Standard* (Winter 2004): 11.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸¹ Center on Educational Policy, "As Schools Spend More Time on Reading and Math, Magnitude of Curriculum-Narrowing Effect Is Revealed: Shifts Appear Quite Large in Districts Reporting Change in Educational Priorities," news release, February 20, 2008; Sam Dillon, "Schools Cut Back Subjects To Push Reading and Math: Responding to No Child Left Behind Law Thousands Narrow the Curriculum," *New York Times* March 26, 2006; National Education Association, "Center on Education Policy: NCLB Narrows Curriculum," news release, February 2008.

than student-centered work, and a reduction of time spent on untested disciplines, even when such changes are not mandated by the curriculum.⁸² Additional unintended consequences include an increase in the presence of the federal government in the management of school funding, test making, and teacher certification,⁸³ and an increase in student drop-out rates accompanied by a corresponding decrease in graduation rates.⁸⁴ Perhaps even more significantly, other studies conducted by the CEP indicate that the movement to adopt neoliberal, data-driven, standardized test procedures has had almost no positive effect on either student achievement or instructor effectiveness.⁸⁵ Among the most shocking of the unintended consequences is that standardized tests lead to cheating by teachers and administrators in determining which student scores would be reported, student cheating on the test, and administrative misrepresentation of dropout figures.⁸⁶

The bottom line is this: education in both the arts and the humanities cannot always be planned based upon preconceived outcome statements. Nor can this learning be measured quantitatively. In fact some learning cannot be measured—period! Sometimes learning takes place in an unplanned, unfocused, unmeasured way simply because the teacher has thrown a subject out to the class for discussion or taken the class to a different location or asked the students a provocative and stimulating question. Moreover, there are experts who believe that this is the best type of learning, that is, the spontaneous, *unquantifiable* learning that occurs because the teacher and the students are in the same place, face-to-face, in an unplanned encounter. This is, in fact, the premise upon which Eliot W. Eisner believed a curriculum ought to be built. In his work *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, Eisner writes:

⁸² Center on Education Policy, *Lessons from the Classroom Level about Federal and State Accountability in Rhode Island and Illinois* (Washington: Center on Education Policy, 2009); Center on Education Policy, *Lessons from the Classroom Level: Federal and State Accountability in Illinois* (Washington: Center on Education Policy, 2008); Brett Jones and Robert Egley, *Voices from the Frontlines: Teachers' Perceptions of High-Stakes Testing*, Education Policy Analysis Archives 12, no.39 (August 9, 2004), [http:// epaa.asu. edu/epaa/v12n39/](http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n39/). Jones and Egley report specifically that the use of high-stake testing limits the curriculum, leads teachers “to teach to the test,” and cuts down on the time that is available for teaching students. Lisa M. Abrams, *Teacher's Views on High-Stake Testing: Implications for the Classroom* (Tempe, AZ: Education Policy Studies Laboratory, 2004), 5-8. Abrams reports on the fact that teachers tend to focus on the disciplines that will actually be tested and that teachers are pressured into teaching the test preparation techniques rather than the subject matter itself.

⁸³ Center on Education Policy, *A New Federal Role in Education* (Washington: Center on Education Policy, 2002).

⁸⁴ Audrey L. Amrein and David C. Berliner, *An Analysis of Some Unintended and Negative Consequences of High-Stakes Testing*, (Tempe, AZ: Education Policy Studies Laboratory, 2002), 31-33.

⁸⁵ Center on Educational Policy, “Majority of State & District Officials Say NCLB’s Teacher Quality Requirements Have Had Little Impact on Student Achievement: More Than One-Third of States, Three-Quarters of School Districts Say the Law Has Not Had a Major Impact on Teacher Effectiveness,” news release, August 22, 2007.

⁸⁶ Sharon L. Nichols and David C. Berliner, *The Inevitable Corruption of Indicators and Educators Through High-Stake Testing: Executive Summary* (Tempe, AZ: Education Policy Studies Laboratory, 2005).

I believe that it is perfectly appropriate for teachers and others involved in curriculum development to plan activities that have no explicit or precise objectives. In an age of accountability, this sounds like heresy. Yet surely there must be room in school for activities that promise to be fruitful, even though the teacher may not be able to say what specifically the students will learn or experience. Parents do this all the time. The trip to the zoo, weekends spent camping in the woods, the bicycle ride after dinner; no specific objectives or problems are posed prior to setting out on such activities, yet we feel that they will be enjoyable and that some “good” will come from them.⁸⁷

As is true of many movements in education this one also has a colorful name. It is called the Curriculum of the Temple (as in the temple to Athena, the goddess of wisdom). The details of the Curriculum of the Temple are outlined by Robert M. Hutchins in an article named, “The Basis of Education.” In a book entitled *Understanding Schools*, Gary K. Clabaugh and Edward Rozycki, explain this concept further by focusing on the central concerns of the Temple:

Character and community is the educational focus of the curriculum of the Temple. Clearly, the concerns of the school as Temple are status concerns. It is a commitment to values in and of themselves, uncompromised wherever possible with practical necessities. Hutchins finds those values in what he perceives as an unbroken tradition from ancient Greece to modern America. He is certainly not concerned with any issues of consensus about those values.⁸⁸

This is, in fact, what the neoliberal fad has cost the educational system, that is, the open-ended, unregulated exploration of knowledge for the sake of knowledge, not because it meets a quantifiable outcome that has been manufactured by Imperial Headquarters at AQIP Central by an infallible Royal Assessment Committee on some distant computerized planet, light years away, but because it makes the learner a better human being in ways that simply cannot be quantified by standardized tests.

Neoliberalism: Conclusions

It is now time to answer the central question that has emerged from this study. That question is, “How can we extricate ourselves from neoliberalism, especially as manifested by the educational fads of TQM, AQIP, and outcome-based testing, before it leads to disaster?” The disaster will be avoided only when educators recapture their role as the primary arbitrators of education in the classroom and this will happen

⁸⁷ Elliot W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination. On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), quoted in Gary K. Clabaugh and Edward G. Rozycki, “The Foundations of Curriculum,” in *Understanding Schools* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990) (25 Jan. 2006).

<http://home.comcast.net/~erozycki/FdnsCurriculum.html> (accessed March 1, 2009), 20.

⁸⁸ Gary K. Clabaugh and Edward G. Rozycki, “The Foundations of Curriculum,” in *Understanding Schools* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990) <http://home.comcast.net/~erozycki/FdnsCurriculum.html> (accessed March 1, 2009), 19-20.

only when we assert our claim to the absolute Judeo-Christian standard of Western Civilization. We will discuss (1) the short term job of the academic community first, before turning, finally, to (2) the long-term job that belongs to all citizens of Western Civilization. First, educators must take on the responsibilities that they accepted when they joined the academic community in the first place. That duty is to ensure that education does not fall into the hands of the neoliberal quantifiers but, instead, stays where it belongs in the hands of educators. Advice on how to assert this autonomy is easy to articulate but difficult to implement. The advice is, when the regional accrediting body, or the regents, or the legislators, or the board of trustees, or the administration, or the dean says that you must quantify your assessment process, just say “no.”

Naturally, any educator who wants to take this step must be armed with meaningful alternatives that can be used in place of the neoliberal philosophy of quantifiable education. One such approach has been suggested by Howard Gardner in a book entitled *The Disciplined Mind: Beyond Facts and Standard Tests, the K-12 Education that Every Child Deserves*. Gardner, Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Harvard, proposes an education system that gives students the ability to think according to certain disciplinary models. In this system, students are not simply fed facts and figures or random concepts. Instead, they are taught how to think.⁸⁹ To accomplish this goal, Gardner proposes a step-by-step process that helps students erase a pattern of mental “engravings” that they have learned over the years, and that burdens them with an inaccurate picture of how the world works. Conventional education, that is, the kind of neoliberal education promoted by AQIP and the HLC, whereby students are forced to simply regurgitate a heap of measurable data, does not, according to Gardner, erase those engraved misconceptions. Instead, the neoliberal strategy reinforces these engravings by compelling students to temporarily memorize information that is forgotten the moment they step off campus. Gardner’s understanding-based educational strategy is designed to erase the false engravings totally and to replace them with new ways of thinking about reality.⁹⁰

As the first step in Gardner’s strategy, the teacher writes a series of brief outcome statements. These outcome statements, however, are much different from the quantitative outcomes promoted by the neoliberal philosophy of AQIP. Students are not told that they will be able to “define this,” or “list that.” Rather, they are made aware that, at the end of the lesson, they will understand how certain analytical processes work because they will have used those processes themselves. The key word here is “understand.” By thinking about a specific problem in a certain new way, the students internalize that process so that it becomes a part of their way of thinking. The process is a little like providing the

⁸⁹ Howard Gardner, *The Disciplined Mind: Beyond Facts and Standardized Tests, the K-12 Education that Every Child Deserves* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 117-118.

⁹⁰ Gardner, 121-125.

students with an understanding of how to read a map, rather than requiring them to memorize street names that may or may not appear on any given map.⁹¹ For example, if we use Gardner's style to create outcome statements for a course in philosophy they might look something like this:

- (1) An understanding goal for an ethics course might read: "Students will understand the way that Immanuel Kant (or John Stuart Mill or Thomas Aquinas, and so on) would deal with the ethical question of preventative war."
- (2) An understanding goal for a course in Western philosophy might read: "Students will understand how First and Second Century Christians reasoned through conflicting views on the nature and the role of the Messiah."⁹²

Once the teacher has written the outcome statements, he or she must provide the students with a scenario that they will investigate using the analytical processes peculiar to that discipline. The students must then apply the reasoning process to the scenario. The instructor acts as a mentor who is on hand to assist the students as they analyze the scenario and formulate a plan of action. Assessment is a constant element in the exercise, but is not measured quantitatively, as AQIP demands. Rather, assessment is an ongoing process as the instructor helps the students deal with the problem on their own. Ultimately, the students become self-assessors who can determine whether they have actually performed properly.⁹³

For instance, in an ethics course, an exercise begins when the teacher gives the students a set of "understanding-type" outcome statements such as the ones listed above. In the next step the instructor presents the students with a scenario in which a person or a group of people find themselves facing an ethical dilemma that centers on a modern problem, including such things as abortion, the death penalty or torture. The instructor then reminds the students about the ethical theory that they have just learned and which they are to use to solve the problem in the scenario. For example, the class may have just learned about utilitarianism, and would, therefore, be required to use that theory to solve the dilemma. Working in small teams, the students apply utilitarian principles to the scenario and eventually develop a plan of action. During these discussions, the teacher helps the students as they work on their action plans. This strategy is rewarding not only to the students who learn how to think for themselves in a structured and directed way, but also to the instructor who is free to act as mentor rather than as a robotic dispenser of quantifiable neoliberal "facts."

Unfortunately, adopting this strategy represents only the beginning of the battle against the neoliberal plague. To achieve a genuine and long-lasting victory in that battle, the wider challenge of Christophia must be addressed. Without the universal moral standard of human authenticity imposed

⁹¹ Gardner, 128-130. This process is not unlike the process that has been the staple of law schools for generations. Law schools do not teach law students the law. Rather, they teach them how to think like lawyers. This process involves immersing them in cases, and encouraging them to understand and explain the legal rationale used by the judge to decide the case.

⁹² Gardner, 130. Gardner uses examples from biology, music, and history.

⁹³ Gardner, 130-132.

upon civilization by the Judeo-Christian tradition, Western Civilization will continue to build self-referential, self-destructive, systems like the one created by neoliberalism. To meet this challenge, we must return to the work of Romano Guardini. Guardini recognizes several key elements that must be addressed if Western civilization is going to be successful in resetting its moral compass. First, Guardini places much of the responsibility for recapturing the heritage of the past on the shoulders of the academic community. This, he writes, is “the task to which schools and universities must apply themselves if they are not to fall by the wayside of time.”⁹⁴ Second, Guardini argues that those who recognize the iniquity of the cultural shift away from the traditions of the past, must also recognize that such developments cannot be prevented. The task, therefore, lies not in stopping the tide, but in directing its drift in ways that can recapture **not** the past, but the universal values of the past, which, if they really are universal, will transcend, yet as the same time, enlighten the new world order. These values, however, cannot speak for themselves. Rather, they require advocates who can speak for them in voices that recognize both the challenges and the power within the cultural shift. This, then, is Guardini’s legacy; not a call to arms, but an invocation; not a critique but a summons to recognize that, to many people, the neoliberal world is a benevolent paradise that represents progress and reform, and to accept the task of taking that paradise, and sifting out what is good and universal from that which is temporary and destructive.⁹⁵ This task can be performed not only in the classroom, as suggested above, but also in the media, on the internet, in the boardrooms, in the academic journals, on the air waves, and on the soapboxes in the heart of every town square in the West.

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⁹⁴ Romano Guardini, *Power and Responsibility* quoted in *The Essential Guardini: An Anthology of the Writings of Romano Guardini*, ed. Heinz R. Kuhn (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997), 38.

⁹⁵ Romano Guardini, *Letters from Lake Como* quoted in *The Essential Guardini: An Anthology of the Writings of Romano Guardini*, ed. Heinz R. Kuhn (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997), 44-45.

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