

In an Age of Global Decline:
The Need for a Return to
a World Classical Philosophy
濟世之道：回歸世界古典哲學

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Following Huang Chun-chieh and Roger T. Ames's insightful observations on the history of Chinese thought, let me suggest that the unity between self and other—other humans and the world's species—that is expressed in Chinese philosophy lends itself to the moral sphere emerging from the empathic capability of our species and resonates with Frans de Waal's thesis that empathy is an evolved feeling that is at the root of all morality.¹ Moreover, this moral sense should be at the root of politics, social interactions, the creation of societies and cultures, and the basis of our educational systems, for it is clearly the nurturing root of the Confucian sage and Greek philosopher.

The one who embeds and embodies herself is the sage. Ames puts it effectively when he writes:

Using the Confucian vocabulary, we might describe the evolving careers of members of the community from beginning as mere persons (ren 人) to becoming exemplary in their conduct (junzi 君子) for their community through achieving consummate relational virtuosity (ren 仁) with other people. For only a few, by coordinating and embodying in themselves the values and the meaning that distinguish some epoch of human flourishing, they have the ultimate distinction of becoming sages (shengren 聖人), and as such, sources of enduring cosmic meaning. In Confucian philosophy, the expectation is that human beings and the natural, social, and cultural worlds they inhabit must be full collaborators in a flourishing cosmos.²

This linkage yields the *shengren*, or highly evolved sagely being, but there are “anti-sages” that ultimately abuse the gift of intimacy or studied adroitness in

1 See Frans de Waal, *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, eds. Stephen Maedo and Josiah Ober (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 30-31.

2 Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011), p. 85.

systems such as business, politics, the military, organized religion, and education. Besotting themselves with power and staying in authoritarian control motivates virtually every move they make. But with this self-serving perspective anti-sages turn away from any intrinsic connectivity or inherent leadership toward sustainable cooperative merit (let alone any contribution to long-lasting emergence) within their particular system. We might ask, for example, what socially valuable or progressive-constructive advances accrued to the world out of the careers of Hitler, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, Robert Mugabe, or most multibillionaire Wall Street bankers, the directors of Enron Corporation, et al.

The times for Confucius and Socrates, our pillars for a legacy of Classical Education in East Asia and the West, were rife with their own political turmoil, abuse of power, inhumanity to others, and a general lack of the most significant of all human qualities, empathy—that ability to feel compassion for the *other*. But compassion cannot be left off there—feelings, as Mengzi, Zhu Xi, and those who subsequently debated the particulars of the Four Buddings (siduan 四端) and Seven Feelings (qiqing 七情) knew, are just the building blocks for something much more valuable. Even the term “seven feelings” goes back to the *Liyun* (禮運) chapter of the *Book of Rites* (禮記).

Feelings are not unimportant in Western philosophy either. Taking his cues from the Greeks, Heidegger, for example, realized we are beings-in-a world (In-der-Welt-sein)—humans living-in and living-with (Mitsein). We are beings living in the world with others and it is here in this world that feelings and their inseparable moods (Befindlichkeit, finding oneself in a world through a mood) matter, for this is how we find (befinden) ourselves, our very own selves. Being-in-the world is a form of “cultural co-embeddedness” for Heidegger, which makes our moods culturally conditioned with a social character. For Heidegger, *Befindlichkeit* needs cultivation since as *Dasein* (a being-there; a subject in the

world), we are always constituted as beings-here and beings-there and it is our way of constituting “a sense of belonging to the world.”³

Those feelings we all “find ourselves in” necessitate discipline in order to heighten, enhance, enrich, and to augment them with the requisite skills in which to deliver the love and care needed for the positive evolution of any culture and society—along with the family, these lessons are born and developed in a classical education. *Shu*, empathy as Huang Chun-chieh translates the term, and the conscientious deliberation and execution of *zhong* 忠, the utmost form of concentrated energy, are, as he states, the “concrete methods” to “... advance steadily along this path into the realm of the ‘noble person’ (junzi, 君子)—whose ‘self’ has proven to be a positive medium for realizing the ideal life, whose moral ‘will’ penetrates his or her concrete practice.” He concludes with, “Confucius would affirm the realization of such a ‘self’.”⁴ To develop this concrete practice is what it means to educate in a classical sense.

The aspiration “for realizing the ideal life” is only possible when the less than ideal is present, or when times are far too dreadfully real because of their lack of empathy, compassion, intimacy, and integrity. This is not a call of escape to an idealized transcendent realm, often a misappropriation of the Platonic project, but is an authentic response to the presencing of the now. Confucius’ time was a period when “it was not unusual for nobles to threaten subordinates and kill those who continued to remonstrate. Hired murderers were sometimes used. Punishments were severe and common. ... Bribery at all levels was common. ... Even relatives could not trust each other. ... The people had few if any rights ... ; in practice they were taxed, worked, expropriated, scourged, and killed by the aristocrats. ... Adultery and even incest were rather common among the nobles. Women, even the wives of other nobles, were sometimes appropriated

3 Matthew Ratcliffe, “Why Mood Matters,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, edited by Mark A. Wrathall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 158.

4 Chun-chieh Huang, *Humanism in East Asian Confucian Contexts* (Verlag, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), p. 14.

without ceremony by those who had the desire and the power” ... “Human life was cheap.”⁵ Confucius was arrested and imprisoned and was forced, according to Creel, “to subscribe and swear to a covenant.”⁶

Confucius’ arrest and imprisonment recalls the like fate of Socrates whose times too were callously cruel. It was a time of the Thirty Tyrants who during their brief reign accounted for the death of five percent of the Athenian population, which amounted to about 1,500, and they confiscated property and banished over 5,000 citizens.⁷ Accounting the effect of Xenophon’s narrative on the Thirty, Andrew Wolpert relates that “it presents the Thirty Tyrants as becoming increasingly violent as their control over Athens grew stronger. They terrorized the community to satisfy their baseless desires.”⁸ Socrates barely escapes his own execution when he refuses to bring Leon of Salamis, who was considered a just man and person of character, before the Thirty for execution. As Socrates says in the *Apology*:

This happened while the government was still democrat; and when the oligarchy came in, the Thirty again summoned me and four others to the Dome, and ordered us to bring Leon of Salamis [...] whom they meant to put to death. Such things those people used often to do to others [...] Then, however, I showed again by acts, not by words, that as for death, if it is not too vulgar to use the expression, I cared not one jot, but all my anxiety was to do nothing unjust or wrong.⁹

5 H. G. Creel, *Confucius and the Chinese Way* (New York: Harper and Row, 1949), pp. 20-22.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

7 N. G. L. Hammond, *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 444.

8 Andrew Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat: Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 18.

9 W. H. D. Rouse, *Great Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Penguin Books 1984), p. 438.

The Thirty Tyrants were cruel and oppressive, but other forces were working against Socrates. In 399 BCE he was prosecuted on the charge of impiety, for introducing religious innovations that can only be seen as an authentic philosophic response to prevailing beliefs that even his accusers were accustomed to seeing in Athenian theatrical performances. And, of course, he was additionally charged with corrupting the youth by making them think, perhaps for the first time, as we do for our students.¹⁰

Plato begins his *Seventh Letter* by recounting as a youth coming of age how he “cherished ... the hope of entering upon a public career,” ... but “It fell out” ... because “There were many who heaped abuse on the form of government then prevailing, and a revolution occurred.”¹¹ He goes on to outline the situation and how he became so disenchanted with political life because of his teacher and friend’s plight with the Thirty and the ultimate execution of Socrates. The words of an old and sad Plato still offered some hope though:

For one thing, nothing could be done without friends and loyal companions, and such men were not easy to find ready at hand, since our city was no longer administered according to standards and practices of our fathers. Neither could such men be created afresh with any facility. The result was that I, who had at first been full of life and saw the incessant movement of shifting currents, at last felt dizzy, and, while I did not cease to consider means of improving this particular situation and informing the whole constitution, yet, in regard to action, I kept waiting for favorable moments, and finally saw clearly in regard to all states now existing that without exception, their entire system of government is bad. [...] I was forced to say in praise of the correct philosophy that it affords

10 Socrates was also charged with being a Sophist. The Sophists were also teachers, but charged fees. This practice was found reprehensible by Socrates and Plato.

11 L. A. Post, trans. *Seventh Letter*, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 1574.

a vantage point from which we can discern in all cases what is just for communities and for individuals, and that accordingly the human race will not see better days until either the stock of those who rightly and genuinely follow philosophy acquire political authority, or else the class who have political control be led by some dispensation of providence to become real philosophers.¹²

Instead of entering political life, Plato started the Academy, and inaugurated the first Western university. This was the only real hope for the future that he saw.

Plato relates the last days of his teacher and friend in the *Phaedo* in which he writes himself out of being present, even though in the *Seventh Letter* he writes that “Socrates, a friend of mine, who I should hardly be ashamed to say was the justest man of his time.”¹³ The *Phaedo* concludes with Socrates, in tribute to the State, its laws and customs, as well as providing the indispensable community that all individuals need, drank his hemlock, not in an act of defiance, or perhaps even for martyrdom as some propose, but out of love, respect, and the irreducible quality of what it means to be human.

Merleau-Ponty correctly accentuates the role of Socrates when he wrote in *Éloge de la philosophie* that “He thought that it was impossible to be just by oneself. If one is just all by oneself, one ceases to be just.”¹⁴ Following this lead, Pierre Hadot affirms these sentiments by avowing that “Care for the self is thus, indissolubly, care for the city and care for others. We can see this from the example of Socrates himself, whose entire reason for living was to concern himself with others.”¹⁵ Even though Greek philosophy gives itself over to *ousia*,

12 Ibid., pp. 1575-1576.

13 Ibid., p. 1575. Many take Plato on his word that he was absent because of illness. To me, this seems unlikely given his love and admiration for his teacher, which leads me to think his writing of his own absence functions more as a literary device so a more “objective” representation of Socrates’ death would become a legacy.

14 Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 37.

15 Ibid., p. 37.

one of the most misunderstood and mistranslated Greek philosophical words, it was always about the *polis*, caring for the circumstances of the city and those *others* in it besides just the individual. Although we may wish not to shoehorn Confucius into the sandals of someone like Aristotle, we should likewise be careful not to fabricate straw sandal models that never went into production until the good Church Fathers got their own agenda-stained hands on them. We must not forget that even Plato's speculation in his Theory of Ideas is about goodness, justice, and equality and putting those ideas into concrete practice in the community.

Following Plato, Aristotle never used the word "metaphysics," which became definitive of the Western philosophical project and would ultimately describe the Western mania for *ousia*. The term was coined to refer to the placement on a bookshelf "after" or "with" his *Physics* and it was long after his death that the word *ousia* took on the range of connotations our word "substance" has today. In John McCumber's *On Philosophy: Notes from a Crisis*, he explores the "longstanding role of *ousia* as philosophy's core principle" and how "it is from the point of view of the speaking of matter that its philosophical repression via *ousia* can be identified as oppressive."¹⁶ The word *ousia* is derived from the verb *einai*, which means "to be." *Ousa* is the participle form and means "being" and *ousia* is its noun form. Typically translated as "substance," which is the English derivative of the Latin *substratum*, the term soon had a whole new set of metaphysical meanings never originally intended. Basically, the parallel word in Latin for *ousia* is *essentia*, which could be translated more along the lines of "being-ness." The English "essence" actually comes from the Latin *esse-essentia*, which was used by Thomas Aquinas in his reading of Aristotle by the flickering light of the Christian project's lamp. Aquinas used *esse* in Latin to mean "existence" and *essentia* to mean "essence"—the actual existence of essence. "Essence" is thus another poor translation for *ousia*. When asked about the nature

16 John McCumber, *On Philosophy: Notes from a Crisis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 20.

of things—a question not unknown to Chinese philosophers—Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle, were asking “What is the basic and/or fundamental being of the things we encounter?” And the being of things was about their becoming and how to explain their emergence as beings. To this day, the West now thinks in a received tradition of what might be considered at worst a calculated mistranslation or at the very least just a nuisance of transmitting meaning across languages, albeit Greek and Latin are close in structure and could borrow from each other more easily than say Chinese and English. In any event, the Western philosophical tradition is marred with “*ousia*-mania,” and this madness has lured us in the West away from what it means to be human—something that was known to the Greek philosophers from Socrates to Aristotle (with premonitions before and continuations after) and the Chinese sages from Confucius and Laozi to Zhu Xi (and beyond throughout East Asia); what it means to be human is that we are irreducibly interpersonal.

Socrates and Confucius’ paramount concern arose in their social contexts, and as such, they are both exemplars of how to respond to the ills facing our progressive evolution as a species, and all species from insects to *Homo sapiens*—the “wise” species—are social. To affect a turn in an appropriate and an even healthy direction is discovered in how both Socrates and Confucius respond to their times—and their unequivocal shared response is through education. (And it may ultimately be the only authentic response we have as well in our current day.) Education is the only possible *pharmakon* for our ills. But this cure can also be a poison as the Greek word indicates.

For the Chinese, following their First Sage, “enlightened and courageous Confucians,” were always strongly interested in and dedicated to education. The English word “Confucianism” lacks the force of the followers of Confucius for they are referred to in Chinese as *Rújiā* 儒家, which refers to the “Family” or “School” of Scholars (often the term is translated with the Latin term *Literati* bearing a host of different connotations). To the Chinese mind, the intimacy of

the family was something to be extended to educating the youth for a future of authentic leadership and the intergenerational quality of sharing and passing down knowledge, wisdom, and character. Such thinking was also natural for the Greeks from Homer to Aristotle and even beyond into Hellenistic philosophy as well. *Aretē* (Ἀρετή), the virtue of excellence that became increasingly intellectualized and potentially achievable by all, was an integral and intimate part of the “the desire to form and to educate.”¹⁷ Even from the side of the Sophists, *aretē* was “conceived as competence intended to enable young people to play a role in the city ... so long as the student had the right natural aptitude and practiced hard enough.”¹⁸ By the fifth-century, all Athenians could potentially achieve the virtuous life of *aretē* and accede to *sophia* (σοφία), wisdom. Education, *paideia* (παιδεία), was a major concern for the Greeks and a response from their tortured times that looked forward toward hope. *Paideia* meant discipline, training, and the education of children with the connotation of correction, even chastisement, and was related to the cultivation of the mind and formation of moral character. And this ancient hope of the Greeks, shared by the Chinese, is now our hope, our only hope as a people, and as a species.

But throughout history in societal life—even in educational institutions, which is more fully addressed next—we encounter an anti-sagely form of behavior that distorts the teachings of great sages of our shared past who professed intimate cooperation and compassion; subsequently, the unsuspecting and un-attuned are led down a pathway of corruption. This pathway unexpectedly extends itself to contemporary education.

17 Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* p. 11.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Anti-Sages in Academe¹⁹

The agents of doom are naturally found in sectors of society where power may promote extreme forms of social, political, and religious behaviors that thrive on self-enhancement with exploitation and despotism toward others. Atrocities perpetuated against humanity are not often as spectacular as presented in the media. Some anti-sagely forces that work against a system and its healthy evolution are quieter, more insidious, and sometimes arise where we might least expect. With the current trends in education and the proliferation of self-aggrandizing educational administrators and those who control educational systems throughout the world, we have been set along destructive pathways away from dynamic inquiry, intellectual accomplishment, and artistic creativity. Our cooperative ideals of learning, acquiring knowledge, appreciating beauty, and achieving wisdom found in classical education have progressively become lost amid abuses of leadership by administrative anti-sages. Higher education, perhaps one of the more surprising systems to be susceptible to anti-sagely behavior, is a place rife with corruption and self-serving attitudes that have little, if anything, to do with educating youth.

The United States, with its enormous range of pedagogy and academic research, prides itself on having the most comprehensive system of higher education in the world. However, for years, a negative trend has developed that countermands the educational mission of institutions and the lofty ideals to which colleges and universities once aspired. Instead of leading their institutions from within, many administrative leaders seek to build their own empires, seemingly with the goal of enhancing their own authority and salaries. Administrators often inflate their salaries on scales that are grossly disproportionate with faculty salaries. Manipulating and controlling those whom they should serve, many college and university administrators have simply become a power-elite. These

¹⁹ This section is adapted from our forthcoming *The Fractal Self: Science, Philosophy, and the Human Spirit* with the University of Hawai'i University Press.

anti-sages develop cultish cadres of vice presidents and deans who begin to support the leadership over the institution. They seek to establish authoritarian control of a system whose health and dynamic well-being was once a true home of the sage or philosopher, sustained by openness, self-organization, and emergent opportunity.²⁰

According to Benjamin Ginsberg in his recent book *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters*, one of the most obvious indices of administrative hegemony is salary inflation. In 2011, the average pay of a president of an American four-year public university was over \$440,000, substantially exceeding the salary of the President of the United States.²¹ Some presidents of private schools are paid far more lavishly, and Ginsberg suggests that “As is often true in the corporate world, the relationship between salary and institutional performance is unclear.”²² In 2010 the highest-paid university president in the nation was Bob Kerrey of New York City’s New

20 In other contexts John L. Culliney and I have referred to this type of person as a “fractal self.” An excerpt from the preface of our forthcoming book, which reaches more comprehensively beyond education, gives some sense to what is being eluded to here: “Out of the evolutionary processes leading to complexity in nature, human beings appear to have reached the potential of achieving a seminal state of being in the cosmos—a state we call the *fractal self*. Like many other emergent phenomena, a fractal self develops and thrives in conditions that are mildly chaotic: a realm of turbulence with hidden patterns and creative potential. The principle of cooperation is closely aligned with a fractal self, a being with the capacity to foster creative complexity that may lead to positive emergence.

This capacity, however, must be nurtured and developed to overcome self- and societal-destructive tendencies if humans are to play a catalytic role in the process of universal evolution. We currently stand at a juncture where no being has stood before. Our world of complex economic, political, and ecological processes is inexorably interwoven in ways never imagined before. The arrival on this scene of the fractal self points to ways to affect evolution in a positive, hopeful manner. Developing sensitivity vis-à-vis the world, such a self has the potential for shaping a future that holds a burgeoning ‘ecology of hope.’ Hence, we discover the fractal self, as it seeks inclusive participation in nature, as a form of saving grace for our planet and ourselves. This holistic tendency then becomes not only a philosophical and scientific issue, but also a spiritual standpoint that projects itself to a benign future.”

21 See ABC News online: <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/penn-states-spanier-leads-top-11-highest-paid/story?id=19151598>.

22 Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 24.

School. According to the January 25, 2013 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, he took home over \$3,000,000 that year.²³

Anti-sagely machinations of college and university presidents occur in a number of categories. Two of the most common are insider dealings and imperial designs. University governing boards of “trustees” or “regents”—the terms vary across the U.S.—commonly elect as members individuals from the top management of powerful corporations. And a university president serves at the pleasure of his or her governing board. In the case of insider wheeling and dealing, Ginsberg recounts a prominent episode.

One notable example is the case of Boston University whose long-time president John Silber was supported by important trustees even when it was clear that Silber had reached an advance stage of senescence. When Silber finally stepped down in 2003 after more than thirty years in office, the incoming president, Daniel Goldin, announced that he planned to reexamine the university’s business relationships with its trustees. The board responded by rescinding its offer to Goldin and paying him \$1.8 million to give up the job one day before he was scheduled to take office.²⁴

Empire building by an aggrandizing college president can be a much more expansive enterprise and, in recent years, has expanded its scope to a global scale. Arguably the most colorful contemporary player at this game is the former New York University president John Sexton. Sexton presented a complex personal and professional combined-self, perhaps still straddling a chaotic edge between sage and anti-sage. According to recent profiles,²⁵ he took significant

23 Jack Stripling, *Chronicle of Higher Education* 59, 20 (January 25, 2013), A11-A11. pp. 1-2.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

25 See for example: Rachel Aviv, “The Imperial Presidency,” *The New Yorker*, Sept. 9, 2013, pp. 60-71.

interest in undergraduate students and saw education as going beyond baselines of intellectual content—residing in encounters with complexity, excitement, discovery, and human values in any discipline.

Sexton's reputed darker side involved alleged secret deals with university trustees, top-level administrators, and influential members of the faculty. For example, favored individuals received payoffs, partly in the form of university-subsidized mortgages on lavish private homes. Beginning with his accession to the presidency in 2002 (Sexton was appointed by the board with no other candidates ever considered), prominent board members and a few power-brokers in the administration and faculty supported the president's Olympian plans. From 2002, Sexton led the university's massive expansion, totaling millions of square feet of new construction in New York City and through 2014, opening satellite campuses in thirteen cities around the world,²⁶ the latest in Shanghai and Abu Dhabi. Sexton termed his controversial and divisive grand vision the Global Network University. He believed NYU was in the vanguard of a paradigm shift in international higher education. Peripatetic students pursued learning at up to several campuses in the chosen cities Sexton dubbed "idea capitals." Perhaps these future NYU-global graduates will emerge as planetary protean selves that would astound the likes of Robert Lifton.²⁷ But perhaps there will be a tendency to seek their fortunes beyond any mutualistic engagement with the developing societies from which many of them emerged. Sexton's jocular quip to one international student—"You're going to run Ethiopia someday, right? Isn't that the goal? If you are going to run the world, it sounds like you need to get more organized."—might hint of an authoritarian attractor in the president's mind.²⁸

26 New York University's Global Network University has campuses or "academic sites" in: Accra, Abu-Dhabi, Berlin, Buenos Aires, Florence, London, Madrid, Paris, Prague, Shanghai, Singapore, Sydney, Tel-Aviv, and Washington, DC. <http://www.nyu.edu/global.html>.

27 See Robert Jay Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

28 Rachel Aviv, "The Imperial Presidency," p. 69.

The Global Network University emerged from Sexton's brow with, reportedly, negligible faculty participation or even consultation. In part, such imperial vision, or grandiosity, or folly, as he obtained land and financing from foreign governments and even crown princes for huge far-away construction projects, triggered a vote of no confidence by NYU faculty across a wide spectrum of the university in the spring of 2013. Many other grievances were cited, among them Sexton's inflating the administration, withholding information on university policy, crushing a graduate student labor union, impoverishing faculty and enriching cronies such as NYU vice-president Jacob Lew who became U.S. Treasury Secretary in February, 2013. When Lew left NYU after cutting \$70 million from the university's operating budget, he got an exit bonus of \$685,000 on top of his nearly \$800,000 salary.²⁹

Out of vision or folly, John Sexton's trajectory as an academic leader may now hover between greatness and disaster. It will reveal its slope in the near future. The president's high-flyer, risk-taker, international-educator persona seems unprecedented in American academia. Part of the NYU home campus is on Wall Street, and one wonders darkly if any of Sexton's vision could derive from the ultimate, anti-sagely "too-big-to-fail" syndrome of some of his neighboring institutions.

In a number of ways beyond the schemes of over-compensated, imperial-minded chief executives, American universities have largely adopted a corporate model in their most hierarchical forms. Virtually across the entire spectrum of American higher education administrators have propagated like an unchecked virus. Numerous vice presidents at three or more ranks head their own divisions, departments, or programs. Beneath many of them are deans, and in the descending ranks they now have associate and assistant deans ("deanlets" and "deanlings" as Ginsberg classifies them). Commonly these lower echelon entities are now paid at the six figures level in the U.S., and they have myriad staff

²⁹ Ibid.

workers at their command. Ginsberg points out that since the 1970s, administrators in American colleges have proliferated to greatly outnumber full-time professors, and administrative staffing has bloated in numbers by 240 percent. He concludes that “colleges obviously chose to invest in management rather than teaching and research.”³⁰

The faculty is traditionally a body of self-governing experts in their fields who plan and carry out the actual educational mission—they develop the curriculum, teach courses, write proposals for research funds, set up laboratories, and carry out research that commonly train students as thinkers and skilled practitioners in a discipline. Today, in many schools, the faculty has become widely perceived as relegated to an institutional tier below the administration and subservient to it, rather than the opposite relationship as it once prevailed in serving the primary mission of a university.

Under administrative dictates, many a faculty member is now beset by diversions, most of them of little use in terms of fostering quality education. Many of these diversions trace to theories of higher education spawned by Ernest Boyer in the 1990s.³¹ This is, however, only the tip of the Boyer iceberg. Much of his work initially appeared in publications of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, of which Boyer was president from 1979 to 1995. Much of what has emerged from “Boyerism” is in the category of what numerous serious minded higher educators consider as “edubabble,” which has realized enormous influence in many American colleges and universities and pervades institutions to this day.

30 Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty*, Educational “management now includes armies of: information technology specialists, human resources staffers, editors and writers for school publications, attorneys, counselors, auditors, accountants, admission officers, development officers, etc.” p. 25. See also p. 24 and 29.

31 See Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1990.

Edubabble piles up in volumes of selected findings, conclusions, procedures, projections, themes, goals, objectives, learning outcomes, assessments, *ad nauseam*, which are the elephantine spoor of mainly ineffective, misguided university committees in the service of which faculty waste a lot of time and whose outcomes are nearly universally ignored. Administrators set up often-well-funded offices or centers of educational excellence that in their wisdom make pronouncements on the pedagogical process, hold workshops on new teaching technology, nominate task forces to study teaching effectiveness in disciplines, invent rubrics, statistics, teaching evaluation forms, and other time-sponging devices that take effort and energy away from classroom and laboratory instruction and research by faculty who value their true calling. That is the work out of which dedication develops toward realizing the beauty, rigor and complexity of truth, knowledge grows, and students may become inspired—the values we have inherited from classical education. Not all faculty members are reluctant edubabblers, however. Confirmed in Boyerism as equivalent in academic merit to disciplinary research or exemplary teaching, many a gray, vapid report on “educational process” or “strategic learning” earns its authors high praise from their ruling administrators, and, in many cases, this pseudo-research counts in the calculus of advancement and salary increase. The administration holds the purse strings.

Unfortunately, faculty members at many schools are now treated more and more as hired hands, day laborers, or mainly as specialized clerks. Judgment of classroom effectiveness has been reduced largely to student evaluations of their professors’ “performance.” Weaker faculty may play to the crowd, and the depth, intricacy, and rigor of their subject gets watered down. Their teaching is often now assessed by administrative “oversight teams” that have become focused on student retention at almost any cost. This world has transformed the faculty into “edutainers” and purveyors of good grades in their negotiations for good student evaluations. In the end, students are reduced to *consumers*—some schools even use this term in administrative memos—who buy their educations from the

marketplace of “edubiz” where the professors are now treated as “clerks with advanced degrees.” What is being suggested here that this new perverse sense of entitlement of students is directly linked to the rise of the “administrative university,” as identified by Ginsberg. As consumers, many students now believe they are entitled to a degree, whereas formerly they were only entitled to a good education if they worked and studied diligently.

For what does our consumer educational system now prepare students? Success, of course, but this success is just another form of the faux success that arises with servile sycophantic career opportunities that have proliferated in hierarchical systems of employment, such as university administrations and governmental bureaucracies. In many cases these systems trace to anti-sagely leadership at the top, and as they bloat with “human resources” they become dysfunctional. Eventually, they tend toward internal tribal identity and defensiveness that may injure the well-being of the greater institution they purport to serve. At worst they become cults. The London School of Economics anthropologist David Graeber has termed most such employment in these perverted systems “bullshit jobs.” In his “On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs,” Graeber writes that:

technology has been marshaled, if anything, to figure out ways to make us all work more. In order to achieve this, jobs have had to be created that are, effectively, pointless. Huge swathes of people [...] spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed. The moral and spiritual damage that comes from this situation is profound. It is a scar across our collective soul. Yet virtually no one talks about it.³²

And it can be added, no one seems to care.

32 David Graeber, “On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs,” *Strike Magazine* (August 17, 2013).

Imperial presidents, aggrandizing vice-presidents and deans—these are the anti-sages of academe. At worst, they come to consider themselves as larger than the institution they serve. Even on lesser scales, their grasping for power subverts the educational mission, which is naturally cooperative. In much of the contemporary system of higher education, outside of the faculty, it has become rare to find a sagely individual in the spirit of Confucius or Socrates, a devoted facilitator and intimately-engaged educator. Such a faculty member is a person we can recognize immediately. He or she is one who is enamored with ideas and with communicating them. A college teacher exciting students about and with these ideas results in any number of butterfly effects—often over and over—during the course of a semester and beyond.³³ One can only hope to see a shift back again to universal values of teaching and scholarship as created by Chinese and Greek philosophers in the service of engaging student’s minds with the infinite joys of discovery in the universe of learning.

33 The potential emergence sometimes appears immediately, or sometimes years later with a visit, an email, or letter from a former student who has realized some discovery or self-discovery at work or play, while traveling or at home, in a career as scientist, humanist or engineer, teacher, or a nurse—who remembers the spark that ignited the curiosity or the fervor. There is no award or reward that feels better than this to a college instructor.