

1 **GLOBALISATION AND A TWO-TIER**
2 **UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

3
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6 As with very many ‘buzz’ words, ‘globalization’ is a term widely
7 used but often in ways that leave its precise meaning uncertain.¹ That
8 it refers to a process of some kind is clear, but just *what* process is less
9 clear. I shall take it to mean a process of change that has the effect of
10 making locality and its boundaries increasingly less significant for the
11 activity that is ‘globalized’. By illustration consider a (relatively)
12 simple case -- the purchase of fresh fruit. This activity was once
13 almost entirely constrained by the locality in which the purchaser
14 lived. Locality confined the choice by climate and season. Markets
15 sold only fruits that would grow in the particular locality, and in
16 accordance with the season prevailing. Methods of preservation added
17 variety to some extent, and local restrictions could be partially
18 overcome by transport. For most people for most of history, however,
19 locality has been a dominant factor in food, and one that partially
20 explains the characteristic diets associated with different parts of the
21 world. This variety was something that travellers discovered, and it
22 contributed to making travel attractive.
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24 After the advent of the railways , the degree to which transport
25 extended fruit markets was greater than before, especially in the
26 United States with its several varied climates. But it is refrigeration
27 and air freight that have had the greatest impact, and in many parts of
28 the world, as a result of rising levels of prosperity in combination with
29 changes in international finance and marketing, the restrictions of
30 locality have been lifted almost entirely. The outcome is what we
31 might call the ‘strawberries in January’ phenomenon. To say that the
32 market in fruit is now globalized, as I am using this term, does not
33 mean that it is dominated by a few large corporations operating world
34 wide (though it may be) but that from the point of view of the
35 consumer, it is no longer of special significance where on the globe a

¹ The literature on globalization is now very considerable. A brief account of the most common definition will be found in Manfred B Steiger *Globalization: a very short introduction* (Oxford, OUP, 2003)

36 given fruit is grown. One further consequence is that, for large
37 numbers of people, such age old patterns as seed time and harvest,
38 summer and winter, do not matter any more, at least as far as diet is
39 concerned.

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41 Globalization in this sense is the most important outcome of the
42 internet. The world wide web's distinctive feature as a medium of
43 communication lies in its indifference to national boundaries, time,
44 season, and to some extent language. The web is part of an immense
45 transformation that digital technology has brought about in almost
46 every aspect of life, and a large part of the change relates to
47 'information technology'. The term is not unproblematic,² but it does
48 capture the importance of this transformation for scholarship, for
49 scientific inquiry and for higher education. Though the world of the
50 scientist and scholar has always been international to a degree, the
51 internet, together with other advances in digital technology, has
52 removed almost all the geographical limits which previously prevailed.
53 The issue I am concerned with is the significance of globalization so
54 characterized for the ideal of a commonwealth of universities with,
55 broadly speaking, equal status.

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57 It is worth remarking that this ideal is for the most part a European
58 one. In the United States, it has long been acknowledged that there is a
59 hierarchy of universities, at the top of which sits the 'Ivy League'.
60 Some universities that are not Ivy League enjoy the same reputation
61 for excellence, but there are also many good institutions with PhD
62 programs, research centres and distinguished faculty members, which
63 are neither regarded nor regard themselves as being on a par with the
64 very best. Nothing much follows from this differentiation, however.
65 Scholars and scientists at these institutions participate in the same
66 conferences and publish in the same journals as do those from the Ivy
67 League. Of course, below this again is another level, and another, and
68 so on. With respect to these lower level institutions there is and need
69 be no pretence of equality with Harvard or Princeton; they can do
70 what they do well, even if they do not do anything at Ivy League level.

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² I discuss some of the relevant issues surrounding this concept in *The Institution of Intellectual Values: realism and idealism in higher education Essay IV* (Exeter, Imprint Academic 2005)

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72 There is however another important division in the US – between
73 the university and the liberal arts college. In general terms, this
74 division marks the difference is between higher level educational
75 institutions that engage in research as well as teaching, and those that
76 do not. It is just such a division that academics in the United Kingdom
77 (and some other parts of Europe) have in mind when they speak of a
78 ‘two-tier system’. But between Europe and North American there is
79 this crucial difference. The American liberal arts college is an
80 admirable (and widely admired) institution, though for a variety of
81 reasons (some of which we will return to), it has come under threat in
82 recent decades and now forms a very small part of the higher
83 education sector in the US and Canada. In sharp contrast, ‘teaching
84 only’ is a status to which European and British universities fear
85 relegation, a second class status within the commonwealth of
86 universities as a whole.

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88 Two questions naturally arise. Is ‘teaching only’ rightly regarded
89 as second class status for a university? And is this a classification to
90 which globalization has given powerful impetus? I shall explore these
91 questions in reverse order.

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93 **The significance of ‘teaching only’**

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95 It might be supposed that recent developments in information
96 technology and especially the internet have introduced a new equality
97 between students and teachers at institutions of higher learning. From
98 the first foundation of universities and colleges, and for almost the
99 whole of their history, a crucial distinguishing feature was the size and
100 quality of the library to which members of the university had access.
101 The libraries of Harvard College or the Bodleian in Oxford for
102 example, provided unrivalled resources for research and study. Other
103 ancient universities could claim less valuable collections of books and
104 periodicals, but all of them easily and vastly outshone the libraries of
105 newer and smaller institutions. With extensive programs of
106 digitization, electronic versions of journals and desktop online access,
107 a great deal of this disparity has become irrelevant. Often it no longer
108 matters if a given book or periodical is not available in the local
109 library, because it is available online. Some thing of the same point
110 applies in fact to purchase. With the existence of Amazon, abe and the
111 like, the fact that the local bookstore is very unlikely to stock a book,

112 whether new or second hand, has become irrelevant. A still further
113 development lies in distance learning. Formerly a second best, many
114 of its disadvantages can now be overcome, and its advantages
115 exploited. Courses can be offered and enrolled in anywhere in the
116 world. Study materials can be updated with far less effort; teacher-
117 student interaction and response times can match, and even exceed,
118 those that previously required personal contact.

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120 All these innovations are unmistakable effects of globalization as I
121 have defined it -- the increasing irrelevance of locality. Whether the
122 textbook, the journal, the teacher or the manuscript is near at hand or
123 far away is irrelevant to their availability for educational and research
124 purposes. The value of this new world order can be exaggerated, of
125 course. Online desk top access for staff and students may still require
126 a level of expenditure that exceeds the resources of a small institution,
127 especially in poorer parts of the world. Online subscription to current
128 journals and back issues is not free, and digitized materials can remain
129 controlled. In general though, the position is vastly different to what it
130 was. How is it then that fear of relegation tends to be more marked
131 than before?

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133 It is important to observe that the equalizing impact of digital
134 technology is far greater in social sciences and the humanities than in
135 the natural and medical sciences. The difference between scientific
136 laboratories in different localities remains and is not much
137 transcended by the internet. This is partly a function of available
138 equipment, and the presence of the people who comprise a research
139 team. More expensive equipment and the ability to pay highly
140 competitive salaries give wealthy institutions a marked advantage over
141 the less wealthy. The gap between the two is intensified further by the
142 increasing cost of scientific inquiry. Whereas original historical
143 research (say) is relatively cheap and facilitated by internet access to
144 documents, original work in the sciences is now very expensive and
145 possible only for those, however talented, who can find the right
146 milieu.

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148 In such circumstances it is inevitable that institutions which
149 formerly had successful programmes of scientific research should lose
150 them. Moreover, insofar as such institutions call upon the State for
151 financial support, the responsible control of public expenditure will
152 remove funds from research programmes that cannot result in truly

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153 significant outcomes. When this happens, it is inevitable that some of
154 the scientists recruited to the institution in question, and possibly the
155 most intellectually fertile, should seek positions elsewhere, and in
156 their turn be sought by institutions which can use that intellectual
157 fertility to enhance their academic status and reputation. Equally
158 inevitably, the scientists left behind must regard themselves as second
159 class, and being confined largely to teaching their subjects, will in all
160 likelihood come to regard teachers as second division scientists. In
161 turn this mindset, and reputation, spills over into other subject areas,
162 where research active academics come to feel that their status would
163 be better served by membership of an institution that is highly
164 regarded overall. So they too seek positions elsewhere, and an
165 institutional ‘brain drain’ takes place.

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167 This is a plausible scenario, and one that has been realized in
168 many places. But does it have any thing to do with globalization in
169 particular? The process just described gives causal priority to the
170 rising cost of science, and it is the fact that the globalization made
171 possible by the internet etc *cannot* offset this, that explains the
172 emergence of a second ‘teaching only’ division. Yet globalization
173 does bring a further dimension to the explanation, and that is the
174 context of comparison.

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176 **The context of comparison**
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178 Universities began in Europe and from the start they were
179 ‘international’ in that they were institutions of Christendom and not of
180 the countries in which they happened to be located. This transnational
181 character is reflected in the fact that they were established on papal
182 authority. Each was a ‘university’ of ‘nations’, which is to say
183 colleges that drew their students from different geographical areas, so
184 that national rivalries made their appearance within rather than
185 between universities. All that is a very long time ago, of course, and
186 the intervening centuries have brought about deep change.³ One of
187 these is the altered status of universities to national institutions whose
188 power to confer degrees (with a few exceptions) was granted and
189 regulated by the nation state. This was the result in large part of

³ I offer a brief history of universities in *Universities: the recovery of an idea* Chap 1 (Exeter, Imprint Academic), revised and reprinted in *The Institution of Intellectual Values: realism and idealism in higher education*

190 political nationalism in the 19th century and the immensely expanded
191 role of government in educational provision, especially since World
192 War I, and one consequence was to make the academic reputations of
193 universities a matter of national pride. The effect of globalization has
194 been to intensify this competition for status by hugely expanded the
195 context in which it is sought. Whereas it was once enough for a
196 university to seek to be (one of) the best in the country (as it still is for
197 a secondary school), the requirement now is that a university be a
198 world class institution (as no secondary school is required to be).
199 Furthermore, this new context of comparison is made ever present by
200 global communications networks and the internet which play so large
201 a part in contemporary academic inquiry. It is in *this* way that the
202 process of globalization has fed the tendency to discriminate between
203 first class/second class universities.
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205 In itself, of course, this discrimination need not correspond to the
206 research/teaching division. It does so because the reputation of
207 university academics is almost exclusively judged on research
208 publication. It is this that has contributed in large part to the decline of
209 the US liberal arts college referred to earlier. The archetypal college
210 professors who made up the Faculty at such institutions secured their
211 reputations among their students, and the esteem in which they were
212 held could not extend itself much beyond the generations of students
213 they taught. By contrast academic esteem now must reflect a
214 contribution to the world of scholarship at large and thus extend far
215 beyond the confines of the lecture hall. Esteem within the lecture hall,
216 hardly counts at all. One result is that liberal arts colleges have no
217 choice but to recruit new faculty from graduate schools that incline
218 their students to place the greatest value on this alternative mark of
219 esteem, and thus to leave the task of teaching to those who cannot do
220 so.
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222 A similar tendency can be discerned in other contexts. National
223 assessments of research prowess, which several European
224 governments have instigated, have led both to research publication
225 and international standing as being the chief (arguably sole) marks of
226 both personal and institutional academic worth. Combined with the
227 fact that not all individuals or institutions can measure up to this
228 standard equally well, it must come as no surprise that institutions in
229 which teaching is the principal activity should appear to those within

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230 and without them as second class, and a move towards this position
231 one of relegation.

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233 Is this inevitable? We can detect and describe something of the
234 process that has led to this position, but the language of inevitability
235 suggests a determinism in the affairs of human beings that we have a
236 deep inclination to resist. ‘Men’, Marx observes in the *18th Brumaire*
237 *of Louis Bonaparte* ‘make their own history, but they do not make just
238 as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by
239 themselves’,⁴ and this middle ground between fatalistic passivity and
240 an absurd over estimation of the power of human agency seems the
241 right position to take. It does not imply, however, that the process just
242 described can be reversed, or even that further moves in this direction
243 can successfully be resisted, which amounts to conceding a measure
244 of inevitability. Where human agency has played its part, and
245 continues to do so is in the choices that academics and academic
246 managers have made under the circumstances the current of times has
247 presented. Two of these choices seem to me crucial. First, there has
248 been a widespread willingness to seek and accept the position in
249 which the principal paymaster of almost all universities is the State,
250 but an equal unwillingness to admit (or even understand) that this
251 necessarily brings with it a loss of autonomy, and thus a seriously
252 weakened ability to defend and protect academic values when they
253 come under attack. Secondly, there has been a willingness (even
254 eagerness) to accept international research status as the only measure
255 of quality worth taking seriously.

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257 The second concession derives such warrant as it has from the
258 thought that that every country, however small its population or limited
259 its resources, can hope to transform at least one of its universities
260 (perhaps more) into a world class institution whose scholars and
261 scientists regularly contribute to knowledge and understanding at the
262 academic ‘cutting edge’. If (say) Berkeley, Harvard, Princeton,
263 Cambridge or the Sorbonne are taken as benchmarks, such a hope
264 seems to me to rest upon an absurdity. The disparity of history,
265 finance and population are simply too vast. But more importantly, the
266 pursuit of such an ambition can bring intellectual and cultural
267 impoverishment in its wake.

⁴ *Marx Engels: Selected Works in One Volume*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1968) p. 96

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In illustration of this I cite my own experience as Chair of the international panel charged by the quality assurance agency for the universities of the Netherlands (QANU) with assessing the research excellence of the Dutch philosophy faculties. The criteria laid down for the panel by QANU gave pride of place to international excellence and research leadership in the specified sub-areas of philosophy as reflected mainly (though not exclusively) in publication. In a global context, this effectively means publication in English. On the other hand publication in Dutch is vital both for the purposes of maintaining of a scholarly vernacular and so that intellectual inquiry may make a contribution to public discussion and debate (a role of special importance in moral and political philosophy). Given the criteria, however, truly excellent work in Dutch that brought philosophical acumen to local cultural life, could not count as being in the forefront. That this was cause for complaint in some quarters is both understandable and (in my view) justifiable. Yet the criteria laid down for the panel by QANU had been formulated in consultation with a committee comprising the Deans of the Philosophy Faculties, and finalized with their agreement.

Similar distorting effects have resulted from the British Research Assessment Exercise which encourages all the universities of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and all academics within them, to assess the value of their work exclusively against standards which put parity with Harvard or the Sorbonne at the top. In this (mostly) fruitless effort to obtain ‘stars’ (since overall research finance is not increased thereby) a ‘market’ in academic reputations that has resulted, with extensive and expensive programmes of hiring comparable to those common for a long time in the US. The consequence is that contribution to both institution and community has been significantly eroded, and pedagogical commitment almost wholly discounted.

Conversations among academics show these to be both facts of common experience, and of regret. Yet, for all that, no serious academic voice has been raised against them. The Roberts review of the RAE invited extensive academic consultation and resulted in no serious proposals for change. It now seems likely that future such exercises *will* take a different form – but because of the desire of government to contain their cost, not because of any academic purpose or value that universities have insisted on protecting.

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In short, it does seem that the division of universities in Europe into at least two leagues – serious research institutions and ‘mere’ teaching institutions, will become increasingly apparent, and that in part this is the result of the globalized context in which universities and academics have come to measure themselves. But there is nothing in the process of globalization as I have defined it that has made this inevitable, and much in the conduct of academics and managers that has hastened it.