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Jeffrey R. Di Leo

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Jeffrey R. Di Leo

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A DOG'S LIFE: AUSTERITY AND CONDUCT IN NEOLIBERAL ACADEME

JEFFREY R. DI LEO

Austerity is the measure of responsible academic conduct in the age of neoliberalism. To tout its power and promise is a key aspect of being a fully engaged member of neoliberal academe; to deny its value and benefit is a central component of resisting neoliberal academe—and perhaps even moving beyond it. The docile subjects of the neoliberal academy are perfectly constituted to follow austerity measures into one of the darkest chapters in the history of democratic education.¹ Those within the academy who even offer the slightest hint of resistance to the allegedly perfect logic of austerity open themselves to marginalization—and ultimately failure.

However, assessing the role of austerity in the academy is not as uncomplicated as it may seem. From the perspective of austerity as an arm of the repressive and destructive neoliberal practices and policies of higher education, austerity is all darkness and no light. But even if this is the most recent and high profile aspect of austerity in the academy, it is not its only dimension—nor even its most longstanding. Rather, austerity has played a large role in defining the emotional, moral, and pedagogical life of the academy. Namely, austerity has come to be a regulative emotional, if not also moral, imperative in the conduct of academic life. Furthermore, these emotional and moral imperatives pre-date the rise of neoliberalism and its austerity agenda.

Austerity as an emotional and moral imperative has long shaped the conduct of academic life. For some, this has been a problem; for others, it has been simply a part of being an academic. Nevertheless, the rise of neoliberalism in the academy has intensified the emotional and moral effects of its traditional relationship with austerity to the point where one must ask whether the resultant academic environment is a healthy or an unhealthy

¹The notion of the docile subjects of neoliberal academe is established in some depth in my recent book, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (2013a). Two other sources on this topic are Davies, Gottsche, and Bansel (2006) and Fanghanel (2012).

one? A harmful or an unharmful one? It will be argued that the confluence of these two austerities within the neoliberal academy results in a higher educational environment that is fundamentally ineffective in meeting the emotional demands of academic life. This coupled with the failure of the neoliberal academy to meet the needs of democratic education and critical citizenship only strengthens arguments in support of rejecting neoliberal academe—and instead working toward an alternate educational praxis. Let's begin though with a brief overview of the more general and contemporary economic sense of austerity before moving on to its emotional and moral dimensions—and then, ultimately, to the confluence of these two austerities within higher education today.

The Austerity State

What is austerity? And what does it mean for those whose lives are inextricably linked to its operation? The former question is a lot easier to answer than the latter. As the story goes, in the decades after the Second World War there was nothing like the conditions that came about in the 1990s. Namely, “diminished growth rates, the maturation of welfare states and an aging population” (Schäfer and Streek 2013, 1). In many ways, the period after the Second World War was one marked by the rise and fall of “easy financing”—an era that reached its apex and end in the 2008 financial collapse.² For the most part, governments were finding that their public expenditures were exceeding their receipts. While this could have been counterbalanced by tax increases, “growing international tax competition has rendered it more difficult to raise taxes on companies and top income earners” (Schäfer and Streek 2).

It has been said that the United States could have easily solved “its fiscal problems by raising its taxes by a few percentage points,” however not only did it refuse to raise them, but in point of fact taxes in the United States *declined* in the 2000s—something which “warns against analytical and political volunteerism” (Streek and Mertens 2013, 55). This resistance to tax increases “has been widespread in rich industrialized countries since the 1970s, when the end of the postwar growth period registered with citizens and ‘bracket creep’ could no longer be relied upon to provide states with a rising share of their societies’ economic resources” (Streek and Mertens 55). It was at this point that governmental debt became the solution to close the gap between revenue and spending—at least until this practice imploded in 2008.

Austerity is the response of some governments to these difficult economic conditions. Running deficits and accumulating debt may have been possible

²For a fuller account of the rise and fall of easy financing, see Steuerle (1996).

in the “age of easy financing,” but in the “age of austerity” it is no longer an option. When governmental revenue cannot keep up with governmental spending, and increased taxation or incurring more debt is not feasible, then reducing public expenditure is touted as an “austerity measure.” Allegedly, governmental austerity measures such as those recently enacting in Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and most infamously, in Greece, are short-term responses to fiscal imbalance between spending and revenue.

However, the phrase “permanent austerity” has come to imply that the reductions in governmental funding expenditure may be ongoing—even should governmental revenue somehow come to exceed public spending.³ Still, even though the welfare state is essentially now in a state of “permanent austerity,” this does not “imply that the expected result is a collapse or radical retrenchment of national welfare states,” writes Paul Pierson, a political scientist from the University of California, Berkeley. “Major policy reform is a political process,” continues Pierson, “dependent on the mobilization of political resources sufficient to overcome organized opponents and other barriers to change.” For him, those opposed to the welfare state “have found it very difficult to generate and sustain this kind of political mobilization” (Pierson 2002, 370).

It is the specter of permanent austerity that is the most troubling aspect of recent responses to the financial meltdown of 2008. While many can understand and sympathize with “austerity measures” as a short-term and failed response to the debt crisis, few will agree to the necessity of an “austerity state” rising out of the ashes of the “debt state.” This is not because most are opposed to setting limits on state funding, but rather because of the fear that an austerity state may weaken democratic government. The real trouble here is the level of uncertainty regarding the long-term effects of austerity on democratic government. There really is no historical precedent for the flourishing of democratic government under permanent austerity.⁴ Therefore, while some are hopeful that democracy can flourish under permanent austerity, others are sure that it will fail.

Debt has played a large role in the establishment of liberal democracy. It has been said that “the build-up of debt, first public and then private, helped preserve liberal democracy by compensating citizens for low growth, structural unemployment, deregulation of labour [sic] markets, stagnant or declining wages, and rising inequality” (Schäfer and Streek 2013, 17). It has also been said that both the state and global fiscal crises

were the prices governments paid for their inability to prevent the advance of liberalization, or for their complicity with it. As governments increasingly gave up on democratic intervention in

³See Pierson (2002) for an account of the “permanent austerity” and its potential to intensify. As austerity measures become a rewarded political habit in the age of neoliberalism, it would not be surprising to see them utilized in times of both fiscal deficit *and* surplus.

⁴See Schäfer and Streek (2013, 17ff).

the capitalist economy, and the economy was extricated from the public duties it was promised it would perform when capitalist democracy was rebuilt after the war, it was through what came to be called the 'democratization of credit' that citizens were, temporarily, reconciled with the declining significance of democratic politics in their lives. (Schäfer and Streek 2013, 17)

The governmental model that has resulted from decreased interventionism into the capitalist economy and the increased reliance on market forces as the determinants of public value has been broadly called "neoliberalism." Austerity may simply be regarded as one of the later stages of what might be termed "the age of neoliberalism." Still, for all that is known about the effects of neoliberalism in state and governmental policy, very little is known as to how its most recent instantiation, the austerity state, will affect democratic values and governance.

An elegant way to view the tensions that arise in the austerity state is to view it as one in which two distinct constituencies are served: the people and the market. Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streek, researchers from the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne, Germany, describe the differing constituencies of the austerity state as follows:

Whereas a state's citizenry is nationally organized, financial markets are global. Citizens are resident in their country and typically cannot or will not switch their allegiance to a competing country, whereas investors can and do easily exit. Citizens 'give credit' to their government by voting in general elections, whereas creditors do or do not give money. Rights of citizenship are based in public law, whereas the claims of creditors are regulated in civil or commercial law. Citizens express approval or disapproval of their government in periodic elections, whereas "markets" make themselves heard in auctions that are held almost continually. Whereas "the people" articulate their views through public opinion, "the markets" speak through the interest rates they charge. There is an expectation that citizens will be loyal to their country, in contrast to the mere hope that creditors will have "confidence" in its government and the fear that they could withdraw this confidence if they were to become "pessimistic" or to "panic." Finally, where citizens are expected to render public service and expect to receive public services, "markets" want debt service. ("Introduction," 19-20)

Argue if you will as to whether each and every one of these differences and tensions are accurate, the more general point regarding the two different constituencies served by the austerity state is an important one. It gives the all-powerful and omnipresent market of neoliberalism a set of characteristics that can be clearly viewed as oppositional to and in conflict with the bearers of democratic culture and society, the people.

While predicting the future of the austerity state may be a difficult endeavor, predicting the future of its two constituencies is less difficult, particularly when one agrees to favor one over the other in matters of public policy. If the market is favored at the expense of the people, then there will be a continued decline in social justice and democratic values. One only need look to recent social unrest in Greece and other countries subject to extreme austerity measures for a sense of democracy's future within the austerity state that favors the markets over the people.⁵ However, if the people are favored at the expense of the market, then and only then is there hope for a revival of social justice and a renaissance of democratic values—even within the austerity state. But don't hold your breath waiting for the latter to occur. The age of neoliberalism is not and has never been about "the people." It is and will continue to be about the neo-Darwinian ascent of the market as the regulator of public value and social justice.

The Two Austerities

The macro-context of austerity, namely, austerity as a governmental response to reduce budget deficits is one of the major topics of our day. It has been widely discussed and debated in both the popular press and scholarly arena—and because of this there is little need to extend our introduction beyond the simple confirmation of its presence.⁶ Nevertheless, there is another context of austerity that has been less examined and explored, namely, austerity within the context of academe. While perhaps not as globally pervasive as the governmental context of austerity, it is still a micro-context of austerity that has significantly impacted life in the academy, particularly in the United States.

My general position regarding neoliberalism in higher education is that it is recalibrating academic identity—albeit not for the better. This general position has been developed over the course of a number of other occasions, most recently and deeply, in my book, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education* (2013). Therefore, I feel no obligation to demonstrate this more general claim here. However, I have not given much attention to the more

⁵The first stage of the debt crisis in Europe came in March 2009 with Hungary near financial collapse. Just over a year later, in May 2010, the second and more severe stage began when Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain went into financial crisis. The latter four countries were often referred to by the acronym "PIGS" during the debt crisis. Mass protest regarding austerity measures was particularly high in Portugal and Greece. See Berezin (2013, 254-255). For example, the Greek protests were held from May through July 2011, and were known as the "Indignant Citizens Movement." On June 3, 2011, it is estimated that between 300,000 and 500,000 people gathered in front of the Greek Parliament. Later, Greek police were investigated for use of excessive force to control the protesters in Athens (Smith 2011).

⁶See, for example, Blyth (2013a; 2013b), Krugman (2011; 2013), Kuttner (2013), Plumer (2012), Stuckler and Basu (2013a; 2013b), and Wolff (2010).

specific claim, namely, that austerity is a major aspect of the recalibration of academic identity. This essay, therefore, aims to be the occasion for it.

But examination of austerity in higher education immediately presents a problem, namely, that there seem to be at least two distinct dimensions to it with respect to its intersection with higher education.

From one angle, austerity requires that all behavior in the context of academic decision-making be made a function of fiscal restraint rather than academic freedom. It makes the pre-condition of higher education decision-making “cost reduction” rather than “academic excellence.” The belief is that lowering the cost of administering academe allows for either more accountability to the sources of educational funding or less concern about the diminishing resources afforded to higher education.

Austerity from an economic angle aims for higher and higher levels of educational efficiency and financial accountability. It is the omnipresent voice of fiscal reduction both as a reaction to monetary constraint and rising debt, and a projection of the normative value of education, namely, as that which can always be done with less — just as long as it produces standardized test scores that validate its efficacy.

If ontological austerity finds its highest expression in Ockham’s Razor, the notion that entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity, then economic austerity finds its most *pernicious* expression in Neoliberalism’s Razor, the notion that costs are not to be multiplied beyond necessity. The cuts made by Neoliberalism’s Razor are more though than just economic. They destroy the very fabric of higher education in America. The razor of neoliberalism’s austerity measures cares not if higher education is well-dressed to meet the needs of democratic education and critical citizenship. Rather, its only concern is to dress-down higher education in an effort to alleviate the state from all fiscal responsibility toward public education — and to pass that responsibility onto the people. In short, as Neoliberalism’s Razor, austerity destroys the very *being* of higher education by allowing economic interests to determine educational ones.

It is this dimension of austerity, namely, the one that views it from the perspective of economic parsimony, that is the most recognizable aspect of austerity in higher education. Educational funding cutbacks are often reported by the press, particularly, reductions in state appropriations to public institutions of higher education. While these reductions are never well-received by the colleges and universities which are affected by them, they are a popular and effective political platform for neoliberal politicians in statehouses across the country. Reducing state-appropriations to higher education for them is an easy political decision because it passes along the cost — and debt — of higher education from the state treasury to the consumer, that is, students and their families. As a result, educational debt is accrued at a higher rate for those least able to afford it, that is, poor and middle-class Americans who rely on state-funded higher education as an affordable option to high-priced private higher education.

The matter is often further complicated by the constraint that not only is state-funding for higher education either frozen or reduced, but so too is the option of state colleges and universities raising their tuition and fees to offset reductions in state higher education appropriations. It is at this moment that the grim reaper of austerity brings a second-level of death into the house of higher education.

Not only are state-funded institutions of higher education receiving fewer state appropriations as a response to calls for “austerity,” but now by not having recourse to increasing tuition and fees, academe is also forced to either increase productivity or decrease costs. Or worse yet, both, that is, increase productivity *and* decrease costs. This double-death brought by austerity measures to higher education, that is, death by state cutbacks and death by internal cutbacks opens the door to the second dimension of austerity in higher education, that is, a sense of austerity that is less about economics and more about emotions.

As a financial concept, austerity involves thrift and economy, but as a non-financial concept, austerity involves gravity, strictness, severity, seriousness, and solemnity—feelings and emotions that have a long and special history in higher education. One of the less commented upon aspects of austerity measures in higher education is the intensification of academe’s predilection toward *emotional austerity*. Specifically, the way in which recent neoliberal austerity measures in higher education intensifies and affects the emotional condition of academe. This is austerity’s other dimension in higher education, albeit one that is not often recognized and even less discussed.⁷ Let’s now take a look now at this other side of austerity.

Emotional Austerity in Academe

Academe’s austere emotional front is well-known. Professors who project an image of solemnity, gravity, and seriousness are more representative of the goals, values, and self-image of academe than those who do not exhibit these characteristics. This is of course not to say academics are incapable of emotions that are more playful, joking, and joyous. Of course they are. They are human after all and as such are capable of a wide spectrum of feelings and emotions. It is to say, though, that academe as an institution is one that privileges and encourages austerity of emotion over its opposite.

Organizations and institutions such as higher education stabilize the emotion work of their participants. The emotions that are supported by the organization are called “representative emotions.” Such emotions are ones

⁷The general subject of the politics of emotion in academe is not widely discussed in the scholarly literature of higher education. However, the emotional world created within higher education is an important aspect of academic life. For an introduction to this topic, see Di Leo (2011a; 2013b) and Bloch (2012).

that are most supportive of the aims of the organization or institution. The better organizations and institutions are able to synchronize the emotion work of their participants in support of their general aims and goals, the more effectively they will be able to assure achievement of these desired aims and goals. Still, it should never be forgotten that these representative emotions are “constructed” ones meaning that though they may have roots in or originate from “natural” emotions, they are different from them. In other words, within the workplace individuals are expected to express some of their feelings, but not all of them. Finding the right balance here between feeling and expression is often the difference between institutional success and organizational failure. Of less concern though is how these constructed emotions effect individuals—and in this regard higher education is no different from most other organizations.

It is important for organizations to control the passions of their participants because in doing so they present the organization with the best chance of not only achieving its goals, but also of maintaining the *image* it wishes to project. Faculty who laugh and joke in the pursuit of knowledge and truth are taken less *seriously* than those pursue the same ends with solemnity and gravity. This may not be a problem for individuals who for example work in creative industries such as game design or music production, but in an institution such as higher education, higher emotions and more austere feelings are the norm. The latter are more representative of the *image* of higher education than the lower emotions and feelings.

Scholars of organizational behavior tell us that organizations establish *norms* regarding the feelings and emotions of their participants, and these norms are regulated by rules and procedures. Some have even proposed theories as to how emotions are formed by organizational values and cultural expectations. For example, the American sociologist, Arlie Hochschild proposes that there is a difference between rules regarding feelings and those with respect to expression.

“*Feeling rules* refer to emotions that the culture prescribes as appropriate to a given context, while *expression rules* refer to norms regarding how, and the extent to which, the emotions in question should be expressed” (Bloch 2012, 10). The key insight here is that within organizations we sometimes feel things that are not appropriate for expression. We then engage in a process whereby we work with our emotions to adapt them to the feeling rules of our organization. This “emotion work” is important for it affords those within the organization the opportunity to temper their emotional responses to events within the organization in ways supportive of its aims and image—a general process Hochschild calls “the commercialization of feeling.”⁸

For those who believe that higher education over the past twenty-five years has seen a gradual yet steady increase in corporatization and

⁸Hochschild (2012) develops these concepts and others regarding emotions in the workplace in more detail.

commercialization, it is important to recognize the emotional work that has been constructed in support of its corporate aims and the commercialization of its image. It might be argued that the changes that higher education has undergone in becoming an increasingly corporate and commercial institution *are* due in large part to the effectiveness of transforming its traditional emotional work into its corporate emotional work. But what then is the traditional emotional work of higher education?

Charlotte Bloch, a sociologist from the University of Copenhagen, the author of a pioneering study of the emotional work of higher education, *Passion and Paranoia: Emotions and the Culture of Emotion in Academia* (2012), describes the traditional, representative emotions of higher education as follows:

Modern academia is an organisation [sic] that is historically rooted in the tension between the Enlightenment's thirst for knowledge and the constricting dogmas of the religious world view of that time. This entails that Academia is historically constituted by distinguishing the spheres of science and religion, by distinguishing systematic method, specialisation [sic] and objectivity on the one hand and traditional religious awareness based on passion, faith and feeling on the other. These historical roots can be interpreted as providing the basis for a culture of emotions, the representative emotions of which are actually an "absence of feelings." (10)

While Bloch's project in *Passion and Paranoia* is neither a historical survey of the representative emotions of academe, nor is it a defense of their appropriateness, it does shed some light on a much neglected and overlooked area of scholarly research, namely, the sources of academe's representative emotions.⁹

Bloch's own project is a quantitative survey of the wide range of emotions present in academic culture in spite of norms that move it in the direction of purging academe of feelings. "The culture of Academia," comments Bloch at the end of her study, "is one from which feelings are absent—a culture of 'no feeling'" (2012, 140). Her research, though only drawn from institutions of higher education in Denmark, draws quantitative conclusions that one would expect to find in other parts of the world including the United States. Specifically, that "feelings abound in Academia" (140). However, it also reveals the ways in which the culture of "no feeling" and no emotion serves as the norm against which the abounding feelings of academe are put in relief.

While I admire Bloch's pioneering work on the culture of emotion in academe, and agree with her assessment of the range of emotions present in academe today (in spite of a norm enforced by practices and policies to purge academe from feeling), I don't exactly agree with her that "[a]cademic culture

⁹See my review of Bloch's *Passion and Paranoia* for a fuller overview of her remarkable and pioneering study.

prohibits emotions" (141). Rather, I view academe as having inherited an emotional landscape characterized by emotional "austerity." That is, the representative emotions and feelings of academe are severity, strictness, seriousness, solemnity, and gravity. One could take this one step further and even say "self-discipline."

Moreover, it is a mistake to think that the cold and frosty representative emotions of academe are tantamount to a culture of "no feeling." Rather, they should be thought of as part of a culture that favors a certain range of emotions over another range of emotions. Bloch is right though to point to religion and science as potential sources for academe's emotional austerity. Here one need look no further than the asceticism that defines both certain classical philosophies and tempers early Christianity for some of the sources of academic emotion.

From Austerity to Asceticism

The philosophical and religious roots of austerity can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy and the late antiquity of early Christianity. Here were to be found various lines of thought advocating a life of austerity and self-discipline. The most prominent school of philosophy in Greek antiquity to develop and defend this line of thought came to be known as the "Cynics," which in Greek (*kynikos*) literally means "dog-like."

Cynicism and the Cynics, who took their name from "Cynosarges," the building in ancient Athens that housed the school, flourished for about a thousand years, from roughly the fifth century before the common era to the fifth century of the common era. Cynicism generally contends that anything that disturbs the austere independence of the will is harmful and should be avoided. They either ignored or despised both the conventions of society and material possessions—behavior which provoked opposition from both Greek and Roman society.

Michel Foucault can be credited with a revival of interest of sorts in the Cynics and Cynicism through his public lectures and later philosophy. In his last public lectures at the Collège de France, for example, held from February to March of 1984, he speaks extensively about the Cynics and their view of life. Of particular note is his commentary on the Greek sources of care (*epimeleia*) of self, "[s]tarting from the *Laches*, a text in which *bios*, much more than the soul, appears very clearly as the object of care" (Foucault 2011, 128). "And this theme of *bios* as object of care," continues Foucault, "[seems] to me to be the starting point for a whole philosophical practice and activity, of which Cynicism is, of course, the first example" (128). But Foucault's interest in Cynicism is not merely because of its emphasis on care of self, rather than care of soul—a dominant topic of his later philosophy. It is also because of its emphasis on *parrhesia*, that is, truth-telling.

For Foucault, “in Cynicism, in Cynic practice, the requirement of an extremely distinctive form of life – with very characteristic, well defined rules, conditions, or modes – is strongly connected to the principle of truth-telling, of truth-telling which pushes its courage and boldness to the point that it becomes intolerable insolence” (165). Moreover, the “essential connection” in Cynicism “between living in a certain way and dedicating oneself to telling the truth is all the more noteworthy for taking place immediately as it were, without doctrinal meditation, or at any rate within a fairly rudimentary theoretical framework” (165). “Cynicism appears to me, therefore, to be a form of philosophy in which mode of life and truth-telling are directly and immediately linked to each other,” concludes Foucault (166). But, for the Cynics, truth-telling does not come without an extreme cost in terms of ones mode of life.

“The Cynic,” writes Foucault,

is the man with the staff, the beggar’s pouch, the cloak, the man in sandals or bare feet, the man with the long beard, the dirty man. He is also the man who roams, who is not integrated into society, has no household, family, hearth, or country...and he is also a beggar. We have many accounts which testify that this kind of life is absolutely at one with Cynic philosophy and not merely embellishment. (170)

Cynicism “makes the form of existence a way of making truth itself visible in one’s acts, one’s body, the way one dresses, and in the way one conducts oneself and lives” (172). “Cynicism,” concludes Foucault, “makes life, existence, *bios*, what could be called an alethurgy, a manifestation of truth” (172).

The links between Cynicism and Christianity can be made through asceticism and monasticism. One of the examples used by Foucault comes from an oration of Gregory of Nazianzus (fourth century c.e.) where he says while he “detests the impiety of the Cynics and their contempt for the divinity,” still “he has taken from them frugality” and their mode of life (172). Speaking to Maximus, a Christian of Egyptian origin, who later becomes a heretic and is condemned, Foucault reports that Gregory says,

I liken you to a dog...not because you are impudent, but because of your frankness (*parrhesia*); not because you are greedy, but because you live openly; not because you bark, but because you mount guard over souls for their salvation.... You are the best and most perfect philosopher, the martyr, the witness to the truth (*marturon tes aletheias*). (173)

Foucault sees in Gregory’s praise of Maximus not just praise of someone for speaking the truth, but also praise for someone because of the mode of life from which they speak the truth. Foucault says the following of Gregory’s comments about Maximus:

It involves someone who, in his very life, his dog's life, from the moment of embracing asceticism until the present, in his body, his life, his acts, his frugality, his renunciations, his ascesis, has never ceased being the living witness of the truth. He has suffered, endured, and deprived himself so that the truth takes shape in his own life, as it were, in his own existence, in his own body. (173)

Gregory's comment then brings us back to the ways in which both Cynicism and Christianity embraced asceticism and a life of austerity.

Moreover, according to Foucault, the "mission" of the Cynic

will be recognized only in the practice of *askesis*. The ascesis, exercise, and practice of all this endurance, which means that one lives unconcealed, non-dependent, and distinguishing between what is good and what is bad, will in itself be the sign of the Cynic mission. One is not called to Cynicism, as Socrates was called by being given a sign by the god of Delphi, or as the Apostles will be, by receiving the gift of tongues. The Cynic recognizes himself in the test of the Cynic life he undergoes, of the Cynic life in its truth, the unconcealed, non-dependent life which remakes, unravels the division between good and evil. (298)

It is the asceticism of Cynicism and Christianity that provides a historical backdrop for the emotional work of the academy as well as the economic work of neoliberalism through its austerity measures.¹⁰ In a world where we are asked to expect less support from our government because of "austerity measures," and an academy where not only does the state provide less and less financial support for education, asceticism seems to have become the new ideal of the neoliberal state under the aegis of austerity.¹¹

¹⁰Certainly a vast amount of genealogy would need to be worked out here to establish the continuities and discontinuities among Cynicism, Christianity, and neoliberal academe. For example, the Cynics were strongly resistant to authority, whereas neoliberal academic austerity involves an acceptance of authority. Nonetheless, by being heirs to a certain tradition, we have a predisposition to identifying austerity with truth, and hence academic life with austerity.

¹¹It should be noted that sexual austerity is a major theme in Foucault's later work. For example, in *The Use of Pleasure*, he proposes a number of themes regarding sexual austerity (1985, 14-24). "From the few similarities I have managed to point out," comments Foucault, "it should not be concluded that the Christian morality of sex was somehow 'pre-formed' in ancient thought; one ought to imagine instead that very early in the moral thought of antiquity, a thematic complex—a 'quadri-thematics' of sexual austerity—formed around and apropos of the life of the body, the institution of marriage, relations between men, and the existence of wisdom. And, crossing through institutions, sets of precepts, extremely diverse theoretical references, and in spite of many alterations, this thematics maintained a certain constancy as time went by: as if, starting in antiquity, there were four points of problematization on the basis of which—and according to schemas that were often very different—the concern with sexual austerity was endlessly reformulated" (1985, 21-22). Presumably, following Foucault's lead, there is also a thematics of *emotional* austerity formed around and apropos of the life of the academic. However, speculation on this topic is best left for another occasion.

The New Asceticism

Academe has become the confluence of two differing though powerful forms of austerity. On the one hand, the moral imperative of higher education has long been connected to a form of emotional austerity that implores academics to favor an austere mode of life in the practice of academic *askesis*. This moral imperative favors austere feelings such as solemnity, seriousness, and gravity over those that are *indulgent*. It also normalizes a form of existential austerity that accepts minimal economic conditions as part of the truth-telling and truth-seeking mode of life. Like the Cynic in his “dog’s life,” who exercised frugality and ascesis, the academic in the age of neoliberalism is asked to find comfort in an austere mode of life that is best exemplified in the beggar’s pouch of ancient asceticism.

On the other hand, the economic imperative of higher education has more recently been connected to a form of fiscal austerity that implores academe to not multiply costs beyond necessity—and then reduce them even more.¹² While the moral imperative of higher education has long been connected to emotional austerity, the economic imperative has only recently been so closely allied with austerity. One only needs to look to the pillars, marble, and ivy of America’s elite institutions of higher education for a visual representation of an economic imperative that is anything but austere.

Moreover, particularly at private institutions of higher education, the motto has always seemed to be “You pay for what you get.” In other words, the higher the cost of providing students with higher education, the better the education will be. This has pushed elite and private institutions of higher education to go into something like a bidding war to see who can offer the highest tuitions, and therefore, by some law of the market, decree that this is an indicator of the quality of the education they will receive.¹³

But the economic collapse of 2008 even brought the private universities and colleges into the age of austerity. Why? Because as a result of the collapse, endowments at these universities were greatly reduced, thereby

¹²The irony here seems to be that while neoliberal academe implores its workers to do more with less, its students are given just the opposite message, namely to amass things and consume. In fact, arguably it is the opportunity to become consumers with more capacity that attracts students to neoliberal academe, rather than the opportunity to exercise austerity and truth-telling.

¹³“A rational pricing strategy for a liberal arts college...begins with increasing—not reducing—list price and, indeed, colleges have proved to be rational in this regard,” writes Victor Ferrall (2011, 73). But, this is just the “list price”—and few buy anything at list price. Again, Ferrall: College pricing “is based on discounting; the higher the tuition, the greater the discount. It is a matter of economic indifference to a college whether its tuition is \$30,000 and its average aid grant is \$20,000, or its tuition is \$40,000 and its average aid grant is \$30,000. Either way, the college’s net revenue per student is \$10,000” (72).

reducing their fiscal capacity.¹⁴ This, in turn, led to even higher tuition and fees at the privates to offset endowment shortfalls.¹⁵

This confluence of a long-standing moral imperative regarding academic life and a more recent economic imperative regarding academe has brought about a higher educational world that is widely regarded as in "crisis." Many believe that to get out of this crisis, we need to go back to a conception of the academy prior to the rise of the neoliberal economic imperative. Others, such as myself, believe that there is no going back to an academy more suited for the middle ages than the age of new media. Part of the problem then of neoliberal academe is not just the austerity measures that have resulted in massive cutbacks in educational funding, but also the way in which neoliberalism has affected the moral asceticism that has been a long-standing feature of higher education.

Arguably, the confluence of austerities in higher education today has brought about a "new asceticism." In other words, the neoliberal mandates to operate higher education under conditions of *economic* austerity have intensified the deeply rooted *moral, emotional, and existential* austerity of higher education.¹⁶ Looking back to the Cynics is looking forward to the philosophical justification for accepting the "dog's life" as a model for the neoliberal academic's life. Or, perhaps put another way, the middle ground between higher education's moral and economic imperatives is something very much like asceticism. It is not difficult to find in the mode of life of this ancient school of philosophy many parallels with our own neoliberal academic condition.

Why not then just admit that the mission of the neoliberal academic, to quote Foucault on the mission of the Cynic, "will be recognized only in the practice of *askesis*"? Why not see in the "endurance" required of the Cynic philosopher to practice austerity a similarity with today's academic who is required to perform a similar task? If the Cynic "recognizes himself in the test of the Cynic life he undergoes," then so too does the neoliberal academic recognize himself or herself in the test of the austere neoliberal academic life he or she undergoes. Moreover, if the *askesis* of antiquity came in different forms such as "training, meditation, tests of thinking, examination of conscience, control of representations" (Foucault 1985, 74), then the *askesis* of academic neoliberalism comes in comparable forms such as

¹⁴A 2009 National Association of College and University Business Officers' study reported that the endowments of the 842 participating institutions dropped an average of 23 percent in value. The rate of return also fell an average of 18.7 percent (Ferrell 29).

¹⁵That is, those *with* endowments. "In the face of a major recession," writes Victor Ferrell, "both the average published tuition and fees and the total charges at all private baccalaureate colleges were 4.4 percent higher in 2009-2010 than in 2008-2009, even in the face of a 2.1 percent decline in the consumer price index between July 2008 and July 2009" (73).

¹⁶However, *economic* austerity is not equally distributed over neoliberal academe (even if moral and emotional are more equally distributed), especially when one considers things like start-up packages in the sciences, and business and medical school salaries.

assessment training, standardized tests of thinking, program elimination, and cost-cutting.¹⁷

But the similarities do not end with comparisons. Rather they end with *intensifications*. If academic sociologists such as Charlotte Bloch are right, and the culture of academe is one of “no feeling,” then the austerity of neoliberal academic practices and policies will only serve to intensify the emotional vacuum of academe.¹⁸ The managerialism of neoliberal academe functions through and creates “docile” subjects who are emotionless to the repressive and destructive policies and practices of neoliberal academe. When these docile subjects are merged with the ascetic subjects of academe’s more traditional environment, one can only fear a deepening of their emotional distance to their academic environment. Or, to draw upon the work of sociologist Arlie Hochschild, the “emotion work” of higher education in the age of neoliberalism will be the further “commercialization of feeling,” which in this case will amount to a new, or even neoliberal, form of asceticism.

Conclusion

Academe under neoliberalism has become a dog’s life. It is also a life filled with cynicism regarding neoliberal policies and practices such as recent economic austerity measures from both outside and inside the academy. Part of the reason for the recent entrenchment of neoliberalism within the academy is the longstanding belief that as academics we need to leave our feelings at the door when we enter the academic world. This emotional asceticism has a longstanding and strong tradition within higher education, and in an unfortunate way plays into the neoliberal agenda of managerialism and economic austerity. Whereas the ascetic life may have worked in ancient Greece and Rome for the Cynics, in a world of global markets and international finance it just intensifies the negative capacities of academic neoliberalism. Doing without emotions and economic resources is viewed as a cost of leading a life of truth-telling.

A new asceticism is not the future of academe—even if it describes well the current state of higher education under neoliberalism. While the

¹⁷See Foucault (1985, 72-77) for a fuller account of the forms of *askesis* in antiquity. Academic *askesis* as a practice of endurance to sustain the neoliberal academic life of truth-telling is a fully modern form of *askesis* that only shares formal characteristics with its ancient predecessor. Though a voluntary practice of the neoliberal academic self, failure to perform puts the individual at risk of elimination from neoliberal academe.

¹⁸It bears mentioning that the Cynics were not about being entirely emotionally numb, nor are they the only historical backdrop against which to understand emotional austerity in academe. While there is a genealogical relation between the Cynics and neoliberal academic austerity, not only is it not without many complications and discontinuities, other more contemporary relations too can be established. Still, the Stoic ideal of *ataraxia* casts a long shadow over both the Cynics as well over the emotion work of contemporary academe.

truth-telling and frankness (*parrhesia*) of the Cynics should be part of our future, the beggar's pouch, the roaming, the lack of integration into society, household, family, hearth, and country is not. Neoliberal academe has turned us into beggars through its austerity measures; has set the majority of college and university faculty roaming from position to position seeking enough income to continue their life of truth-telling; have not provided many with the minimal economic and emotional conditions to care for their families, households, and self; have brought about policies and practices that do not forward the ends of critical citizenship and democratic education. The new asceticism of the neoliberal academy is not a cause for celebration.

Rather, it should be a rallying cry to move beyond the neoliberal academy and seek a way of life within the academy that is fit for truth-seeking, committed individuals who care both about family and country; care about democratic values and social justice. Who are not beggars on the fringes of society, but rather well-integrated and -respected members of American culture and society. Enough with austerity—economic and moral—let's establish a new model for higher education. One that supports a more robust sense of our economic needs and emotional life; one that is less corporate and more corporeal; one that is built on pleasure rather than its absence; one that is healthy rather than unhealthy, helpful rather than harmful. Let's just say "No" to living like dogs on the short leash of neoliberal academe and its austerity measures.¹⁹

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¹⁹A woof goes out to my colleagues Paul Allen Miller and Zahi Zalloua for their helpful commentary on this essay.

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