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Résumé de l'article

It is no secret that humanities professors find themselves disenchanted by the current state of neoliberal universities; as the story goes, jobs are scarce, enrollment continues to drop, and students seem increasingly disconnected from the value of humanities-based classes. Universities and departments strive for new ways to respond to the current "crisis" in higher education internally, by appealing to the usefulness of the liberal arts, and structurally by institutionalizing the diversity of universities via DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) requirements and offices. On the surface, such measures seem "Deweyan" in spirit, by increasing social diversity, by removing class barriers, and by removing "waste" in the divisions between vocational and humanities studies. However, such responses to neoliberal institutions reproduce the very logic to which they respond and reflect a refusal to think institutionally. Using Dewey's theories of democracy, growth, and waste, as well as contemporary literatures on the neoliberal university and virtue hoarding in education, we argue that these seemingly Deweyan measures reproduce the problems which they purport to resolve.

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Democracy, Human Capital, and the Neoliberal Arts

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It is no secret that humanities professors find themselves disenchanted by the current state of neoliberal universities; as the story goes, jobs are scarce, enrollment continues to drop, and students seem increasingly disconnected from the value of humanities-based classes. Universities and departments strive for new ways to respond to the current "crisis" in higher education internally, by appealing to the usefulness of the liberal arts, and structurally by institutionalizing the diversity of universities via DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) requirements and offices. On the surface, such measures seem "Deweyan" in spirit, by increasing social diversity, by removing class barriers, and by removing "waste" in the divisions between vocational and humanities studies. However, such responses to neoliberal institutions reproduce the very logic to which they respond and reflect a refusal to think institutionally. Using Dewey's theories of democracy, growth, and waste, as well as contemporary literatures on the neoliberal university and virtue hoarding in education, we argue that these seemingly Deweyan measures reproduce the problems which they purport to resolve.

In a recent essay, Sarah Blackwood, chair of the English department at Pace University in New York City, describes a curriculum that seems tailor-made for resolving much of what John Dewey found problematic about the 20th-century university, from the "enforced mental seclusion" of the student to the artificial boundaries between the liberal arts and other disciplines, to the ivory-tower "aloofness" of the institution itself. For example, her program appears to undo the opposition between the liberal arts and vocational training: "Excellent writers and communicators with honed skills in analysis and critical thinking, [their students have] gone on to gainful employment in publishing, the arts, media, business, education, law, and the nonprofit sector" (Blackwood, 2023). The curriculum is also interdisciplinary, or at least prepares students to expand their vision of what could count as a "humanities" discipline, as evidenced by "an alumna [who] was profiled by *The New York Times* for her feminist video game design, much of which she credits to her poetry education" (Blackwood, 2023). Most notably, the program seeks to make the university more attentive to the needs of the community and more inclusive of students and cultural voices who might normally be "marginalized." This program appears to be governed by the logic of what Dewey calls "social efficiency," which he defines as "nothing less than that socialization of mind which is actively concerned in making experiences more communicable; in breaking down the barriers of social stratification which make individuals impervious to the interests of others" (Dewey, 1916/2008, p.127).

And yet Blackwood's piece – which describes a liberal arts program that, for all its impressive features, can be taken as representative of many such programs – is anything but a celebration of the current status of the liberal arts. Instead, the essay is, as the title suggests, a "letter from an English

department on the brink." Despite experiencing a substantial growth in majors and "a 50 percent increase in revenue," the department has also experienced a "50 percent decrease in long-term investment," what Blackwood characterizes as part of a vicious cycle endemic to the contemporary university, one in which administrators *decide* that students do not consider majors like English or philosophy to be good "investments" and therefore direct funds and resources away from such majors, eventually pushing students away as well, creating a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy (Blackwood, 2023). As she writes, "students correctly see [this] as a story being spun by the universities themselves: this area of study lacks value, is in some sense wrong. That story has become powerful enough to shape their world, restricting the number of paths presented to them as real options" (2023).

In this sense, the scenario described in Blackwood's essay is not the enactment of Deweyan ideals, but just the opposite, an instance of what he calls educational "waste": isolation, disconnection, the closing *down* of viable educational paths. In this paper, we argue that neoliberalism – the discourse implicit in this world-shaping "story" – has made this kind of educational waste the defining feature of the contemporary university, for both the material reasons described by Blackwood but also because neoliberalism's individualizing focus shapes the very ways in which academics have attempted to respond and adapt to this new material reality. Indeed, we contend that many university practices that might seem "Deweyan" in function and spirit – the vocationalization of the liberal arts and the emphasis placed on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statements – actually reflect this refusal to think institutionally.

Dewey, Waste, and the University

Dewey's critiques of traditional educational practices centre on the intertwined notions of growth, democracy, and reconstruction. Education just *is* reconstruction of experience, as Dewey (1916/2008) states in *Democracy and Education*: education is "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (p. 82). This reconstruction, for Dewey, is one which adds meaning to our experience; we gain deeper insight into our activities and those of others. We are, to put it simply, more deeply aware of *connections*.

We can compare this basic notion with Dewey's conception of "waste," as discussed in *The School and Society*. Here, in his lecture "Waste in Education," Dewey (1899/2008) states that waste pertains to organization, insofar as waste comes from a decided *lack* of organization. The tragic loss is not of money or material, but "that of human life, the life of the children while they are at school" (p. 39). Waste, he states, is due to isolation. Organization is meant to prevent isolation; organization, Dewey states, "is nothing but getting things into connection with one another" (p. 39). Dewey's discussion here on "waste" specifically pertains to the structure of educational systems; each level of the schooling system, from kindergarten through college, arose from a different historical condition, and has different moral goals and educational ideals. Thus, the school system is divided. The administrative challenge is to find and form a "unity of the whole" (p. 44). What we see here, in Dewey's earlier discussion of waste, is a focus on unity and connections; while *The School and Society* does focus more explicitly on the schooling structure, that fundamental concern that pervades Dewey's corpus is present: waste occurs when we lack deep insight into connections. Education, as a reconstruction of experience, avoids *waste*.

For Dewey (1916/2008), a reconstruction of experience (education) is *democratic* in nature, a "mode of associated living" (p. 93). This is no mere *Gesellschaft*, but rather, a living together in which we each make reference to the activities of others, and allow the activities of others to give "point and direction" to our own (p. 93). We are more aware of connections between our own doings and undergoings and those of others. This awareness is, in fact, what constitutes a difference between mere activity and *experience*. "Mere" activity or habit is blind: "It does not know what it is about; that is to say, what are its interactions with other activities" (p. 83). These are actions that are unintelligent, without meaning for us

(p. 34). However, a reconstruction or reorganization that adds meaning to experience achieves deeper insight into these doings – our activities – and undergoings – our passivity. We can connect the consequences with the action, and thus gain more control over ourselves and our futures (p. 146). When we make such connections, we are *thinking*. This – thinking – is what "makes it possible to act with an end in view" (p. 154).

Forget not in this discussion Dewey's emphasis on *democracy* as a mode of living. Thinking, reconstruction, education – these are never in isolation. As Dewey states in *Democracy and Education* (1916/2008), we must measure the "worth" of a form of social life by two elements: 1) the extent to which interests of a group are shared by all members, and 2) the freedom with which a group interacts with other groups. "Undesirable" societies are those which "internally and externally" set up "barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience" (p. 105). Education is a *social process*. In fact, one of Dewey's critiques of traditional educational processes is that these methods *ignore* both the "social" and "process" elements of education; education is not "preparation" for some life stage that is to come, but an already-in-motion process. A democratic mode of life is one that includes common interests between community members – and between communities – and has "free and equitable intercourse" between groups (p. 90). More shared interests, more exchange, brings deeper understandings of doings and undergoings, and reconstruction of experience. When we lack this free exchange and common values, culture becomes "sterile" (p. 90); we might say there is a "waste" in culture. As social beings, we cannot perform our own activities without taking those of others into account. The activities of others are "indispensable conditions of the realization of [our] tendencies" (pp. 15–16). Reconstructing and reorganizing experience necessarily includes reference to the activities of others. In this way, "the result of the educative process is the capacity for further education" (p. 73), and this includes associated living.

We can reconstruct our understanding of education in Dewey by also viewing it in light of "growth." Growth, "the cumulative movement of action toward a later result," is the ongoing process of reconstruction (p. 46). Growth is how we develop new habits; it is "the ability to learn from experience; the power to retain from one experience something which is of avail in coping with the difficulties of a later situation" (p. 49). Importantly, growth must create conditions for further growth. A thief grows in efficiency, but to what end (Dewey, 1938/2008, p. 19)? Loyalty among an association of thieves does not meet the "ideal" requirements of society; they do not grow insofar as opening up avenues for sharing common interests and free intercourse with others – thus, they do not grow.

Dewey critiques higher education – especially research universities and liberal arts programs – on the basis of wastefulness, and lack of growth. Universities are disconnected from social life – wasteful – and, thus disconnected, do not promote education as growth. Leonard Waks (2018), pointing out that "Dewey wrote relatively little about higher education" (p. 1), builds on Dewey to extrapolate his thoughts on higher education. As Waks points out, Dewey's conception of university education is based on the three stages of inquiry as described in *Studies in Logical Theory* (Dewey, 1903/2008, pp. 293–375): 1) an unsettled or problematic state of affairs, including a challenge to habits – this is antecedent to thinking; 2) inquiry and knowledge production – this is where "thought" and "knowledge production" occur; and 3) restoration of balance – this is the "results" stage (Waks, 2018, pp. 2–3).

As Waks points out, educational institutions are "aloof," or set apart from the communities from which they emerge. Specialists become their own "academic classes" that are the intermediaries of knowledge (p. 4). This class of inquirers is no longer situated within the whole, and as removed, they are prompted by questions unique to their specialized interests. As Waks writes, "members of the specialized technical research profession now can pursue specialized 'questions' at one or more institutional removes from the unsettlement of the situations that provoked them" (p. 5). Inquiry is no longer driven by pressing needs of the community, and the knowledge obtained in stage two is not evaluated against the concerns of the "real world" (p. 5). Thus disconnected, research conducted at these institutions is a "waste." The inquiry occurs behind barriers, and is not based on common interests with the "general public." Students have little interest in underlying social problems; in this way, they are "immature" and mentally secluded. This immaturity pervades their whole lives (Dewey, 1929/2008, p. 102). As Waks (2018) writes, "The

bad results of this breach include that most citizens outside the university do not care about science, embrace antiscientific ideologies, and reject university-based knowledge even when they have problems where solutions could make direct use of such knowledge" (p. 6).

Dewey's critique is not limited to scientific specialists at research universities; waste also occurs in liberal arts programs. In "Challenge to Liberal Thought," Dewey (1944/2008) points out the inherently *illiberal* basis of the liberal arts:

> Liberal education was liberal in Greece because it was the way of life enjoyed by a small group who were free to devote themselves to higher things. They were free to do so because they lived upon the fruits of the labor of an industrially enslaved class. (p. 263)

"Mechanical" and "liberal" education, Dewey narrates, were placed in opposition to one another in ancient Greece; vocational, practical education was "illiberal," for it belonged to a class of non-citizens, a "servile" class (pp. 262–263). This is, as Kotsko (2018) so succinctly frames it, a division between the political and the economic (but, one in which political freedom – ostensibly separate from economic interests – still arises from the economic). The "freedom" marked by the study of the liberal arts is a "freedom" gained only because of the enslavement and servility of others. Dewey's critique shows us a tension in the discourse of the "liberal" part of the "liberal" arts. The distinction between "vocation" or mechanical labour and the liberal arts rests on a dichotomy between those who are suited to be free and lead, and those who are *not* suited to be free. And therein lies the irony: the freedom of the citizenry came through the non-freedom of the "servile" classes. Reproducing this distinction also reproduces the inherent contradiction *within this* distinction. Furthermore, those "suited to be free," and thus freed from manual labour, were also free to be *useless*.

Anything "useful" was categorized as "mechanical"; only a truly free citizen could have the privilege of studying something utterly non-useful. Thus, as Waks (2018) points out, for Dewey, the liberal arts were founded on elitism, and emphasized studies (such as language and literature) that provide "an obstacle to extending their processes of thought to practical and productive doings" (p. 10). Liberal arts were freeing, insofar as they "made men free insofar as it lifted them from the immediate present to a longer temporal and larger spatial domain, one accessible only through knowledge" (Brown, 2015, p. 185). As Scott Stroud (2013) points out, the separation between labour activities which produce and non-labour activities which are "non-productive" is a separation between the "pure" end and the means. Means "are the dirty, effective aspects of life that we would rather not deal with if at all possible" (p. 117). Liberal arts were, historically, a mark of the privilege of being the social equivalent of a knick-knack.

Such inefficacious (because it is "non-productive") elitism is no true liberality. As Dewey (1944/2008) tells us, "To be liberal is all one with being liberating, with effecting a release of human powers" (p. 265). The separation between humanities on the one hand, and industry, on the other, speaks to the belief "that there are those few who are educated to live on a plane of exclusive and isolated culture, while the many toil below on the level of practical endeavor, directed at material commodities" (Defalco, 2016, p. 60). Such division is yet another barrier, rather than the liberation of human powers. In contrast to the division between liberal arts and humanities on one side, and vocational or mechanical on the other, Dewey (1944/2008) envisioned an education that would link the humane to the practical: "A truly liberal, and liberating, education would refuse today to isolate vocational training on any of its levels from a continuous education in the social, moral, and scientific contexts within which wisely administered callings and professions must function" (p. 264). Humanities-based education should not be isolated from the other disciplines, and no discipline should be isolated from social life and social problems. Identifying the humanities with literature and philosophy alone displays a "lack of imagination"; "the humanism of today can be adequately expressed only in a vision of the social possibilities of the intelligence and learning embodied in the great modern enterprises of business, law, medicine, education, farming, engineering, etc." (Dewey, 1917/2008, p. 156). Dewey speaks to this in *Individualism, Old and New* (1929/2008):

> A "humanism" that separates man from nature will envisage a radically different solution of the industrial and economic perplexities of the age than the humanism entertained by those who find no uncrossable gulf or fixed gap. The former will inevitably look backward for direction; it will strive for a cultivated elite supported on the backs of toiling masses. The latter will have to face the question of whether work itself can become an instrument of culture and of how the masses can share freely in a life enriched in imagination and esthetic enjoyment. (p. 101)

The stark division between humanities and vocational education is a "barrier" that inhibits the reconstruction of experience, and thus inhibits growth; it is, Dewey might say, a waste. While there are programs like Blackwood's, which seem to overcome the "barrier," they in fact have been shaped both internally and externally by the contemporary discourse of neoliberalism.

The Post-Golden Age of Education and the Neoliberal University

Neoliberalism is "a governing rationality that disseminates market values and metrics to every sphere of life," including education (Brown, 2015, p. 176). According to this rationality, students are supposed to view education as an "investment" in their "human capital," their currently existing skills and abilities, with the idea being that this investment will pay off in the form of improved earnings, "psychic income," or both (Becker, 1994, p. 11). Michel Foucault put this notion of "human capital" at the heart of his influential 1979 account of American neoliberalism, arguing that what first emerges as an economic theory – essentially, the decision to view wages as return-on-investment rather than the price of labour – ultimately functions as way of conceptualizing and governing human subjects (Foucault, 2010, pp. 219–237). Understood as an "entrepreneur of himself," the individual subject should be governed in such a way that they feel compelled to "invest" in themselves, thereby producing economic and psychic income and contributing to the economic well-being of the nation as whole (p. 226).

Many subsequent theorists have explored how this market-oriented "theory of governance" and "theory of human nature" have functioned together as a system of social and moral legitimization, specifically a legitimacy grounded in, as Adam Kotsko (2018) puts it in a representative recent account, "the guarantee of economic freedom" and the notion of "participation in economic competition as the highest expression of human personhood" (pp. 33, 36). In practice, these theories have legitimated decades of privatization, de-regulation, and "responsibilization," in which the obligation to provide for social welfare shifts from the state to individuals and their families, a shift Brown describes as the "neoliberal assault on the social," (2015, p. 83; 2019, p. 40). This ideology should not be confused with classical, "laissez-faire" liberalism, as its logic supports state intervention in the name of constructing markets and (in theory) the subjects who will thrive in them, but, as Kotsko (2018) notes, its public-facing rhetoric often amounts to a kind of "vulgar libertarianism," especially in its "victim-blaming" insistence that economic failure is caused not by capitalism or by neoliberal policy but by bad personal choices: "If you fail, it is your fault, and yours alone. You are in control of your destiny, and if your destiny is miserable, then misery must be what you deserve, because the market is always right" (pp. 95–96).

This individualizing thrust is certainly visible in the way that human capital, as both an economic theory and a vision of the subject, has helped shape the landscape of higher education. As Melinda Cooper (2017, pp. 220–223) writes, the logic of human capital can be used to justify public investment in education – as it was in the work of economist Theodore Schultz (1971), who defined human capital as the solution to "the mystery of modern abundance" (p. 3), and whose work helped underwrite the expansions of higher education's golden age – but it also can be used justify disinvestment. This is what happens in the work of economists Gary S. Becker and Milton Friedman, who argue that the benefits of investments in human capital primarily accrue to the individual, and therefore should be funded primarily through private loans rather than through federally funded grants and direct investment, a politically

influential claim that helped pave the way for our current student-debt crisis (Cooper, 2017, pp. 223–226).

This new rationality and new economic circumstances have had a range of material effects on the university, effects that have added up to what is often known as the "post-golden age" in higher education. As Brown (2015) notes, for example, "It is a commonplace that broadly accessible and affordable higher education is one of the great casualties of neoliberalism's ascendance in the Euro-Atlantic world" (p. 175). Inside and outside the university walls, students, administrators, and policy-makers have increasingly felt compelled to direct their funds away from liberal arts courses and research programs and toward courses and programs with more readily apparent "return on investment," the process that – as Blackwood writes in her "Letter" – can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, with administrators causing the very student disengagement they claim to be trying to resolve. Blackwood (2023) also states that one of the major effects of such "decrease in long-term investment" is a loss of tenure-track lines and the adjunctification of the academic workforce, a transformation that erodes academic freedom and the critical reflexivity that is supposed to be made possible by this freedom. As Nicholas Eastman and Deron Boyles (2015) put it:

> a model of higher education in which most teaching is carried out by those who are utterly without job security can hardly be expected to "help make public opinion more self-critical and more circumspect," which the [American Association of University Professors'] founders [including Dewey] argued were characteristic functions of the university in a democratic society. (p. 33)

Scholars like Marc Bousquet (2008) argue, indeed, that adjunctification reflects the fact that the "functions of the university" (p. 26) have fundamentally changed. He contends that people with PhDs in the humanities should identify as the "waste product of graduate education" – not in the sense of acknowledging that "they feel 'treated like shit,'" but in the sense of grasping the "systemic reality that they *are* waste" (p. 21). His claim is that increasingly "the holders of the doctoral degree are not so much the *products* of the graduate–employee labor system as its *byproducts*, insofar as that labor system exists primarily to recruit, train, supervise, and legitimate the employment of nondegreed students and contingent faculty" (p. 21).

Perhaps the approach to Carnegie Classifications has some part to play in this oversaturation of undigested doctoral students. This brainchild of Clark Kerr, birthed in 1973, provided five basic classifications of educational institutions: liberal arts colleges, two-year colleges, professional schools and other specialized institutions, doctoral-granting institutions, and comprehensive universities and colleges (Altbach, 2015, p. 22). The purpose of such categorization then, as is now, was to provide an objective, neutral classification – not ranking – of educational institutions for research purposes, to identify groups of comparable institutions (Carnegie Classification, 2024). Today, there are 33 total classifications, from the much-lauded "R1" (Doctoral Institutions – very high research activity) to – coming in 2025 – "Social and Economic Mobility." Despite the clear Carnegie goals and language – classification, not rank – academics still view these classifications in terms of academic rank, with R1 being the "highest." R1 is based on two factors: how much money a university spends on research, and how many doctorates it awards each year (Diep, 2023). Francie Diep (2023) writes that university leaders seek to rise through these purported "ranks" of the Carnegie system to attract funding and faculty: "Nevertheless, many college leaders seek to lift their institutions to R1 status, or whichever category they see as a step above their own. Aspirations to reach R1 status appear frequently in colleges' strategic plans and initiatives. Many in higher education believe that being classified as an R1 helps colleges land research funding and attract faculty members." Since a university needs a certain number of doctoral students to attain R1 "status," universities are incentivized to accept and graduate more students than there are jobs for, thus creating this "waste" of which Bousquet speaks.

As we suggested above, one way to understand Dewey's claims about educational "waste" is that this waste – isolation, a lack of connection – ultimately emerges from a failure to think critically about

educational structure and organization (such as a failure to think critically about the pervasive Carnegie Classification, misunderstood as "rankings"). Perhaps Bousquet (2008) is pointing out something similar: the transformation of liberal arts PhDs into "waste," in a system predicated on extracting "labor from persons who are nondegreed or not yet degreed," reflects a failure to think and act structurally, including on the part of academic workers themselves (p. 21). For Bousquet, thinking and acting structurally means embracing one's status as "labor" and organizing to fight for job security and better pay, the preconditions for genuine academic freedom, and therefore the precondition for a university that serves the public good. In this sense, he offers a vision consonant with that of Dewey, who co-founded the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and emphasized the need for teachers' unions in order to help counterbalance the possibility of external entities using universities and schools to advance personal, economic, and political interests. Thus, Dewey (1928/2008, p. 271) states that we need unions to protect schools, teachers, and students "against all of the outside interests, economic and political and others, that would exploit schools for their own ends, and in doing so, reduce the teaching body to a condition of intellectual vassalage" (p. 271). He speaks of this in "Faculty Share of University Control," expressing that it is "undesirable" that boards of trustees or regents have fundamental control over universities, when they have no fundamental connection to education (Dewey, 1915/2008, p. 109). Such influence is undesirable precisely because it interferes with the university's ability to fulfill its role as a public trust dedicated to serving the public interest (Dewey 1917/2008, p. 166). As Julia Schleck (2022) explains, summarizing the AAUP's 1915 "Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure," this view of academic freedom holds that: "In order to be effective tools, able to perform research guided solely by the idea of finding the truth, faculty must be protected from outside pressure, which could be wielded as easily by state politicians as by donors. Similarly, the public itself, although the beneficiary of university work, also must not be allowed to influence its direction. Thus the public good would only be achieved, paradoxically, without the influence of the public, either directly or through its elected representatives" (p. 24).

As recent controversies in states like Texas and Florida suggest, right-wing politicians and their allies on governing boards of trustees and regents have become increasingly emboldened about trying to exert the kind of "political" control that troubled Dewey. In 2023, Governor Greg Abbott signed Texas SB 17 into law; higher education institutions in Texas are no longer permitted to have diversity offices, mandatory DEI training, or include DEI statements in hiring processes (TX SB 17, 2023). This bill specifically prohibits institutions from requiring or giving preferential consideration for "ideological oaths," which includes requiring students or employees to provide "views on, experience with, or past or planned contributions to efforts involving diversity, equity, and inclusion, marginalized groups, antiracism, social justice, intersectionality, or related concepts" (TX SB 17, 2023). This bill also prohibits DEI offices, stating explicitly that institutions of higher education "may not establish or maintain a diversity, equity, and inclusion office or hire or assign an employee of the institution, or contract with a third party, to perform the duties of a diversity, equity, and inclusion office" (TX SB 17, 2023). We could easily replace "New York" with "Texas" or "Florida" in the following quote from Dewey's "Why I am a Member of the Teachers Union" (1928/2008): "[The Teachers Union was] the first organization to protest against the bills introduced in the Legislature which would involve a censorship of history teaching and which would have made New York as ridiculous in the eyes of the civilized world as is now a city in the middle west that I won't mention" (p. 217). There is also the case of Texas A&M University's "failed" hiring of Kathleen McElroy; A&M moved from initially offering her the directorship of their journalism program, a position with tenure, to backtracking and instead offering her a one-year contract. In text messages released as part of an internal investigation, Board of Regents member Jay Graham wrote to A&M Chancellor John Sharpe, stating, "I thought the purpose of us starting a journalism program was to get high-quality Aggie journalist[s] with conservative values into the market. This won't happen with

someone like this leading the department" (McGee, 2023). This is just the kind of political interference about which Dewey was concerned.[1]

And yet decades of neoliberalism have already had a much greater impact on the quality of higher education than these instances of political interference. Dewey (1928/2008) himself was no stranger to critiquing capitalism's influence upon universities, stating that the "unconscious and subtly pervasive influence[s]" of capitalism "move and have our being" (p. 277), and that this influence is within institutions themselves. Since "those who control the money that is behind an institution generally control the rest of the institution as well" (Dewey, 1928/2008, p. 272), then *who* is funding *what* and for *what purpose* is vital to how a university functions. We contend that – notwithstanding the long (and recently intensifying) tradition of adjunct and graduate-student organizing – the pervasive influence of neoliberalism has shaped not only the material conditions of academic work and study, but the very way in which resistance is conceptualized. In other words, these experiments in thinking and acting structurally have yet to fully penetrate the humanities on the level of theory or institutional arrangements.

Virtue Hoarding within Neoliberal Universities

The most obvious example of this neoliberal resonance – and of a feature that seems "Deweyan" in spirit but "waste"-producing in practice – is the rhetoric academics have adopted to defend the value of the liberal arts in the face of the patterns of disinvestment described above. Absher (2021) explains it thusly: the worker, as an "entrepreneur of himself," is both productive, and produced (pp. 49–51). Students are the "input" or raw material of a university, and emerge as the product of a "skillsification" (pp. 26, 51). Absher focuses specifically on philosophy (and its new iteration: neoliberal philosophy), but we can generalize his claims to the liberal arts in general: philosophy must legitimate itself to economic criteria; it must "perform its performativity" – market itself – and show that it produces employees with skills (such as "critical thinking") desired by employers (pp. 37, 52–59). These new defenses tend to play out in one of two forms: "the humanities and interpretive social sciences are accounted as [either] building the analytical thinkers needed by the professions or as building the mind and hence securing a more

[1] One reviewer, noting that we explored connections between DEI and neoliberalism later in the paper, suggested here that we give an account of "why conservatives who are themselves neoliberal capitalists oppose DEI initiatives." This is an excellent, urgent question, but mostly beyond the scope of this paper, as answering it would require wading into a broader debate on the left: should social conservatism should be understood as a byproduct of the same economic and political forces that produced the neoliberal turn, and thus in some sense intrinsic to neoliberalism, or should it be understood as fundamentally distinct from neoliberalism, even if alliances between these two ideologies have been frequent and crucial to the neoliberal turn itself? Those committed to the intrinsic view (among whom we might include, at the risk of oversimplification, Melinda Cooper and Adam Kotsko, among many others) might contend that neoliberalism is producing this opposition to DEI because it needs racism, sexism, and homophobia to function, in the sense that it needs those who can be made "blameworthy" for legitimization purposes (to use Kotsko's terms), or it relies on an economic logic grounded in gendered notions of the nuclear family (Cooper, 2017; Kotsko, 2018). Those committed to the view that social conservativism is fundamentally distinct from neoliberalism (among whom we might include, at the risk of oversimplification, Nancy Fraser, Walter Benn Michaels, and Adolph Reed, Jr., among many others) might contend that "conservatives who are themselves neoliberal capitalists" can "oppose DEI initiatives" because resistance to DEI and support of DEI are both perfectly compatible with neoliberalism's main project of redistributing wealth upwards (Fraser, 2013; Michaels and Reed, 2023). In this view, obviously, DEI (even in its fully realized institutionalized form) poses no real challenge to the growing economic inequality that has defined the neoliberal era; indeed, Michaels and Reed suggest that the main function of diversity rhetoric has been to legitimate this inequality (in the sense that it seems to replace a politics of redistribution with a politics aimed at "diversifying" the wealthy) and erode working-class solidarity in a manner similar to racist rhetoric (thus underscoring how flexible social politics may be under neoliberalism) (Michaels and Reed, 2023).

gratifying life for the individual" (Brown, 2015, p. 187). In other words, they are conceived as either "something for individuals to … utilize like engineering," the source of skills that "may be broken off and honed as instruments" for "the material world, the practical world, the world of power, profit, and achievement," or, conversely, as something for people to "imbibe like chocolate" or "practice like yoga," "presumed to inhabit a land apart from the material world" (p. 188).

Obviously, the latter view reproduces the stark divide between "mindless occupationalism" and liberal arts elitism that Dewey spoke so vehemently against (Stroud, 2013). As Brown (2015) notes, moreover, even this "impractical" defense aligns with "the neoliberal notion of building human capital," in the sense that it allows the study of the humanities to be understood in terms of what a theorist of human capital would describe as a purely personal "psychic income." The view that insists that subjects like philosophy and literature *are* actually useful does challenge this divide between occupationalism and the liberal arts, but it also represents a new form of "learning for earning," something else that Dewey singled out for critique.

In fact, in "Industrial Education – A Wrong Kind" (Dewey, 1915/2008), he suggests that the triumph of this view in the context of industrial education reflects the influence of business corporations, precisely the kind of external force he warned about in his writings on unions. For example, he describes how the "Indiana System" made provisions for "continuing education" *only* if that education was vocational, "whose controlling purpose is to fit for useful and efficient service in the shop, home and on the farm, given only to persons who have already indicated their intention to enter such employment, or who are already engaged therein, and who wish to increase their efficiency in their chosen occupation.'" Education is "learning for earning," meant to benefit the business, not the worker (pp. 118–119). Dewey (1917/2008) goes so far as to label this kind of education "evil," "socially inefficient," and "badly conceived learning," in which the labourer adds earnings to others (pp. 144–145).

In the case of the contemporary university, it is the liberal arts, rather than simply industrial education, that is being filtered through the lens of "learning for earning," but his critique of this view would likely be the same. Here the humanities are justified in the name of how this study might benefit individual employees (and, more to the point, potential employers); it is understood as a private, rather than public, good. Public goods are, in one sense, goods in which we are collectively invested as "stewards of shared futures" (Honig 2017, p. 14)[2]; the neoliberal attitude is hostile to "anything that is not clearly instrumental, profitable, and practical," and has led to the privatization of education in terms of funding, access, and practical outcome (p. 18). Part of the "ongoing work of democratic citizenship" itself necessitates public goods: these are, Honig states, the objects of democratic life (p. 11). Public goods situate our social sphere, that space between personal and political life; here, we are more than consumers and more than private citizens (Brown, 2019, pp. 27–28). Absher (2021) regards this kind of "learning for earning" as a process of the "engine of inequality" of higher education (p. 30), creating pliable workers to generate profit for others, and, in focusing on training ("the teaching of technical knowledge to meet preestablished ends set by others") a workforce rather than education (for self-governance, moral cultivation, and autonomy), suppressing any democratic resistance that might challenge this social structure (p. 25).

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[2] Honig's work, in many ways, expands upon Brown's; Honig, largely agreeing with Brown, focuses on the constructive possibilities of what she calls "public things." As Honig (2017) states, for Brown, loss of public things is part of the loss of citizenship as well; education as a public "thing" has been lost to neoliberalism's grasp, but education is necessary for democratic living. For Honig, public things – which she purposely leaves undefined – are things that are publicly used, or publicly owned, or just have public oversight (a "public university," for example, may have private funding but is still "for the public." A private university may also be a public thing, insofar as it fulfills some public good) (p. 4). They are a necessity condition for democratic life (p. 90). Public things "are the infrastructure of democratic life, and they underwrite the signs and symbols of democratic unity" (p. 17). Public things move us from "subjectivity to objectivity, from identity to infrastructure, from membership to worldliness" (p. 28).

As Brown (2015) suggests, Dewey was among a long tradition of liberal thinkers who "regarded raw economic interest as too thin a reed and too crude a principle on which to build either an individual life or a democracy; cultivation of mind and character through education was one crucial counter to this thinness and crudeness" (p. 187). The education they envisioned was not just for personal cultivation or material success, but rather for the capacity for personal and collective self-governance (social life), which includes "the acquisition of a vastly enlarged view of and encounter with the world – its diverse peoples, sciences, languages, literatures, and histories" (p. 187).

Dewey's critique of the liberal arts has not yet seen an adequate response, nor has his critique of the relationship between the university and the wider community. Universities have, indeed, taken initiatives to overcome social barriers through implementing DEI initiatives, for example – initiatives and offices that, as we have discussed, are under attack from right-leaning legislators. However, even those initiatives – whether they are eradicated or left in place – often reproduce the neoliberal focus on individual virtue, rather than bring about systemic change. Like Smaug in Mount Erebor, in Tolkein's *The Hobbit*, we crouch protectively over our self-proclaimed goodness. In her polemic *Virtue Hoarders*, Catherine Liu (2021, p. 2) argues that this focus on personal virtue distinguishes the current generation of professors from earlier academics like Dewey and Jane Addams, and allows the contemporary professional-managerial class to signal its superiority to the working classes. This virtue hoarding transforms questions of "political economy" into questions of "culture," and thereby serves the needs of capital: the contemporary professional-managerial class likes to "talk about bias rather than inequality, racism rather than capitalism, visibility rather than exploitation. Tolerance for them is the highest secular virtue – but tolerance has almost no political or economic meaning" (pp. 8, 16). While Liu's point is that focusing on "racism" can itself be a way of ignoring structural concerns like class conflict, this focus on individual virtue also undermines efforts to fight racism itself, as does the focus on individual racists, rather than racism. As Sara Ahmed (2012) states, "the very identification of racism with individuals becomes a technology for the reproduction of racism of institutions. So eliminating the racist individual would preserve the racism of the institution in part by creating an illusion that we are eliminating racism" (p. 44). This is part of the atomistic individualism – neoliberal subjectivity – that obscures any systemic responsibility, and thus any need for systemic change (Kotsko, 2018, p. 95).

Take, for example, the university commitments to DEI. Colleges and universities across the United States publicly show their condemnation of sexism, racism, and ableism by including DEI statements on their websites, and by requiring DEI statements as part of their hiring processes. In 2021, 83 institutions volunteered to be part of a collaborative study with the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE) and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU): 73% of the volunteering institutions stated that they explicitly supported DEI, but only 49% had culturally relevant academic programs, only 45% had conducted analyses to identify achievement gaps, and only 42% had established diversity offices or programs to actively work towards equity and justice in education. Additionally, numbers were even lower for programmatic, structural changes in institutions: mentoring programs for retaining faculty of colour (13%), and systematic reviews of program curricula for equity and fairness (23%), to name a few (Cumming et al., 2023, pp. 36–37). Additionally, while "data suggest that a more racially/ethnically diverse faculty is positively correlated with underrepresented minority graduation rate" (p. 33) many universities – despite public commitments to DEI – still rely upon institutional practices that undermine DEI goals, especially in relation to the retention of underrepresented faculty members (such as the use of "collegiality" and student evaluations as part of the promotion and tenure process).[3]

[3] The AAUP itself disavows the use of "collegiality" as an evaluation category for promotion and tenure. See American Association of University Professors, 2016, https://www.aaup.org/report/collegiality-criterion-faculty-evaluation. For discussions of how and why collegiality is harmful for faculty retention, see Cho (2006) and Frazier (2011).

Using Ahmed's (2012) understanding of "institutionalization" – what occurs when institutions (in her sense, frameworks in which things do or do not happen [p. 50]) are *already doing something habitually* – we can see that institutions have not "institutionalized' their own diversity initiatives: hence, the need for them in the first place. As she relates, diversity practitioners aim for diversity to "*go through the whole system*," not simply exist as "part" of the institutional machine; diversity, in other words, becomes part of "the organizational flow of things" (pp. 28–29; emphasis in original). A "commitment" that comes with no structural changes, then, is no practice of diversity. In this sense – in which diversity and equality are not "done" – we see "diversity" as a way of marketing a "positive, shiny image of the organization that allowed inequalities to be concealed and thus reproduced" (p. 72); this is "performance culture," a self-conscious performance by institutions in order to "perform well" in systems "by generating the right kinds of procedures, methods, and materials, where rightness is determined as the fulfillment of the requirement of a system" (pp. 84–85). Commitments without enaction are "non-performatives": the effect is not produced by the articulation (pp. 116, 119). Furthermore, they are in fact used to ensure non-performance, for commitments are based on fulfilling other conditions. For example, a commitment to DEI that is also enacted may include removing "collegiality" or student evaluations from tenure and promotion standards. Doing so requires the revision of faculty handbooks, at the very least, which itself involves navigating faculty senate, the creation of committees, and other onerous tasks, which can take years.

UC Berkeley is an excellent example of the tension between cultivating diversity within the university and DEI initiatives. In 2016, five universities in the University of California system – Berkeley, Irvine, Davis, Santa Cruz, and Riverside – decided to initially screen applicants based on DEI statements alone. As Michael Powell (2023) reports for the *New York Times*, "At Berkeley, a faculty committee rejected 75 percent of applicants in life sciences and environmental sciences and management purely on diversity statements," and candidates were continually evaluated on the basis of their DEI statements at every stage of the interview process. The University of California commitment to DEI statements is serious enough that they even have an official rubric by which to evaluate candidate statements. The UC Berkeley "Office for Faculty Equity and Welfare" provides assessment categories: "knowledge and understanding," "track of activities to date," and "plans for contributing to Berkeley." Each category is scored on a scale of one to five, with one representing the "lowest" level of awareness, or the fewest activities or future plans, and five encompassing "[the candidate discussing] diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as core values that every faculty member should actively contribute to," an in-depth track record of activities that promote DEI, and clear plans of how one would continue to further DEI at UC Berkeley. The university even provides sample DEI statements for prospective candidates to use as templates and inspiration.

And yet, one must question their actual commitment to DEI initiatives beyond evaluating faculty members and publicly flashing a rubric. According to the 2021 to 2022 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) report, UC Berkeley employs 1,172 tenured faculty, 246 tenure-track faculty, and 3,569 teaching graduate assistants – more than twice the amount of tenured and tenure-track faculty, combined (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Despite their purported commitment to DEI, the higher number of graduate student assistants speaks of a continual reproduction of that most socially inefficient waste. UC Berkeley is certainly not alone in its hypocrisies. Elon University (2023) – which offers campus-wide initiatives and DEI "action items" (including requiring DEI education for students across all majors) for "inclusive excellence" – ranks near the bottom in a list of the nation's most selective universities (279 out of 286) when it comes to Pell Grant-share, at only 9% (Leonhardt & Wu, 2023).

Of course, we might also note that universities, no matter how committed they are to "economic diversity," are limited in their ability to contribute to the broader struggle against economic "social stratification." The view that education is the key to upward mobility is another instance of the individualizing logic of "human capital," as it ignores the fate of "those who, because of lack of ability, lack of interest, or other barriers to entry, do not or cannot earn a college degree," and, more to the point,

ignores the fact that "[t]he U.S. economy, despite claims to the contrary, will continue to produce more jobs that do not require a college degree than jobs that do. A college degree will not make those jobs pay any more than the pittance they currently do" (Marsh, 2011).[4] From this perspective, fighting social stratification ultimately requires that (like Dewey) academics reach outside the institution itself, and get involved in labour and political movements designed to make "jobs outside the professions pay something closer to a living wage – if not a living wage itself" (Marsh, 2011).[5]

Concluding Thoughts

Recently, we the authors gathered some statistics of our own; the results are limited – due to how certain journals are indexed – but perhaps are telling nonetheless. With guidance from university librarians, and using Google Scholar, we searched for specific key words and phrases, in nine prominent journals dedicated to pragmatism, within a five-year range (2018–2023): "John Dewey" combined with each of the following, respectively: "academia," "educational institutions," "higher education," "neoliberalism." The objects of our queries were *Contemporary Pragmatism*, *Education and Culture*, *Dewey Studies*, *School and Society*, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, *Pragmatism Today*, the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, and the *Pluralist*. We were seeking to answer a question: How much are Dewey scholars writing about neoliberalism and higher educational *institutions*, not just pedagogy? Stretching the parameters about what we mean by "articles about Dewey and higher education institutions," we found *nine* relevant results. We intended to replicate the search for articles on teaching, running "John Dewey" plus "classroom," "education" and "pedagogy," respectively. Using the same date range and just "John Dewey" plus "classroom" yielded *eleven* results from *Education and Culture* alone.

While some might say that this paper is just "preaching to the choir" of Deweyans, the results above, combined with our discussion of how neoliberalism has shaped the very *resistance efforts* against it, say something else. The focus on pedagogy *is* important; it was important for Dewey, and it is important for us, as teachers. However, the focus – intentional or unconscious – on reducing the liberal arts to job skills, or on the moral merits of DEI initiatives, without looking at economic issues – is myopic and continues to reproduce waste and inhibit growth, channelling and reproducing antidemocratic logics. Perhaps this is one of the spoils of bureaucracy, as Bruce Wilshire (1990) expresses. We exist within a "system for organizing human activity so that persons become almost totally absorbed in the welfare of their particular module, and are only dimly aware of the role this plays in the whole, or the way in which the welfare of the whole affects the part. It is inorganic and desiccated connectedness" (p. 50). But, as "organisms who cannot escape" our surroundings (p. 11), we must reflect not only on what we commit to do in the classroom, but on *how* what we focus on is a byproduct of neoliberal logics that prevent growth.

What has been, need not always be. We support DEI commitments, and we support the breaking of boundaries between liberal arts and vocational training. Many of us – educators within universities –

[4] We can think again of that "engine of inequality"; higher education is less available to the poor, working class, and students of colour, due to rising tuition. As Absher (2021) states, "the Neoliberal University functions to sort people and reproduce existing inequalities" (p. 30). Both low-income students and students of colour are overrepresented among lower-ranked institutions (p. 30).

[5] Kotsko (2018, pp. 43–44) critiques Brown (2015) for framing her project in terms of the political–economic divide, in which the political realm is the realm of freedom – of our active citizenship – and the economic realm is one of utility, in which we are bound by necessity – the necessity to work, to toil, with no leisure to be free. We have already critiqued this from a Deweyan lens, and here we show that this divide will simply not do. Political commitments must also be economic ones. For another relevant critique of this divide in Brown's work, from a Marxist perspective, see also Annie J. McClanahan's "Becoming Non-Economic" (2017).

feel like the classroom is the only place in which we have control. But to truly achieve the goals of such efforts, we must have critical awareness about the environments in which we exist, as well as the will to alter these environments, which are, at this cultural moment, producers of waste in education. Perhaps making these changes will require material and teleological shifts,[6] both implicated in Dewey's own writings. By weaving together Philip Kitcher's and Christopher Newfield's suggestions, we might find a path through what seems an ever-toxic fog of neoliberalism. In *The Main Enterprise of the World* (2022), Kitcher draws from a Deweyan notion of ideals as "diagnostic tools, pointing to the problems in our current state and offering directions in which to amend it," suggesting that economics organize around our goal, rather than limiting our goals to the "fixed constraint" of economic habits (p. 324). One sees this demand more militantly applied by Newfield (2023) – the recent president of the Modern Language Association (MLA) – who argues that the humanities disciplines must stop trying to adapt to the apparently dwindling demand for our work and instead seek to *control* and *create* demand. In his view, the liberal arts funding-and-jobs crisis is driven partially by the widespread belief that humanities disciplines are not "dynamic research fields," a belief also reflected in (and encouraged by) the infinitesimal percentage of public and private higher-education research funding dedicated to the humanities (a little over one-tenth of one percent of the whole, by his estimate) (pp. 6, 8).

Kitcher (2022) offers up a vision that, like Newfield's, presses forth the need to recognize the import of the funding of the humanities. We must recognize the values placed on certain career types, including those without *social* value (those which exist only to display socioeconomic status and increase hierarchical distinctions) (pp. 330–333). That is, we must undergo a reorientation of values, for currently valued "prestigious" vocations are those which gain economic capital and produce economic inequality. Schools must recognize the social worth of occupations, and the positive impact we make on others' lives; "value" pertains to both individual fulfillment *and* contribution to the common good (pp. 330–331). The humanities are *valuable* and need increased funding *because* of their ability to add enrichment and meaning to one's life, and to serve the common good by addressing contemporary needs, such as "decarbonizing" or reducing "levels of inequality and precarity" (Newfield, 2023, p. 13). Such needs are distinct, Newfield contends, from the needs of Cold War and neoliberal capitalism, which have relied on the humanities to help facilitate "global military sovereignty (and the use of force at home via police and prisons), tech-based capital concentration, managerial democracy, and capitalist diversity" (p. 13).

While Newfield's suggestion revolves around harnessing the utility of the humanities in order to save them, and Kitcher's focuses on value including but beyond utility, both share in common a demand that the humanities must be socially and economically recognized for their contribution to the common good – and we, in the humanities, cannot passively wait for such attention. Thus, per Newfield, liberal arts professionals must develop a "national strategy" for analyzing and advocating for humanities research funding, a task that will require the formation of "a consortium" of humanities associations like the MLA and the American Philosophical Association; the disciplines will reform themselves to serve the aforementioned needs (Newfield, 2023, p. 17).

Whatever one thinks of these particular visions, it seems clear that we must reconstruct and reorganize our human activity beyond classroom activities, or even beyond the institutional structures we have critiqued here. This means truly confronting the consequences of Dewey's (1928/2008) observation that: "our whole educational system suffers from the divorce between the head and the hand, between work and books, between action and ideas, a divorce which is symbolized in this segregation of teachers from the rest of the workers who are the great mass of the community" (p. 275).[7]

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[6] In which the telos or guiding ideal is neither fixed nor antecedent to reality.

[7] For a relevant discussion of Deweyan liberalism's relationship with Marxian class struggle, see Livingston and Quish (2018).

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