Special Issue Introduction: What Is the Good University?

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As higher education continues to internationalize, and as the state continues to disinvest from the funding of post-compulsory institutions, the question of how best to understand the educational mission of colleges and universities has become contentious. The post-WW2 expansion of higher education was driven by the view that it could serve as both a valuable gateway to upward social mobility and as public good (Labaree, 2016; Trow, 2007). As the public costs of higher education have appeared to outpace its economic return, however, public intellectuals, scholars, and policy-makers have endeavored to disentangle the values and aims of higher education from the economic policies that drove its rapid growth. What has resulted is a growing list of goods proposed as candidate aims for universities: promoting economic justice, protecting basic liberties, cultivating civic virtues, and undoing cultural harms, to name but a few. But to what extent are these various (and sometimes conflicting) claims about the goods of universities and colleges justified?

One contribution of philosophy to the public debate over the goods of the university is to move us from rationalization to argumentation. Consider that political philosophers and philosophers of education have proffered a number of compelling and influential accounts of the political and epistemic goods of compulsory education. Such analysis has developed by taking a normative stance on what societies owes to all children in terms of their development. This stance has led to policy recommendations that greatly diverge from conventional assumptions about the values and aims of schooling and have presented a clearer picture of what education in a just and fair society ought to look like.

Without a parallel philosophical analysis of higher education, policy decisions risk undervaluing the place and importance of such education in a just society and a well-lived life. Take, as just one example, the increasingly fractious debate over freedom of expression in Canadian universities. Part of this debate is driven by the fact that Canadian jurisprudence is unclear about the extent to which, and ways in which, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms applies to universities. Provincial Supreme Courts have diverged on this issue, in part due to conflicting judgements about the university being part of government or about the particular activities undertaken by the university that could be plausibly seen as a legitimate aim of government (McKay-Panos, 2016). A better understanding of the values and aims of higher education—and the relevance of such values and aims for the responsibilities that such higher education institutions have to their students and the larger community—could go some way to help better inform such judgements.

Accordingly, the aim of this special issue is to draw on concepts and arguments from philosophy in order to more closely engage with questions centered on the goods that higher education ought to be promoting in political communities. Two contributions, one by Ben Kotzee and one by Nick Tanchuk,

Marc Kruse and Kevin McDonough, draw from the growing literature on epistemic justice in order to address the role of universities in advancing social justice. Kotzee assesses the extent to which, and ways in which, university policies aimed at justice can be justified on either socioeconomic or epistemic grounds. For Kotzee, a conception of the university that sees the production of epistemic goods as a priority does not entail a lack of concern for questions of justice; rather, the behavior of universities is bound by epistemic goals such as transmitting knowledge to future generations and the development of thinkers who can make epistemic contributions in the future. By fronting the epistemic goals of the university, he argues, we can identity pathways—such as disseminating research findings more fairly and admitting students on grounds of scholarly potential—through which higher education institutions can do more to advance justice and fairness than a focus on socioeconomic goods alone.

Tanchuk et al. address recent controversy over the introduction of course requirements in Indigenous studies (ICRs) at several Canadian universities. Some critics have argued that such requirements are illiberal, limiting freedom of inquiry for faculty and students. However, Tanchuk et al. counter that Canadian society actually has *liberal-democratic reasons* for introducing ICRs. Specifically, they show that educational institutions have a duty to promote knowledge of constitutional essentials and, given that there is a unique constitutional relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada, failure to promote such knowledge and understanding among Canadians risks perpetuating epistemic injustice against Indigenous peoples. This duty applies as much to universities as it does compulsory schools given that the former will produce many of the future elites (such as those working in the politics and law) that will engage in issues of central importance to Indigenous peoples.

Debates about the legitimacy of imposing course requirements on students raises broader questions about the legitimate authority of the state to intervene in the structure and governance of higher education more generally. In his contribution, Christopher Martin argues that anti-perfectionist or "rights-based" conceptions of political authority unduly restrict the state from exercising authority over post-compulsory education in order to secure valuable goods for citizens. He defends an alternative conception of educational authority, one grounded in Joseph Raz's "Service Conception," in order to argue that the liberal state has perfectionist reasons for intervening in the higher education market, especially when the market fails to provide an adequate range of educational options for citizens to be able to flourish in their free pursuit of a good life.

While higher education may have a role to play in promoting the wellbeing of citizens more generally, Dianne Gereluk focuses in her contribution on the importance of wellbeing within academic life. She points out that, while universities have largely embraced the language of flourishing and positive psychology, wellness policies and campus initiatives largely fail to draw from a philosophically-informed conception of wellbeing and, for this reason, risk devolving into "quick-fixes" and sloganeering that actually undermine wellness in the long run. Gereluk draws on Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach in order to identify, and proffer a justification for, several capabilities essential to wellbeing in the academy. These capabilities should inform not only university practices in particular, but how we think through the norms and values of academic life in general. While Gereluk emphasizes that a capabilities approach for the university may never be perfectly realized, its pursuit is a worthy one given that a healthy and stable academy will have real dividends for students and society.

While the contributions in this volume have mainly focused on higher education in Western nations and within the liberal democratic framework, Tristan McCowan's contribution traces out the rise of the modern "developmental university"—an institution whose role centers on supporting the stability and

prosperity of the political community within which it is situated, and which has taken on renewed importance in light of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. McCowan argues that we need to carefully think through the tensions between the aims of the developmental university and more traditional university aims. This, in part, because challenges for the future of sustainable development, such as income inequality and environmental decline, are coming home to roost in high-income and low-income countries alike. While it might be tempting to think of the developmental university as a clear path forward, McCowan urges caution in framing the university as an institution that can serve any social goal; rather, the pursuit of such goals by higher education institutions must be tempered with careful consideration of the impact of such pursuit for the epistemic goals to which it is most suited.

While the philosophical frameworks adopted by each paper differ in important respects, it's worth emphasizing that they all demonstrate the relevance of key concepts in the philosophy of education for contemporary debates over the values and aims of higher education. Authority, epistemic value, political justice, instrumental and intrinsic goods, human flourishing and autonomy; these are all concepts that have served to help philosophers think through educational problems in a broad sense and for basic education, and are fruitfully applied to the post-compulsory context, here. Therefore, these papers foreground common space for future work in the philosophy of higher education. I thank the authors for their excellent contributions, and the editorial team of *Philosophical Inquiry in Education* for their help and support along the way. I would also like to thank the issue's external reviewers for their thoughtful feedback.

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