

INTRINSIC HIGHER EDUCATION

AND THE THREAT OF THE EMPLOYABILITY MANTRA

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WHERE DID
WE ALL GO
WRONG?

OR DID WE?

Life for universities is “actually very comfortable. You bundle content, delivery, accreditation – you can get quite a nice monopoly rent”. Micro credentials can “get employers better signals of what people know and can do” –

Andreas Schleicher, OECD director for education and skills, 14 March 2023

In UK the Teaching Excellence Framework judges the quality of the intrinsic education function, cultural formation in knowledge, by ... **graduate salaries.**

‘Low value courses’ are vulnerable to enrolment reductions

“There are pressing signs that high levels of university attainment do not have only positive effects on societies and economies. Graduate underemployment overqualification, mismatches, and substitution effects are examples ... Most promising seems to be the rapidly expanding interest on short programs and non-traditional certifications such as micro credentials” –

Dirk Van Damme, former head of OECD CERI, International Higher Education, April 2023

In Australia the government wants ‘job ready graduates’ now, and just **loves micro credentials ...**

IS EMPLOYABILITY ALL THAT HIGHER EDUCATION DOES?

CAN IT BE DIVIDED INTO PIECES AND DISTRIBUTED A BIT AT A TIME?

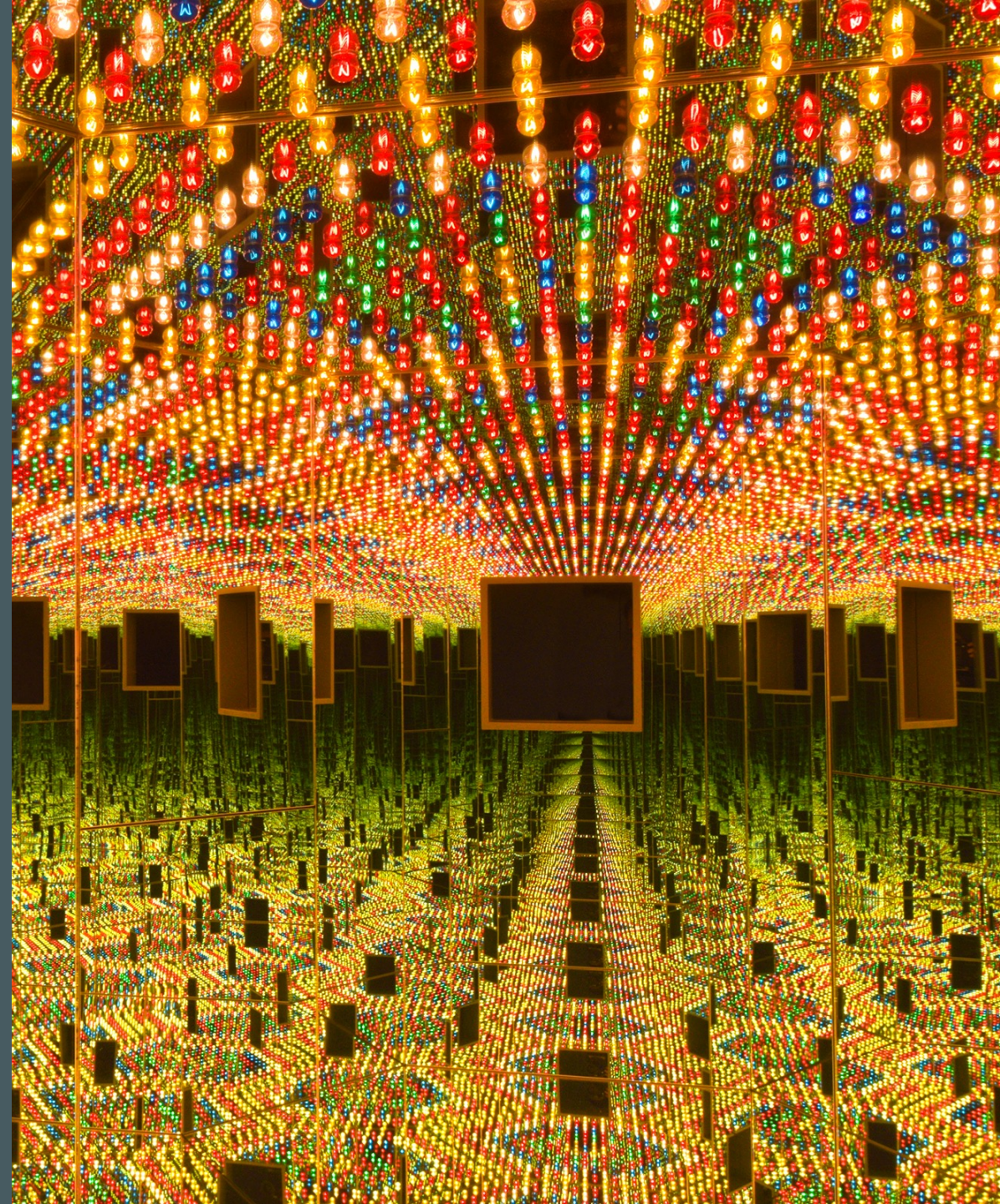
- Preparation for life via cultural self-formation: immersion in complex knowledges and experiences
- Socialisation as an active citizen, learning about professions and occupations, intellectual and relational insights and practices that contribute to work
- Contributions of institutions, faculty, graduates to economic life, cities and regions, social tolerance, global understanding, law and social stability, public health and welfare, policy and regulation, culture, etc



NO ONE SINGLE VALUE
PROPOSITION CAN
CAPTURE THE COMPLEXITY
OF WHAT HIGHER
EDUCATION DOES FOR
PEOPLE AND SOCIETY

Reducing the multiple outcomes of higher education to a single purpose or single measure of value ('employability', salary) blocks out most of what's actually there

A single value proposition can only be *ideological* and means that most students would receive a paper-thin education



TODAY'S WEBINAR

- I. Intrinsic and extrinsic purposes of higher education *[no, it can't all be done by AI]*
- II. Biesta's three functions of education
- III. Intrinsic function: subjectification
- IV. Extrinsic function 1: social status
- V. Extrinsic function 2: preparation for work
- VI. Cultural formation or 'job ready graduates'?



I. INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC PURPOSES OF HIGHER EDUCATION



THE INNER CORE ACTIVITY AND THE OUTER ROLES

- The **intrinsic purposes** are the classical inner core of higher education, where value is judged on academic grounds
 - education of students
 - transmission, creation, dissemination of knowledge
- The **extrinsic purposes** are the external social roles of higher education, carried out in partnership with other social agents, who share judgments about value
 - this includes the allocation of social **status** via higher education, and the preparation of students in **work**, the professions and occupations

Rene Magritte, *The human condition*, 1935



Magritte

THERE HAVE BEEN DIVERSE FORMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN HISTORY

- China's Imperial academies, training scholars in statecraft, began in Western Zhou (1046-771 BCE)
- The great scholarly monasteries of Northern India
- Library and Mouseion at Alexandria, 270 BCE
- The golden age of Islamic scholarship, 7th-13th CE
- Medieval European universities, Bologna 1088 CE
- Von Humboldt's teaching/research university in Berlin 1809 CE, followed by the comprehensive US science university that has spread everywhere

University of Al-Qarawiyyin (Fez, Morocco) founded 859 CE



**BUT *EVERY* FORM OF HIGHER
EDUCATION HAS HAD **TWO**
CORE INTRINSIC PURPOSES,
CONTINUING TO THE PRESENT
THEY ARE ESSENTIALLY CULTURAL**

- The educational formation of students as persons and social agents
- The reproduction (and also often the creation) of knowledge through scholarship and inquiry



QUALIFICATION, SOCIALISATION, SUBJECTIFICATION

Biesta, G. (2009). Good education in an age of measurement: On the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21: 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-008-9064-9>

- **Qualification:** providing the knowledge, skills understanding, dispositions and judgements that enable students/graduates to ‘do something’
- **Socialisation:** ‘The many ways in which, through education, we become members of and part of particular social, cultural and political “orders”’
- **Subjectification:** The ‘individuating’ effects of education, whereby students become autonomous and self-realising subjects



THE TWO PURPOSES AND THREE FUNCTIONS TOGETHER

Biesta (2009) function (understood as student learning)	Intrinsic purposes: (a) teaching and learning; and (b) knowledge creation, transmission and dissemination	Extrinsic purposes: Shared by higher education and social partners, e.g. law curriculum and certification; applied research
Qualification: learning to do things	SECONDARY The intrinsic core is foundational to extrinsic qualification	PRIMARY Qualification is largely realised in relations with social partners
Socialisation: ordering students in terms of external norms and values	PRIMARY Teaching, knowledges contribute to socialisation	SECONDARY Relations with social partners also contribute to socialisation
Subjectification: becoming an autonomous self-realising person	PRIMARY Subjectification in knowledge-intensive learning and sociability	MINOR Social partners want regulated not self-determining autonomy

THE TWO PURPOSES AND THREE FUNCTIONS (2)

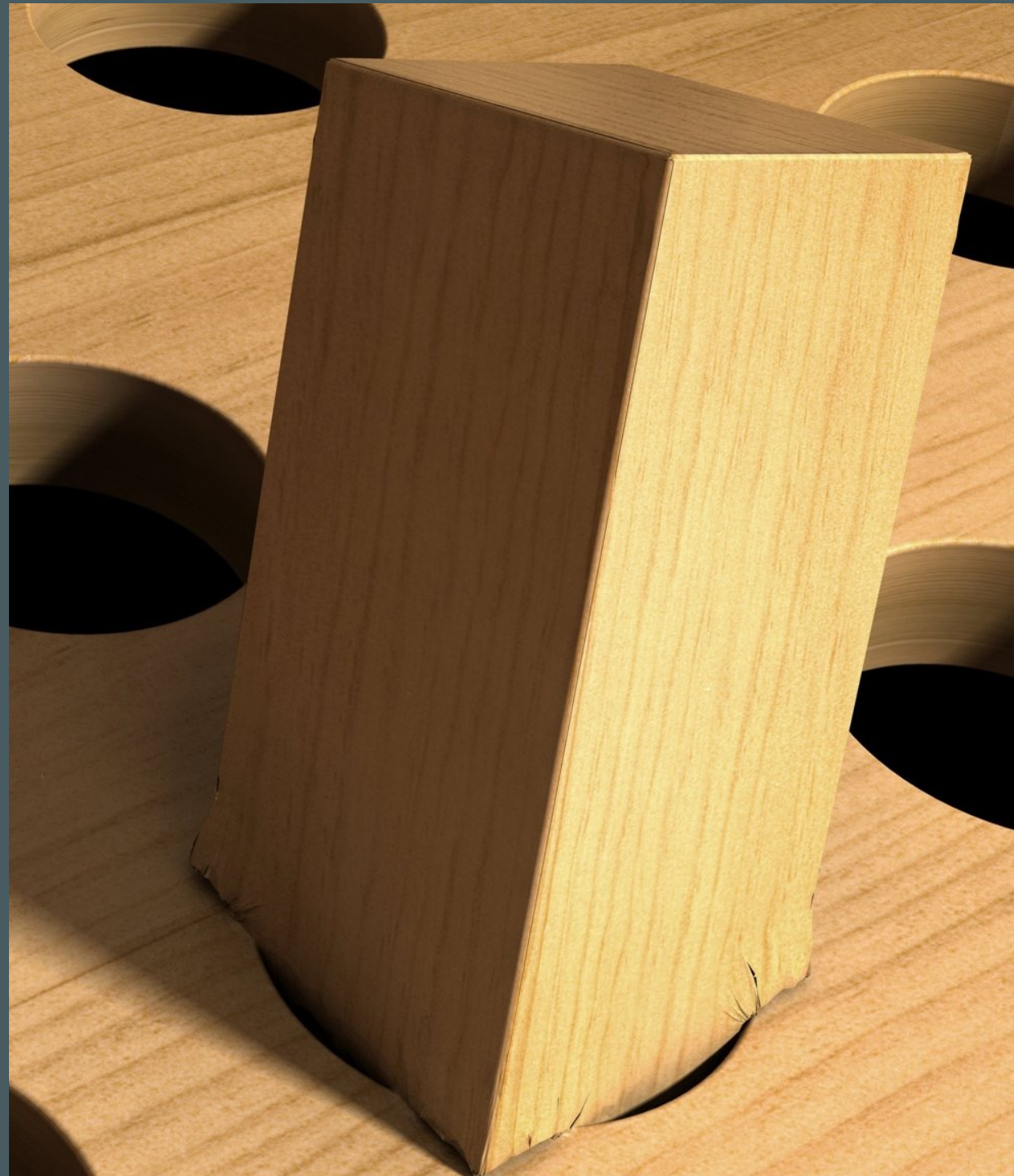
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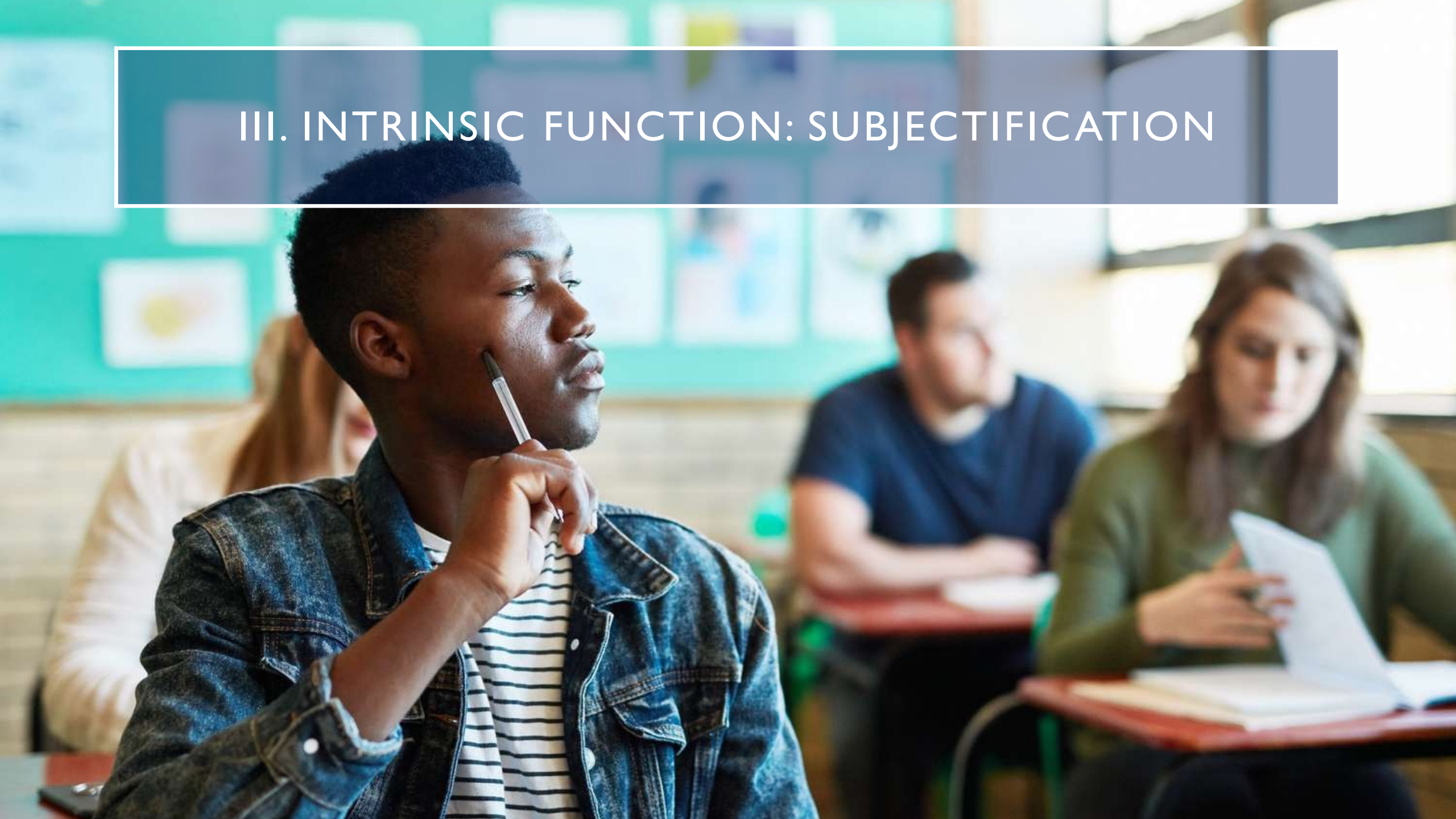
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WHEN *CULTURAL* PROCESSES
ARE REMADE AS SOLELY
ECONOMIC TRAINING,
SUBJECTIFICATION AND
SOCIALISATION ARE
MARGINALISED

When policy defines the purposes of higher education in terms of economic value, this pushes the intrinsic educational activities to conform – a square pegs in round holes situation that hides the non-economic functions of higher education.



III. INTRINSIC FUNCTION: SUBJECTIFICATION



SUBJECTIFICATION AS SELF-FORMATION OFFERS MORE TO STUDENTS

Higher education enables people to transform themselves through the work of the self on the self, immersed in knowledge. Higher education as intrinsic self-formation offers students much more than higher education as extrinsic consumption

Marginson, S. (2023). Higher education as student self-formation. In S. Marginson, B. Cantwell, D. Platonova and A. Smolentseva, *Assessing the contributions of higher education*. Edward Elgar. Open Access at: [https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollbook-
oa/book/9781035307173/9781035307173.xml](https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollbook-oa/book/9781035307173/9781035307173.xml)



‘Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself, and creating things’

– Bob Dylan, Nobel Prize for Literature, 2016

STUDENT SELF-MAKING GROUNDED IN REFLEXIVE AGENCY

- At best higher education is a reflexive process of self-formation that establishes, or deepens, deliberate self-making grounded in self-aware agency. Self-formation goes on being empowering throughout life
- Higher education students are self-realising adults not children. Only learners can do the actual learning/ becoming. The teacher is not an agent of other-formation but the gateway to knowledge and skills
- Essential elements of higher education as self-formation are the autonomy of the learner, reflexive agency, the will to learn, and immersion in knowledge and in social and collective relations outside class



IV. EXTRINSIC FUNCTION I: SOCIAL STATUS



HIGHER EDUCATION HAS SURVIVED AND EXPANDED THROUGHOUT THE 935 YEAR HISTORY OF THE EURO- AMERICAN UNIVERSITY BECAUSE ...

- It produces graduates who become employable human capital for the knowledge economy?
- Its research generates innovations in industry which lift global economic competitiveness?
- It creates a more equal society?
- None of the above??



THE UNIVERSITY - WHICH FORMED PEOPLE THROUGH IMMERSION IN KNOWLEDGE -

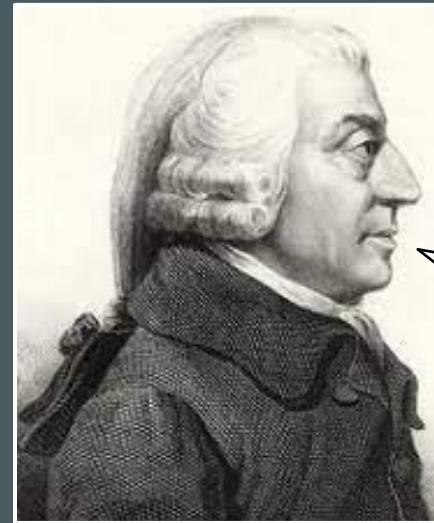
- Evolved the extrinsic function of producing and allocating social opportunity and status,
- and of sorting and differentiating populations,
- and hence became the common and increasingly universal focus of family and student aspirations all over the world

Cantwell, B., Marginson S. & Smolentseva, A. (eds.).(2018). *High participation systems of higher education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press



THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN DESIRE FOR SOCIAL BETTERMENT THROUGH STATUS AND MATERIAL IMPROVEMENT

- Social betterment includes both social standing and material improvement
- Of these status is *the* driver. Students and families *want* higher education to augment earnings, but they *know* it will lift individual status above that of those who do not enter higher education
- Hence desires for higher education have universalised even though average graduate earnings have fallen



'The desire of bettering our condition ... comes with us from the womb and never leaves us till we go into the grave'

~ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776/ 1979), p. 441

STATUS HOLDS HIGHER EDUCATION TOGETHER IN SEVERAL WAYS

- Higher education's role in producing and distributing individual status has become symbiotically joined to cultural formation within teaching/research institutions
- The universities that engineer and calibrate individual status, on a differentiating basis, pursue a second form of status – institutional status. The institutional hierarchy regulates the differential distribution of status to persons
- There is also an exchange of status between selective institutions and high scoring students



MOST BASICALLY HIGHER EDUCATION IS
EDUCATION + KNOWLEDGE = SOCIAL STATUS



+



HIGHER EDUCATION IS BETTER AT SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION THAN SOCIAL EQUITY

- Higher education is good at creating and allocating social status via cultural formation in knowledge
- BUT it is less good at social inclusion
- And poor at social equalisation
- **These factors are undermining higher education's social and political base**

Marginson, S. (2018). Equity. In B. Cantwell, S. Marginson and A. Smolentseva (eds.), *High participation systems of higher education* (pp. 151-184). Oxford: Oxford University Press



V. EXTRINSIC PURPOSE 2: VOCATIONAL PREPARATION



HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORK: DIFFERENT WORLDS, CHALLENGING TRANSITION

- Many students want personal development, *and* immersion in disciplinary knowledge, *and* want to be employable. Multiple purposes
- While for many higher education and work co-exist, these intrinsic and extrinsic domains are *heterogeneous*. Agentic positioning, objectives, values, knowledges and skills, and the required behaviours, are all different
- Graduate transition to work is often challenging and protracted. There's no 'quick fix'

Marginson, S. (2019). Limitations of human capital theory. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44 (2), pp. 287-301. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1359823>



THE INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC FUNCTIONS ARE OUT OF SYNCH

- the **intrinsic educational function** of higher education in culturally preparing students as autonomous persons, via immersion in knowledges, differs radically from the
- **extrinsic policy expectations** that higher education creates employable graduates who augment productivity and growth

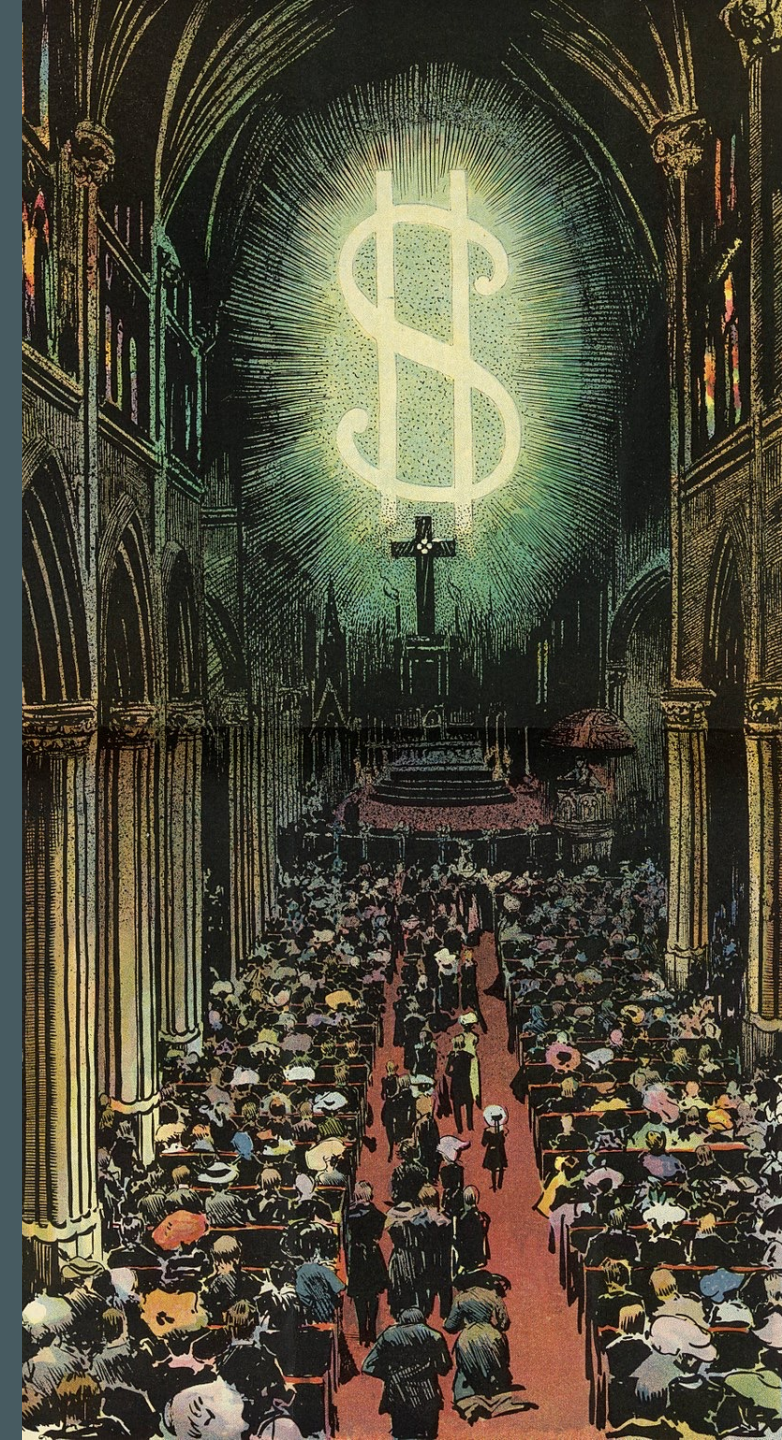




VI. CULTURAL FORMATION OR 'JOB READY GRADUATES'?

POLICY NOW WANTS TO INSTALL THE EXTRINSIC HUMAN CAPITAL IMAGINARY *INSIDE THE EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE*

- Higher education is between school and work. It is more like school. Now policy wants it to be like work, e.g. the UK and Australia are now systematically making employability the master purpose of higher education.
- Higher education tries to tick all the boxes. But economic policy does not like multiplicity. In policy and public debate 'employability' is the new universal, the alleged goal of every higher education programme.
- Yet higher education is immersion in knowledge, not work, and **higher education cannot create jobs**



'EMPLOYABILITY' IS OSTENSIBLY DESIGNED FOR STUDENTS BUT IS PROFOUNDLY DETRIMENTAL

- When employability is made the universal measure of value, so educational/cultural/personal formation via learning scarcely exists, this creates dissonance between education and work with perverse effects
- Instead of students being supported as self-forming autonomous learners, they are reduced to satisfied or unsatisfied consumers choosing between brands



ECONOMIC POLICY AND HIGHER EDUCATION AT CROSS PURPOSES

- If government set out to design higher education for employable graduates it would not use cultural formation, academic knowledge and the teaching/research nexus!
- But pushing the existing system into the imaginary human capital model is never going to work. Higher education is what it is. Like schooling it is an extended cultural process of cultural-personal formation



AN EXISTENTIAL CRISIS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

- The core intrinsic purposes are education/research/knowledge. Subjectification as self-formation is more attractive to students than consumerism
- The policy primacy of extrinsic employability and innovation, mediated by economic markets, block student self-formation and knowledge from view and create unachievable expectations
- Will higher education sustain its purposes? Or will future higher education focus only on employability and innovation, plus status and social stratification?

Brad Holland

