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Higher Education's Challenges: A Dialectical Analysis

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Abstract: Higher education in the United States faces many challenges and many criticisms today. Some of the criticisms are politically based, some concentrate on finances, others attack a variety of elements of factors. A potential means of analysis of the predicament of higher education is that of Marxist dialectics. Oppositions can be examined as they are manifest within the organizations, and the causes of the oppositions can be described. This study applies the dialectical method to provide a diagnosis of some of the essential problems faced at this time. No prognosis or remedy is presented here; the first step is the description of the problems.

Key words: Marx, Karl, dialectical materialism, higher education, political economy

1. Introduction

Critiques of higher education abound. Some have a political basis (from practically all ideological positions); some are grounded in finances (focusing, for example, on tuition rates and mounting student debt); some question curricula and pedagogy. The merits and demerits of the works are, of course, debatable and many people will agree with any one of the critiques. The present examination takes a somewhat different tack, suggesting that a dialectical analysis, informed to a substantial extent by Marx, provides the most fruitful starting point for serious study of the current state of higher education and potential directions for its future. The study here is diagnostic; it does not include suggestions for remedying the challenges that are presented or ways to resolve the dialectic. In other words, this presentation is analytic in form and substance.

2. A Brief Review

The number and scope of works addressing higher education in the United States today are far too numerous to mention in detail here. That said, a look at some contemporary items is necessary to set the stage for what is to follow. A place to begin is the politically based examinations of the present state of higher education. While there will be apparent differences among works, there will be some similarities that can be identified. Since there has to be a beginning, one place to start is the recent book by William Bennett (with David Wilezol). A sizable portion of the book constitutes criticism of the cost of higher education, with special attention paid to tuition rates and student debt. There is, however, an extension of that discussion to critique of the purposes of universities: "the reality is that the modern university has proven in many cases indifferent to cultivating the minds and souls of its students" (Bennett, 2013, p. 128). That is indeed a damning indictment, but this claim, like many in the book, is offered without anything other than occasional anecdotal evidence. There could well be instances, perhaps not

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institution-wide, where commitment to learning and moral development could be found wanting. Is that a rule, or an exception, in higher education today? Bennett's opinion is clearly on the side of this being widespread, but the kind of analysis that would be required to demonstrate a clear answer is quite likely impossible.

A reason for the dearth of development, according to Bennett, is the lack of teaching by tenured faculty members. He (2013) writes, "Yet many, if not most, tenured professors spend their time engaged in their research, with teaching considered a chore" (p. 137). There can probably be found faculty who behave in just such a way, and who find teaching a distasteful necessity at best. There can also be found many tenured faculty members who seek teaching opportunities and who greatly enjoy fruitful and meaningful interactions with students. That is, for every story of a person who avoids teaching, there may be many counterpoints. Bennett (2013) wonders why more faculty members are not productive teachers. That point will form a central component of the investigation that will follow this review of literature. To provide a hint, research universities are judged, not merely by prestige and esteem, but by the material measure of the amount of external funding attracted by faculty. If an individual wants to earn tenure at such an institution, that person will be required to seek research funding from a variety of sources, most notably the US federal government. More will be said about this later. The principal takeaway here is that data on the numbers of classes offered or students taught by tenured faculty is not a causal link, in every instance, from a desire to avoid teaching; it is institutionally bound.

Bennett, in the above example, is guilty of a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* error. The teaching loads do not equate to discernible desire to teach. This is not the only occurrence of the error. He (2013) cites the Princeton student newspaper, *The Daily Princetonian*, as noting that 157 Princeton faculty and staff donated money to the 2012 election campaigns, with only two giving to the Romney effort (p. 154). From this datum he (2013) concludes that faculty members imbue their classrooms with political bias, to the detriment of the development of students' critical thinking skills and their academic performance (p. 155). The conclusion suggests that faculty tend to be Left-leaning and that voices from the Right are suppressed. The phenomenon may hold true in some instances, but the claim that universities are Leftist is not warranted. Again, Bennett makes the logical error by presuming one's contributions to one campaign over another necessarily lead to pedagogical and assessment bias. The phenomenon undoubtedly occurs at times, but the manifestation could possibly be a Right-leaning bias. What a reader is left with is a set of claims, some which may have some validity, but unsupported by unprejudiced analysis and by sound evidence. It may be telling that, as Fareed Zakaria (2015) reports, "'How many PhDs in philosophy do I need to subsidize?' the radio show host William Bennett asked North Carolina's Patrick McCrory, a sentiment with which McCrory enthusiastically agreed. (Ironically, Bennett himself has a PhD in philosophy, which appears to have trained him well for his multiple careers in government, media, nonprofits, and the private sector)" (p. 19).

Charles Murray addresses the extent of education in another recently published book. Murray pays special attention to higher education in several sections of the book. One of his (2008) claims is that a small percentage of high-school graduates should attend four-year-colleges, primarily because few graduates have the intellectual apparatus to succeed (p. 68). He (2008) offers his own assessment of a hypothetical occurrence:

> Should all of those who have the academic ability to absorb a college-level liberal education get one? If our [sic] young woman is at the 80th percentile of linguistic ability, should she be pushed to do so? She has enough intellectual capacity, if she puts her mind to it and works exceptionally hard.
>
> The answer is no. If she wants to, fine. But she probably won't, and there's no way to force her (p. 83).

Murray is presumptuous; he could have as easily said "yes", and stated that the individual in the hypothetical *would* want to put forth the effort in order to reap the intellectual and social rewards. In short, there may be reasons to attend a four-year institution in order to become a fully participating member of a complex social and political community. One can question Murray's premise.

Murray also expresses skepticism about the financial benefits of a four-year college degree. However, evidence suggests his skepticism is misplaced. David Leonhardt (2014) reports that the bachelor's graduate earned 98% in 2013 more than someone without the degree; that figure was up from 89% per hour in 2008. Leonhardt suggests that the time has already arrived for people to have 15-17 years of formal education to be able to perform (and live) in a technologically complex society. He quotes David Autor as saying, "We have too few college graduates. . . . We also have too few people who are prepared for college." Murray actually agrees on the latter point and urges reform at the elementary-school level. The purpose of including Murray here is to demonstrate some specific opinions held by individuals in one locus of the political spectrum.

There are, of course, alternative political conceptions of higher education, some of which are quite critical of the present atmosphere and practice. Henry Giroux, for example, has written several works that decry the economic positioning of higher education, concentrating principally on neoliberal politics and their effect on teaching, learning, and inquiry. In a recent work (2014) he writes, "Four decades of neoliberal policies have resulted in an economic Darwinism that promotes privatization, commodification, free trade, and deregulation" (p. 1). Others have stated somewhat similar criticisms over the past several years, but Giroux's is a rather strident voice in the denouncement of the current political state of the academy. He (2014) states, "Critical learning has been replaced with mastering test-taking, memorizing facts, and learning how *not* to question knowledge or authority" (p. 6). This claim sounds hyperbolic, but it echoes Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) description of the postmodern condition in education:

> We may thus expect a thorough exteriorization of knowledge with respect to the "knower", at whatever point he or she may occupy in the knowledge process. The old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is in dissociable from the training *(Bildung)* of minds, or even of individuals, is becoming obsolete and will become ever moreso. The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume — that is, the form of value (p. 4).

Giroux is not alone in his critique of the force of neoliberalism in higher education. Blacker (2013) expresses a similar distrust: "neoliberalism's endgame is not just another problem for clever humanity to figure out and from which to move on. . . . [I]t represents an *existential* threat, not a threat against specific practices or even our particular way of life as a whole. It is a threat against life itself" [emphasis in original] (p. 18). Blacker (2013) argues against a particular brand of utilitarianism where the ability to earn money takes precedence over learning that values critical perception and the commitment to exercise of a rationality that weighs claims against evidence. He (2013) does fall prey to some of the hyperbole that Giroux is guilty of: "I call this wrenching de-leveraging process 'the falling rate of learning'" (p. 62). While disagreeing on cause and outcome, Giroux and Blacker are not entirely unique from Bennett and Murray. In other words, critics of higher education recognize that something is not working, even as they disagree precisely on what and where the dilemmas are.

One of the things that observers focus on is the cost of attending a college or university. At this point in time student debt far exceeds $1 billion. A number of writers state that this magnitude of debt will take years for each

student to pay down. A portion, but by no means the entirety, of the debt is accounted for by the high cost of professional schools such as law and medicine. Those debts may occupy the majority of an individual's career to pay off. Goldie Blumenstyk (2015) relates a specific example of cost:

> As this author herself observed in reporting about the University of Kansas, a major flagship university where the student body remained the same size from 1988 to 2008 but spending increased threefold, the expansion of student services, the increasing sophistication of sponsored research, and even the growing use of information technology has required the hiring of nonacademic personnel (p. 91).

The last point is borne out by a data set presented by Benjamin Ginsberg (2011). From 1975 to 2005 the category of "other professionals" on campuses grew by 240%, while the size of faculties during the time period increased by 51%. Ginsberg (2011) also notes that the numbers of administrators increased by 85% (p. 25). He (2011) further points out that the increase in students over the same period was 56%, or roughly the same ratio as the increase in faculty. It should be made clear that these are aggregate numbers; data for individual institutions may exhibit other trends.

3. Some Data

The foregoing section offered some figures, but a bit more on the numbers related to higher education may be useful. The *Digest of Education Statistics*, published by the US Department of Education, is a principal source for data of all types. While Ginsberg cites increases in several employee categories, a closer look at more recent years may paint a clearer picture. For example, from 2001 to 2011 the number of executive/administrative/and managerial personnel at public and private four-year institutions increased by 47.7%. During that time period the number of students enrolled at four-year institutions increased 39.2%. The *Digest* also indicates that the percentage of faculty in 1995 who were full-time was 59.1; by 2011 the percentage was 50.0. From 2001 to 2011 the number of full-time faculty increased by 23.3% (a figure that did not keep pace with the increase in students).

Additional data can be presented for comparison from the University of Missouri flagship campus in Columbia. From 2005 to 2014 the student population rose by a rate of 26.6%. The numbers of executive/administrative/managerial personnel saw a 22.8% increase. The number of tenured and tenure-track faculty increased by only twenty-two, or 1.8%. Pertinent to the discussion which will follow, the rise in non-tenure-track faculty for the time period was 61.3%. There may be a tendency, particularly given some of the speculation presented above, that office administrators and support personnel may have increased as well, but the figure actually fell by 13.6%. It is true that numbers cannot be used alone as a means to develop either analyses or policies, but data can provide support for other types of evidence and should not be ignored. The foregoing data will be important components of the further dialectical investigation.

4. Dialectic

Dialectic, for Marxis a method and a way to organize and present findings of inquiry (Ollman, 1971, p. 62).

> In a dialectic we know in a general way where we want to go conceptually, but instead of simply positing concepts, we try to let their necessary inner connections emerge as a logical unfolding. For example, the class relation emerges necessarily from the basic opposition between value and use-value when it becomes clear that self-valorizing value requires the exploitation of labour [sic] (Albritton, 2007, p. 88).

A principal purpose of dialectical examination is the analysis of phenomena which are in opposition (and sometimes in contradiction) to one another. Dialectic has a long history, dating back to the Greeks, but Karl Marx's exposition will be of particular application here. Moreover, though, dialectic has a number of historical forms, including good and evil, male and female, Right and Left, etc. (see Jameson, 2009, p. 18). Marx's version is one in this historical formation, but it has characteristics that will be especially fruitful in investigating the present state of higher education. Also following Jameson (2009), the simplistic pseudo-Hegelian structure of thesis-antithesis-synthesis is actively rejected here. Another way to state the purpose of dialectic comes from Roy Bhaskar (1993): "dialectic has come to signify any more or less intricate process of conceptual or social (and sometimes even natural) conflict, interconnection, and change, in which the generation, interpenetration and clash of oppositions, leading to their transcendence in a fuller or more adequate mode of thought or form of life (being), plays a key role" (p. 3). Bhaskar's description is a very useful one for the investigation here. It also incorporates Marx's own admonition, "all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided" (Marx K., 1993).

Dialectic may be couched in terms of an opposition (as is indicated above), but it is more productively conceived as an ontological gap rather than as dualistic (Jameson, 2009, p. 23). The opposition, then, is at the level of existential Being, rather than as merely between two objects or ideas that may be resolved through a rather straightforward creation of a middle ground. The opposing problems are active, not static; they may be seen as conflicting "centers" of Being that may not even be fully realized as problems because of a dominant conceptualization. Albritton (2007) posits a set of statements about biological organizations, the individual elements of which set can be in opposition. In analyzing the hypothetical set, he (2007) concludes, "because of capital's self-reifying ontology, I would argue that they all hold for theorizing capital's inner logic" (p. 87). His example illustrates the challenges presented for a logical investigation of dialectically opposed ideas; capital's internal logic seems to be able to subsume the opposition into its own Being. That core ontological challenge is the one that must, first, be acknowledged and, then, problematized so as to negate the sole propriety of the internal logic. Henri Lefebvre (2009) recognized the challenge and noted that thought has its reality, just as do physical objects (p. 26).

The ontological examination, for Marx, is a materialist one; it is based in empirical evidence that illuminates the oppositions which are manifest in certain sets of phenomena. This method does present some challenges in the social sciences, since the empirical evidence is what, usually, is apparent. That may not readily give rise to motivations, or "causes". The researcher should follow Marx in his insistence that appearances are, in fact, real. Moreover, the recurrence or repeated manifestations of evidence lend credence to the reality of the appearances; the likelihood that appearances will be accidental becomes lower. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1973) explicates the necessity that accompanies the Marxist dialectical method:

> Historical materialism is not the reduction of history to one of its sectors. It states a kinship between the person and the exterior, between the subject and the object, which is at the bottom of the alienation of the subject in the object and, if the movement is reversed, will be the basis for the reintegration of the world with man.
>
> Marx's innovation is that he takes this fact as fundamental, whereas, for Hegel, alienation is still an operation of the spirit on itself and thus is already overcome when it manifests itself (p. 33).

Marx (1976) himself makes the concepts clear in his examination of commodities when he observes that the

quantitative determination of value is something very different from the quality of value (p. 164). He further clarifies by explaining that the material existence of the substances that go to make up commodities are transformed when the commodity is produced (or realized). The transformation transcends the use-value of the commodity. Commodities are fetishized by the social relations that entail production; the social aspect of the labor process and product contribute to the fetishism. The materials of production become, through labor, social. As Marx (1976) writes, "It is only by being exchanged that the products of labour [sic] acquire a socially uniform objectivity as values, which is distinct from their sensuously varied objectivity as articles of utility" (p. 166). This first stage of transformation is essential to Marx's analysis of practice, of the workings of a capitalistic structure. The ultimate phase is the alteration of surplus value into capital, signifying growth in material accumulation. In the extreme, which does occur (as we will see), labor becomes a mechanism of capital, if it is not actually transformed into capital for those in control. Marx (1988) says, "The demand for men [sic] necessarily governs the production of men, as of every other commodity" (p. 20). The transformation is a social one, and it affects the laborers themselves. Commentators from Georg Lukács to Louis Althusser to Merleau-Ponty agree that Marx's contribution to the understanding of capitalism is his explication of the structural transformations of material objects to commodities, to fetishized social relations, and then the creation of surplus value which can be turned into capital. David Harvey (2010) explicates the predicament: "[Marx has an] intention to reinvent the dialectical method to take account of the unfolding and dynamic relations between elements within a capitalist system. . . . He doesn't simply talk about labor; he talks about the labor *process*. Capital is not a thing, but rather a process that exists only in *motion*" [emphasis in original] (pp. 11-12). Higher education is in the midst of the dialectical materialism that Marx describes.

As a prelude to analysis, a few additional points are necessary prior to a close look at higher education. For one thing, the words of Roy Bhaskar (1993) are important: "Change cannot be analyzed in terms of difference because it presupposes the idea of a continuing thing in a tensed process" (p. 45). Hence the use of the word "transformation" has been used thus far. The processes of higher education have not simply undergone "differences" over time; the tendencies and the practices have been altered by complex forces that are external and internal.

5. Higher Education

One way to characterize the state of higher education at this point in time is that institutions are totalized structures. Bhaskar (1993) reminds us that there can be good totalities (which tend to be open) and bad totalities (which are closed) (p. 25). Universities are, for the most part, closed. This manifestation typifies one of the most challenging problems of higher education; there is a systemic opposition to Hegelian idealism and, while dynamic in some aspects of commodification, there is a systemic stasis of capital control. The control takes the form of Marx's (1988) very succinct description, "Capital is stored-up labor" (p. 36). Universities have undergone change over the last several decades that mirror some societal alterations. The idea of a commodity has broadened to include subjects as well as objects; no longer are only things commodified. Ollman's (1971) words apply here: "If the dialectic as inquiry is the search for internal relations within and between abstracted units, the dialectic as exposition is Marx's means of expounding these relations to his readers" (p. 66).

In universities there are, of course, appearances; to those outside the academy it may well seem that there has been little change over the past number of years (perhaps for the fact that many institutions have grown larger and

more extensive in their programmatic offerings). This perception accentuates the reality that change is not a linear passage of time, but constitutes difference that affects the essence of the universities, and size is one of the differences. It is true that many universities have grown in certain ways, but increase in student population (while the most obvious outward change) tells only one component of the story. The data presented above relating to the University of Missouri can be used as a source to examine the difference between appearance and essence. The student population has indeed increased dramatically in recent years. That signifies, not merely more people on the campus, but a need for instructional capacity and a potential influence on the policy related to the education of undergraduates. Other data indicate how policies may be taking shape. The numbers of tenured and tenure-track faculty have not increased, but the number of non-tenure-track faculty has soared. The essence that can be gleaned is that undergraduate students do not require instruction from full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty, that a separate labor force is employed for the purpose of teaching undergraduates. That labor force may be full-time and the individuals may receive certain benefits (including health care), but their appointments are tenuous; at best they receive three-year contracts. In some instances the individuals may be working from semester to semester. That labor has a particular value to the university, and one element of the value is the flexible terms of the faculty. Should the enrollment decline, non-tenure-track faculty positions might be eliminated.

The question arises about the tenured and tenure-track faculty. Since the University of Missouri is a research university it may be expected that greater emphasis is being placed on the research enterprise. A primary measure of research success is the attraction of external funding, especially from the federal government. However, data paint a certain picture; in 2010 the institution received about $117 million in federal support, but in 2014 the figure was about $95 million (a 24.5% decline)[1]. The consciousness of the university centers on research university status, but the construction tells a different story. The consciousness and public statements from the university tend to express an ideal regarding research, but the data may be more illustrative of reality.

The University system details the means and criteria of program audits, which also present a representation of consciousness; whether that meshes with praxis is an open question:

The Program Audit committee should examine, but is not limited to, the following criteria during an audit of an academic unit:

(1) Quality of faculty and students;

(2) Outcomes of instruction, research, and outreach activities;

(3) Student demand and state need for the affected programs;

(4) Centrality to the mission of the campus and the University of Missouri;

(5) Comparative advantages or uniqueness of the program;

(6) The adequacy of resources to support the program and other financial considerations[2].

In the statement and putative assessment, instruction, research, and outreach are equal. The research university status may suggest that research is primary, but student demand is also a key criterion. What is said and what is practiced appear to be at odds here; it is in practice that conclusions may be reached.

The University of Missouri is used only as one example of the dialectic to be analyzed. The oppositions are several and are represented by instruction, research, administration, and labor (at the least). It is important to remember that Marx's capitalist system is "the outcome of specific historical factors, subject to historical

[1] http://research.missouri.edu/about/files/ORAR_14.pdf.

[2] http://www.umsystem.edu/ums/rules/collected_rules/administration/ch20/20.035_program_assessment_and_audit.

metamorphoses and constantly passing through distinct but interconnected cycles of production, circulation, sales, and reinvestment" (Dupré, 1977, p. 653). The outcomes can be explicated with regard to higher education. There has been a change in, for example, state appropriations to public higher education, with a steady decline being manifest in many instances for at least fifteen years. The historical change, once again, is not merely a linear trend, but a substantive difference in support and policy. The alteration has caused material differences in the actions (the praxis) of higher education institutions. One change has been the increase in tuition and fees charged to students. Again, this represents a policy shift in the attraction of resources by universities. A result has been the need for students to assume debt in order to attend the institutions (as is noted above, that student debt now exceeds $1 billion. The public character of public universities has shifted to a more private one, with "sales" in the form of tuition and fees replacing public funding.

"Fees" has become a problematic revenue category for analysis. To use the University of Missouri once again as an example, a supplemental fee (in addition to tuition and other instructional fees) of $40.50 per credit hour is charged to every student in the College of Education. Almost all students on campus are assessed some kind of supplemental fee[3]. While tuition increases are limited by State of Missouri statute, the supplemental fees constitute a method to increase "sales". Students, then, constitute a social source of capital for universities (although not the sole source). Students, particularly graduate students, also form a source of labor. Graduate students can be teaching and/or research assistants, and their purposes are, to a considerable extent generators of value. The value generated can seem fairly straightforward when students are teaching assistants. At the University of Missouri the tuition (exclusive of supplemental fees) for a full-time undergraduate student is approximately $1,100 per course. A teaching assistant with about 100 students per academic year (twenty-five students per course in two courses per semester) generates roughly $110,000 per year. If the graduate assistant earns, say, $18,000 per year, plus a tuition waiver, will generate around $80,000 per year in surplus value. Obviously, this labor is part of a value-and-exchange system. That graduate assistant is also, lest we forget, a student. In states where there may be formula funding, that graduate student generates some state support as well. It should be noted that the above constitute hypothetical examples; data may well vary from university to university.

This set of information points to an opposition relating to many graduate students who teach, or whose tuition, fees, and stipends are paid by external funding, such as grants. The opposition manifests itself as, on the one hand, students whose purpose is learning and, on the other hand, generators of value. The dialectic arises when there is conflict between the two roles. From the university's point of view, having student teachers and researchers is of value and can generate surplus value. The students, however, are still of a mind to learn, conduct their own inquiry, and complete their degrees. This predicament is further complicated by the fact that the teaching and research experiences students gain will make them employable once they earn their degrees. Therefore, the experiences have value for the students, extending the dialectical problematic. One can ask if the predicament for students is necessary and inevitable. In the structure that reigns today, the answer appears to be yes. The hypothetical can be extended further. Suppose a doctoral student is guaranteed four years of support as part of her or his program. That provides a value to the students as she or he is providing value to the institution. It is estimated, though, that only 50-60% of doctoral students complete their programs in less than ten years[4]. The

[3] http://admissions.missouri.edu/costs-and-aid/costs/index.php.
[4] http://www.cgsnet.org/cgs-occasional-paper-series/university-georgia/chapter-1.

students may have to incur debt in order to complete their programs, and may lose time completing their own research and preparing for the job market.

Money and student learning comprise two of the oppositions detailed here. Another is personnel. The aforementioned data for the University of Missouri illustrate some of the problematic trends in personnel, but more extensive information may exemplify the challenge more clearly. The *Digest of Education Statistics* (2014) tracks the breakdown of personnel in all higher education institutions. One thing that is most telling in Table 314.20 is the trend in full-time position descriptions over a two-decade period. From 1991 to 2011 the number of full-time faculty (a category that includes research and service positions) rose by 23.3%. It should be remembered that the "full-time" category includes full-time non-tenure-track faculty members. The number of executive/administrative/managerial personnel grew by 58.1%. While student enrollment was growing by substantial amounts, administrative positions increased at a rate that was more than double that of full-time faculty. That said, the number of part-time faculty rose by 53.8% during the time period in question. The number of graduate assistants also increased, and by a margin of 36.3%. Colleges and universities are relying less on full-time faculty now than on part-time faculty and graduate assistants. The dynamics of instruction have undergone a substantive transformation, while institutions have increased the numbers of administrators.

The effects of the personnel changes are, in some ways, overt. For example, the ratio of students to full-time faculty has risen considerably during the time period. The figure for all institutions was 27.6 to 1 in 2011. Connotations related to this number include the likelihood of large class sizes in lower-division required classes and large numbers of advisees for each faculty member. Given that some of the faculties are in research positions the ratio is probably even higher. Another impact is that the full-time faculty members are making admissions, curricular, and other policies that the large numbers of part-time and non-tenure-track faculty are obliged to follow (unless departments make explicit decisions to include some or all of those faculty in the policy-making deliberations). Granted, the student-to-faculty ratio at four-year institutions (and especially at research universities) may be lower than the above figure, but the data suggest that those ratios have probably been increasing as well. The trends regarding faculty and administration have something of a history by now. If the trends continue the ratios will become more skewed. Underlying the trend is the question concerning the need for more administrators. It is a facile trope to say that administrators are not essential, and some growth has been prompted by the growing number of students and also by increased federal regulations. However, as we have seen at the University of Missouri, the numbers of support staff members has declined. Table 314.20 of the *Digest* (2014) demonstrates that the percentage of nonprofessional staff declined by 2.2% from 1991 to 2011. The nonprofessional staff may be the group that assists students with many of their needs, such as financial aid, registration, and other services.

Throughout Marx's *Grundrisse* (1993) labor is referred to variously as "human activity itself", "purposeful activity", "form-giving activity", "value-positing activity", and "creative activity". Labor is, in short, a source or site of Being for humans; it is an indispensable component of the ontology of human life. Paul Paolucci (2005) says, "labor is not only an inherent human capacity, but it is *the* trait that provides for the species' survival in nature. . . . In class systems in general, the division of labor into laboring and non-laboring classes create a divide in human sociality" (pp. 565-566). Paolucci's observation in as far as it goes, but it is missing some consequential distinctions. The labor of teaching may seem well defined, but the labor of being a faculty member is manifold. Full-time, tenured and tenure-track faculty labor in particular ways that part-time and non-tenure-track faculty do not. The former can act as student advisors; they can establish curricular requirements; they can create or dissolve programs or emphasis areas; they can supervise theses and dissertations. These are not merely distinct labor

processes; they are immanent labor categories. The scope of their labor is constituted by important features which are distinct from those of the latter group (and to which the latter group is excluded). Paolucci correctly cites Lukács (1978), who notes that labor is an ontological category. Paolucci (2005) adds, "History and/or social structure remain fundamentally incomprehensible with understanding [labor's] role" (p. 569).

Administration is, of course, a separate ontological category. The very nature of the labor is different from that of the faculty, even when administrators at some administrators assume some teaching duties. The work tends to include bureaucratic characteristics (for good or ill), which means that the language of the job is distinct and decisions may be pre-formed (in that there are policies and guidelines that define and limit discretion over some of the things administrators are able to accomplish). This ontology of the categories, including administration, can be said to be immanent; that is, there are features that are inherent within the nature of the categories. If this claim obtains, then there is an almost inevitable difference among the categories. For example, Guido Starosta (2008) avers that there is a "common property" immanent in the commodity. If we examine, for example, academic administration, we should be able to analyze existence of what can be called a common property immanent within it. The property appears to be "control"; control is a partial function of the bureaucratic functions that tend to determine administrative work (see Hummel, 1994, for a complete description of the bureaucratic experience). This experience is something different from the Being of the tenured and tenure-track faculty member, and also of the part-time and non-tenure-track faculty member.

6. Discussion

The preceding presents a dialectic analysis of the structure of higher education. The oppositions among personnel and purposes of the institutions are clarified by means of demonstration of the ontological dynamics that typify modes of production and of existence. The purpose of higher education is, at this time, mired in contradictions and opposition that have become immanent. In particular, conflicts among financing, learning, inquiry, and development of students are manifest as part of the warp and woof of colleges and universities. The opposition is particularly evident in research universities, where the various elements of Being are in full force. In such institutions commodification is also most prominent. The elements of the ontological structure are reified in certain ways and are woven into the social interactions of all of the functional elements. Inquiry, for example, is measured by products that include publications, presentations, citations, and external funding. Each of the products has value in the assessment of the rankings and prestige of the universities. In fact, the assessment is reduced to "more is better." Within the institutions the dynamic is not merely the production of more than other universities, but the production of more year over year. Lefebvre (2009) says, "A State which grows quantitatively (in population or wealth) changes its nature, its structure and its constitution; it may collapse from within, because of the selfsame constitution which, before it expanded had made it strong and prosperous." (p. 32). There is a clear analogy with the university.

The structure of higher educations, and especially universities, is historically conditioned. Some external forces have contributed to the alteration of the actions of the institutions, including federal government policy relating to research and research funding. The availability of money, including increases after World War II and geopolitical/scientific/technological developments in the 1950s led to the impetus for universities to seeks financing for research endeavors. The developments have also had some force of determination that has influenced what kind of research is now valued at research universities. Funding from, for instance, the National

Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Energy has become especially valorized. Funding from these agencies is valued over that from other agencies for any number of reasons, not least of which is that these agencies are preferred by evaluative bodies. Research funding from, say, the Department of Agriculture is valued less by some evaluative agencies, in part, because some types of universities are better positioned to attract that kind of funding. Land-grant universities have little or no reason *not* to value Department of Agriculture funding, though. The selectivity of external funding is one example of the reification of the commodity to which universities are subject.

The pressure to engage in the above modes of production can have an impact on the teaching of full-time, tenured and tenure-track faculty. Publishing, preparing presentations for conferences, and writing grant proposals are time-consuming activities. If these are the modes of production that have the greatest value at universities, teaching may well have a lesser value, at least as evaluated in particular ways. There may be requirements to teach classes of certain sizes for the above faculty personnel. If that is the case, and if the faculty members must teach a load of two courses per semester, the time that is available to teaching could be limited. Tenure and promotion decisions at universities are typically focused on particular modes of production that can acquire a commodity fetish character. If that proposition obtains, then teaching could be of lesser importance as a mode of production (apart from student credit hours produced). James Fairweather, as early as 2005, examined the relative values of teaching and research in the matter of faculty salaries and concluded, "These findings strongly suggest that institutional leaders should not expect the academic marketplace to increase the value of teaching on its own, even in institutions with an espoused teaching mission" (p. 419).

Student learning is another problematic that is related to all of the other dynamics of universities. As is noted in the data presented above, students tend to leave higher education institutions with debt burdens; the customary cited culprit for the debt is tuition but, as we have also seen, there are additional fees that add to the cost of a degree. A study reported by the organization Politifact states that students who enroll in four-year institutions within one year of completing high school take five years and eight months, on average, to earn a bachelor's degree[5]. Students may have to take on jobs while in college in order to offset some of the expenses, in some ways further commodifying their educations. Market Watch notes a survey of students in all types of institutions that indicates nearly 80% of students work part-time, averaging nineteen hours per week of work during the school year[6]. While there may be benefits for students (learning responsibility, understanding time management, appreciating budgeting, as well as earning money), the time spent working may be deleterious to an overall learning experience. The opposition of learning and finances can be profound.

It is demonstrated her that there is a complex dialectic in place with higher education in the United States today. The oppositions are analyzed here, with particular attention paid to the variety of modes of production and the commodification that is at the root of many of the challenges that are systemic. Superficial commodification is not addressed here; the deeper creation of commodities and their socialization is of special interest. Further work is needed to develop this analysis into a prognosis for higher education and means to address the problematic nature that permeates institutions and their activities. That work could help remedy the deep-seated difficulties that colleges and universities now face.

[5] http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2013/aug/11/ron-johnson/average-college-degree-takes-six-years-us-sen-ron-.
[6] http://www.marketwatch.com/story/nearly-4-out-of-5-students-work-2013-08-07.

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