Chapter 12

From Jevons to Collini (via Douglas Davies): Reflections on Higher Education and Religious Identity

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During my time as an undergraduate student in Theology at the University of Nottingham during the mid-1990s, Douglas Davies taught the anthropology of religion. In one of his especially inter-disciplinary lectures, he addressed the work of Frank Byron Jevons, a Victorian polymath whose life and work had fascinated Davies so much that he wrote his intellectual biography after being granted access to Jevons' unpublished papers, housed at their shared *alma mata*, the University of Durham. Jevons was a classicist and philosopher, a pioneer in the embryonic study of religion, a lay Anglican and a speaker and writer on a variety of other subjects, including education. His strongly held convictions about the proper character of a good education are inspiring in their principled idealism, and serve as a valuable point of reference in considering reforms to education in schools and universities in the present day. In considering Jevons' time and work, we are alerted to the cultural changes that have transformed common assumptions about the purpose and delivery of educational processes over the last century; while Durham is a place steeped in tradition, its university is a radically different kind of institution from the one overseen by Jevons as its one-time Vice Chancellor at the beginning of the twentieth century. But reflection on Jevons' perspective on the role of education as a social good also highlights the moral imperatives that have informed critical voices in his time and our own. His fiercely held and widely voiced views on education are, to a degree, echoed among critics of educational reform within 21st century Britain. In this sense, Jevons epitomises an enduring disposition, generated among university academics as a critical perspective on the very processes their institutions have come to embody.

This essay considers current debates about the changing nature of university education within the UK context. It begins with Jevons, then brings his work into conversation with one of the most influential and insightful critics of recent higher education reform, Stefan Collini. My argument is that in highlighting their shared, underlying moral imperatives, we are presented with a useful lens through which to consider common assumptions about the capacity of universities to transform the identities of their students. Much debate about the state of higher education rests on assumptions about this matter, and yet empirical evidence is rarely used to connect the impassioned rhetoric with the experiences of students themselves. The second part of my argument calls for a greater dialogue between the critical voices exemplified by Jevons and Collini and a sociology of higher education that takes seriously empirical realities on the ground, including institutional structures and the social interaction among staff and students. By way of illustration, the final part of the essay takes students of faith – in this case Christian students in particular – as a case study, drawing on recent research into how the experience of universities shapes their moral and religious perspectives. Consideration of this segment of the student population highlights the complex ways in which universities impact upon the lives of their students, as well as offering insights into how religious identities are constituted within higher education. However, I begin with Jevons, because his convictions about education – even though published a century ago – actually serve as a useful way into these contemporary debates. In this respect, I also pay tribute to Douglas Davies, who has long sustained a passion for bringing the Victorian age and our present one into fruitful conversation.

Visions of Education in Two Ages

Frank Byron Jevons had been a school master before coming to the University of Durham as a philosophy lecturer, where he stayed for the rest of his academic career. His perspective on education, I know, from numerous impassioned comments and lively conversations over the years, inspired and continues to inspire Douglas Davies and informs his own university teaching. Jevons believed in the liberating power of education, holding it to be a major force for social progress and equality for all, including marginalized segments of society such as women and the working classes. Jevons also taught courses for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), aimed at sharing university-level education with members of the local community. Indeed, Jevons was inclined to see the WEA initiatives as superior to school and university education because they were founded on the principle that no examinations would be held. This, for Jevons, allowed the WEA to embody the true value of education, which was about human flourishing, rather than passing exams, or indeed, the acquisition of qualifications as an instrumental means to economic betterment. As Davies puts it, describing Jevons' viewpoint, "Prizes and degrees cause a man to work for his own ends while the unselfish desire for education worked out in a group is nobler and conduces to the good of many." (Davies 1991: 119) This gets to the heart of Jevons' attitude, which rests on the importance of co-operation, both as a central characteristic of good education and a desirable value to encourage within society as a whole. Indeed, competition – the opposite of co-operation – Jevons associates not just with the fostering of self-centred possessiveness, but also with humankind's propensity for conflict and war. Jevons' perspective on education is a symptom of a much more all-encompassing worldview, and in this sense his confidence perhaps mirrors the Victorian propensity for grand narrative so typical of the scholarship of his time. Jevons was an idealist, as Davies acknowledges, and his idealism is embedded within a coherent vision of the 'good society', arguably as compelling as it is ambitious.

While very much a product of his era, in other respects Jevons embodies an enduring set of concerns for which we can find ready analogies in the twenty-first century. Davies cites one of Jevons' more impassioned speeches on the proper character of education:

> "If each man is an end in himself – an end as valuable and as precious as any other man – then an education which fits him merely to be a means is no complete education, no true education. Serve one another we must; and our education must enable us to do service. But it is no part of the function of education to make us useful instruments whereby the millionaire may increase his millions. We too have a right to the education which shall enable us to taste the higher joys of life." (quoted in Davies 1991: 131)

Jevons believed knowledge within the right kind of education could free the mind from external authority and foster wisdom. What is anathema to him is the reduction of education to a process of conferring skills for the sole purpose of future employment. Faced with the poor working classes of County Durham around the turn of the twentieth century, he does not view education as something to be debased to their circumstances (reduced to an elementary provision) nor accommodated to their industrial occupations (translated into practical skills). Rather, he wants to take higher learning beyond the preserve of the university and into their lives as a universally edifying good. In a striking parallel, his dismay at an instrumentalisation of education is poignantly echoed in critiques of higher education reforms that have emerged in recent years. Increasing student numbers and cuts in public funding have emerged in the UK alongside policy reforms which increasingly conceive the value of universities in chiefly economic terms (Browne 2010). Serving first and foremost the need to enable students to contribute to the global economy, universities are treated as providers of

educational product and their students as consumers of it (Sabri 2011), echoing the logics of a neo-liberal economics that celebrates diversification via unfettered competition and the festishisation of individual choice. With increasing pressures on today's universities to justify their degree programmes on the basis of 'transferable skills' and 'employability', one can see why academic commentators might find common voice with Jevons in their efforts to resist the commercialization of university life.

One of the most scathing critics of such innovations is the Cambridge Professor of Intellectual History and English Literature Stefan Collini, whose book *What are Universities For?* (2012) is a collection of essays on this subject. Collini's essays are subtle and perceptive, witty and humorous, and his concerns about how universities have become less and less unlike other – especially commercial – organisations within British society over the course of the last couple of decades, are echoed among academics across the sector. In fact, Collini's work is but one example of the abundance of literature produced over the past few years by academics and other commentators who find in the contemporary university an all-absorbing bureaucracy and slavish kowtowing to the business world as efficiency and cost-effectiveness encroach ever more on the hallowed freedoms of scholarship (e.g. Brown 2013; Giroux 2014; McGettigan 2013; Murphy 2015). As Collini puts it with characteristically acerbic wit,

> "One of the supposed benefits of treating universities as though they were businesses is that their efficiency can then be measured and improved. It's well known that universities used to be full of idle, port-swilling dons and equally idle, unemployable students, but now they are lean and mean and geared to meeting national needs through increased productivity. One thing that needs saying in the face of this self-deluded and self-important twaddle is that in several important ways universities are

> now *less* efficient than they were twenty years ago before the commercial analogy started to be applied in earnest. After all, two of the most important sources of efficiency in intellectual activity are voluntary cooperation and individual autonomy. But these are precisely the kinds of things for which a bureaucratic system leaves little room." (Collini 2012: 134)

In addition to lambasting the extent to which universities have become caught up in misconceived logics of efficiency and control, Collini is particularly concerned about the instrumentalisation of higher education. He is keen to preserve a sense of its value that is not reducible to a practical – especially economic – end. In this he echoes Jevons, and although he does not cite him nor show any signs of being aware of his work, he does engage with similar concerns raised by John Henry Newman in the mid-19th century, highlighting the historical lineage of this modern debate (Collini 2012: 39-60). Indeed, it is possible to draw a line between Jevons and Collini in terms of common clusters of ideals, each constituting a normative vision that is in some important respects reflective of the other. Here, cultural and intellectual context is important. Jevons' thinking is shaped by a late Victorian socialism coloured by his experience as an educator in the industrial north of England. Collini embodies the disillusioned perspective of a Cambridge don who views his age as one in which higher education has morphed from public good into consumer product, via depleted funding, increased bureaucracy and increasingly centralized systems of oversight and accountability. The thinking of both arises out of elite British universities and assumes an understanding of education shaped by the disciplines of the humanities, foregrounding the expansion of critical thinking and the irreducible value of knowledge as a human good. This understanding is pitched over and against encroaching forces governed by a logic that is utilitarian, informed by the concerns of industry and private business and the reduction of the

individual to the status of self-interested agent. While operating within very different circumstances, both Jevons and Collini emerge within a scholarly tradition of reactionary critique contingent upon cultural trends commonly viewed as characteristic of the late modern age. The archetypal narrative here is Max Weber's sociological account of a disenchanted modernity confined by the 'iron cage' of rationalizing systems (Gerth and Mills 2009: 196-264). Many have developed Weber's portrayal, including those who see in the contemporary world new systems of rationalized control emanating into a variety of social spheres as well as migrating from the west to the developing world (Ritzer 1996). Three lines of thought seem most relevant to the current discussion, commonly integrated into sociological debates about the transition from traditional to modern societies. These might be described as, firstly, the functional differentiation of social spheres – including the decoupling of traditional institutions, including those concerned with education, health, religion and politics. A consequent tendency here is the emergence of specialist providers whose purpose is defined in increasingly narrow terms and whose processes are increasingly segmented into discrete sub-divisions (Berger, Berger and Kellner 1974). Within the university context, a prime example would be modularization, which contains teaching and learning within relatively self-contained, discretely assessed courses. A second aspect of Weber's legacy that is particularly relevant here is the related proliferation of utilitarian habits of thought characterized by an instrumental rationality. Robert Bellah et al (1985) theorized this as one dimension of western individualism in the late modern age, 'utilitarian individualism' being the tendency to forge identities in accordance with self-interest (emerging alongside 'expressive individualism', which foregrounds individual experience). While accounting for patterns in individual decision making, a more resonant definition for our purposes would also pay attention to how forms of instrumental rationality are embedded within institutional cultures, not least via bureaucratic systems of organization. A third aspect

that extends Weber's model into a neo-liberal context is the growing tendency for the 'ends' of processes to be justified in economic terms. In university contexts, this includes the configuration of research so as to maximize the generation of external funding, but also the measurement of the success of university processes of teaching and learning according to cost-benefit analysis. On a deeper level is the complicit tendency to treat knowledge itself as a commodity, to be guarded, manipulated and negotiated in a way that maximizes 'return' (Kenway et al 2006: 55). While these trends are manifest differently within the contexts in which Jevons and Collini are each working, they arguably proceed along the same trajectory. In other words, Collini is responding to the long-term amplification of the tendencies Jevons sees in embryonic form within his own industrial age.

Utilitarian habits of thought also inform assumptions within universities about accountability (Strathern 2000). For example, Collini calls attention to how, while freedom of intellectual enquiry is acknowledged by government policy makers to be essential to good scholarship, there is nevertheless among them a perennial return to the question of how *useful* university activity really is. The language of utility is telling, and Collini is under no illusions about what is primarily meant by this: universities are increasingly measured by the extent to which their work serves the needs of the economy. This is what lies behind the recent emphasis on integrating skills that enhance 'employability' into undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and informs the increasing prioritization of STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) at the expense of other areas of scholarship. Collini sees a tension here that belies muddled thinking among policy makers, who while supporting a free market model that permits no measure of a university subject's worth beyond student demand, at the same time wish to preserve a privileged status for STEM subjects, whose economic value is presumably taken for granted. But Collini advances a more fundamental critique, calling into question the very criterion of economic value when

used to justify university activity, a criterion he argues is presented in government policy documents – such as the recent Browne report on higher education funding (Browne 2010) - as if it were self-evident. Such is the pervasiveness of neo-liberal reasoning that arguments based on 'economic output' are not seen as in need of further justification. Collini takes a different view, pointing out that this assumption "begs the question of what needs the economy serves." (2012: 110) If it enables us to do the things we think are important, as Collini puts it, we should decide what's important and adapt our economic strategies to the task of bringing this about. As it stands, we are in danger of simply spending money for the sake of generating more money.

But it is not simply the reduction of academic work to economic ends that Collini finds most objectionable; it is the instrumentalist reasoning that misrepresents and perverts the nature of university life. We have become uncomfortable, he argues, with the language of 'intrinsic goods', preferring instead to see the worth of an activity in measurable quantities. And yet the most important goals of a university are not quantifiable; they are not amenable to measurement, only to judgment by those competent to judge. Here he touches on a perhaps deep cultural tendency in English life that associates judgment with prejudice or snobbery. This tendency, at least in today's context, calls into suspicion human capacities that cannot be called to account with reference to a set of measurable outcomes. Moreover, an emphasis on measurable outcomes is morally validated by its advocates with reference to the values of transparency and fairness, making it difficult to contest without appearing self-interested or having something to hide. But as suggested by Jevons, such instrumentalist thinking is often distinguished by its tendency to disempower, rather than the opposite, for it reduces scholarly endeavor to a conveyer belt of skills and capital, and also denies the marginalized in society the vision of an irreducible higher learning so often enjoyed and coveted among the elite.

Collini also echoes Jevons in his wariness towards competition within educational contexts. Granted, Collini is talking about academic staff and Jevons is concerned with students, but they share a vision for intellectual enquiry that has co-operation at its heart. As Collini puts it, "Cooperation and a sense of shared commitment to the enterprise is infinitely more fruitful" (2012: 135) than setting individuals against one another in a battle to the top (or, a battle to flee the bottom, as may well be the case). Collini expands on this by outlining his view of university work as essentially a creative task, about ideas and intellectual endeavour that is most effectively stimulated by co-operation and mutual, supportive engagement. This is a vision that would resonate with Jevons, the idealist champion of education as a source of enrichment and human flourishing, both at the level of the individual, and in its capacity to edify the group.

The Collective and the Individual in University Education

While there is now abundant literature on the structural changes to the higher education sector that have come about in recent years, there is precious little on how these changes have affected the lives of university students. Does the commercialization of the sector encourage a more hard-headed ambition among undergraduates? Do they approach their university lives less as seekers after new knowledge, more as consumers keen to extract maximum advantage from their – now much more expensive – degree programmes? Or is there a residual idealism among arts and humanities students, perhaps, an ambition for a broadening of the mind that would warm the hearts of Jevons and Collini alike? Or are such students generally confined to the elite universities, comprised of upper middle class undergraduates who can afford to muse on the writings of Dickens or Coleridge, or debate the moral bankruptcy of the 'new left', precisely because they do not have to worry about their career chances after they graduate? According to this analysis, the visions of education promoted by Jevons and Collini

are not only idealistic, they are also destined to be the preserve of the privileged few, an outcome that would be painfully ironic, given Jevons' ethical and political convictions.

Both Collini and Jevons present a vision of education that resists the elevation of the atomized individual, and instead foregrounds the collective energies of the co-operating group. However, while both consistently affirm the *process* of education to be a collaborative one, neither offer a developed description of how the *outcomes* of education might be public, rather than private. Jevons' socialism leads him often to colour his impassioned speeches and writing with a vision for a better society, but this vision is often vague and as he is not aiming to develop a systematic sociology of education, his work lacks a concerted examination of the precise relationship between education and the social order. In this his work stands in contrast to his direct contemporary, French sociologist Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1956). Collini offers much more comment on how higher education interrelates with wider society, but while he conceives government influence over universities as a corporate, bureaucratized imposition, his understanding of how universities influence society very much focuses on the level of the individual. In discussing students, his archetypes of choice are the employable graduate and the cultured scholar, each representing the anodyne and the enlightened in contemporary higher education respectively. Moreover, in reflecting on how universities might rescue something of value from the neo-liberal mire in which they find themselves, Collini has little to say about possible collectivist responses to society or novel methods of engagement that promote social change beyond the existentially inspired individual. The 'market model' reconfigures the student as consumer and higher education as a process of economic exchange (Sabri 2011), arguably frustrating the capacity of universities to build community, so it is unfortunate that Collini does not have more to say about possible strategies for retrieving a collective voice.

It is tempting to attribute this relative insularity to his Cambridge context, although I suspect it has more to do with how the disciplines of the humanities in particular deal with issues of human identity. Again, a comparison with Jevons is instructive. The problem of the coherence of the self is one in which Jevons had a strong interest, and his book *Personality* (1913) grapples with the philosophical problems surrounding our understanding of the self, identity and personality. While acknowledging that any striving towards unity and coherence is imperfect in practice, Jevons' view of the self mirrors his view of society in so far as they point towards integration and co-operation rather than fragmentation and disintegration (Jevons 1913: 166). A framing influence here is Jevons' Christian faith, and his argument that society is properly integrative and participatory, a shared experience in which all must play their part, owes as much to his conviction that this emerges in Christian love for one's neighbor as it does to his communitarian political values. Jevons' thinking is also shaped by his understanding of evolution, which he takes to be the model along which societies develop, but not necessarily for the better; in other words, we cannot take it for granted that unfettered human evolution will lead to uniformly positive outcomes – as he says, "evolution and progress are not identical." (Jevons 1896: 88) As a consequence, we need to be vigilant, and here his passionate convictions about education are put into context; sound and ethical educational processes are essential if we are to ensure that human evolution does not leave the poor impoverished and the lost without hope. This interventionist vision reflects Jevons' belief that education is about bringing about radical change – in individuals and in society – and that, for him, this ambition is inspired and validated by Christian teaching.

Collini's work on universities emerges from a different kind of stable. As a literature scholar, he is fully aware of the subtleties of language and the politics of representation, and makes self-conscious use of his skills in scrutinizing aspects of university life through a critical lens. His sensitivity to emerging complexities means he is also cautious in offering

easy solutions to the problems he sees. In an amusing and perceptive essay on the 'useful' and the 'useless' in higher education, he observes how those arguing for a non-instrumentalist model are given to overstatement, seeming "inexorably driven to ambitious phrases about the most general and most desirable human qualities, about a vision of a civilized community, about the ends of life." (Collini 2012: 52) His starting point in this essay is John Henry Newman's *Idea of a University* (Newman 1966), which is subjected to a sardonic analysis that leaves little doubt as to Collini's skepticism about both Newman's inflated and ponderous prose, and his argument for theology as the governing disciplinary jurisdiction within which all other subjects realise their significance. And yet Collini is not entirely dismissive of Newman's ambitious programme, and it is in this essay that his own perspective on how students might be transformed by university is most clearly expressed.

Collini is careful not to endorse a naïve vision - still often rehearsed by academics in the humanities – based around universities generating knowledge 'for its own sake' and hence representing a kind of irreducible value entirely untainted by objectives that lie outside of the 'pure' cultivation of the mind. He acknowledges the legitimate place of vocational training and is mindful of how even the most traditionally 'scholarly' disciplines are shaped by self-justifications that appeal to their 'usefulness'; he is not willing to jettison the language of utility altogether. And yet his attempts to characterize what is distinctive about the purpose of a university is permit external ends only insofar as they refer to the expansion of an individual student's horizons. Part of this involves fostering a critical awareness of the contingency of different forms of knowledge, a hermeneutic of suspicion that bestows skills in discernment and critical evaluation. A similar perspective is offered by former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who sees a major goal of universities as helping people to become 'intelligent citizens', enabled to exercise critical thinking and so more responsibly navigate 'the confused mass of propaganda and fashion that swirls around in the

overpopulated information culture of our age.' (Williams 2014: 38) Adopting this understanding, it is easy to see how such an education could be a source of enrichment and empowerment for all people, whether faced with the common challenges of weighing up conflicting newspaper coverage, achieving a fair resolution to a neighborly dispute, or deciding how to vote in an election. According to Collini, that which is learned within universities is indeed "useful preparation for life" (Collini 2012: 56), but is distinctive insofar as the "open ended quest for understanding has primacy over any application or intermediate outcome." (2012: 55) This language of 'open-endedness' coheres with assumptions about student learning that emphasise the broadening of the mind and the cultivation of cross-disciplinary awareness, and perhaps these are the kinds of outcomes that Collini imagines as taking place within universities were they properly configured. In this, as in many other ways, Collini is forging a counter-narrative to the functional differentiation of higher education alluded to earlier. While working within a sector structured around discrete and rationalized processes – from the modularization of degree programmes to their justification via specialist committees and audit trails – his instinct is to challenge boundaries rather than exist comfortably within them. Moreover, it is this challenges of boundaries – disciplinary, epistemological, even ontological – that he places at the heart of his vision for a university education. Students will ideally leave university with a learnt capacity to exercise such transgressive practice, to their advantage and to the credit of their universities. And while Collini does not use the language of empowerment, his argument for fostering in students a sense of the "contingency and vulnerability of knowledge that is, in other settings, treated as so fixed and stable…" (2012: 57) hints at a vision for the emancipatory potential of higher education entirely in keeping with Jevons' own perspective.

Given his tendency to conceive of the potential influence of universities primarily in terms of individuals, Collini may be accused of under-estimating the power of universities to

change society. Perhaps this is understandable given his jaded view of the current HE sector, and his essays often have a voice of exasperation at a sector already deeply infected by a neo-liberal agenda. Put another way, it is difficult to read Collini without feeling the damage has already been done. But he does retain, as demonstrated above, a strong - if often implicit - emphasis on the individual student as a site of significant transformation. Collini's graduate is – if all goes to plan – at once enlightened, empowered and rendered autonomous by an education that has unsettled prior assumptions but replaced them with a keen intellectual awareness. Both Jevons and Collini share an understanding of education that foregrounds the interior, empowering experience of a profoundly personal learning, and while Jevons alone integrates Christian social teaching into his perspective, both assume a process that provokes the changing of minds, and, in consequence, the changing of identities. It is worth asking, the university having been stripped of its capacity to change society, does Collini overestimate the capacity of the university to transform the lives of individuals? A question impossible to answer in the abstract, at this point it is necessary to consider the available empirical research that has recently been undertaken into the lives of students.

Faith, Identity and the Student Experience

Neither Jevons nor Collini are social scientists, and their reflections on the transformative potential of education operate on the level of ideas and broad reflections on the world around them, rather than on any concerted analysis of empirical data. Located firmly within the humanities, their preference is to deal in abstractions and also to privilege the cognitive and cerebral over the cultural or affective. Consequently, their treatments of education are compelling on account of their rhetorical elegance and conceptual nuance (not to mention their moral conviction), but they also lack an attentiveness to the perspectives and experiences of students. This is not meant as criticism - this is not what either of them set out

to do – but it does raise the question of how empirical research might enrich our understanding of universities by bringing into conversation their astute commentary and the actual experiences of being at university among students who are on the receiving end of the processes Collini so persuasively critiques.

My focus in the discussion below is on students of faith, particularly Christian students, whose experiences of university present an empirical case study that, I would argue, benefits from being framed by the work of both Jevons and Collini, especially as it constitutes a lens through which arguments about the transformative power of university education might be examined. Recent research into student faith in the UK highlights both the contentious status of religious groups represented in universities, as well as the public discourses that position religion as irrelevance, oddity or risk (Dinham and Jones 2012; Guest et al 2013; Weller et al 2011). Recent government policy intended to tackle so-called 'radicalisation' among university students raises particular concerns about the treatment of Muslims (Brown and Saeed 2014) while also highlighting a broader tendency to conceive of religious students as passive subjects. While the neo-liberal rhetoric of the Browne report (2010) emphasizes students as empowered consumers, best placed to decide what they want from higher education, religious students are frequently portrayed in public fora as credulous dupes or as dangerously suggestible, their agency presumably flawed because they have clearly made the 'wrong' choices. Faced with such problematic assumptions, an empirically based consideration of how processes of influence proceed among students of faith becomes especially important.

The importance of a Christian context for Jevons has already been noted, as has his understanding of both society and self as properly integrated and participatory rather than atomized and self-serving. Collini does not share Jevons' framing hermeneutic of Christian love, but he does affirm an understanding of selfhood that assumes atomization is inimical to

a healthy and enriching educational experience. Universities do their job best when fostering a capacity to see beyond immediate horizons and across parameters of intellectual possibility, always open to new insight and never ossified into fixed canons of meaning (Collini 2013).

In this respect Collini echoes other scholars who express concern about the instrumentalisation of education and point to the growing tendency among both teachers and students to be assessment-led (refs?). A consequence of measuring school and university education by quantifiably structured league tables, and of reducing education to economic advancement, is the danger that education becomes thoroughly compartmentalized. Knowledge is taught and learnt for the purposes of securing qualifications, resulting in an arguably impoverished learning experience, the problems of which Jevons was well aware. In the process, subject matter is divided into convenient digestible chunks and managed accordingly, and students are made less aware of the connections between them, and of the creative possibilities for thought that only occur when disciplinary and topical boundaries are crossed, subverted, questioned and challenged. Within university-based teaching about religion, there prevails a persistent assumption that personal faith has no place inside of the classroom and that to permit discussion of student experiences of faith would somehow undermine the 'objectivity' of university study (Fairweather 2012). This tendency reinforces compartmentalization by affirming a clear differentiation between commitment and knowledge (Flanagan 2001). According to this approach – pervasive in public universities in the USA and across the UK Higher Education sector – religion constitutes an object to be studied, while religious convictions of students doing the studying ought to be 'bracketed out' and confined to non-academic contexts. As Fairweather highlights, this legacy of post-Enlightenment rationalism persists even in the discipline of social anthropology, in which the personal experiences of religious actors have long been acknowledged as central to a proper understanding of the religious phenomena that are assumed to embody. Permitting the faith

lives of others into the classroom but not those of students themselves contributes to the 'othering' of faith communities and perpetuates a false polarisation between 'religion' and the 'secular' (Fairweather 2012: 53). It also denies the university classroom a critical reflexivity that is defended and practised among academics undertaking social scientific research (Davies 1999). This secularization of the study of religion in universities has been criticized for not taking seriously the ways in which the perspectives of students – including their orientations to religion – shape the assumptions that frame the learning process. It similarly excludes the perspectives of university teachers, whose presentation of religious topics in the classroom may, as some recent research suggests, emerge as qualitatively distinct from how they conceptualise religion within their academic publications (Skeie 2015: 138). An approach that prevents such inter-subjective dimensions to be openly addressed in the classroom risks an impoverished presentation of religion and a disempowering experience of university education. It presumes a 'view from nowhere', preventing an honest conversation permitted to acknowledge the genuine differences between human actors, differences that, when critically addressed, can actually advance our understanding of religion.

So compartmentalization has at least two dimensions: the separation of disciplines and sub-disciplines into discrete bodies of knowledge, and the differentiation of student identities that positions personal religious convictions outside of the classroom. Both invite a challenging of intellectual boundaries of a kind that Collini seems to advocate. And yet it is precisely this crossing of intellectual boundaries, associated with a heightened awareness of the contingency of knowledge and the complexity of human meaning-making - to which the humanities are especially sensitive - that has persistently been seen as undermining the plausibility of religion. Sociologist Peter Berger has gone as far as suggesting that, not only is western style higher education a vehicle for secularization, but the humanities and social

sciences are especially potent forces within this process (Berger 1999). It is the unremitting questioning of knowledge and its bases, something Collini sees as quintessential to both university life and the integrity of academic disciplines, that resonates with modes of thinking that encourage a critical perspective on religious truth, truth that, it is assumed, depends on foundationalist claims that cannot withstand this kind of analysis.

Aside from the assumptions and arguments of academics, this crossing of boundaries also provokes anxiety among some Christian students who fear their university education will damage their faith. This is not helped by the general weakening of the liberal tradition within Anglicanism, of which Jevons was an advocate, so that intellectual enquiry as a means of enriching Christian faith is not a notion familiar to many of today's undergraduates. Indeed, as recent research has demonstrated, the most active and engaged Christian students are evangelicals (Guest et al, 2013). While this movement includes numerous variations and complexities, its dominant forms among students often privilege textual exposition of the Bible, leaving little room for contextual hermeneutics, and/or foreground charismatic worship and fellowship, favouring the experiential and subjective, with theological learning a secondary concern. In addition, Theology and Religious Studies as a subject area has suffered continued decline in recent years, with falling undergraduate applications leading to academic departments shrinking, merging or, in some cases, closing, and, in some quarters, a continued institutionalized skepticism about whether religion should be the proper concern of universities at all (Dinham and Jones 2012). Intellectual engagement with matters of faith within the context of university is often either peripheral to the culture of student churches, or is channeled into parallel curricula: Bible studies and discussion groups facilitated by local churches along lines in keeping with their own theological perspectives. The Christian Unions – long established as the most well-resourced and influential of student Christian organizations – run their own scheme for supporting students struggling with how to relate

their faith to their studies. While such schemes may encourage intellectual engagement, it is an engagement whose boundaries and methods remain distinctive from those fostered within university degree programmes, often reflecting an underlying unease about the potential of university study to disrupt, challenge or undermine Christian faith. As might be expected, it is the evangelicals who are most concerned to address the interface between scholarship and faith as a challenge among Christian students.

And yet the evidence available suggests such anxieties might be misplaced, and that concerns among church leaders and evangelical organizations do not match the orientation to faith and study in evidence among the students themselves. Here I am drawing on research I undertook between 2009 and 2012 with Kristin Aune, Sonya Sharma and Rob Warner about the ways in which the experience of university shapes the lives of Christian undergraduate students (Guest et al, 2013). Notably, and keeping in mind my reservations about Jevons and Collini's intellectualist tendencies discussed earlier, the 'university experience' here is not restricted to class-room based academic learning, but also includes the social experiences distinctive to university life. This approach is based on the observation that university encompasses a variety of human experiences that are often mutually constitutive within complex processes of identity formation (Stevens, Armstrong and Arum 2008). It also responds to a discernible tendency in academic literature on student faith to treat students as atomized individuals, decontextualized from the institutional cultures that frame their experiences (Mayrl and Oeur 2009).

The 'Christianity and the University Experience' (CUE) project deployed a national survey covering 13 universities across England, supplemented by case studies including interviews with staff and students at five universities selected so as to be representative of the institutional variety of the HE sector. In order to avoid being led by doctrinal or practical assumptions about what properly counts as 'Christian', the survey was targeted at a random

sample of all students and invited each respondent to identify the religious tradition to which they belonged. Allowing for sampling complications and taking into account comparative data, the proportion of self-identifying Christians we estimate at around 40-45% of the undergraduate population (a figure that reflects the proportion identified in the 2011 national census among young adults not working but in education) (Guest et al 2013: 211-217). Within this population, there was significant diversity of belief and religious practice. Not surprisingly, those most active in church attendance and in local volunteering are the evangelical students, and this is matched by resource and influence filtered through university-based organisations like the Christian Unions. However, these evangelicals only constitute at most 20% of the overall Christian student population, most of whom are more liberal in their morality and more uncertain in their commitment to core Christian doctrines. Around half of all Christian students never attend church during term-time, around a third never attend at all, regardless of context. Given self-identification was our method of ascertaining Christian identity, it is not surprising that a range of orientations has been found, and this certainly includes a small minority who view their Christian identity in solely cultural, rather than religious, terms. Perhaps most strikingly, a significant majority – almost 75% - when asked whether their religious identities have become stronger or weaker since they started their university career, say they have more or less stayed the same. This is mirrored in the very low proportion – 5% - of students reporting a dramatic experience of conversion – either into or out of Christianity – since they embarked on their university studies. Stability of faith identities was the norm (cf. Bäckström 1993), a far cry from the 'crisis narrative' that has, in the past, assumed faith and higher education to exist in fierce opposition (Paton 1946).

This finding provides a clue to a broader tendency among Christian students, a tendency to keep their religious identities and their identities as learners in higher education

markedly separate. Our survey allowed us to explore correlations between subject of degree programme and a range of other variables, including those related to religious belief, moral conviction and religious practice. There were no clear correlations between choice of degree and whether or not respondents self-identified as Christian, and subject choice could not be established as a predictor of responses to most questions about belief, morality or religious practice. An arguable exception relates to private prayer, with physical science students significantly more likely to say they never engaged in private prayer than students in medicine and allied subjects, social sciences or arts and humanities. One might attribute this to skepticism about an interventionist God or the supernatural more generally, although given it was medical students who were most likely to pray daily, the evidence does not point to a clear correlation between scientific training and skepticism about the act of prayer. Responses to a question about the relative authority of science and the Bible point in a different direction, with all four subject categories reasonably level in the degree to which they uphold creationism, intelligent design, evolution as the mechanism for divine creation, and the elevation of science above scripture respectively. The exception here is the social science students, who appear significantly less keen on elevating science above scripture, but who include a correspondingly high proportion saying they are 'unsure' about this issue; social scientists are just as likely or unlikely to affirm creationism, intelligent design or divinely established evolution as students in other disciplines.

Interviews with students also suggest minimal engagement between the subject matter of their degree programmes and the beliefs and values they hold to be essential to their Christian lives. Across subject areas, many Christian students did not seem to have considered how the new knowledge they had acquired might impact upon the assumptions they held as Christian believers – and this applies to fervently committed, church-attending Christians as well as those less engaged in conventional forms of Christian practice. The

notable exception was students in Theology and Religious Studies, for whom a much more active engagement in how class based learning might relate to their faith was in evidence, including reflection on meta-level questions such as how the faith orientations of lecturers might lead the class in a particular direction and if so, whether this was a legitimate part of the education process. For most Christian students, though, the encounter between scholarship and faith – something to be carefully managed according to evangelical organisations, but encouraged and celebrated according to figures like Jevons – features minimally in their reflections on their university experience. The compartmentalization of subject fields some commentators fear is damaging the quality of higher education appears evident in the internally differentiated identities of Christian students, for whom religion is something they do in one segment of their lives, while study is something altogether separate, the two rarely being brought into conversation.

This is not a phenomenon restricted to the UK. Writing about the very different US higher education sector, Glanzer, Hill and Ream point to the "disparity between the curricular and cocurricular as the reason why American college students have a reputation for vibrant religious practice, but not more advanced forms of religious knowledge both of their own and other religious traditions…" (2014: 157) Jonathan Hill explores patterns of cognition and knowledge legitimation among young adults in the US, focusing particularly on orientations to evolution and creationism, and argues for a clear distinction between learning about evolution and personal acceptance of it. He finds no evidence that attending college has any influence on whether young adults change their beliefs on these issues. Far more influential than formal education was stable involvement in religious subcultures of co-believers (Hill 2014). Another US study, Tim Clydesdale's *The First Year Out* (2007), identifies a pattern of compartmentalization among college students that presents an interesting angle on our present concerns. Clydesdale found that before embarking on their college education,

students typically placed their religious identities in an 'identity lockbox', leaving them relatively unexamined and unquestioned during their first year. Religion was treated as something good to have, but chiefly as a resource to draw upon later in life; in effect, the relationship between religion and college was distinguished by a *lack* of interaction. Moreover, it was not only religious identities which were treated in this way; Clydesdale found students also putting aside concerns about gender, political, racial and civic identities in favour of 'daily life management' (Clydesdale 2007: 2). They did not see their entry into a college education as an opportunity to examine their place in the wider world, but preferred to focus on more immediate concerns of relationships, personal gratifications and economic upkeep (2007: 2). In this sense, compartmentalization might be viewed not as a pattern of behavior that students simply learn by cultural osmosis, but as a deliberate strategy for coping with the pressures of young adult life, and there was clear evidence of this pattern in the CUE findings (Guest et al 2013: 118). This is, perhaps, not a surprising discovery, and reflects the logic of arguments about modernization that point to a heightened social differentiation or even privatization of religion within some western contexts. That religion is reserved as separate from education both structurally and in the minds of individuals is arguably as understandable as the similar separation of religion from political or economic spheres of life. However, previous sociological discussion has tended to treat these consequences of differentiation as latent byproducts of a broader modernization; their presence here as deliberate strategies deployed by individuals negotiating the challenges of university raises pressing questions about both the nature of religion and the character of higher education within contemporary Britain.

Concluding Comment

Echoing the subversion of disciplinary boundaries that Douglas Davies has pursued so fruitfully during his academic career, my overall argument in this essay is that student life is most effectively understood when public rhetoric about the purpose and status of universities is brought into critical dialogue with empirical investigation into the student experience. More specifically, a proper understanding of how religion is configured within universities cannot be separated from broader debates about the capacity of universities to shape the identities of their students. The work of Collini reveals common assumptions about how universities do and should function, but emerging debates about the status of universities in a neo-liberal age need to connect critique of institutional change with patterns of engagement among students themselves. We have considered Christian students as a case study, subjects of an influential narrative that positions them as vulnerable to a disruptive, secularizing encounter, but whose experiences suggest something different. The preceding discussion has raised far more questions than answers, but its exposure of a strategic compartmentalization among Christian undergraduates calls for further research into patterns of agency among the student body. Ongoing debates about radicalization highlight the need for a more sophisticated model of student identity than the passive one often rehearsed in government and media rhetoric.

I hope this discussion will continue, and conclude with a brief reflection on an issue that illustrates its potential benefits for wider academic discussion. It relates to the CUE project evidence of a strategic differentiation among Christian students, that deliberate process of keeping faith separate from learning that also finds evidence in US contexts. We might ask, does this suggest an impoverishment of the learning experience of higher education more generally, or just a profound curtailment of faith, which is apparently restricted to limited realms of interaction and thinking. Wider discussions about the

instrumentalisation of learning – teaching and learning 'to the exam' – might suggest the former, with matters of faith merely symptomatic of a wider tendency among students to prioritize the internalization of 'facts' over the forging of connections between new knowledge and pre-existing assumptions. In this sense, the study of religion in universities can be a case study in support of a more integrated learning experience, as Kieran Flanagan argues in calling for a legitimate place for reflexivity within undergraduate classes in the sociology of religion. It is in confronting and questioning the tensions between one's prior convictions and open observation of the religious 'other' that we achieve an appropriately nuanced and responsible understanding of religious identities (Flanagan 2001). Evidence from the CUE project suggests such reflexivity is lacking among many Christian students, and yet it is in abundant evidence among Christian students of Theology and Religious Studies, whose considered attempts to relate class-based learning to their personal orientations to religion mark a notable exception to the rule. Class-based proximity to religion as a focus of study appears to foster creative and thoughtful engagement rather than disillusionment, as some advocates of secularization theory might have us believe. By contrast, for Christian students in other disciplines such engagement appears to be fostered chiefly in 'alternative publics', within church home groups, Bible studies or friendship networks, reflecting the differentiation within education highlighted above. Further illumination of how these social clusters of reflexivity emerge and function might be afforded by future studies of student faith taking an ethnographic approach alert to the subtleties of meaning-making among the student population.

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