

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Angus, I. (2009). *Love the questions: University education and enlightenment*. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing. Pages: 176. Price: 14.95 CAD (paper).

Reviewed by Bonnie L. Stelmach, Associate Professor, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan

This “little book”, as Angus modestly describes it, is tome-like in its elucidation of the forces that have altered the university from its traditional ideals into a contemporary corporate ethos. Angus champions enlightenment as a worthy and viable enterprise to protect as the *raison d'être* of the university. Inspired by the poet Rilke's statement to “love the *questions themselves*” (p. 29, italics in original), Angus declares self-knowledge and self-expression to be the enlightenment ideal. He is careful not to romance the concept, and instead seeks to redefine enlightenment and demonstrate its rootedness despite the trending toward “practical” and “material” endeavors that mark the contemporary university. The commitment to questioning self and world gives a university coherence—that necessary “unity of knowledge” (p. 61). Ultimately, enlightenment is a disposition and process of critique rather than a product, much like education is something one *lives* rather than *has*, as Angus explains. It is these careful dissections of definitions and concepts that give *Love the Questions* explanatory power and argumentative force.

Angus outlines his agenda in the preface and defines the problem in the first three chapters. The purpose of his book is to explain how university has changed and why, and to champion enlightenment as the epitome of education. His writing is personable, if not vulnerable, for he shares his experience of teaching university seminars and admits to being “horrified” (p. 30) at students' nonchalance with ideas. This admission is a narrative hook: readers are drawn into the notion that university and what goes on there is not (or should not be) an abstract or inert idea or venture. It has affect. Angus' willingness to share his disillusionment may be a position with which others in the academic community may resonate. That professors such as Angus care about students' experiences is something about which those outside the academy should know. Despite the shift in students' posturing toward ideas, and the corporatized environment in which they seek their credentials, Angus constructs a positive argument and not a “narrative of decline” (p. 101). What makes *Love the Questions* different from some books about the changing

nature of the university is that it presents a changing reality while resisting resignation to it. This book calls for professors, students, administrators, and the lay public to become aware of how and why the university has changed.

Angus charts his course using history, philosophy, and observation. He engages in what he promotes: reflecting on the historical application of concepts as a means to reorienting them for modern times. To understand how enlightenment can be applied to the contemporary university requires one to know from where it has come. Although organized like a footnote, the section “A Note on Enlightenment” that follows the main chapters provides a foundational overview of how enlightenment has been considered by key thinkers. Besides displaying Angus’ philosophical acumen, this section serves to nuance the meaning of enlightenment. Angus cleaves what may be considered cannon or cliché by showing how “enlightenment” is not the same as its capitalized progeny, “Enlightenment.” The historical insight and conceptual clarity is central to Angus’ claim that critique which is both reflective and forward-looking is a *sine quo non* of a university. Angus justifies appending this Note to “lighten the often over-burdened academic style” (p. 11), and this is what makes the book appealing and accessible to a broad readership. Unequivocally, however, the exposition anchors his project.

The same can be said about the “Note on Techno-Science” which follows the exposition on enlightenment. Again through reference to notable philosophers such as Heidegger, Lyotard, and Deleuze, Angus illuminates the “performative spirit” (p. 149) inherent in techno-science, and challenges the perhaps unexamined assumption regarding the boundless nature of the network society as it constitutes techno-science. The first Note on enlightenment might be considered the frame, this second Note on techno-science the engine of the argument. Both are structurally necessary for his logic. Those comfortable with non-linearity may find it useful to begin reading at these ends.

Though hopeful, Angus does not hedge. In Chapters IV to VI he explains why the “university is in crisis” (p. 41). Angus attributes to techno-science three shifts that have threatened the liberal arts tradition of the university: “corporatization of the university, the commodification of knowledge, and the emergence of a new model of knowledge” (pp. 61-62). Because universities operate like corporations, its orientation toward knowledge as a product has undermined the university ideal. Corporatization of universities has been well described by other scholars from an administrative and market-based perspective, and Angus’ fourth chapter is a complement to these writings as he offers both a micro-economic understanding of how a corporation functions and a macro-economic and sociological explanation for the decline of the university’s service function. This chapter helps us to understand *why* corporatization makes difficult the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself. His distinction between knowledge transmission and knowledge production exemplifies par excellence Angus’ ability to penetrate well-mined issues.

Angus discusses the danger of commodifying knowledge in the fifth chapter. Canadian case studies of academic freedom violations add practical weight to the problem, and emphasize the question of the role of the university that Angus asks. After the discussion of this second force of university restructuring one begins to understand the complexity of how the university is being altered; thus, Angus’ summary of “anxieties” at the end of this chapter is a useful organizer and orientation before one ventures into the third force in Chapter VI. This chapter helps one to understand that it is not that knowledge itself is

treated as a product, but that the process of creating knowledge is eclipsed by the bottom line. A focus on innovation and answers, and seeing knowledge as information without understanding its *form* in the formation has reinterpreted the role of the university. This final chapter bolsters the poignancy of Angus' claim in Chapter I: "it is not learning that justifies teaching, but the ability to ask and confront genuine questions. The idea of the university can be defined as loving the questions" (p. 22). Thus, the book comes full circle, and the reader can understand Angus' worry over the way a liberal arts tradition of the university has been stripped to a skeleton by the modern view of science and research.

In a world where innovative solutions are revered, in which research is expected to impact immediately upon social and scientific problems, and in which success is time-sensitive and quantifiable, Angus' argument might seem eccentric and antiquated. I suggest his book is instructive and timely. It is written for the academic fraternity as a reminder to tether, as Angus does, to what inspired our pursuits for knowledge in the first place. It is written for undergraduate and graduate students as a lesson that the question is primordial in the research and learning endeavor. And it is written for society as a celebration of the redemptive power of the question. ♣