

Rise of Authoritarianism in Higher Education: A Critical Analysis of the Research Assessment Exercise in British Universities

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents a critical analysis of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in terms of theory, practice, and a Kierkegaardian metaphor related to issues of authoritarianism, the individual, objectivity, subjectivity, and maieutic communication. The assumptions that underlie the principles of the RAE are problematic in that conflict and contradictions are an inevitable part of these assumptions, particularly as they relate to issues of power and resistance. Governments should embrace risk – a leap of faith – and trust the university to take care of itself. To do otherwise can only end in failure of the university and its ability to conduct research in good faith.

RÉSUMÉ: Ce travail écrit expose une analyse critique sur la Pratique de Recherche d'Évaluation (PRE) dans la théorie et dans la pratique. Une métaphore de Kierkegaard sur les questions d'autoritarisme, d'individu, d'objectivité, de subjectivité et de communication maïeutique y est aussi présentée. Les hypothèses tirées des principes de la PRE, particulièrement celles qui traitent du pouvoir et de l'opposition, génèrent des problèmes et mènent inévitablement à un conflit et à des contradictions.

This paper presents a critical analysis of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in the United Kingdom vis-à-vis theory, practice, and a Kierkegaardian metaphor for the individual and subjectivity. It is the hope of this paper that the British model be not adopted in Canada and Australia where the growing, echoing tendency toward centralization in research in higher education and elsewhere in the Commonwealth is slowly casting and spreading its sinister shadow. In a recently published consultation report, commissioned by four British government funding bodies, Sir Gareth Roberts (2003) states that “the recommendations in this report constitute a radical overhaul of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). They do not however represent a wholesale rejection of

the RAE and the principles upon which it was built" (Roberts, 2003, p. 2). In this paper, it is argued that the assumptions that underlie the principles of the RAE are also problematic in that conflict and contradictions are an inevitable part of these assumptions, particularly as they relate to issues of power and resistance. Before undertaking any radical overhaul, it is necessary to elucidate, debate, and challenge these assumptions if educators and policy-makers are to overcome the inherent and often self-imposed barriers associated with the RAE.

Overview of the Research Assessment Exercise

According to Sir Gareth's report, the two main objectives of the RAE are: (a) to provide "ratings of the quality of research conducted in universities and higher education colleges in the UK, to inform the selective allocation of funds in accordance with the quality of the work undertaken;" and (b) "to maintain and develop the strength and international competitiveness of the research base in UK institutions, and to promote high quality in institutions conducting the best research and receiving the largest proportion of grant" (Roberts, 2003, p. 4). In order to achieve these objectives, all higher education institutions are asked to submit units of assessment (based on a standard format) that included staff who are research active. The last exercise took place in 2001, with research in the United Kingdom divided into 68 subject areas. A panel of peers were appointed to examine the research and grade each submission on a seven point scale (1, 2, 3a, 3b, 4, 5 and 5* – five star). However, as Sir Gareth points out, since 80% of submissions received one of the top three grades, and 55% received one of the top two grades, the full range of the rating scale is not being utilized. Based on the outcome of the 2001 RAE, Sir Gareth's report was commissioned to review eight main concerns, as follows:

- (a) the effect of the RAE upon the financial sustainability of research;
- (b) [the] increased risk that as HEIs' understanding of the system becomes more sophisticated, games-playing will undermine the exercise;
- (c) [the] administrative burden;
- (d) [the] need to properly recognize collaborations and partnerships across institutions and with organizations outside HE;
- (e) the need to fully recognize all aspects of excellence in research (such as pure intellectual quality, value added to professional practice, applicability, and impact within and beyond the research community);
- (f) [the] ability to recognize, or at least not discourage, enterprise activities;
- (g) [the] concern over the disciplinary basis of the RAE and its effects upon interdisciplinarity and

multidisciplinarity; and (h) the lack of discrimination in the current rating system, especially at the top end with a ceiling effect. (Roberts, 2003, pp. 4-5)

Despite the recognition of these concerns, the RAE has adopted a positive interpretation of its empirical data resulting from its fixed rating system; thus, for the two reviews of 1996 and 2001, it is no surprise that John Sutherland of the *Guardian Higher Education Supplement* of February 4, 2002, reported that the RAE claimed that research had improved by 30% in the United Kingdom since 1996 (Sutherland, 2002). But what does that mean? Are we to assume that the RAE was successful making researchers work 30% harder than they had before the exercise, and this in turn moved research ahead by that very same figure? Quick reflection on the part of any sort of statistical analysis reveals the impossibility of any such definitive interpretations. All we can safely say is that according to the dictates of the exercise 30% more publications than before were now in numerical preponderance. Thus the length and quality of such published papers is presumed a priori in this assessment and that the researchers inferentially now work much harder than before to appease the criteria of the RAE. (To the general public this could mean that researchers were frightened or bullied into this improvement by the exercise). Thus it is no surprise that the RAE argues that this has contributed to a most salutary effect for the research practices and activities of the university.

Of course, these messages result from a misleading use of data, which in turn necessitate many other questions concerning their interpretation. For example, one may actually ask what does a researcher have to do in the United Kingdom to acquire or be part of this 30% gain? How do you define a gain in research? What is the price paid for this gain in terms of the university at large? Seemingly a host of many other such questions are possible in this regard. The objectives and concerns associated with the RAE reflect a number of principles or ideologies, each containing different assumptions that are committed or tied to particular meanings. Inconsistency, fragmentation, and contradiction are often apparent since there is no unitary meaning.

This paper will attempt to address these issues, but first one should ask what must universities, as a body of individuals, do to generate such seemingly optimistic figures? One recognized response is that departments in universities bolster the number of publications by rearranging or purging their personnel to accommodate favorable outcomes vis-à-vis the perceived expectations of the exercise, it also

means hiring people who seem to have the knack of publishing papers or a history of such proclivities. Negatively stated this could mean that universities are more likely to favor hiring individuals based on the numbers of publications they can sell now or generate in the very new future. Other concerns of university life such as service to the community and teaching skills are more apt to be overlooked in the anxiety of the numbers game. Simply put numbers and frequency of publication is all that really matters in order to appease the dictates of the RAE and thus remain active as a university.

This outcome of a governmental bureaucracy intent on its own game of quiet and veiled intimidation, even if it could be proved to be an unintended intimidation as such, of researchers and synchronic appeasement of its public is a reflection of the growing tendency of centralization and the rise of educational authoritarianism in all parts of the Commonwealth today and is based on and engendered by a mistrust of universities, curriculums, and the educational system at large. It is a distortion of a politically misguided sense and disposition of accountability and expediency in governmental practices, in which, *possible* sycophancy, fear-inducement techniques, intimidation, intolerance to complexity, propaganda, simplistic and misleading arithmetic, reductionism, and poor criteria become the main tools of conduct and procedure on both sides of the fence; that is, the whole collective involved in this exercise. In complex ways that seemingly defy definitive socio-philosophical analyses, such as those attempted in the representative writings of critical theory and others, these tools of conduct are largely necessitated by the sustaining needs of an impersonal bureaucracy based on and trapped by its very own centralizing forces and mandate. These tools often feed on themselves with such practices in a role of enforcement and self-serving accountability and maintenance of governmental standards and values. In Kierkegaardian terms this means that there would be no need for such practices without the negative benefit of such a centralizing reflection of society (as we shall see shortly – both in terms of Kierkegaard and his notion of reflection) and thus of a self-serving bureaucracy and those who may be favored to carry out its terms of reference within its collective anonymity as a whole. Of course, innocent and well-meaning people are also caught in this web of sustaining needs on all sides of the exercise.

This paper presents the argument that the roots of the RAE are a misdirection of the so-called objective, centralized approach which has

already resulted, in spite of the official statistics in diminishing returns vis-à-vis research and education. It is also argued that the top winners of this system – the five and four star recipients – may ultimately be the real losers--in that they ironically reflect the erroneously successful outcome of a flawed rating system. Once again, to put it bluntly, more papers published is not necessarily an indication of effective research – especially as papers of uneven quality get published as well. As for the argument that good journals are part of the rating system is just another way of begging the question. The simple truth is that journals are only as good as their publications. And even if they are all good publications there are not enough of them to accommodate many other good publications. This obsession for the numbers game in papers is morally deficit. Wittgenstein, technically speaking, wrote one paper – but it was worth more than many others published in his time.

Objectivity and Subjectivity in the RAE

Its very title – the RAE – adroitly avoids the personal; in particular, it seeks an avoidance of the concrete and subjective notions associated with the complexity of research and researchers who actually conduct the research to be assessed. The idea being that *they, the RAE*, who impose the exercise do not *actually* do this – *it* does – that is, the members of the committee as a whole rather than its individual parts – thus, the unindividuated members, who comprise this committee or governmental organization. Such a membership can therefore hide behind its exercise as people hide behind committees; thus, the RAE as the government, hides behind the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), which in turn hides behind the phantom public. In this way the RAE can argue that the committee or exercise as a thing is not responsible for any negative outcomes as its members constitute a collective. But, of course, this does not preclude its membership from assuming a temporary individuation for successful outcomes of its assessments.

Soren Kierkegaard argued that such an impersonal process as outlined above would constitute an innate irresponsibility on the part of its committee members because it is already rooted in corruption amongst its ranks. He wrote that “when corruption sets in at this point, people seek consolation in company, and so reflection catches the individual for life” (Kierkegaard & Bretall, 1973, pp. 260-261). Reflection in this Kierkegaardian context refers to objective thinking on the part of government officials; that is, the RAE presumably *reflecting* the needs

and wants of the public. Kierkegaard thus referred to this state of affairs or thinking as a corruption on the part of the government and its membership; thus, in the case of the RAE, the inherent irresponsibility and corruption of ultimately carrying out such an exercise.

The RAE also generates an uncomfortable relation and tension between subjectivity and objectivity so common in philosophical discourse (the former exemplified by the researchers to be assessed and the latter by the assessors who hide behind the impersonality of objectivity). The popular assumption of these strange bed-fellows, that is, objectivity and subjectivity, in conflict with each other, is that they stem from postmodernist conceptualizations; that is, the disdain of postmodernism for constructs of objectivity as a form of patriarchy. But this is mostly nonsense as in fact the matter or stuff of subjectivity is mostly derived from Kierkegaard's philosophy of objectivity as an indeterminate phenomenon, which at its limits and parameters is generative of a responsible subjectivity as truth and passion. The responsibility factor is the result of having done one's homework rigorously in order to know where the limits of objectivity end in order to understand how subjectivity must then take over. In other words, there is no subjectivity without its concomitant objectivity at its roots and only a limited objectivity without the benefit of subjectivity. Thus they are relational precisely because they are not dichotomous. But it would be an error of judgment to presume that I would therefore equate the RAE as a representative document of postmodernism. For all the strengths of postmodernism, recognizing its own limitations vis-à-vis the objectivity and subjectivity debate is not one of them. In addition to this the RAE is not even capable of understanding any need for a responsible subjectivity.

Objectivity for Kierkegaard answers the what of the matter and the how refers to subjectivity. The former is abstract knowledge and the latter is concrete as it relates to the concrete individual. A major fault of an irresponsible and rampant subjectivity can be defined by its seemingly prodigious inability to know its own philosophical roots. Thus the RAE can be viewed as a metaphor, in a Kierkegaardian context for what has gone wrong with so-called, mistakenly determinable, objective approaches to education vis-à-vis research proclivity *without* the benefit of indeterminate human factors which pertain to subjectivity. To understand this metaphor better it is necessary to review Kierkegaard's understanding of subjectivity and its relation to an individual passion

that, according to him, makes one's existence possible. Stephen Evans writes that for Kierkegaard:

It [subjectivity] is passion ... that makes existence in the strongest sense possible. Only through passion can a person begin to collect herself and give her life a unified direction.... (Evans, 1983, p. 40)
[Nevertheless, this is just a step toward subjectivity].

The recognition and realization [of passion] is made possible in and through the passion the individual develops in the course of living. This passion then makes up the inwardness or subjectivity that is the actual content of a person's existence. (Evans, 1983, p. 72)

It is precisely this element of inwardness as the subjectivity of the assessed and assessor that is overlooked by the RAE. To reiterate, Kierkegaard like Nietzsche, conceptualized objectivity as a generative apposite, and not an opposite aspect of subjectivity because they are of necessity a relational entity which inform and are informed by each other. For Kierkegaard objectivity without its indeterminable limits of causality was an illusion that resulted in the bankruptcy of a person's capacity for truth as subjectivity. Mary Warnock writes:

The myth which Kierkegaard aims to destroy is the scientific myth that everything is causally determined, and that therefore in principle a complete and objectively true account of the behavior of everything could be provided, if only we took trouble and observed enough. (Warnock, 1988, p. 8)

It would be a serious misinterpretation of Kierkegaard to assume that this meant a disrespect for objectivity just as it is wrong on the part of the RAE to believe in this very myth on the part of their 'exercise' vis-à-vis research in the university. He saw the limits of the what of objectivity and how it could chip away from the 'how' of our individuality inherent in subjective reflection and knowledge. Warnock clearly defines three essential characteristics of Kierkegaardian subjective knowledge:

First it cannot be passed on from one person to the next, nor added to by different researchers. It cannot be taught in the classroom. Second, what is known subjectively always has the nature of a paradox. Therefore, subjective knowledge is identical with faith. For faith alone, and not reason, can induce us to accept paradox. ... Third, subjective knowledge is concrete, not abstract. This is because it must necessarily be related to the actual concrete existence of a living individual. (Warnock, 1988, pp. 9-10)

Thus, on the subjective or personal level, it can be said that RAE contravenes all of the above and results in a group of people cooperating or possibly colluding with the government and ultimately attempting to

evade the actual content of their existence and their lack of faith in other human beings. And ultimately misunderstanding and mistrusting the true nature of subjectivity as an entity of the concrete existing individual rather than the erroneous abstraction so commonly associated with subjectivity. But Kierkegaard argued that one *cannot* evade or escape one's subjective inner self. It is there anyhow whether we like it or not. In Kierkegaardian terms one could say that the RAE abrogates its responsibility by forcing an objective or direct form of communication (i.e., the exercise which adroitly extricates itself from an indirect form of communication concomitant with subjective communication). Why is it important for the government to communicate indirectly with university teachers and researchers? Or to put it another way why does the government assume a direct form of communication rather than that of indirectness of subjective communication? Evans provides an interpretation:

The answer in general is that such communication must be artful or "indirect," since the communication to be understood must eventuate in a double reflection on the part of the recipient. The receiver must personally appropriate the content, and he is free to do this or to refrain. Hence the success of the communication cannot be guaranteed. The true subjective communicator practices the maieutic art, as did Socrates. ... The paradox of the maieutic life is that "the recipient by the help of another comes to stand by himself." But if this is to be possible the communicator must find a way to reduce his own significance to the recipient to a vanishing nothingness. (Evans, 1983, pp.102-103)

In other words the RAE avoids indirect communication precisely in order to control and dominate research in its own predeterminable terms. The exercise accomplishes this by not reducing its own significance in relation to other people or colleagues in order to evade communicating indirectly; in effect this leaves it free to dominate others without having to admit to it. The direct heavy-handed, police-like objective approach is used to avoid the responsibility of an authentic, subjective communication. According to a Kierkegaardian metaphor, it is easy to get away with this because objective communication is associated with abstract knowledge. Concrete knowledge is subjective communication as individuals are concrete. In other words the government hides behind the direct approach in order to avoid the complexity and authenticity of a subjective approach and the inherent need for trust of the other. Thus the whole exercise is one of latent dehumanization – an abstraction if

you will – and thus a reductionism of sorts which avoids the authenticity and complexity of the indirect subjective approach.

Individualism and Collectivism in the RAE

Alternatively one could be tempted to retort with the question how would it be possible to do such a thing otherwise? The answer is that researchers in the university do not need the RAE at all. As stated before, and for the sake of emphasis the RAE is ultimately based on a lack of trust on the part of the government for the university and its personnel to take care of itself forthrightly. The dominating power of the government through its tentacle, the RAE, ought to be able and willing to trust researchers and the university community at large and dispense with notions of enforcement and veiled intimidation. It ought to take such a risk in the name of subjectivity and passion even though it consists of an unindividuated membership. For this to be so, it (these unindividuated members) would presumably have done their homework in the rigorous pursuit of objectivity's limits and its *personal* surrender to a responsible subjectivity.

In doing this it would cease predetermining outcomes and alienating researchers from themselves through a misguided strategy of domination and control. The perceived pressure of the public and its inherent distrust of the government and the university generate this mistrust of control and domination on the part of the government and the RAE. And since the government does not trust the university it only stands to reason that the public too will reflect this view. One mistrust feeds off the other. Yaroslav Senyshyn (1999) writes: "What if educators, civil servants, and governments in power were to stop dominating, controlling, predetermining outcomes and alienating that very teaching (research) profession which actually actualizes the awesome responsibility of teaching and educating our most important resource, our students?" (p. 154). If this was to happen then it could only be done if the RAE membership had turned into Kierkegaardian individuals. But what precisely did Kierkegaard mean by the term individual?

Since the public is the predominant force and symbol of leveling, the individual – at last – can be defined indirectly as one would expect of a definition pertaining to subjectivity and maieutic communication. Bretall sums this up thus "he [Kierkegaard] saw the leveling tendency and the rule of 'the public' as predominant; [thus] in contrast to a society dominated by individuals (those who precisely are not 'like everybody else')" (Evans, 1983, p. 259). The individual is of necessity the grand

negation who, in not being "like everybody else," is conceived as possessing the antithetical qualities in opposition to that which constitutes the abstract leveling process of the public. Of course it stands to reason, and according to Kierkegaard, that leveling is a necessary catalyst for that very development of individual independence from the conformity and uniformity of the Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean "herd."

Part of good research is precisely the ability to not fear or succumb to the leveling of society and to be particularly able to research even that which is not popular or acceptable to it. Ironically the RAE caters to this leveling and creates criteria in an exercise that rewards the leveling by ultimately discouraging complexity of research. This is done in addition to all the reasons thus stated and implied, by crowding it and not allowing it to breathe freely in the necessity of its own time and self-imposed will. In not understanding what constitutes the individual in authentic research concomitant of that individual, the RAE misses the rare opportunity as well to see its own inadequacy of aggressiveness in its non-individuated membership. This membership of impersonality results in its misjudgement and particular distrust of other individuals, as researchers, that is, those being assessed, and who should be able to do research in the cause of complexity and authenticity unsullied by mistrust through the impersonal domination, intimidation and control of unindividuation.

To further our understanding of the concept of the individual and its relation to the RAE and the researchers it assesses, we can learn *indirectly* from this following quotation as well:

The present age is essentially a sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence. (Kierkegaard, Hong, & Hong, 1978, p. 68)

From this quotation we clearly know that for him "the individual" is not sensible, reflecting, devoid of passion, indolent or fickle, superficial, or short-lived in his enthusiasm; as well, it is now clear that the qualities associated with the "present age" are one and the same for the attributes of the public. In spite of these clues, our problems of clarification are not yet solved because the notion of indolence is important, as we shall see shortly. Since the majority of individuals are leveled, it follows that we must make a further distinction in nomenclature between those individuals who are indolent and therefore remain leveled, and those individuals who can rise above this leveling because they are not lazy.

The late and eminent scholar of Kierkegaard, G. M. Malantschuk, traces concepts or stages of the individual outside of and inside the context of society which range from a state of "animality" to "the qualification of spirit" which appears in "the single individual." Malantschuk points out that at the lowest level Kierkegaard designates animality in man not by the term individual – but simply, human's lowest stage as "specimen" or "copy" [Exemplar]. At the next level, the word *person* is "individual" [individ]. The individual is dependent upon his environment and race, and must free one's self from this dependence to gain self-dependence. But this can only be done by assuming the guilt of the human race as one's own. Malantschuk then traces the next stage to that of "individuality" [Individualitet] which he feels is closest to the concept of personality. The highest stage of all is "the single individual" [den Enkelte]; as we have seen this is the religious stage in which:

One first becomes the single individual through an existential God-relationship. For Kierkegaard the category of the single individual is central. He often points out that he was the first to propound this category as central and predicts that it will become very significant in the future. He wished that his grave would bear the inscription, "that single individual" [hiin Enkelte]. (Kierkegaard, Hong, Hong, & Malantschuk, 1967, pp. 597-599)

In summation, the categories of the individual from the lowest stage to the highest are for Kierkegaard: specimen or copy (Exemplar), individual (Individ), individuality (Individualitet), and the single individual (den Enkelte). No doubt the reader can surmise at which stage the membership of the RAE is situated in this hierarchy of individuals.

The Private and the Public in the RAE

There is an interesting twist in Kierkegaard's thought in that the opposing force of the single individual – the phantom public – develops with the aid of the press which itself becomes a phantom. He writes:

A sedentary reflective age devoid of passion will produce this phantom [of the public] if the press is supposed to be the only thing which, though weak itself, maintains a kind of life in this somnolence. The public is the actual master of leveling... but the public is a monstrous nonentity. (Kierkegaard et al., 1978, pp. 90-91)

If individuals are real, then how are we to account for the phantom public? Kierkegaard also refers to it as "a monstrous nonentity." What makes it this nonentity? Kierkegaard explains with the following quotation:

Only when there is no strong communal life to give substance to the concretion will the press create, this abstraction "the public," made up of unsubstantial individuals who are never united or can never be united ... and yet are claimed to be a whole. The public is a corps ... [that] can never be called for inspection ... because it itself is an abstraction. Nevertheless, if the age is reflective, devoid of passion, obliterating everything that is concrete, the public becomes the entity that is supposed to include everything. But once again this situation is the very expression of the fact that the single individual is assigned to himself. (Kierkegaard et al., 1978, p. 91)

The latter part of this quotation is clearer in the Alexander Dru and Walter Lowrie translation. In particular they translate the last sentence thus: "And that again shows how the individual is thrown back upon himself" (Kierkegaard & Bretall, 1973, p. 265). When the individual is "thrown back," Malantschuk writes (in his commentary on Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*) that:

Kierkegaard calls this development a qualitative movement because a person thereby comes into an absolute relation to the absolute. But through such a relation the single individual also influences the laws of external, relative actuality – that is social and political life. On this point Judge William declares that a person must always translate himself from the personal and the religious to the civic and social, because the self is not only "a personal self but also a social and civic self." (Kierkegaard et al., 1967, p. 664)

The inability of the individual self (such as the self of the unindividuated individual of the RAE) to participate in a developmental "qualitative movement" will lead to a form of spiritlessness; that is, uniformity, conformity, despair, and anxiety. It has to be stressed that once again Kierkegaard reveals himself as a non-relativist; Malantschuk points out that "the social and political can never have absolute importance, because they lie within the world of relativities." Furthermore, "a person can practice love and self-denial to his neighbor, but in the world as an external actuality, his action will be judged as good or bad by a relative criterion, because the world and thereby the social and the political have other criteria." Thus the RAE is this external actuality which of its very own *socio-political* necessity, as outlined previously, must needs wallow in its world of relativities by reifying the impersonal, evading absolute importance, and opting for political criteria. The only way a body politic can avoid this moral impasse of relativity is to keep its nose out of other people's business. Without that trust Kierkegaardian relativities gain

the upper hand. Malantschuk points out that because "the interior life of the single individual is on another and higher plane than that of the social and the political, there is always interaction between the individual and society" (Kierkegaard et al., 1967, p. 664). This interaction is good because the individual can thus influence and improve society. Thus the RAE should give its researchers this very opportunity to influence and improve society by trusting them and their heightened interiority. Those few "rotten apples" who have not developed this interiority will evade that interiority even more so under the enforcement guise of the RAE. Worse than that, they may even thrive under it as their interiority will not be valued or needed. Thus it is precisely in its socio-political stance that the RAE evades its moral responsibility, this higher interaction between the individual and society.

Obviously neither the exercise of the RAE and its non-individuated membership is in this higher phase of spirituality. Thus according to Kierkegaard it cannot elevate social conditions in the sense that, for example, the authentic researcher can in his or her immediacy which can then draw in and directly involve the public and heighten its spiritual experience by the participation of each other through each other. It is the spiritual interaction of individualities – the public and researcher and ideally the individuated membership of an RAE – that heightens and elevates social conditions. The RAE makes this interaction impossible by creating an artificial rift between the public and the researcher. Thus research is impeded or even prevented in its ability to heighten or elevate social conditions. When a spiritual experience is not heightened in human beings then "there is a constant erosion and leveling of values in the social and political spheres, which Kierkegaard observed on a large scale" (Kierkegaard et al., 1967, p. iv, 664).

It is the public or society that constantly erodes and levels values in the social and political spheres. Kierkegaard's analysis of the herd or mass society constitutes what Merold Westphal refers to as Kierkegaard's sociology. Westphal writing in the first person makes:

No claim to have been either the first or the only one to make these discoveries, though much discussion of Kierkegaard has been quite innocent of them. These discoveries are important to me (Westphal) not as events of scholarly history but as moments of personal illumination. Thus they are only secondarily discoveries about

Kierkegaard. Primarily they are discoveries through Kierkegaard, insights gained with his help. (Westphal, 1987, p. viii)

Westphal's insights through Kierkegaard are particularly valuable to researchers and those that assess them because he is able to demonstrate clearly that the dedicated researcher is ideally a "single individual" (and this does not exclude teamwork) because he or she is a non-conformist who does not view research as merely an exclusive vehicle of some form of research as mere and political accountability to alleviate the boredom and indolence of society. The message of the master researcher tends to go against this inclination of the public. The RAE knowingly or unknowingly encourages it.

Conclusion

What does this all boil down to? Is there a way to summarize all the above into one fundamental concept? I believe there is. If one looks back to the earlier part of this paper where I outlined the eight concerns of the funding bodies in Sir Gareth's report, one can see in light of my subsequent arguments that these concerns are remarkably non-committal in their intent. Note also the interesting designation of the funding bodies as responsible for these concerns. Again how very convenient this impersonality. ("The funding bodies decided that the RAE ought to be reviewed in the light of the following concerns"). In other words the funding bodies' have gone out of their way to avoid the concrete or any allusions to the subjectivity and individuality of human beings. Human bodies are irrelevant here. Why?

I would hazard to suggest that the predominant concern, conscious or unconscious, is to avoid the notion of trust as an issue of one's self and the trust or mistrust of others. For the sake of emphasis I will quote myself once again: "Thus the whole 'exercise' is one of latent dehumanization – an abstraction if you will – and thus a reductionism of sorts which avoids the authenticity and complexity of the indirect subjective approach." In doing this it forces everyone else taking part in the exercise to reciprocate by reacting directly, abstractly and thus void of any human complexity and authenticity. Simplify the procedure and proceed accordingly by sloughing off any semblance of a moral dilemma; that is, strip the issue of any moral dimension and thus preempt the looming imposition of the spectre and phantom of the 'research' police (big brother) in the guise of educational authoritarianism. In an earlier article (Senyshyn, 1999) I write that mistrust breeds "impediments to our creative ability to exercise freely our individual passion and

subjectivity. ... Surely, without trust and its inherent risk factor, there cannot be subjectivity and passion" (p. 160). Indeed risk-taking is the corollary of trust. Governments should embrace risk – a leap of faith – and trust the university to take care of itself. To do otherwise can only end in failure of the university and its ability to conduct research in good faith. In this manner there will be a good marriage between the government and researchers in higher education. As for the public it can then tend to its own concerns. Only in this way can the words of Sir Gareth's intention for a radical overhaul of the RAE be actualized.

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