

# Gothenburg Research Institute

GRI-rapport 2008:6

Science for sale –  
build or criticize science as trademark

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ISSN 1400-4801

Layout: Lise-Lotte Walter



## Abstract

Over history science has, in a more and more agnostic world, come to replace religion as the most important hegemonic factor how to decide what is correct and what is incorrect, what is necessary and what may not be done, but also what is (at least in technical terms) good respectively bad. In this essay, originally a speech for the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, I argue that science in an utilitarian manor has left the virtues upon which it bases its societal status, to instead become an instrument for stability and protection of beneficiaries established position, deceiving not only the ideals Socrates stood for but hence also the fundamental values upon which it has during history, and with so many sacrifices built its societal position.



## Science for sale – build or criticize science as trademark

Speech at the symposium *Abuse and Misconduct in Science*, arranged by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Stockholm November 23-25 2006. By Dennis Töllborg, professor in legal science, Gothenburg Research Institute GRI, University of Gothenburg.

**1.** Everything is of course always done in best of will, or at least in the name of what is immediately necessary. This also goes for what history later will condemn as unusually stupid, corrupt or even mean.

**2.** They never really discussed the brochure – it just arrived as a supposedly brilliant idea from brilliant leaders. If it had not been for the professor in accounting, who at the monthly professors lunch humbly asked what this brochure really was about, its meaning and the intention, I probably never even noticed it. At least not before it became a fact.

They offered “your own professor as a contact link in to the school of Business, Economics and Law”, as well as the right to “in connection with ordinary lessons”, as they labelled it, “present your own company”. In other words, what we know from the movies as, branding. The gold donors was also to decide not only which “subjects the doctoral thesis’s at the School focus upon”, “the drawing up” of these thesis’s and the right to be a member of the research students (and other graduated scientist’s) “commanding board”, but donating also meant as a part of the gold donors privilege to decide the “content” of these thesis’s; in other words the result.

Honestly, when they told me now almost ten years ago, I was first convinced it was a joke. Yes, a bad joke, but still a joke. It was my impression that also the rest of the professors at the lunch regarded it just as a joke.

It was not. 300.000 Swedish crowns, approximately 33.000 € or 42.000 US\$, gave you a contract with all the just mentioned privileges. I needed to puke. So I did, using the power I had at the time – when everyone else, as usual, agreed with me, but did not dare to do anything – and wrote about it in a chronicle in Metro. The theme was that from January 1st this year it became prohibited to buy prostitutes, but it was still OK to buy your self a professor. And all this was really democratic; everyone who was prepared to pay may have not only their own professor, but also the scientific results they wanted – or needed.

The repression was immediate, decided and carried through by my nearest professor colleague, which not only was one of the inventors of this new system for selling science, but also my former research student fellow, writing her thesis at the same time as I, sharing the same supervisor, even though she never

understood or wanted to try to understand Radnitzkys Contemporary Schools of Metascience, and hence skipped all our seminars. Her decision was to, with immediate effect, freeze my salary. It was a clear message, open to and understood by everyone. Decided and carried through by the same woman which only one year before arranged a seminar on Ethics in Public Sector.

Well, that was almost ten years ago. So where do we stand today? Maybe a clip from the Schools own official blog, this text written three weeks ago by a researcher who I never met, gives us an answer: “When my colleague presented the hypothesis he meant was the most interesting and important, the donator explained that those were not for the benefit for the company or the branch. As a consequence, the donator did not prolong the research project, in spite of earlier guarantees that the project was to last over a longer period. The given reason was that the colleague was not a good team-mate... Maybe you between the lines can read that my colleague was sent out in to the cold, because he refused to be just a part of a PR-coup. Well,” this blog-writer continues, “what are there to say? Is it enough to be really mad and then just let life continue, or can we see a more fundamental structural problem which forces us to address?”

**3.** I claim: We have left a system where science included some very specific internalised virtues: independent critic, founded on a qualitative and transparent discourse, with a slow career-development, based on absolute freedom under the only responsibility that all the time be prepared to be challenged by other scientists. Greed for money and social status, fed by coward and utilitaristic indifference, gave us a new system, where science became dependent on a system of handing out rewards, and this regarding scientific status as well as financial support. This new system promotes adaptation and more or less open plagiarism, changing, at the best, the focus in science from what we need to know, or what is worth knowing, to what is knowledgeable – at as little effort, little personal risk and maximum profit as possible. And all this is steered not by the classical virtue of the scientist, but by what does the benefactor want to know – and what does he absolutely not want to be known.

**4.** I furthermore claim that this has led to that science is at the risk to be reduced to be, at the best, an instrument for hegemonic control over what are to be regarded as economic, medical and social development. At the worst science today has no other aspiration than to create a qualitatively empty trademark, behind which street-level policy defending utilitaristic bureaucrats can develop a personal strategy for successfully defending own established position. The more fancy, the emptier the trademark seems to become. But it doesn't matter, not even ethically, since the common theoretical explanation is that everything

anyway is just matrix. In this system, both externally and internally, quality is, can and may only be measured with standardized bureaucratic nonsense, externally in numbers of “produced students”, “produced thesis’s” etc, creating imbecile demands like minima- and maximaquoto of passed students, timetables for the development of thesis’s, hence also standardized timetables for research project, including education for research students as well as maximum number of pages for the thesis’s, disregarding individual differences in the subject as well as the research students necessary and welcome different skills, capabilities and talents. Internally this has led to measuring the “quality” of the mature researcher with even more stupid, and definitely lazy and coward, methods like social citation index and normalize-shaping peer-reviews, promoting plagiarism and ass-licking. Intellectual work and ethical demands are replaced by seemingly neutral and objective statistical reports, leaving no space for transparent intellectual critical, hence difficult, dangerous and qualitative evaluations. The Governmental and Economical Power goes into an unpronounced agreement with the common unreflected, paradigmatical, mission to prevail and defend own established position, both individually and collectively. I’ll scratch your back, if you scratch mine – let us take “social responsibility”, as they like to call it. The critical discourse as a method for evaluating theories and scientifically claims is replaced by bureaucratic pseudoscientific surveys of quality, made by colleagues and friends chosen among by the economic and political power trustable persons. Cover up becomes the common theme, in the name of stability, social competence and fear of losing established position, and the reports are easily tailed to not disturb, each involved realizing that in the world of Matrix and Trademark, myth is more important than reality. Cynicism is the result when social competence and cowardness becomes the most important, and desirable, qualities, demanded from the benefactors and accepted by the universities. And the new research students, just as every child and every bureaucrat, learn and copy from what we do, not what we say.

**5.** And I do claim that the new genesis of science is no longer to create genuinely new knowledge, at least not on a systematically and definitely not on a paradigmatic, level, in other words to destabilize just because this is necessary for creating dynamic. The new genesis is instead to be an instrument in creating stability. Hence, sciences main contribution is to strengthen existing structures, and to be contextually adjustable. Of course, I claim as the naïve person I love to be, this is problematic. But it is also unethical, maybe unintentionally, but still unethical.

It is unethical since the factual changes have not changed the image of science. Science still has a good trademark, deriving its status from the image of science as something built on aspiration to always be truthful, putting new



knowledge in context whatever the consequences, and the scientist as a human being characterized by courage, creativeness, always a pioneer and striving for new emancipation. If this picture is untrue to the amount that it can be claimed to even be false, then science and scientists participate in an unethical social movement, where the new science, and the new scientists, sponge on old values that they not even have the aspiration to live up to.

The Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences has this autumn reminded the new Government that Sweden has become unique in the sense that we are the only country who does not guarantee a full professor space for free research as a part of her employment (I have it, but I am unique in a unique country). Instead full-time professors must, with well-known results, apply for – or actually politely beg for – resources from politically and economically appointed organs, overwhelmed by politically correct people, who in their mercy contributes with gifts and rewards to scientists and projects which pleases those with established position. And, as you know, you cannot demand to have a gift. But a scientist who keeps focusing on his benefactor can hardly ever be anything greater than a pupil, since, with Edward Said, the thought in the depth of his consciousness all the time is to please instead of being unpleasant.

I do believe that Said summarize the Swedish situation perfectly when he, although in another context and here in my awkward translation, writes: “I believe that intellectuals who are close to those who draw up policies, and are in the control over what projects should be chosen, what scholarships to be granted, who is going to be employed and who is going to be promoted, (these intellectuals) in a deeper and more consequent way internally develops a tendency to avoid persons who breaks the social or methodological rules, and which sooner or later will radiate as being controversial and difficult to cooperate with.” Like Socrates, Archimedes, Jesus Christ, Galilei, Einstein, Chaplin, Picasso, Solsenitsjyn, Deirdre McCloskey...

**6.** I can understand, but I refuse to sympathize, with scientists who in such a community “choose their battles” or try to be pragmatic, as they themselves call it, when the choice is between the brutal truth – ”the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” – or to be satisfied with parts of it because you do not want to stand alone, or do not dare or have the strength to take the fight. But it is a choice you do, and it is a choice where you choose to act as an utilitarian, and promote what’s seems to be best for your own career or the institution you belong to, instead of being loyal against the value you then sponge upon when you claim that you are a scientist. And it is a choice where you choose to drop Socrates, with his idea that the universities most important task is to be the bee that awake the lazy ox the state represents, and you make that choice just because you prefer a comfortable, or at least more comfortable, life for your self.

With that choice, all too many, to quote from the Swedish Broadcasting Company Kalibers great survey among all professors in Sweden spring this year, find themselves, to quote one professor, to do “what somewhat critical can be labelled prostitution, in other words: I do whatever I get paid for”. Another professor is just as explicit, but maybe less dramatic, when he claims, “Everything actually is only done in order to raise money. We have become advisers and the universities companies for consultation”. And a third just certifies that “the system with giving allowances leads to that I have to be and behave politically correct and keep to the mainstream in order to be financed. The system creates adaptation”. But for this, no matter how many royal medals you receive and no matter how many festschriften you will receive, and no matter what can be read in the obituary notice, you, of course, carry guilt. And for science, as well as for the vitality in democracy, the result is devastating. This is particularly central in a social system where power – may it be political or economic – bases its legitimacy on references to value arguments which are linked to the superiority of the democratic rule; in other words in a system whose most powerful cohesive force is voluntary acceptance. This, just because that every acceptance of this kind ultimately is based on a *conception* of the actual state of things, and more rarely on an empirical analysis. In the modern version of these social systems, science and scientists plays a decisive part in the confidence those who are controlled have in the actual state of things; science as an instrument of legitimacy and the scientist as the tool for diverting issues and knowledge that are sensitive for hegemony.

In the end of the 1990s this became almost a parody, when every politically-morally sensitive issue that was brought up in the debate caused the government to take lightning action and gave the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSFR), an assignment to conduct specially-oriented research programmes in order to quickly remove the question from the political agenda. And the “scientists” came like flies to sugar, always ready to through their work and hiding behind their titles give the necessary authority, in order to themselves make a substantial bit of cash or at least a faster promotion.

The most stunning example must of course, I love to believe, be fetched from my speciality; pro-active policing and intelligence. I am thinking about the so-called Säkerhetstjänstkommissionen (the Swedish Security Commission).

Anyone with some knowledge in the area remembers it as the most silly attempt to be something like a Swedish Church-committee, the Canadian McDonaldcommission or at least the Norwegian Lund-commission. No matter its complete failure in this attempt, it still was an internal Swedish success-story, as far as using science for covering up. In three-thousand pages it presented nothing new what-so-ever – as far as concern those who had some knowledge, something which only could be said about one of the members of the commission – and managed to avoid every question which had explanatory force or could endanger the position for any still living member of the political and bureaucratic

aristocracy. The method was as elegant as simple: give them so much empirical information at the same time that it is impossible for anyone who is not familiar with the material to see through it, or even draw any new conclusions, and let it be said that the survey has been done “by scientists”. The truth is, as everyone familiar with the field know, that nothing new was presented – just old news together with some new empiri confirming what we already knew – and that the groundwork was done by the security services own archives-personnel and by the three men, by the chairman repeatedly presented as “scientists”, of whom two was researchstudents and one did not even have an academic candidate exam. The result: the researcharea, and the citizens, now so mixed up with confusion that all the structural deviances could be covered up, and hence prevailed, in other words promoting stability and defending established position. And the researchers rewarded, both economically and with new higher ranks in the scientific society, for their compliance with the power, and non-compliance with scientific honour. But it leaves us with a stalinized history and with a deterioration of the quality of our Secret Service and Military Intelligence, the number of telephone tappings doubled, still with no substancial examinations from the Courts, etcetera etcetera. And, of course, Sweden once again convicted for breaching human rights, both by the European Court of Human Rights, the United Nations Court of Human Rights and even the United Nations Committee against Torture.

Enough about this, I written so much about it<sup>1</sup>, that you all know the story, and the empiri is so obvious that it is impossible even for a blind not to see. But the stupidity, and the success of the stupidity and dishonesty, still makes me mad, and the utilitaristic decision by the researcher who let them self be bought will make me furious until I die. You see, I meet the victims on both sides – the real professionals in intelligence, who wants to do a good job, but are denied this, and the citizens whos lifes are destroyed because of bad, stupid and lazy intelligence. So I believe my anger is healthy, really strait, even though maybe no more socially competent than the children in *The Emperor’s New Clothes*.

Back to the story.

**7.** New knowledge, new thoughts and new ideas; this is the dynamic that must be sciences most important driving force, internally as well as externally – it is getting better every day, but it will never be good. This view demands free basic research, it demands science and scientist who dare to challenge, who dare to stretch the limits. There is no room for coward scientists, and there can never be any pragmatic science, since both conceptions are a contradiction in terms. Every other position reduces science to an activity among others, with the unspoken

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Töllborg, Dennis: a. Om detta må ni *inte* berätta (I Festskrift till Anna Christensen, Juridiska Föreningen i Lund 2000) samt b. Twenty Years After – välkommen till Oceanien (I Festskrift till Reinhold Fahlbeck, Juridiska Föreningen i Lund 2005).

purpose to serve economic and hegemonic power. And this is, just for science, unethical to the extent that it excludes such activity from the deepest meaning of science, since science high reputation, its genuine trademark, is built on altruism, collectiveness, truth, courage and transparency. A scientist must be curious; he must be brave, loyal only to values, never to person. A scientist may be uncertain and he may be wrong, but he may never be pragmatic and he may never choose his battles. Then he is not a scientist, then he is a parasite.

But where did we go – less than 15.000 € buys you the professor title, we sell “courses” where lawyers for 2.000 € and six seminars are given the belief that they can become a doctor juris, we have research students who are learned that it is more important to act socially competent when meeting Human Rights-careerists and other potential benefactors, than to critically view and explain what is happening in the world now, since they otherwise – according to their supervisors – will receive no funding for finishing their thesis’s. We receive research students with the first question; “is there anything I can do research on”, in other words; where are the money to be made, instead of young presumptive researchers who are burning for a subject, an idea or a theory and because of that are looking for financing for a career as a research student. The new research student may not be the least interested in the question “why” anymore, since the context teach them immediately that the most important question is “how” – *how do I raise money*. And the university-bureaucrats give courses for the scientists “how to write a successful application for a research project”.

We get a society where you may be, even are supposed to be, critical, but may be neither frank or correct. Research like “How come we are so fucking good?”, in other words on whether angles has wings, is as welcome in Sweden as in the former Soviet Union, while every attempt for research regarding if angles, or corruption, exists is met by immediate repression by the men and women in power and frightened silence from your colleagues. But can we live, can we survive, with a university, and a science, whose main characteristic is pragmatism, and where the employees are marked by cowardness and their most skill feature is social competence?

“You hardly bite the hand that feeds you” has become the new slogan for Swedish, maybe also other countries, science. That pragmatic was never Socrates, and still his trademark became the strongest ever in science. Maybe we have something to learn from that, paradoxically enough also pragmatically, especially those of us who are to be labelled utilitarians. Maybe we should stop pitying ourselves and instead take the power we actually have, taking the fight for the ideals that we so much sponge on with our high status positions in our society, maybe we even are ethically obligated to take the power and the war, taking the personal risk every war always mean. Simply to choose to be loyal with Socrates, instead of with the power and the glory.

Well, that was my last claim. I claim that the least we must be expected to dare, is to dare. To dare to all the time be naughty and nasty! Naughty and nasty

against those forces who reduces science to an instrument for hegemonic control and transform scientists to become prostitutes and universities to be brothels. We owe this not only to our fellow citizens and our children; we owe it to all our predecessors, who took the fight that gave science its once well-earned trademark.

### *Postscript*

Am I angry? No, not any more. Now I am just fed up. Fed up with cowardness, social competence and ignorance. Stupidity has a certain charm, but ignorance does not! Certainly not in science.