Higher Education in Societies: A Multi Scale Perspective  
Goastellec, Gaële; and Picard, France, eds.  
Sense Publishers, 2014  

Book Review  

Tags: administration | higher education | politics and education  

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The editors ground the collection in social contract theory, specifically the claim that higher education should foster equality of opportunity (2). Many of the chapters discuss how that goal is being problematized and privatized by political pressure to emphasize education’s economic
benefits to individuals and society in a knowledge-based economy in place of other kinds of personal and public goods, such as an informed citizenry. These political shifts have the effect of calling peer review into question as the standard for evaluating academic research because different generations of researchers may emphasize different standards and measures of performance, and because public managers impose their own criteria (13). These articles document some paradoxical developments, such as declining student demand for science and engineering courses in some countries (139). They also illustrate how the increasing internationalization of higher education standards, through processes internal to the European Union and also due to the rising prominence of international rankings, puts disproportionate pressure on humanistic disciplines that tend to emphasize national or regional topics (12).

*Higher Education in Societies* provides an important reminder of the crucial role of national politics in formulating the goals and ideals, as well as the funding, of higher education. For this reader, it highlights by omission the unusual situation of American academics like myself who work for private colleges and universities, which disproportionately dominate the teaching of theology and religion in the U.S. (A complementary discussion of theology and religious studies in European universities appears now in Christoph Uehlinger’s “Is the Critical, Academic Study of the Bible Inextricably Bound to the Destinies of Theology,” in *Open-Mindedness in the Bible and Beyond* [Korpel and Grabbe: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015], 287-302).

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