

Review of *Impostors in the Temple*, by Martin Anderson,
(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 255 pages, index.

By T. E. Wilder

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“It has been quite a while since anyone spoke of the world of American higher education as a place of integrity.” The cause of this, Martin Anderson argues, is bad guys.

They are the corrupt priests of America's colleges and universities and, while small in number, their influence is large and pervasive. They are the great pretenders of academe. They pretend to teach, they pretend to do original, important work. They do neither. They are imposters in the temple. And from these impostors most of the educational ills of America flow. (p. 10)

Of the many writers on the ills of the universities, Anderson is especially angry. Unfortunately this leads him to look for a few malefactors, when the problem is the breakdown of the institutions of a dying liberal culture. Indeed, he sees the very dominance of liberal intellectuals in this century as a sign of essential health.

Anderson traces the decline of the Universities largely to their massive growth after WWII. It was not possible to add the necessary faculty without lowering standards, hiring those whose ability or interest in teaching was deficient. The resulting lower commitment to the mission of education made the path smoother for the other corruptions.

Chief among these is the abandonment of a huge amount of the classroom instruction to teaching assistants (TAs). Anderson find the existence of TAs (“children teaching children”) outrageous and needing completely to be abolished. First, they lack the experience, the emotional and psychological distance from the other students, and the training to teach. Then, many TAs are foreigners who don't know English and can't teach. Finally, the teaching duties take graduate students away from their own studies at the point in their lives when they most need time and freedom from distraction.

The academic publication glut is also destructive of scholarship. Faculty performance is measured by publication record, chiefly articles in professional journals. Most such articles are pointless, Anderson contends. They are a meticulous exercise in triviality, they are not effectively evaluated for publication, and when published remain unread. As a measure of academic achievement they are also used poorly. Generally, faculty

evaluations simply count the number of articles, or the number of times they are cited by others as reported in a citation index, without any attempt to determine the quality of the work.

A major focus of faculty effort, therefore, and the main criterion for hiring, tenure and promotion, is the participation in a largely pointless publication industry that resists evaluation. For Anderson this distinction between academic and other intellectuals is fundamental. Media pundits, journalists, commercial research scientists, legal and medical professionals, etc. are subjected to market forces, and their success and prominence is earned. University faculty have insulated themselves from any meaningful external check on their performance, and have jettisoned any reliable internal method of performance review.

As might be expected, the book has a section on political corruption, also known as political correctness. There is, in addition, financial corruption. Anderson's position at the Hoover Institute left him ideally placed to report on both the political and fiscal corruption in which Stanford is a world leader, and also the faculty indifference to the outrages.

Faculty hiring, award of tenure, and promotion, is often done largely by decision or recommendation of faculties colleagues. If they are mostly good guys, why do they allow a few to abuse the system and ruin American education? Consider the case of Dartmouth, described by Charles J. Sykes in *The Hollow Men*.¹ When the humanities faculties came under attack by New Left radicals determined to seize power, the science and engineering faculty sided with the radicals. To fight the left invited retaliation; as techies they imagined themselves immune from ideological interference if they played along. But if the science people are part of the academy should they not be committed to the values and standards that make academic enquiry meaningful? This wholesale failure of courage and integrity showed that Dartmouth's problems were not limited to an handful of impostors.

Here are Anderson's recommendations for reforming the universities:

1. Prohibit student teaching.
2. Stop rewarding spurious research and writing.
3. Change the Ph.D. degree process.
4. End faculty tenure.
5. Reorganize faculty titles and responsibilities.
6. Return to the four-year bachelor's degree.
7. Take sexual harassment seriously.
8. Ban political discrimination.
9. Stop athletic corruption.
10. Crack down on institutional corruption.

¹ Charles J. Sykes, *Hollow Men: Politics and Corruption in Higher Education* (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1990).

The endorsement of prominent neo-cons covers the back of the dust jacket. This is a tip-off to the book's fundamental shortcoming. A neo-con does not recognize the present civilizational collapse. Where conservatives see the need for a renewal of moral vision, purpose and commitment in the academy, the neo-con looks to institutional and programmatic fixes designed to get the institution back on track. The neo-con, pluralist in his very bones, cannot see that a meaningful university must be a community of scholars, and that a community presupposes a common moral commitment.