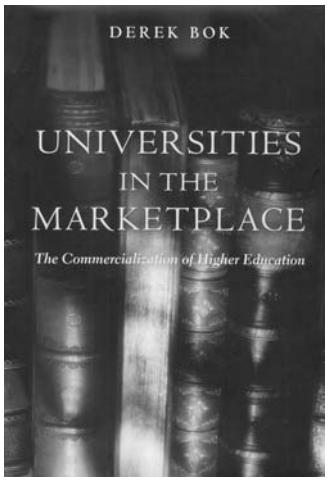
More To Academe Than Making Money

—Tom Nesbit



However reluctantly, universities are being forced to change. Rapid technological development allied with the pressures of economic globalisation are requiring them (and those who pay for their services) to redefine the role and purposes of higher education in what's increasingly being called a "knowledge" or "learning" society. No longer quiet enclaves for the pursuit of truth, far removed from the busy world of commerce and industry, universities are now closely linked with national economic and scientific objectives. They are regarded as the chief source of the elements essential for society's continued growth and prosperity: highly trained specialists, expert knowledge, and scientific advances that can be turned into valuable new products or procedures. The demand for university services related to their mission of teaching, research, and community service is expected to grow significantly in the next 10 years. In Canada, the AUCC (the principal association of universities and colleges) projects several changes: a 20-30% increase in demand in student enrolments (particularly amongst adult and other "non-traditional" learners), a significant increase in research performance to make Canada one of the top five countries in the world for research and development, increased interactions and partnerships between universities and industry, more international collaboration and competition, and a tripling of gross revenues. Such growth is expensive; already costs are spiralling while financial support from governments steadily declines. Clearly, new sources of revenue need to be found to pay for universities' expanded role. The pressures upon academic institutions to commercialize and upon their scholars to become entrepreneurs are becoming intense.

These issues are comprehensively examined by former Harvard University president Derek Bok in *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education* (Princeton University Press, 2003). Reflecting on a lifetime's experience of higher education administration, he probes university efforts to profit financially from an increasing range of activities—not just athletic endeavours but educational and research work as well—and shows how such ventures are undermining core academic values. He details the ties between corporations, universities, and faculty and the growth of commercial activities in both scientific research and educational programming. In sum, Bok finds the enterprise of commercializing the academy decidedly risky. The promise of financial gain often leads to conflicts of interest, unnecessary secrecy, and corporate attempts to influence research results. Although Bok focuses primarily on US higher education with its extraordinary mix of public and private institutions, his overall cautions will resonate in Canada as well. Higher education here has also seen its share of challenges to academic freedoms stemming from the clash between commercial and academic values (as the recent experiences of David Healy, Nancy Olivieri, and David Noble will attest).

Bok examines competing explanations for increased commercial activities in the academy: university presidents and senior administrators intent upon expanding the size and reputation of their institution; the growing influence of the market throughout society; the increased legitimacy of private enterprise and corporate approaches; institutional competition fostered by questionable but nevertheless popular magazine league tables; a lack of clarity in academic values and a loss of institutional purpose and any mission "beyond a vague commitment to excellence"; cutbacks in government funding; and attempts by the businessmen and others who sit on boards of trustees and governors to commodify education and research, reduce faculty status, and push universities towards serving corporate rather than scholarly interests. Bok sees all these explanations as influential. Yet, for him, no attempt at commercialization would bear much fruit were it not for the rapid growth in opportunities to profit from the production of knowledge provided by a more technologically sophisticated and knowledge-based economy.

Bok finds that the supposed benefits of increased commercialism—extra scholarships, more library books, new laboratory equipment, endowed chairs, faculty incentives—often prove illusory in the long term. Hoped-for private amounts don't always materialize, rising costs eat up anticipated gains, and the level of public funding declines. He also sees threats to core academic values: admission and educational standards are undermined, vocationally-oriented programs are promoted at the expense of more traditional liberal arts, collegiality and trust can be undermined, and the basic canons of independent scholarly and scientific enquiry can suffer. These have moral and practical consequences: the

concerns for character- and citizen-building are subjugated to more commercial and competitive values and the reputation of universities for objective and unbiased teaching and research is impaired. Most importantly, the philosophical underpinnings and social mandates of universities suffer if their activities follow only what is lucrative.

As might be expected, the rise of academic entrepreneurism has not met with universal enthusiasm on campuses. Universities' attempts to commercialize rarely seem to meet with approval from either faculty or students. Some complain that universities have turned into knowledge factories where intellectual ideals are routinely compromised for the sake of money and senior administrators respond more to political and market forces than to faculty, students, and staff. For others, learning and research come to be valued in terms of their ability to be translated into cash or merchandise, and not in other ways, such as aesthetic, intellectual, or recreational pleasure. The dangers in this are readily apparent: the idea that there are other kinds of value than the economic eventually gets downplayed or even lost. And, once essential values are sacrificed they become difficult to restore. This remains the single most compelling argument against unfettered academic commercialism: envisioning universities as economic agents rather than educational institutions threatens to change their character in ways that limit their freedom, sap their effectiveness, and diminish their integrity. Although not all ties with industry are suspect and universities need not refuse every opportunity to earn financial reward from their work, commercial ventures are decidedly risky…not only in themselves but also to the academic standards and scholarly values that universities maintain and to the integrity and independence they hold.

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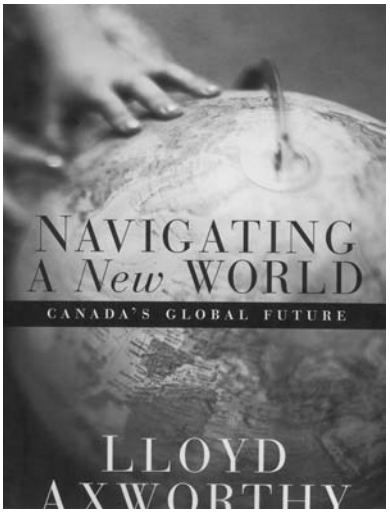
Navigating A New World: Canada's Global Future by Lloyd Axworthy

—Nancy Harris



For those who have been fortunate enough to hear Lloyd Axworthy speak, his account of a viable and just place for Canada in a rapidly shifting global politic is a continuation of his regular public speaking theme. While he describes the way he sees us—individuals who give shape to this country—we hear his voice, consistently courageous and inclusive as he points out the path that runs through challenging bureaucratic processes, international opposition and made-in-Canada partisan politics to a place where Canadians can lead with their best skills. This is not a comfortable text. It is weighed down with our failure to act out of humanitarian intent. Mr. Axworthy articulates his desire to see Canada move ahead using "soft power"—advantages of wealth, good education and a generally secure stable society—to establish humanitarian intervention in the context of traditional state sovereignty. Defining sovereignty as the responsibility to protect must, Axworthy states, become accepted international behaviour. The imperatives for the use of soft power are the atrocities committed around the world.

With an excellent reputation at home and on the world stage, Dr. Axworthy can now be found at the Liu Institute at the University of B.C. This is an ideal time to document an impressive public life. Still, one might ask to whom this navigational instruction is addressed. Given that Axworthy has retired from politics, his opinions now might have greater acceptance in the broad Canadian community than they did while he was in public office. This is one of the problems in Canada. We love to find politicians incredible and hold their ideas suspect of political agenda. If there is a challenge outside the boundaries of Canada to resolve major issues without resorting to a partisan or protectionist politic, there is an equal challenge within Canada to do the same. The challenge within Canada's boundaries is one that could be addressed in public dialogue. When Axworthy criticizes "Canadian academics [who] tend to be detached and at times disdainful of involvement in the political process" (p. 32), I see an opportunity for universities to be part of community-based dialogue. While this concept might seem a natural fit for intellectual interest it must be appreciated that universities have their own internal dynamics and inside/outside political mechanics that need to be retooled for a discussion intended to build solutions. Many academics struggle with the uncertainty of where to begin community-based discussions involving politics and stand mute as a result of that struggle. In addition, it must be acknowledged that universities are entities that market a product, that product being credit courses. Any project involving community outreach requires funding.

A solution might be found in Dr. Elizabeth Jareg's commentary quoted by Axworthy. When asked if it is possible for young people caught in the tragedies of Uganda to recover, she emphasizes the "importance of being accepted back into the