

## Reviews of recent books in social science and sociology

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As I write this, in early 2018, the NHS is so overstretched that it has been forced to suspend all non-urgent care. This comes a few weeks after Bob Kerslake, Chair of King's College Hospital Board, resigned in protest against government underfunding. Hours into New Year's Day there was widespread criticism of the decision to appoint Toby Young to the new Office for Students Board. Reasons included his public comments in support of "progressive eugenics", derogatory remarks about disabled people, and a range of sexist and homophobic statements. In December, Brexit Secretary David Davis confessed that the 58 impact assessments of leaving the EU he had cited did not actually exist. Most worrying in recent months, a UN committee investigated the UK government and found that it has not done enough to protect disabled people's human rights.

As this sample illustrates, public services are in poor shape. *The Knowledge Corrupters*, argues – using a breadth of evidence from across many services – that the imposition of neo-liberal market logic should take the lion's share of the blame.

and political forces, but instead has become just a cog in a profit driven neo-liberal system.

The university ought to be a civic institution as well, one which should promote critical dialogue and debate. Yet, with greater marketization, higher education has become a luxury or a privilege more than a right, with students falling deeper into debt, robbing them of their future potential, caught in an endless cycle of debt repayment. Far from questioning social and economic inequalities across society, universities have become part of a rat race. Order and obedience is maintained through an increasingly strong managerial system, but also more directly through security services that have been outsourced, where any dissent is successfully

### The Knowledge Corrupters

Colin Crouch

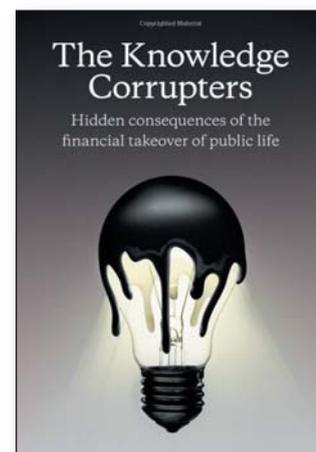
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Advocates of the market see it as the best solution to managing public services, for instance by developing key performance indicators which can be continuously collected and automatically analysed, hence supposedly improving effectiveness and reducing costs. Crouch's argument is that, on the contrary, the market severely oversimplifies the knowledge required to run services, undermines professional expertise, and rewards dishonest behaviour to achieve narrow and short-term targets. This has a detrimental effect on services. Concentrations of monopoly powers such as Atos, Capita, and Serco – each enmeshed in providing public services and now too big to fail – mean there is no true market anyway.

The problem is illustrated by Crouch's opening example. Dementia is under-diagnosed, according to prevalence surveys. So, the market logic goes, the way to encourage more diagnosis and better care is to reward each diagnosis financially. A 2014 proposal was £55 per diagnosis. Medics explained in a public letter to the BMJ that professional integrity was a more important driving factor and that financial payments would undermine trust. The policy was eventually shelved. This case illustrates how the market is supposed to work: financial incentives and market forces trump professional knowledge, and professionals cannot be trusted to do what is best for society.

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quashed not through debate but by force, in the form of the campus police. Any quality of relations amongst students, or between faculty and students, is further disrupted through quantifiable measures of student support in the form of a "contact hour fetish", highlighting the extent to which university life is controlled and disciplined. In its concluding chapter, Docherty sheds light on the system of governance and government, where value for money dictates policies and processes within the university, with surveillance and discipline becoming the norm.

While Docherty's work focuses on the higher education system in the UK, his analysis can be extended to different contexts across the world, as neo-liberal market

failings of the market machinery. How, for example, policing targets led to arbitrarily prioritising some crimes over others. How intensive school attainment testing is used as a proxy for evaluating teacher performance and creating school league tables, rather than tracking children's progress, regardless of the impact on children being tested. Other examples include falsified vehicle emissions tests and the untrustworthiness of financial ratings agencies, with the three main ratings agencies giving banks top scores – shortly before the banks showed major problems during the financial crisis.

The final chapter discusses solutions, driven by an overarching aim to "advocate openness in knowledge" (p.149) by striking the right balance between political and professional power while involving and respecting citizens who rely on services. Too much democracy leads to hyper-democracy, where every little detail is debated by politicians without the necessary expertise. Although professional knowledge is crucial, over-reliance on professionals leads to technocracy. Crouch argues that public management cannot be reduced to cold reason.

In summary, *The Knowledge Corrupters* provides a comprehensive review of problems with market logic. It is an important contribution to the debate on how public management could be improved.

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principles are increasingly dictating the nature of higher education today. His book is important not just for sociologists of higher education, but also compulsory reading for education practitioners and policy makers in the higher education sector. By exposing the increasing marketization of the higher education sector, he offers the possibility of challenging this system by building on a "collegium" – a space where collective action and interaction is possible, where collaboration is the norm, and an idea of citizenship is promoted based on such "collective – if always fluid and dynamic – identities" (p.101).

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