**Character, corruption, and ‘cultures of speed’ in higher education**

**Commissioned by:**

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**1. Introduction**

An abiding theme of critical higher educational discourse, other than its gloomy tones, is the use of a rhetoric of *corruption* For Martha Nussbaum, fixation on rote learning of narrow curricula threatens to ‘corrupt the mission of humanistic scholarship’ (2010: 130). For Stefan Collini, a narrowly ideological philistinism is leading to the ‘corruption’ of educators’ role as ‘custodians’ of our ‘complex intellectual inheritance’ (2012: 199). For Michael Sandel, modern regimes of performativity and assessment ‘erode, or crowd out, or corrupt’ what really matters – ‘love of reading’, understanding, and education for its own sake (2012: 61). Similar denunciations of the increasing corruption of academic practitioners, institutions, and ideals are also heard on blogs, around watercoolers, and in staff rooms.

Unfortunately, the critics rarely define the term ‘corruption’. Obviously, it has many senses within academic contexts, from selling university places to accepting funding from Big Tobacco, not all of which may be apposite. Such ambiguities may lead to misperception, such that the real worries go unnoticed. Moreover, some definitions are too narrow. Sandel argues that we corrupt something when we assess it according to lower standards than are appropriate (2012: 34). But this does not cover the different, destructive sense of corruption voiced by the now-neglected philosopher of education, Michael Oakeshott, for whom to corrupt something is to treat it in ways that tend to ‘deprive it of its character’, of its positive, essential features or qualities (1971: 57).

I want to propose a way of thinking about the corruption of higher educational social environments inspired by Oakeshott’s specific sense of character damage. My claim is that higher educational cultures are increasingly characterised by imperatives, pressures, and temptations that are corrupting in the sense that they can tend systematically to damage the character of academics. This draws out Oakeshott’s talk of good and bad qualities of character – that is, virtues and vices. This should be a concern for many, but especially for modern advocates of character education who argue that education ought to be *edifying*, conducive to cultivation and exercise of virtues and other excellences of character (Arthur *et al* 2016, Kristjánsson 2016). Corruption, here, is the negative counterpart of edification.

I have elsewhere provided a fairly complex account of character corruption and the relevant corruptors – the various events, conditions, and processes liable to encourage the development and exercise of vices and other failings of character (Kidd 2019, 2020). Some of them may cause us to acquire novel vicious dispositions, not previously features of our character, while others might act on our existing vicious dispositions, perhaps by increasing their strength or stability. Some corruptors may promote a single vice, while others could be capable of feeding a whole range of vices, which often have distinct constituent motivations and behaviours. For these reasons, corruption is best understood as a dynamic process that unfolds over time, rather than single, dramatic events, although some corruption may take that radical form.

Corrupting processes are arguably ubiquitous throughout the social world, given the variety of ways of scaffolding vices and failings and the obvious manifestations throughout our institutions and shared ways of life of systematic patterns of abusiveness, exploitation, and culpable inefficacy. I was first inspired to think about corruption, however, by the work of a handful of philosophical critics of higher education who offer corruptionist criticisms. In practice, two styles of corruption are offered. First, *active corruption*, where vice-promoting structures are criticised, such as Heather Battaly’s argument that certain higher educational policies promote in teachers and students the vice of insensibility, an inability to perceive or desire an appropriately diverse range of intellectual goods (Battaly 2013). Second, *passive corruption*, where the offending structures create obstacles to the cultivation and exercise of certain virtues, albeit without promoting the opposing vices. David E. Cooper argues that several modern educational imperatives tend to marginalise truthfulness, a professional virtue of those, like teachers, engaged in the authoritative transmission of intellectual goods (Cooper 2008). In these papers, one finds critical corruptionist analysis of higher educational systems grounded in sophisticated philosophical character theories of the sort that I want to develop in this chapter.

I concentrate on ‘the culture of speed’, a feature of many modern higher educational institutions and systems, vigorously condemned by the Canadian literary scholars, Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber in their influential polemic, *The Slow Professor*. Central to criticisms of Speed and praise of Slowness are, I argue, substantive concerns about their effects on moral and intellectual character. A full reckoning of the wrongs of academic cultures of speed must include appreciation of the ways they promote a host of accelerative vices and failings while also impeding exercise of a range of the virtues vital to enactment of our core academic commitments to teaching, scholarship, and collegiality.

**2. Slowness and speed.**

Ainé Mahon warns us that the meanings of the term ‘slowness’ range from the derogatory, such as ‘slothful’ and ‘sluggish’, to the more positive, such as ‘measured’, ‘moderate’, and ‘gradual’ (Mahon 2019: 3). It is those positive meanings that drive modern Slow movements, animated by hope in the morally, culturally, and politically transformative power of personal and collective efforts at ‘slowing down’. Slowness came to popular awareness with the Slow Food movement, a grassroots initiative, originating in Italy, encouraging embrace of food cultures marked by sustainability, appreciation, and community. Its values and possibilities were generalised into a broader philosophy of life, articulated by the journalist, Carl Honoré, in his book, *In Praise of Slowness*. Nowadays, one can read about Slow ageing, Slow cinema, Slow science, and Slow sex – to name but a few – many promoted by connecting them to other contemporary concerns, such as environmental protection and mental health.

A constant refrain of advocates of Slowness is the destructive effects to the social and natural world, not to mention our own health and happiness, of submitting to an ever-encroaching ‘cult of speed’. ‘We are all enslaved by speed’, declares Honoré in baleful tones, subjected evermore intensely to an accelerative ethos which ‘strikes at the heart of what it is to be human’ (Honoré 2005: 16, 17). Examples abound – the wastefulness of fast fashion, the rapacious exploitation of nature, the punishing demands of workloads driven by the imperatives of ever-increasing pace and productivity. Everything must be done faster, an unsustainable tread-mill of industrious self-destruction, reinforced by a zealous focus on narrowly defined values, like efficiency, innovation, and productivity. For this reason, Slow movements typically align with various progressive concerns, such as protection of workers’ rights and condemnations of ‘corporate capitalism’. None of this, though, necessarily has an obvious connection with the corruption of *character*; and when discussion does move in the direction of the bad effects on individual persons, the focus is usually mental health.

Connections between moral character, Slowness, and Speed start to emerge when one considers the effects of internalising accelerative tendencies on patterns of attention, behaviour, and judgment. Honoré talks of ‘diverse acts of deceleration’, of slowing down to make time for ‘activities that defy acceleration, like meditation or gardening or yoga. But of course, such activities cannot slow us down in themselves, since they are susceptible to the internalised imperatives of acceleration.

For that reason, we must ‘cultivate inner Slowness’ (Honoré 2005: 14, 274). I take this to mean at least the following: actively restructuring our inner economy of motivations, desires, and values to ensure they are not dominated by the imperatives of acceleration and Speed. Such ‘inner Slowness’ acts as a natural brake on those accelerative dispositions, until one is no longer among those whom Berg and Seeber call ‘disciples of speed’ – the blinkered devotees of an ideology of acceleration (Berg and Seeber 2016: 60).

Such language points to the corrupting effects on our characters of cultures of speed, something confirmed by Honoré’s characterisation of Fast and Slow as ‘ways of being’ or ‘philosophies of life’:

Fast is busy, controlling, aggressive, hurried, analytical, stressed, superficial, impatient, active, quantity-over-quality. Slow is the opposite: calm, careful, receptive, still, intuitive, unhurried, patient, reflective, quality-over-quantity. It is about making real and meaningful connections (Honoré 2005:14)

Notice that these include several vices and virtues, such as aggressiveness and superficiality and calmness and patience. The virtuousness of some traits will depend on context— being analytic is appropriate during surgery, but not on a first date. It is not bad to be Fast, only to only ever be Fast, especially when slower, calmer, more leisurely attitudes and behaviour are appropriate. Despite the denunciations of cultures of speed, Honoré’s actual proposal is subtler than merely *slowing down*, period. What he’s really urging is what musicians call *tempo giusto* – achieving an ideal tempo, the right speed, achieved by exercising intelligent capacities to comport ourselves according to criteria of sensitivity and appropriateness. Too Slow can be as bad as too Fast and careering from one extreme to another is unwise (Smith 2019). Consider Honoré’s qualifications about the aims of advocates of Slow:

Most of us do not wish to replace the cult of speed with the cult of slowness. Speed can be fun, productive and powerful, and we would be poorer without it. What the world needs, and what the Slow movement offers, is a middle path […] The secret is balance: instead of doing everything faster, do everything at the right speed. Sometimes fast. Sometimes slow. Sometimes somewhere in between (Honoré 2005: 274)

Sticking with musical analogy, some pieces ought to be played slowly, others quickly, others in very carefully constructed rhythms of alternating speed. Indeed, advocates of Slow enjoy musical analogies. For Berg and Seeber, slowing down includes efforts to ‘give meaning’ to ‘periods of rest’, to create suitable rhythms to one’s activities, involving a discerning use of ‘pauses and periods that may seem unproductive’ (Berg and Seeber 2016: 57).

Construed in this more careful way, achieving Slowness requires the cultivation and exercise of a range of virtues, of excellences of character that help us achieve and to sustain the appropriate degrees of discernment, sensitivity, and judgment. Some obvious virtues of Slowness include attentiveness, carefulness, diffidence, restraint, and a subtler sensitivity to and respect for the proper rhythms of thought, feeling, and understanding. An appreciation of these unflashy sorts of virtues is visible in ancient philosophical traditions. Kǒngzı praised the virtue of ‘timeliness’, a discerning judiciousness, shown in the seamless ability to ‘advance when it is appropriate to advance and remain still when it is appropriate to remain still’ (Slingerland 2003: 67). Similarly, Buddhist and Daoist writers celebrate the calmness, steadiness, and receptivity which protect one from the turbulent zeal of energetic ambition and ‘grasping-desire’. Zhuāngzǐ often laments the ‘sadness’ of people whose life is like ‘a horse galloping by, unstoppable’, permanently active and so ‘exhausted to the point of collapse’ (Ziporyn 2009: 11).

I suggest that a culture of speed can corrupt our characters by promoting a range of accelerative vices while also impugning the Slower virtues, such that our characters become problematically imbalanced. Incapable of carefulness and restraint, one becomes locked into increasingly reckless styles of thought and action. Internalising an urge to perpetual acceleration, one forsakes discernment and patience. Timeliness falters because it often demands waiting for the right time. Life becomes all accelerators and no brakes and as a consequence we hurtle towards an inevitable crash. In such cases, what one is losing is the array of virtues that lend to one’s life as a whole a sense of appropriateness, balance, and stability. In this way, cultures of speed corrupt our characters, promoting our vices while in turn eroding our virtues. This is a deeper truth in Honoré’s warning that to succumb to Speed ‘strikes at the heart of what it is to be human’.

**3. Accelerative vices.**

The intrusion of cultures of speed into higher education is the theme of *The Slow Professor*. Its guiding concerns are ‘to alleviate work stress, preserve humanistic education, and resist the corporate university’ (Berg and Seeber 2016: ix). In effect, Berg and Seeber are urging forms of Slow scholarship, which honour the ethical, intellectual, and pedagogical values increasingly under pressure from the cultures of speed characteristic of modern academia. Slow scholarship and teaching complements other themes of critical higher educational discourses, such as casualisation, subjection of universities to neoliberal demands, and, at a deeper level, the impoverishment of the languages in which those discourses are pursued (Smith 2012).

*The Slow Professor* begins by documenting the baleful effects of cultures of speed on teaching and scholarship, collegiality and educational values, and the physical and mental health of educators. Berg and Seeber also clarify several misconceptions about the nature of Slowness—it is not, for instance, a ‘counter-cultural retreat from everyday life’, nor a ‘slow-motion version of life’, nor some cunning ploy to carry on business-as-usual by other means (Berg and Seeber 2016: 11). Instead, Slowness ought to be ‘subversive’, challenging the imperatives of acceleration and pressures of productivity. One form of subversion is actively trying to create conditions conducive to conscientiousness, diligence, and thoughtfulness. Like Honoré, who inspired their project, Berg and Seeber see the enactment of Slowness in academia as a collective political project, involving ‘intellectual work, social critique, and engaged citizenship’ and, above all, a ‘counter-discourse of Slow scholarship, understanding, and ethical engagement’ (Berg and Seeber 2016: 13-14).

Speaking as an escapee of the academic ‘cult of speed’, I sympathise with the critical analysis of the spread of cultures of Speed in academia and the corrective calls for Slowness. I worry, though, that Berg and Seeber undersell the book by calling ita ‘self-help book for academics’ (Berg and Seeber 2016: 13). Important though they are, the therapeutic concerns about mental health and self-esteem are parts of a more systematic project with ideological and historical dimensions. Moreover, the term, ‘self-help’, sits uncomfortably alongside the strident calls for collective activism and ‘counter-discourses’. Indeed, ‘self-help’ sounds too individualistic for what is fundamentally a collaborative project. (Incidentally, the clear spirit of collective activism and concern was ignored by pre-emptive critics who derided the book as a self-indulgent lament by two tenured scholars with too much to do. No-one who takes the time to read the book could form that judgement).

A recurrent theme of *The Slow Professor*, often gestured at rather than developed, is the corrupting effects on character of academic cultures of speed. ‘Slowing down’, Berg and Seeber declare, is ultimately ‘a matter of ethical import’, that driving oneself at ever-faster paces is ‘a form of self-harm’, which leaves one unable to ‘generate compassion for others’ (Berg and Seeber 2016: 58). By internalising ‘psychologies of speed’, one starts to become ‘jealous, impatient, and rushed’, resistant to ‘allowing room for others and otherness’, until one can no longer honour ‘the values of density, complexity, and ideas which resist fast consumption’ (Berg and Seeber 2016: 59, 66). Certain topics are dense, thick with meanings and complexities that it takes time and patience to explore and untangle – many ‘moving parts’, as philosophers like to say. Such values are integral to any properly rich account of thoughtful scholarly endeavour, whether in teaching or research. But they also require of a person a certain range of virtues, dispositions and sensibilities vital for proper responsiveness to density, complexity, and depth. Some obvious virtues of this sort would include broadmindedness, intellectual carefulness, and reflectiveness.

I think Berg and Seeber’s ethical critique of cultures of speed incorporates an implicit concern for its corrupting effects on the character of academics, underlying their concerns about changes to ‘the conditions for academic research’, teaching, and collegiality (Berg and Seeber 2016: 63). As a culture of speed becomes entrenched, it starts exercising corrupting effects by eroding the conditions for the exercise of the Slower virtues, while also creating conditions that fuel the accelerative vices. Moreover, those cultures start imposing normative conceptions of the ideal academic, ordered around a set of values or ideals, such as ‘mastery’, productivity, and ‘self-sufficient individualism’ (Berg and Seeber 2016: 12). The cultures of corruption are therefore complex. As two critics put it, many of the structural changes to higher education are ‘changing [for the worst] the character of the people who work in universities: of fundamentally altering the myriad patterns and possibilities of the academic life and how they might be lived’ (Conroy and Smith 2017: 706). In this case, Slower styles of thought are ruled out in institutions fixated on what Ainé Mahon, another eloquent critic of cultures of Speed, calls ‘a privileging of the rapid and the eager’ (Mahon 2019: 3).

To repeat an earlier caveat, the criticism is not of Fast in all its forms, nor is the point to join some rival culture of Slowness. The metaphor of speed reminds us of the importance of alternating periods of acceleration and deceleration or – in the prettier musical metaphor – of intelligently sensing the proper *speed* of performance, of the intelligent selection of pauses and pace characteristic of *tempo giusto*. What is problematic is not the accelerative vices, nor the virtues of Slowness: both have their roles, whether in music, driving, or one’s life-as-a-whole. The danger is a culture which overemphasises accelerative traits without counterbalancing appreciation of the virtues of Slowness. Put into the terms of character, corruption take the form of damage to the integrity of our character, of patterns of distortion caused by the supercharging of accelerative vices at the cost of the atrophy of the Slower virtues.

I think the ethical critique of academic cultures of speed offered by Berg and Seeler includes worries about their deep corrupting effects on the moral and intellectual character of academics. Still, since they do not speak in those terms, several points remain unclear. An obvious set of questions concerns the specific nature of the corrupting effects of cultures of speed—for instance, I emphasised the variety of possible corruptors and noted that one can think of them as either vice-promoting or virtue-eroding, even if many corruptors in practice do both. I therefore now consider how cultures of speed tend to impede the formation and development of richly layered interpersonal relationships between students and academics that are essential to the provision of virtuous intellectual guidance.

**5. Speed and separation.**

It is a truism that cultivating and exercising virtues is a difficult, often delicate project which depends on a range of supporting conditions. Confucians, for instance, emphasise the need for established ‘rituals’, the stable array of shared practices and norms for the performance of virtues and structured opportunities for instructive encounters with exemplars of virtue. I want to focus on certain kinds of interpersonal relationship, which are integral to the proper exercise of a range of ‘other-regarding intellectual virtues’, described by Ryan Byerly (2020). Their distinctive feature is that they dispose and enable a person to enhance the intellectual wellbeing of others, whether students or fellow researchers. In a compelling account, Byerly proposes that the common motivation of other-regarding intellectual virtues is ‘intellectual beneficence’, defined as ‘a refined motivation to promote others’ intellectual good as such for its own sake’ (Byerly 2021: ch.4, 1). Just as many of the more familiar intellectual virtues reflect a love of intellectual goods, like wisdom, we can think of the other-regarding virtues as reflecting a love of *knowers*—a motivating desire to nurture *their* intellectual interests, advance *their* intellectual projects, and improve *their* intellectual capacities and character.

It should be clear why these virtues should have a special significance to academics. All of them, in the course of teaching and research, encounter opportunities to enhance the interests, projects, and abilities of students and researchers. Since there are many ways to do this, there are many other-regarding intellectual virtues. Byerly’s own examples include ‘audience sensitivity’ and ‘communicative clarity’ (Byerly 2021: chs. 5-8). Other intellectual virtues can also enhance the intellectual wellbeing of others, albeit as a secondary effect. Acts of truthfulness, for instance, mainly honour Truth as an ideal, but may also contribute to your stock of true beliefs and thus benefit you, which is a main reason Cooper nominates it as ‘a distinctive virtue of teachers, one, that is, which they have a special responsibility to cultivate and exercise’ (Cooper 2008: 83). But I want to focus on a different virtue, which Byerly names *intellectual guidance*, then argue that it is under special threat from cultures of speed.

An obvious feature of our development, as academics and as persons, is our reliance on the *guidance* of those who enjoy superior experience, ability, or understanding. To guide someone intellectual in virtuous ways, argues Byerly, means being disposed and able to help them to make good decisions that advance their intellectual wellbeing. It is related to other virtues, like fairmindedness and sensitivity and consists of a complicated set of dispositions, reflecting the intellectual and developmental needs of the guided and the particularities of their interests and projects. Consider Byerly’s account of its component dispositions:

They are attentive to the different aims their dependent inquirers may have in their inquiries and to how these inquirers weigh distinct aims in inquiry. They are attentive to the processes of inquiry these inquirers have engaged in and are engaging in. They are attentive to the patterns these inquirers have employed in conducting these processes of inquiry, the patterns they are employing in conducting these processes, and the patterns they could employ (Byerly 2021: ch.8, p.3)

Moreover, the intellectual guide’s attentiveness must be coupled to effective means, since attentiveness to someone’s needs does not, in itself, guarantee good judgments about the relevant sorts of advice. A virtuous intellectual guide is therefore attentive, thoughtful, and has skilled judgment in selecting and delivering specific forms of advice – to use *this* method or work on *that* text or read up on *this* body of scholarship or *that* theorist. Furthermore, an intellectual guide must avoid the accompanying vices, such as a vicious paternalism in which one presumptively overmasters the one seeking guidance (Byerly 2021: ch.8, p.4; see Croce 2018).

Characterised in this way, the virtue of intellectual guidance has obvious roles within academic life, even if it does not feature on canonical lists of the virtues. It clearly relates to very familiar practices, such as mentoring and supervision, maybe by articulating their moral and intellectual dimensions. Thinking of virtuous practices of intellectual guidance, we might think of the teacher who carefully selects readings customised to their students interests’, rather than suggesting some standard text. Or a doctoral supervisor, subtly attentive to the developing strengths and developmental needs of their student. I often only realised years later just how skilfully my doctoral supervisor helped me overcome my irksome intellectual idiosyncrasies, to build up important dispositions once lacking in my character, while still protecting my distinctive interests and sensibilities, however much these differed from their own.

The question is whether cultures of speed are hostile to the exercise of this virtue of intellectual guidance, and if so, how? Byerly offers a useful clue when remarking that a good intellectual guide needs knowledge of, among other things, the dynamics of inquiry and ‘the kinds of aid suitable to dependent inquirers’. This knowledge, he adds, can ‘only [be] gained via sustained participation in communal inquiry’ (2021, ch.8, p. 1). Sometimes, of course, no such particular knowledge will be necessary, since simple advice is very often good advice. A virtuous guide, we might say, advises neither too much, nor too little, and neither too often, nor too rarely. Crucially, though, a capacity to make these judgements about the proper *sort* and *content* and *timing* of advice and then to deliver it effectively will depend on two crucial conditions. First, good *personal knowledge* of the advisee – informed understanding of their

intellectual concerns, foibles, interests, preoccupations, and characteristic habits of thought, the whole inner economy that shapes the content, direction, and rhythms of their thought. Second, crafting and delivering good guidance often needs a strong degree of *interpersonal trust* between advisor and advisee, at least in cases where the advice refers to certain needs or vulnerabilities of the advisee – think of advice intended to remedy a persistent pattern of ignorance, for instance, or cases where a need for guidance arose because an advisee made bad decisions. As two philosophers recently put it, trusting often involves a willingness to be vulnerable to another – a teacher, say – which would certainly help to explain its moral and pedagogical importance to education (Fisher and Tallant 2020).

**6. Time and trust.**

The personal knowledge and trust essential to proper exercise of the virtue of intellectual guidance are perhaps most ideally gained through the cultivation of mutually nourishing interpersonal relationships. Granted, good advice can be anonymous – anonymous journal referee reports, say – and not all guidance must take these intensely invested forms. Within higher education, though, the necessary sorts of advice and guidance certainly do, perhaps especially for those whose subjects can be very existentially charged – philosophy and theology, say. In those cases, what is often needed are relationships characterised by trusting acquaintance and mutual understanding. Initiating and sustaining such relationships needs many things, but a fundamental one is *time*.

Consider the time demands inherent in Byerly’s conception of intellectual guidance. It takes time to come to know and understand someone’s intellectual projects, especially if they are not quite sure themselves. It takes time to understand their interests and concerns, resonating with which is often integral to really good advice. It takes time to get a sense of a person’s characteristic ways of thinking and their patterns of responses to certain problems, without which it can be difficult to anticipate the effects of the advice one might offer. Time also scaffolds other interpersonal goods, like rapport and a sense of being at ease with someone. Famously, mere proximity and exposure are often insufficient to spark any real professional or personal relationship. Social relationships are not measured in duration and distance, but in warmth and depth.

It should be clear how academic cultures of speed militate against proper exercise of the virtue of intellectual guidance. They deprive us of the time needed to really cultivate the relevant forms of interpersonal relationships that provide the necessary scaffolding for that virtue. Such deprivations won’t impact all our academic activities; only those where advising and guiding are integral. Such deprivations take two forms. The most obvious is depriving us of proper amounts of time needed for conversations, supervisions, and other encounters vital to building up those relationships. Such encounters must enjoy frequency and regularity in ways impossible for ‘time-poor’ academics, rushing between meetings and lectures, scoffing down a sandwich as they rush across campus. Such time pressures worsen for those with *many* students and *many* commitments, including those dragooned to serve on the proliferation of committees and projects that clutter the life of modern universities.

A less obvious way that cultures of speed can preclude the formation of relationships and impede the exercise of a whole array of virtues is by distorting our *experience* of time. It was Henri Bergson who distinguished ‘clock time’ and what he called *dureé*, time as actually experienced – time which *flows* or *drags*, for instance, and other forms of ‘lived time’. These temporal experiences often affect our practical activities, which are temporally structured in ways that can obtrude into our consciousness – when, for instance, what is usually a routine task for some reason takes ages. When writing philosophy papers, like this one, what I really need is not just *amounts* of time, but certain *sorts* of time – open time, dedicated time, time empty of competing demands. Writing this paper today, I did not really get going until late morning – the entire day an open expanse – then write for a few hours, then a stop for lunch, then do another hour, then an idle break to listen to music, then a few more hours of writing. These experiences of time are receptive to the activities of writing – of mulling over phrasings, wondering about where best to use a certain quotation, and so on. By design, the day afforded me *quantities* of time, but also, crucially, the right *sorts* of time for a leisurely and unhurried day of writing.

Within cultures of speed, however, such time becomes increasingly impossible. One starts to lose both the necessary quantities and kinds of time, ones we describe as ‘free’ or ‘regular’. Such double temporal impoverishment makes initiating and developing those enriching intellectual relationships much harder – one has less time to share, spending time becomes a matter for pained deliberation. As a consequence, one’s academic life increasingly starts to lack the complexly layered intellectual relationships on which good intellectual guidance depends. Other virtues and sensibilities can suffer, too. Berg and Seeber quote the obnoxious complaint of one ‘time management manual’ that academics ‘waste a tremendous amount of time … chit-chatting at the water cooler’, which we can make good on by ‘sneak[ing] in reading … on the way to Aunt Joanie’s barbeque’ (quoted in Berg and Seeber 2016: 19). Although offered, one presumes, in a spirit of intellectual guidance, such advice fetishizes *activity* to the point of neglectfulness and self-indulgence, a stance that comes at the cost of a properly humane sense of collegiality and sociality.

Time is therefore a crucial precondition for many of the virtues integral to academic life as traditionally construed. Think of how vital it can be to conscientious, diligent, introspective, and reflective thought and action, then notice that these are among the virtues of Slowness. In cultures of speed, there is that unrelenting privileging of the rapid described by Mahon, which marginalises activities characterised by slowness and that derogates the measured and moderate in favour of the immediate and the intense.

An ethical criticism of academic cultures of speed should include condemnations of their tendencies to entrench corrupting conditions which tend to damage the moral and intellectual character of academics. Internalised psychologies of speed and the accelerative pressures of modern academia can tend to fuel the development of accelerative vices, while also eroding the conditions necessary to the formation of rich interpersonal relationships and exercise of the quieter, Slower virtues – the ones that guard us against aggressiveness, sloppiness, and superficiality while also protecting our responsiveness to the density, depth, and complexity of human life. A culture of speed deprives us of time needed to cultivate deeper relationships and characters, those that are our surest routes to fuller understanding of ourselves and our place within the wider order of things. As Mahon puts it, by denying us the possibility of ‘less harried modes’ of thinking and living – slow, deliberative, deliberate – cultures of speed ultimately deny us ‘world enough and time—for education and for each other’ (Mahon 2019: 10).

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