

Bill Clark or the ironic analyst of *homo academicus*

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Humboldtallee: the address seemed to be the best possible one!

During the academic year 1994-95, the two of us had the incredible luck to be hosted at number 11 on this street under the roof of an institute for the history of science in Göttingen, Germany. The host was not an old and strict German mandarin, but a young, humorous and brilliant Californian researcher: William alias Bill Clark. Nevertheless, he knew perhaps more than anybody else about the historical figure of the German "Prof. Dr." He was able to bring this figure to life, to sketch out all the rituals, habits, and practices of this odd type of human being: not in order to caricature it, but to understand it better and of course to understand himself and help us understand ourselves better.

As Bill's work showed so clearly, given how the German academic system became a model on a global scale during the 19th century, looking at its practices is crucial in understanding how it has continued to structure our own manners, customs and unconscious behaviours or taboos. One of the lessons he taught was therefore that it is not actually possible for one to be a "serious" historian of science. That is, one cannot reproduce the academic manners one analyzes without any distance or irony. A seminar on the history of the seminar has to be of a different type; the same for a PhD, an article, a book on the topic... A historian of science has to simultaneously be able to look ironically at his or her own productions.

Bill didn't overtly theorize on this methodological and ethical question, preferring to suggest it more obliquely. He nevertheless mentions in a sentence of his book

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Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University (2006): "irony is for me, moreover, an essential academic attitude about academia, that is, the essence of reflexivity" (p. 20). And at the end, the question remains: was it not in order to promote another kind of academic sociability that he scrutinized the history of the academy in the way he did? Bill would probably have smiled at such a "serious" conclusion. But indeed, the preface of *Little Tools of Knowledge* suggests it:

One fine evening in the autumn of 1992, finding that they had not only made too much pasta and dessert, but also had more than enough wine, Becker and Sabean called up Clark. Though usually resisting invitations entailing he be somewhere within fifteen minutes, Clark found this an offer he could not refuse, as Sabean was departing Göttingen the next day for Ithaca. Unused as they all were to wine, much of the evening quickly became a blur. Two things however still stand out. First was Becker's dessert, which Clark and Sabean, with heavy hearts, had to admit was the only truly inedible dessert they had ever encountered (and, worse, for a good time thereafter they had other suspicions). Second, were the plans they all laid that eventually led to this volume.

This wasn't just a rhetorical flourish; indeed, with his co-editor, Peter Becker, he invited an anthropologist (Heidrun Friese) to the conference to study it as a field and published the latter's article at the end of the book, making the volume doubly reflexive.

In 2006, he added in his magnum opus *Academic Charisma* that: "This book contains criticism of the sort of academic life and labor that has descended upon us from the German university system. Part of this critique may be motivated by a vague nostalgia for a golden age of college life. Such nostalgia can perhaps lead one to the antipodes of the Germanic university as potential resources to help remedy the ills of contemporary academia. But that is another matter and exceeds the rationale of this book, albeit desiring to offer a history of the present, but still a history, and not a manual of action. Nostalgia must thus be leavened with irony" (p. 20). As a result of enormous archival labors, to help us be able to laugh together about our academic habits: this is maybe one of the key contributions of William Clark's work, echoing that of David Lodge.

Bill excelled in the seminar, that form of teaching whose origins he probed in one of his earliest articles ("On the Dialectical Origins of the Research Seminar"). Grinning widely, he would hold up his mug of coffee and ask us & the assembled students to provide an Aristotelian analysis of it, working out its material, formal, efficient & final causes, so that we could prove we understood a text we had just read. Or he might request that we explicate the reasoning of an eighteenth-century German author who posited that there might be varying numbers of lawyers on different planets in the solar system, based on the degree of heat and agitation of particles on that planet. The experience was spellbinding. Both of these examples come from a seminar he taught on "Cosmology and Anthropology in the German Enlightenment"; with his colleague Michael Hagner from the Institute for the History of Medicine, he also co-taught a seminar on "Mad Scientists", where the texts read ran the gamut from the sixteenth-century Faust-Buch to the twentieth-century shamanic intellectual outsider Carlos Castaneda. Was the mad scientist an outlier from the academic norm, he asked, or rather the personification of it? Seminar meetings were intense. Outside the seminar room, he gave generous & earnest counsel on the rites and rituals of academic life, for example, on the relationship between orality and literacy in the conference talk. The entire time, he was simultaneously within and without the university, taking part in its rites and rituals (like that of the seminar) while also serving as an ironic guide to them.

In some ways, the objects of his study seemed to be very traditional and canonized ones: the history of the German research university, of the research seminar, of the doctor of philosophy, of "the death of metaphysics". Working on the history of the German university and of academics and that during the Enlightenment: what a traditional topic! How could he manage not to make it boring? The answer is that Bill had read a lot: not only his primary sources – the famous as well as the much less well

known, the philosophical as well as the ministerial – but also an enormous number of volumes on the social sciences: Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber, Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Bruno Latour, Clifford Geertz, Gérard Genette, and so forth. But here again, he didn't take them as gurus. He was not Weberian, Foucauldian, Bourdieuxian; he read them all, but he also read literature and watched TV series. As a result, he had a very singular and self educated gaze. So the main thesis of his magnum opus (*Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*) was in no way a Weberian one. Contrary to Robert Merton, who tried to decipher the Protestant ethic of seventeenth-century English science, Bill showed that bureaucratization of science didn't produce the end of charisma in academia but on the contrary, fixed charisma as a norm. The "modern" type of homo academicus was no mere bureaucratic officer, but rather a charismatic and original figure. No orthodox Weberian would have accepted such an iconoclastic thesis.

Thanks to what we call with caution his deep learning or "culture" (here again he would probably have laughed at such a serious word, which itself affords an historical undertaking in order to deflate it), he was able to read differently not only the *Gesammelte Werke* of Kant or Fichte, but also the ministerial registers like *Vorlesungsverzeichnisse* or course catalogs (which he called "little tools of knowledge") as epistemic genres.

Bill would almost certainly have read our text with an ironic eye. Is our text a vain undertaking? In its failure to grant him tenure, the academic world revealed itself to be unable to see the importance of having, within its walls, such a clever and distant man, able to be simultaneously serious and funny. But Bill's gaze should be known, and his writings should be read and re-read. Not like Tablets of the Law, but rather as propositions and therefore to be discussed, debated, and engaged with. This is why we

present here this extensive bibliography of Bill Clark's works. We very much hope that even though he never found a tenured position within academia, his writings will continue to spark the recognition they deserve.

WILLIAM CLARK (1953-2017)

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BOOKS:

Clark, William. *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Tracing the transformation of early modern academics into modern researchers from the Renaissance to Romanticism, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* uses the history of the university and reframes the "Protestant Ethic" to reconsider the conditions of knowledge production in the modern world.

William Clark argues that the research university—which originated in German Protestant lands and spread globally in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—developed in response to market forces and bureaucracy, producing a new kind of academic whose goal was to establish originality and achieve fame through publication. With an astonishing wealth of research, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* investigates the origins and evolving fixtures of academic life: the lecture catalogue, the library catalog, the grading system, the conduct of oral and written exams, the roles of conversation and the writing of research papers in seminars, the writing and oral defense of the doctoral dissertation, the ethos of "lecturing with applause" and "publish or perish," and the role of reviews and rumor. This is a grand, ambitious book that should be required reading for every academic. (publisher's description)

Becker, Peter and William Clark, eds. *Little Tools of Knowledge: Historical Essays on Academic and Bureaucratic Practices*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001.

This volume brings historians of science and social historians together to consider the role of "little tools"—such as tables, reports, questionnaires, dossiers, index cards—in establishing academic and bureaucratic claims to authority and objectivity.

From at least the eighteenth century onward, our science and society have been planned, surveyed, examined, and judged according to particular

techniques of collecting and storing knowledge. Recently, the seemingly self-evident nature of these mundane epistemic and administrative tools, as well as the prose in which they are cast, has demanded historical examination.

The essays gathered here, arranged in chronological order by subject from the late seventeenth to the late twentieth century, involve close readings of primary texts and analyses of academic and bureaucratic practices as parts of material culture. The first few essays, on the early modern period, largely point to the existence of a "juridico-theological" framework for establishing authority. Later essays demonstrate the eclipse of the role of authority *per se* in the modern period and the emergence of the notion of "objectivity."

Most of the essays here concern the German cultural space as among the best exemplars of the academic and bureaucratic practices described above. The introduction to the volume, however, is framed at a general level; the closing essays also extend the analyses beyond Germany to broader considerations on authority and objectivity in historical practice.

The volume will interest scholars of European history and German studies as well as historians of science. (publisher's description)

Clark, William, Jan Golinski, & Simon Schaffer, eds. *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Radically reorienting our understanding of the Enlightenment, this book explores the complex relations between "enlightened" values and the making of scientific knowledge. Here monsters and automata, barometers and botanical gardens, polite academies and boisterous clubs are all given their due place in the landscape of enlightened Europe.

The contributors examine the production of new disciplines through work with instruments and techniques; consider how institutions of public taste and conversation helped provide a common frame for the study of human and nonhuman natures; and explore the regional operations of scientific culture at the geographical fringes of Europe.

Implicated in the rise of both fascism and liberal secularism, the moral and political values that shaped the Enlightenment remain controversial today. Through careful scrutiny of how these values influenced and were influenced by the concrete practices of its sciences, this book gives us an entirely new sense of the Enlightenment. (publisher's description)

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Clark, William. "Die Politik der Ontologie." Trans. Martin Dehli. In Michael Hagner & Manfred Laublichler, eds. *Der Hochsitz des Wissens: das Allgemeine als wissenschaftlicher Wert*, pp. 97-127. Zürich: Diaphanes, 2007.

William Clark legt seiner Analyse die These von Levinas und Derrida zugrunde, wonach Ontologie als *prima philosophia* eine Philosophie der Gewalt und Tyrannei darstelle. Daran anschließend knüpft er die Frage, wo in der Philosophiegeschichte eine solche Metaphysik als Ontologie proklamiert worden ist. Es gab sie bei Aristoteles – aber nur, wenn man der Lesart des Altphilologen Werner Jaeger folgt. Es gab sie in der deutschen Schulmetaphysik des 18. Jahrhunderts als diejenige Grundwissenschaft, die die allgemeinen Aspekte des Seienden behandelte – aber nur, um von Kant in seiner kritischen Philosophie erledigt zu werden. Und es gab sie bei Martin Heidegger, der in der berühmten Davoser Disputation mit Ernst Cassirer die These vertrat, dass ausgerechnet Kant nach einer allgemeinen Ontologie als Metaphysik gestrebt habe. Wie verzerrt eine solche Deutung der Kant'schen Kritik als Fundamentalontologie auch sein mag, ihr geistesgeschichtlicher Hintergrund ist offensichtlich. Heidegger mochte sich nicht damit abfinden, dass die allgemeinen Eigenschaften des Seienden mit dem Fortschritt der Wissenschaften seit dem 19. Jahrhundert nur noch diesen zu untersuchen vorbehalten bleiben sollten. Kronzeuge dieser Entwicklung war für ihn der Neukantianismus (also auch Cassirer), der die Philosophie in eine exakte Wissenschaft umformen wollte und zugleich liberale politische Ansichten vertrat. Was dabei nach Heidegger verloren ging, war das Allgemeine, »seine eigene Bestimmtheit, Notwendigkeit und spezifische Fassbarkeit«. Um es zu bewahren, musste die Philosophie sich als Fundamentalontologie verstehen. Für Clark ist diese Interpretation eng mit Heideggers Engagement für den Nationalsozialismus verbunden, oder genauer: Er glaubt, dass Heideggers philosophischer Gewaltakt ebenso wie die nationalsozialistische Bewegung auf die gleiche historische Konstellation reagieren, die man im weitesten Sinne als Untergang der Metaphysik beschreiben könnte. (article abstract)

Clark, William. "Einsteins Haar." Trans. Michael Adrian. In Michael Hagner, ed. *Einstein on the Beach. Der Physiker als Phänomen*, pp. 15-39. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005. Republished in Michael Hagner & Christoph Hoffmann, eds. *Nach Feierabend: Materialgeschichten*, pp. 203-228. Zürich: Diaphanes, 2018.

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Much recent research has established the importance of visualization in modern science. This essay treats, instead, of the continued importance of the aural and oral: the professorial voice. The professor remains important for science since so many scientists still instantiate this persona and, as is here argued, a "voice" constitutes an essential feature of it. The form of the essay reflects its contents. From the Middle Ages until well into the modern era, the archetypal professorial genre was the disputation, an oral event recast in written form. Apropos of the traditional disputation, this essay begins with a

disquisition more or less to the point. It concerns Nietzsche's first major publication, which violated norms for the proper professorial voice, thus accelerated the destruction of his academic career. The essay then presents six theses on the professorial voice. The theses treat relevant aspects of the professorial voice from the Sophists onward. It is argued, in Weberian terms, that the professorial voice or persona embodies elements of charismatic and traditional authority which coexist with and condition the rational authority or "objectivity" of science. (article abstract)

Clark, William. "The Pursuit of the Prosopography of Science." In Roy Porter, ed. *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 4: *Eighteenth-Century Science*, pp. 211-237. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521572439.010>

The difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions ... is not upon many occasions so much the cause, as the effect of the division of labour. The difference between the most dissimilar characters, between a philosopher and a common street porter, for example, seems to arise not so much from nature, as from habit, custom, and education. ... By nature a philosopher is not in genius and disposition half so different from a street porter, as a mastiff is from a greyhound

David Sabeian remarked a few years ago that Anglo-American sociology faced a crisis, as it had based itself fundamentally on the structures of "social class" – a concept that has now given way nearly completely to the concept of "identity." So many ask now about the historical identity or persona of the scientist but do not seem to want the prosopographer's answer, for that answer has tended to be given in terms of social class and its related sociological notions, such as the division of labor in the scientific community: a Smithian political economy of knowledge. It is interesting, moreover, that, although a prosopography of the subjects or "heroes" of knowledge may be at once a rather ancient and a very modern pursuit, its true age, from which it traces its provenance, is the eighteenth century. Our prosopography is kith and kin with the liberal, materialistic, and positivistic social and political philosophy of the eighteenth century. (article abstract)

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This paper attempts to illuminate parts of the academic unconscious through a study of the lecture catalogue. The analysis is confined essentially to early modern lecture catalogues from German-language universities. There are three aspects to the analysis. First, the lecture catalogue is analyzed in terms of academic "manners": what does the lecture catalogue tell us about how academics conceived themselves? The second and third aspects of the analysis place academia in the context of state and society. Thus, secondly, the lecture catalogue is analyzed in terms of governmental "ministry": what does the lecture catalogue tell us about how ministries of state endeavored to police and control academics? Finally, thirdly, the lecture catalogue is analyzed in terms of entrepreneurial "markets": what does the lecture catalogue tell us about the relation of academics to the marketing of knowledge? (article abstract)

Clark, William. "Der Untergang der Astrologie in der deutschen Barockzeit." In Hartmut Lehmann & Anne-Charlott Trepp, eds. *Im Zeichen der Krise: Religiösität im Europa des 17. Jahrhundert*, pp. 433-472. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999.

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Part 2 : <https://doi.org/10.1177/007327539703500302>

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Using a pernicious Foucaultian reading of Weber's rationalization theories, I endeavor in this essay to illuminate academic acts as kept in the Brandenburg-Prussian state archive in Berlin, with some comparison to others, chiefly those in the Bavarian state archive in Munich. The essay concerns the microtechniques of marking, collecting and keeping records, and the form and content of archives of academic acts — interesting for the reason that paperwork circumscribes the state ministry's ability to recollect academic acts and hence its power and knowledge over academics. I consider mostly acts relating to the early modern "Arts and Philosophy Faculty," which corresponds more or less to the present-day "Division of Arts, Letters and Sciences." The transformation, traced from the Baroque to the Romantic era, is understood as a process of "ministerial-market rationalization" of German academia: I try to show how central German ministries, as reflected in archival acts, altered the academic persona to suit themselves and the market, and how professorial appointments were rationalized accordingly. (article abstract)

Clark, William. "Narratology and the History of Science." *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 26, 1(1995): 1–71. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0039-3681\(94\)00029-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0039-3681(94)00029-9)

Clark, William. "On the Ironic Specimen of the Doctor of Philosophy." *Science in Context* 5, 1(1992): 97–137. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269889700001101>. Revised version in *Academic Charisma* in ch. 6: "The Doctor of Philosophy."

The Doctor of Philosophy, a nonmedieval academic figure who spread throughout the globe in the Modern Era, and who emblemized the transformation of academic knowledge into the "pursuit of research," emerged through a long and tortuous path in the early modern Germanies. The emergence and recognition of the Doctor of Philosophy would be correlative with the nineteenth-century professionalization of the arts and sciences. Throughout the Early Modern Era, the earlier Doctors and older "professional" faculties from the medieval university — Theology, Law, and Medicine — opposed recognition of the Doctor of Philosophy. In Saxony, the forces of "medievalism" were able to block recognition of the Doctor of Philosophy, and they retained the degraded Master of Arts or Philosophy as the highest degree in arts and sciences. Forces of "modernism" prevailed, however, in Austria and Prussia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

centuries. In Austria, the Doctor of Philosophy arrived as a wholly modern figure, the creation of a nice dossier and a civil service examination: the medieval "juridical" persona became a modern "bureaucratic" persona. Between this bureaucratic modernism of the Austrians and corporatist medievalism of the Saxons, the Prussians pursued a *via media*. Unlike the Saxons, they recognized the Doctor of Philosophy; but unlike the Austrians, they did not completely bureaucratize the candidate's persona. The Prussians demanded from the candidate a "work of research," a doctoral dissertation, which exhibited the aesthetic qualities of the Romantic artist: originality and personality. (article abstract)

Clark, William. "The Scientific Revolution in the German Nations." In Roy Porter & Mikulas Teich, eds. *The Scientific Revolution in National Context*, pp. 90-114. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139170215.004>

Historia von D. Johann Fausten (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1587) tells the sad story of a Wittenberg alumnus. Faust, an astrologer, a doctor of theology and medicine, who studied night and day, despaired finally of the knowledge in books. He sold his soul to Satan for twenty-four years of real power, in order to fulfil academic male fantasies. But, like a good German, Faust continued working for eight years after the pact. With Mephistopheles he journeyed through the celestial spheres, and from these observations produced the best calendars and prognostications. Through satanic arts, he was able to dominate nature, emblemized by food, peasants and women. He travelled much, and demonstrated his abilities for many audiences, including the imperial court. His fame spread. (In later editions of his *Historia*, other universities will woo him from Wittenberg.) By magic he feted his colleagues on free food, as if a job search committee were in permanent session. He slept with a new woman every night. But he perished wretchedly, and went to hell.

Faust's *Historia* is a German testament to a male intellectual crisis of the early modern era: desire for more power and knowledge over heaven and earth than were contained in the traditional philosophy's books. That is the motif for my analysis of the Scientific Revolution, which has this structure: instruments and experimentalism; mathematics and heliocentrism; *mechanica mundi et harmonia mundi*. (article abstract)

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