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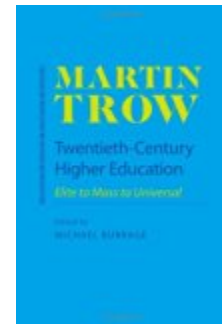


**Martin Trow.** *Twentieth-Century Higher Education: Elite to Mass to Universal.* Edited by Michael Burrage. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. vi + 627 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-9441-1; \$40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8018-9442-8.

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## A Sociologist Looks at Higher Education

Martin Trow (1926-2007) established his reputation as a political sociologist, policy analyst, and most especially, sociologist of higher education. A reading of the thoughtful, clearly presented, and jargon-free seventeen essays in this volume should lead any reader to understand why he gained the reputation that he enjoyed among scholars and policymakers concerned with higher education. This is the first collection of Trow's essays available in English; selections of his essays have been published in China and Japan. Although essays on such topics as student culture and academic assessment are not included, the essays in the book provide a good sampling of his scholarly work. The pieces were selected from more than 170 published analyses and commentaries. Trow died before he could complete the selection; however, the work was carried on by editor Michael Burrage and Trow's colleagues.

The essays are presented in six parts: "Emergence of an Enduring Theme," "Causes and Consequences of America's Advantage," "Britain as a Contrasting Case," "The Private Lives of American Universities," "Governance and Reform of the American University," and "The Completion of the Transformation." It is clear from these titles that while Trow stressed the importance of historical and comparative analysis, he viewed higher education from the perspective he knew best, the American university. However, he also recognizes that "American higher education today has quite different functions and structures from those elsewhere" (p. 525). His understanding

of higher education was greatly enhanced by the roles he played at the University of California, Berkeley, and by his visiting positions at a number of universities in the United States, England, Sweden, and Japan. He supplemented his insights gained as a participant observer in those institutions with conversations, institutional documents, and reports from various agencies.

The three essays in part 1 and the two essays in part 6 address Trow's thesis concerning the transition from elite to mass to universal access to higher education in advanced societies. Although the first essay, initially published in 1961, focuses on the transition in America's secondary system from elite to mass access for learners, readers are told that in the United States, developments in high schools form the basis of a system of mass higher education. The causes, consequences, and implications of the transition from a postsecondary system for the elite to a system of higher education for the masses are explored in the remaining two essays in part 1.

Rather than look at problems, such as finance, curriculum reform, and administration in isolation, Trow offered the following bold hypothesis: "these problems can be understood better as different manifestations of a related cluster of problems, and ... they arise out of the transition from one phase to another in a broad pattern of development of higher education, a transition-underway in every advanced society—from elite to mass higher education and subsequently universal access. Underlying

this pattern of development lies growth and expansion” (p. 89).

Nations appear to be able to maintain a system of elite institutions until they provide for about 15 percent of the relevant age grade. Beyond that point, they must make the transition to a mass system, and beyond a 50 percent enrollment figure of the total eligible population, they again create new institutions on the path to universal access. As of the early 1970s, the United States was the only society to approach the third type. In his 2006 revisit to his theme, he stated that universal access begins when about 30 percent of the relevant age group is admitted. One can only speculate why Trow revised the approximate enrollment figure of 50 percent (from the early 1970s) to 30 percent (in 2006) as a point at which changes are made in higher education institutions to accommodate universal access. My speculation is that he did not anticipate fully the growth in opportunities for postsecondary education that would be provided by the rapid expansion of community colleges and by the information technology revolution.

Trow reproduced a table from the scholarly work of John Brennan to compare the three types along ten dimensions. A brief definition of the function of each type is all that is possible here: elite refers to “shaping the mind and character of a ruling class; preparation for elite roles”; mass stresses “transmission of skills and preparation for a broader range of technical and economic elite roles”; and universal points to “adaptation of the ‘whole population’ to rapid social and technological change” (pp. 556-557). For the next twenty-five years, he saw the continuation of forces rooted in Western society (i.e., democratization and rationalization), leading to various forms of mass and universal access. In both his 2000 and 2006 papers, he cited the uncertainty factor of new information technologies, such as the Internet, in the emergence of forms of universal access and lifelong education.

The three types are likely to coexist within the same society and even within the same institution. A particular concern of Trow’s is evident in the title of his third essay, “Elite Higher Education: An Endangered Species?” For him, such education is not in danger. However, there are forces, such as calls for social equality and for short-term and measurable outcomes, and high costs that present potential threats.

Part 2 includes two essays on “America’s advantage,” and part 3 contains two essays on Trow’s most frequently explored comparison case: England. In “Federalism in American Higher Education,” he retold the quite familiar

history of independent and diverse colleges with strong presidents and boards. In addition, historically, financial support was not dependent on the church or the state but was spread among the state and federal government; student fees and tuition; and grants, gifts, and contracts. However, he argued that in recent decades, decisions of each branch of the federal government “have bypassed state agencies and brought the federal government directly into the daily life of the colleges and universities” (p. 204). Examples include protection of civil rights, monitoring of admissions, and faculty appointment and promotions practices.

In his second essay in part 2, Trow proposed the following and interesting hypothesis, “A culture is defined, in part, by what it feels guilty about” (p. 224). And for numerous historical reasons, he concluded that Western European nations feel guilty about class, and Americans feel guilty about the history of race relations. The latter is reflected in the absence of affirmative action policies based on class, and the emphasis based on race. Given the current discussions about the concentration of income and wealth and the cost of public and private higher education, I wonder how long this neglect is to persist.

If U.S. society has advantages that enabled it to support both elite and mass higher education, as late as the 1980s, England lacked a broad understanding that there are pressures for the expansion of higher education inherent in the development of modern societies. In the second essay on England, Trow pointed out that during the decade or so since his first essay in the section, the country has moved slowly down the path toward a mass system. Unfortunately, there has also been a loss of trust between the British government and the system. And a dysfunctional and “hard” managerial-type system with a bottom-line mentality imposed by the government has been instituted.

A previously unpublished essay, “Guests without the Hosts: Notes on the Institute for Advanced Study,” is a good illustration of how Trow turned his personal experience into an analysis of the “environment for intellectual work” (p. 362). Here he wrote about the mainly unsatisfying academic year (1976 to 1977) that he and his wife, Katherine, spent in Princeton at the Institute for Advanced Study. To understand the isolation, lack of civility, and alienation that he experienced at the institute, he compared that think tank to another, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California. He concluded that “perhaps the most important difference ... is that the Center has no permanent

members” (p. 358).

For the meaning of this finding, Trow turned to the work of the Columbia University sociologist Robert K. Merton. Merton found that the first residents in a housing project had to play a number of roles and were highly involved, whereas residents in an established project were likely to demonstrate a low level of involvement. In the case of the think tanks, the institute had a culture, structure, and permanent members (similar to the established project) whereas at the center, the lack of permanent members meant that the culture had to be created by its current members (similar to the new projects). In his introduction to this essay, Neil J. Smelser states that he included this largely negative discussion “because it is a brilliant piece of social science analysis” (p. 343). I concur and appreciate its inclusion in the book.

The remaining three essays in part 4 are concerned with the ways in which spatial design and organization affect the quality and style of postsecondary education, with the cross-pressures between the academic department as an administrative unit and as a disciplinary community and with the organization of the Center for Studies in Higher Education. I would speculate that the negative experiences of the Trows at the institute influenced his sensitivity to the need for a center at Berkeley “to create and sustain a scholarly and intellectual community” (p. 367).

Affirmative action is the subject of Trow’s most political and polemical essay. Briefly, he opposed any system in which students are admitted to college on the basis of group membership. The other three essays in part 5 are concerned with governance and are more typical of his scholarly work. He used the case of the failure of biology at the University of California, Berkeley, to keep pace with research developments in peer departments to question the consensual wisdom that universities are so large and complex that it is nearly impossible for leaders

to bring about significant change. Leaders, for example, chancellors, vice chancellors, and deans, at the Berkeley campus were able to lead a restructuring of the organization of 250 biologists from 20 departments and to upgrade the national ranking of the campus’s biology departments.

The reality of the strong American university presidency is contrasted with the lack of a true counterpart in European universities. The latter have retained their character as corporate bodies of academics “regulated, funded, and in varying degrees governed by agencies of the state” (p. 440). Finally, he used his knowledge of the University of California, Berkeley, to argue that “two broadly shared principles”—the maximization of autonomy and the pursuit of excellence—are the basis for many of the actions at Berkeley concerning its external and internal relationships, and help to account for the university’s prominence (p. 465).

Trow’s scholarly work reminds scholars that educational structures cannot be isolated from the particular social, political, economic, cultural, and technological settings in which they exist. For the historian of education, his most important message is that contemporary educational settings cannot be isolated from their long-term roots and causes within particular societies. However, the effects of information technology and globalization on the importance of particular national settings remain to be seen and understood.

From studies at the micro level of research groups to the macro level of societal transitions, Trow’s scholarly work provides a model for social scientists and historians. In addition, to quote from Burrage’s fifty-page introduction, “his (Trow’s) ideas, concepts, arguments, and examples provide guidance for anyone wishing to take them further. Indeed, since he usually asks as many questions as he answers, his essays are an open invitation to do so” (p. 8).

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