

on commodification, “The university aims not at its mission, that is, the education of its citizenry so as to promote the common good, but at its own financial survival” (174). Especially at faith-based universities, this succinct claim about a university’s mission seems foundational. And yet it also provides an inclusive framework for those who choose to come to higher education. Couple that general mission with the particular mission of a specific university, and, I believe, we have a compelling case for a bond that can unite all constituents, thus enhancing a university-wide community. That case is, of course, contingent upon serious, well-constructed orientations about mission for all new constituents, along with ongoing opportunities for deepening their understanding of and commitment to the mission. The mission can then be made manifest in constituent-appropriate ways. One example for faculty might be this: each and every course syllabus would have the mission statement on it, and the professor would explain, on the first day of class, how the particular course fit the mission of the university. In addition, and as Keenan rightfully argues throughout his important book, there must be, both in words and in resources, the necessary structures, processes, practices, and norms to support the vivification of the mission throughout the university. It is within that context, I would contend, that the conversation about ethics could fruitfully occur.

Let me close, however, as I began. We owe James Keenan, SJ, a debt of gratitude for this well-written, wide-ranging, critical, and constructive call to action. There is a wealth of research, commentary, and insight in this book. I hope all who read the symposium reviews will go to the book itself, discover its richness, and collaborate with others to build on Keenan’s significant work for the benefit of their own universities, thereby contributing to the kind of twenty-first-century university system we so desperately need.

KATHLEEN MAAS WEIGERT
Loyola University Chicago

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE

University Ethics and Its Much-Needed Hermeneutics of Ethics

I thank the editors of *Horizons* for making this discussion possible, and in particular Gerald J. Beyer for his suggestion in the first place. Beyer has done much to articulate and develop the issues that I raise in *University Ethics*, particularly in mining the Catholic social tradition so as to set critical, social, and institutional standards that could well be used by our schools of higher learning.

I am very grateful to the three contributors, all women, who offer us a great deal to consider. I appreciate especially the fact that I know two of them and have learned much from them already, even before seeing these considered judgments. I depended greatly on Maria Maisto and her work on the New Faculty Majority and confess that no one better informed the chapter on adjunct faculty than she. Over the years I have taught Donna Freitas' *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) in the course Sex, Body, and Gender. I will return to her prophetic work in a moment. Finally, I am delighted to find Kathleen Maas Weigert's insights, and in particular the perspectives she brings from her own background and professional experience.

I will develop my reply by considering each of their arguments in the above order. I hope that in this way I sufficiently engage their claims while also further advancing my own.

When I was writing the book, one of my readers, Grant Gallicho at *Commonweal*, asked me what I meant by ethics. My reply became my second chapter, following the presentation of my argument in the first. There I demonstrated my interest in ethics by examining the development of medical ethics as a cultural reality in the professional lives of physicians, nurses, administrators, and others in the medical community. I looked first at an early question in medical ethics: how physicians and ethicists sought collectively to discuss and determine what were the right ways of addressing the issue of whether and how to inform patients directly of their prognosis, particularly when their status was remarkably bad. I contrasted the long-held practice of physicians acting on their own intuitions, without any benefit of ethics. I tried to show how the willingness to enter into an extended ethical discussion on the matter prompted those involved to ascend through a number of contexts, from private practice to grand rounds, from letters to the editor to AMA (American Medical Association) commentaries, to develop a culture whereby through professional relationships, physicians could resolve their dilemma and eventually articulate binding professional and institutional norms on the matter. I then considered two subsequent issues: the evolution of the ethics of patient-informed consent and then the ethical decision by nurses to shift their primary role from physician assistant to patient advocate. In these three instances I highlighted how creating cultures of professional ethics developed a capacity for interpersonal and communal engagement to provide guidance for professional and social conduct.

In a similar way, in my third chapter I tried to show, as the title suggests, that "The Literature on the University Is Moving Slowly but Surely toward University Ethics." This chapter looked at critical studies of the university

that I considered to be pre-ethical. That is, these writings would raise questions about how research was better rewarded than teaching, and then tried to contend that the two should be equally normative. They were interested then in the ethical, but they did not address it as such. Similarly someone could write on the differing salaries that university presidents made and while they highlighted the “scandal” of it, it was often in the writer’s estimation, self-evidently wrong, but not specifically ethically wrong. That difference is where a demonstrable argument is made, one that takes the *apparently* (or *evidently*) wrong issue of exaggerated presidential salaries and through concepts like justice, inequity, prudence, limited resources, and the common good makes the case that some of these salaries are in fact ethically, that is, objectively wrong.

This, then, is one of the two things I am trying to do in my book: encourage and help critics of the university advance their arguments by appropriating the right hermeneutics for establishing why a variety of scandalous issues are de facto wrong. It is one thing to talk about how universities are scandalous in permitting binge drinking, inadequately addressing sexual assault, posting unsustainable tuition hikes, overlooking adjunct faculty, not educating student athletes, leaving tenured faculty unaccountable, not scrutinizing trustee boards for potential conflicts of interest, tolerating rampant gender inequity, and so on. It is another matter to make the argument why these matters should not be allowed at a university. The emotivism of the first *should* lead to an actual investigation that shows why such behavior is wrong and how the behavior would look right. Thus the summons of *University Ethics* is to address what we already believe to be wrong and to show how it is in fact wrong and needs to be made right. This is the function of ethics: to promote human flourishing by correcting and improving human conduct.

The second objective is what I call connecting the dots. Let me explain. Inasmuch as the university is siloed, so are the ethical issues. Critics tend to focus on one ethical issue, but do not address other, related ones. While student affairs is familiar with sexual assault and binge drinking, faculty are more familiar with cheating, and neither knows really what athletics are doing with their athletes. These four topics remain in their own unconnected silos. Similarly, only deans and department chairs usually know about the adjunct faculty and few dare to address the responsibilities of the post-tenured faculty. Similarly problematic issues of race, gender, and class are played out across the university in a variety of unrelated silos, and no one sees the entire landscape or panorama, a point I made in the chapter “The Cultural Landscape of the University without Ethics.” Connecting the dots then is the work of trying to show that all these “scandalous” matters are ethically related and can be addressed by engaging the same hermeneutics.

Here at Boston College, as I was finishing my book, I became the director of the Jesuit Institute and started several interdisciplinary faculty seminars: Economic Inequity; Sustainability and *Our Common Home*; Mental Health, Stigma, and Suffering. One seminar that I maintained from my predecessor was designed to introduce tenure-track faculty to one another. I decided I wanted to parallel that seminar with a new one for our full-time contingent faculty. I invited eighteen such faculty from across the university to meet one another. It was like a homecoming: these faculty, who had been here on average at least twelve years, were now meeting each other on a regular basis. The committee became known as the “Jesuit Essentials.”

When *University Ethics* was published, the Essentials made the book required reading for their seminar and then decided to host a conference here, April 5–7, entitled “Toward a Culture of University Ethics” (<http://www.bc.edu/centers/jesinst/toward-a-culture-of-university-ethics.html>). They designed the conference so as to connect the dots. For instance, the panel “Silos” has Johns Hopkins’ Benjamin Ginsberg, who has written on faculty losing authority to burgeoning administrative bureaucracy; Kevin Kruger, who heads the NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators); and Goldie Blumenstyk of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, who writes on the differences among private, public, and for-profit universities. Hopefully these three authors who often look at their own experience of siloing will see an ethical connection between their work on transparency and access and others who write in other silos. Similarly on another panel, “Money and Transparency,” the speakers are Cornell’s Ronald Ehrenberg on advancement, Scott Jaschik of *Inside Higher Ed* on legacies and admissions, and George Mason’s James Finkelstein on executive salaries. The organizers are hoping that questions about transparency, accountability, classism, and privilege will emerge among the three writers, who usually only focus on their singular issue. The organizers are therefore promoting the hermeneutics of ethics to connect the dots among issues that are too often siloed and therefore hidden from view by others elsewhere on the university campus, even those who investigate an ethical issue in one of those silos.

Ethics then provides the link between the isolated topics; with a science that investigates what constitutes right and wrong behavior, we should be able to recognize each of these ethical interruptions across the campus so as to respond to the overall lack of a culture of university ethics. Not only does ethics teach us what is wrong with the university; it also provides us with ways for how the university could be made right.

While the book has been well reviewed elsewhere, no one comes closer to understanding my agenda than Maria Maisto. She connects the dots in her

review right from the very beginning when she appreciates how deeply related the issue of gender is to the situation of the adjunct. Therein she highlights the need to see how interconnected these two issues actually are, even though they are treated separately. But she highlights as well the irony of “the neglect of contingent faculty by gender-conscious scholars . . . given that contingent academic employment is linked to the feminization of certain academic disciplines and to teaching relative to research.”

Likewise she shows how efforts to curb cheating are frequently out of reach of adjuncts, who “often report that lacking job security and due process protections puts them at risk if they investigate academic dishonesty.” At the mercy of student evaluations, these workers hardly enjoy the power or authority to challenge integrity issues. We need to see these as ethically related issues.

Similarly she recognizes how commodification rightly conspires to validate in the minds of administrators the need for a subordinate faculty: “The adjunct, after all, is the embodiment of commodification; the ideology animating the shift to contingent academic employment demands the transformation of teaching from a vocation, a viable profession, and a human relationship into an impersonal transaction to be exercised as cheaply and efficiently as possible.” Maisto makes the connection, here, of the need to identify the ethical as such: “The resulting human, and therefore ethical, damage is done not only to the adjunct professor but also to the students, faculty, administrators, and communities who are affected by it.”

Finally, Maisto sees the hermeneutics of ethics providing not only a way of identifying the connection of university vices and oppressive practices, but more importantly a means of promoting ethically based community-building practices that aim toward equity, inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, most importantly those practices that aim at the ethical recognition of the contingent faculty by the very constituencies that alienate them. She closes her review by emphasizing my own expectation that “the discourse of gender is a pathway to restoring a commitment to ethical practice in higher education.”

Donna Freitas with great exactitude conveys her own experience of pursuing ethics at the university, which leads to her own alienation from the university. She adeptly describes how she has become an itinerant university visitor who shines the light to illuminate the state of things, highlighting both practices of perdition and restorative ones. I have to confess enormous sadness at reading her account because I can only imagine Freitas as a regular, inspired professor whose honesty, critical eye, careful research, and overriding confidence in both her students and the university make her, in

my estimation, an extraordinarily capacious presence in the classroom. Her journey mirrors, nay embodies, the reasons for my complaint.

In a way she implicitly addresses a question that I never address in my book: why the institution that teaches all the courses that there are on professional ethics does not have one course on university ethics, anywhere. I basically attribute this disinterest to the cultural myopia that arises from the fairly solitary, insular, and aloof vocation of the faculty, and the medieval fiefdoms that house such people at the contemporary university.

Freitas offers herself as another reason why others do not raise such investigations: the university has very little tolerance for its critics. In short her narrative conveys that critique is dangerous, certainly for the untenured or the adjunct. The fiefdoms can handle such critics with the little accountability that their meager transparency offers.

Furthermore Freitas hones in on the phenomenon of how “very disjointed” the university is in addressing sexual assault because of the similarly disjointed relationship between student affairs and faculty. She highlights again the need for a comprehensive cross-campus engagement of a culture of ethics where human dignity, accountability, equity, and consent are tangible goods.

Still if Freitas faults me, it is for not posting better positive pathways for ethically improving the university. I think I do, in each chapter, and in particular in the closing chapter, on what I would do were I a university president.

I hesitate though to go further. I am more interested in trying to create a culture for ethics than I am in trying to articulate the direction a university ought to take in order to improve ethically. I think the university still needs to create a groundwork for the constructive engagement of a culture. As that culture is established, we can simultaneously build positive pathways and institutions can occur. But as of yet the university shows, in my estimation, little interest in either the culture or the pathways. Still, I appreciate very much the compelling and critical urgings of Freitas.

I conclude with Kathleen Maas Weigert’s essay, which complements well my argument and the way I make it, but makes a major intervention regarding the frame of the argument: “Even though Keenan remarks that he will be using ethics ‘in a rather broad, inclusive sense’ I am inclined to think the more inclusive concept is really ‘university mission.’”

Clearly she has an impression of ethics at odds with what I propose in the second chapter. She argues against ethics for three reasons: “ethics has traditionally been about individual behavior,” and attempts to give it corporate claims are “a stretch”; “unfortunately ethics seems to have a rather bad reputation, at least for those who dismiss it all as ‘merely relative’”; and, “if for at least some members of a university there is no ‘universal standard’ of ‘appropriate’ (let alone ‘good’) behavior, what would enable them to think about

community membership and appropriate (even good) behavior within that community, namely, the university?"

I guess the reason I am in ethics is precisely that I believe ethics is fundamentally social and structural and not primarily personal, or worse private, and that ethics is not relative but articulated and forged through the polis seeking the right. Maas Weigert's third argument cannot really be held as credible at the university, for any professor who tries to remain immune to the claims of ethics effectively is out of place at the university, which is after all *the* place that makes the case for ethics.

She proposes instead "the mission' of the university, both the mission of higher education in general and the mission of a specific university in particular." She especially thinks that faith-based universities have the capacity for an inclusive approach to address many of the issues that we agree are scandalous at the university.

I respond in two ways. First, I avoid anything specifically religious or confessional in the ethics I espouse in my book. I was specifically interested in all universities, not solely faith-based ones, though I did and do believe that those universities would be the first responders to my complaint. I think moreover that there are, however, great riches in the tradition of Catholic social ethics, which can discuss subsidiarity, solidarity, social justice, the dignity of the person, and the common good. But again, these are ethical concepts, not primarily mission ones. I use these concepts as they have been appropriated more universally rather than as they might be applied as specifically Catholic. That is, I am looking to ethics precisely because it has universal claims for the social conduct at the university.

Secondly, I am not interested in replacing mission, but rather complementing it. Still, my anchor is not in determining what is the specific mission of the university in general or as its specific instantiation. That is another discussion. I am interested in the hermeneutics of ethics getting traction on the university campus. I am interested in the interruptions that have been made that have been ethical intrusions into the campus. For instance, I note that Take Back the Night is a fifty-five-year-old attempt to bring ethical claims about consent, equity, accountability, and procedural justice onto the campus, just as Maisto's New Faculty Majority and Freitas' *Sex and the Soul* also are.

I am interested in the language that addresses the issues of equity, accountability, transparency, solidarity, subsidiarity, the common good, fairness, nondiscrimination, honesty, consent, right reason, prudential judgment, racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and a host of other fundamental concepts in the repertoire of ethics. My claim is new: Mission

needs ethics, and the university, more than any other corporate body, has allowed itself to think that because it has its mission it has ethics. Mission is not enough; the hermeneutics of ethics has to enter the discourse of the way the university pursues its mission.

JAMES F. KEENAN, SJ
Boston College