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Reviewed by

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William Clark. *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 576 pp. Cloth: \$45.00. ISBN: 0-226-10921-6.

It is a rare book that not only engages my scholarly curiosity but also piques my historical sensibilities; this book succeeds in doing both. Despite my many years of scholarly skepticism, Clark indeed provides a compelling set of arguments about the roots of our current experiences as academics. Beginning with the northern European university of the Middle Ages, he carries arguments about powerful traditions and powerful modernity through to a breezy but self-admittedly uncomfortable epilogue on the modern university of northern Europe and the United States.

The table of contents is, by itself, a warning that Clark looks at the research university through unique eyes; chapters on university course catalogues and library catalogues are not necessarily how we see academe. In his chapters on the expected—the development of the doctoral dissertation and the appointment of professors—his attention to detailed evidence and his sometimes quirky writing sustain the flow of the narrative. Clark highlights the

cathedral characteristics of the medieval university—noting, for example, how academic processions reflected traditional forms of authority, with seniority, nobility, and theology taking primacy.

Slowly and erratically, academics moved from the disputation, a formal and at times insightful means of argument framed within accepted theological assumptions, to the dissertation, which was at first an oral exercise, then a professor's published work, and finally, a doctoral student's product of increasingly modern conceptions of research in the 1700s. He argues that, by the mid-1700s, the notion of publish or perish had taken hold in Germany; and although such academics as the British (who repeatedly appear as rather stodgy) resist such modern academic processes, Germany succeeds in conquering all. Germany's victory is exemplified, in the most striking word choice I have seen in years, in Weber's 1919 examination, identifying the United States as *Amerika* (Weber's term and clearly one that Clark enjoys).

Early charisma, Clark argues, derived from the cathedral. As he reminds the reader more than once, seniority continues to haunt the university as it seeks to identify who is important and why. Yet the attribution of super-human, or perhaps supra-human, qualities of charisma shifts in the 1700s with the advent of the bureaucracy. That human version of *deus ex machina* demanded accountability in terms of reports of who taught what to how many (in course catalogues), professorial candidates' and professors' dossiers, and eventually, how important a professorial candidate's publications were. Grade reports, tables, and government visitations were all means to incorporate the academic. In fact, his discussion of visitations and institutional reporting sounded eerily familiar, as if NCATE officials had too closely examined the German university before developing their own procedures.

My only regret is that he did not take a moment to remind the reader that *police*, as in policing by bureaucracies which he uses throughout the book, has the same etymological roots as *policy*. Bureaucratic policies police us all. And, in his characterization of the growth and transformations of libraries as well as academic publications, he shows how charisma takes a modern form with librarians' selections of canonical texts within increasingly specialized fields and peer review showing who is important, perhaps even transformative.

The most difficult argument—that ministers of education and their ministries affirmed charisma through reporting and detailing academics' lives—requires careful attention. In brief, he shows how bureaucracies highlighted the applause of students (mostly through professors' ability to draw large enrollments) and peers (lauded by colleagues) even as they demanded increasingly [End Page 206] detailed reports. The result was academic capital, which occupies a nebulous position between traditional charisma (remember seniority) and bureaucratic expectations (the more publications, the better the professor). That latter institutional behavior he names, in reflection of sociological works of the 1960s, "academic managerial capitalism." The results of the charisma and bureaucracy, he suggests, appear today in such relationships as biomedical researchers serving as CEOs for biomedical corporations using postdoctoral students to generate new knowledge, as if those researchers had an ethic higher than most of the rest of us. Even more than his concern about the fallacy of charisma (extolling the virtues of other academics in order to be praised oneself), he seems to fear what he calls "neofeudal . . . plutocrats" (p. 474).

Clark is not afraid of humor—his chapter on the movement from academic rumor and gossip to academic conferences is ironic yet cheerful. Nor is he, as a historian, afraid of the postmodernists, as Michel Foucault is a persistent reference, suggesting that perhaps humorous postmodernism is not a self-evident oxymoron. Nor is he afraid of forms of the metanarrative, at one point articulating arguments from Kant to Foucault in just a few pages. Finally, he does not fear the messiness of history, outlining or even discussing in detail exceptions; the German universities had a variety of features and patterns which he discusses carefully. Hence, this work challenges the reader to think beyond the boundaries of standard academic narratives and to realize through varied academic analysis that academics and academic institutions are bundles of contradictions.

The only substantial flaw of the book occurs when Clark attempts to show the development of the doctor of philosophy degree. This is an odd problem, since the PhD is part and parcel of the developing modern academic; but in a curious lapse from his typically detailed evidence and insightful arguments, he posits a possible reply among jurists (those whom we now know as law

professors) to a defense of the doctorate in 1571, and most of his arguments focus on opposition to the use of the term and the degree rather than their clearly uneven development.

As a final caution, this book is lengthy, with 473 pages of text and 37 pages of appendices. It is not a book for the faint-hearted, but then again, Clark would likely argue that a scholar seeking charisma should no more be faint of heart than weak of mind.
