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Postmodernity, Tertiary Education and the New Knowledge Discourses

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ABSTRACT
I am delighted to have this opportunity to respond to Michael Peters' Macmillan Brown Lectures of 2000. In my view, the issues raised in the lectures are of fundamental importance for all educationists in this country. Indeed, they have international significance. Much of what Peters has to say about the politics of neoliberal reform, the commodification of knowledge, and education under conditions of globalisation resonates strongly with themes considered by critical scholars in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and other countries. Tertiary education continues to feature prominently in New Zealand public discourse, with the release of a Tertiary Education Strategy document (Ministry of Education, 2002) setting out government priorities over the next five years and announcements of new funding proposals in the 2002 Budget. With a general election looming, questions al!out student loans and fees are likely to again become the object of heated debate. Educational concerns at other levels in the system, for example, over secondary teachers' salaries, have also gained considerable media attention. In this environment, the contribution Peters makes to a deeper understanding of the philosophical issues behind the rhetoric and the reforms is vital. This paper reflects on, and extends, some of Peters' key ideas on postmodernity, neoliberalism and education. The first section highlights some of the main features, as I see them, of Peters' argument, and selects three points in the lectures for further comment. This preliminary discussion leads, in the second section, to an assessment of recent developments in tertiary education in New Zealand, with a particular focus on the new "knowledge" discourses.

Introduction

I am delighted to have this opportunity to respond to Michael Peters' Macmillan Brown Lectures of 2000. In my view, the issues raised in the lectures are of fundamental importance for all educationists in this country. Indeed, they have international significance. Much of what Peters has to say about the politics of neoliberal reform, the commodification of knowledge, and education under conditions of globalisation resonates strongly with themes considered by critical scholars in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and other countries. Tertiary education continues to feature prominently in New Zealand public discourse, with the release of a *Tertiary Education Strategy* document (Ministry of Education, 2002) setting out government priorities over the next five years and announcements of new funding proposals in the 2002 Budget. With a general election looming, questions al!out student loans and fees are likely to again become the object of heated debate.

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Modernity, Postmodernity and Neoliberalism

Peters draws heavily on the work of Nietzsche in developing his analysis. He argues that postmodernity "can be pursued as the *question of value* after the event Nietzsche called 'death of God' which involves both the re-examination of our traditional sources and orientations of normativity, and the search for new ethical and political directions for our major institutions" (Peters, 2002a: 4). Peters' discussion of culture, knowledge and education rests on his account of Nietzsche's critique of modernity, and in particular his problematisation of the rational, autonomous subject at the heart of liberal thought. Postmodern philosophy, Peters argues, can be seen as "seeking a positive answer to nihilism; a way forward, which suggests that while there may be no foundation for values or for knowledge, this does not mean that knowledge is not possible or that the creation of new value is denied" (7). Peters characterises postmodernity as a cultural, political and socio-economic phenomenon: as a break not only with "traditionally modern ways of understanding the world but also transformations of the dominant mode of economic organisation, including changes in production and marketing, corporate and financial organisation, as well as the labour market and patterns of work" (8). Among other features, the new economic organisation emphasises the role of new information and communication technologies and supports a global networked knowledge economy.

Postmodernity in Aotearoa/New Zealand is, according to Peters, signalled by the election of the fourth Labour government and the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant paradigm for economic and social policy reform. Peters provides a concise overview of changes in the tertiary education sector, including brief remarks on the early work of the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission. This is followed by a lengthy discussion of neoliberalism, globalisation and "Third Way" politics. The second of the three lectures concentrates on the notion of "culture", considered in postmodern terms, and reflects on some of the tensions and possibilities in Maori educational politics. Peters detects an Hegelian logic in the work of a number of Maori critics of colonialism and neocolonialism, and considers the relevance of Wittgenstein's concept of culture for the Aotearoa/New Zealand context. The third lecture focuses in a more extended way on globalisation and discourses on the "knowledge economy". Peters draws attention to some of the fundamental flaws, tensions and omissions in current constructions and applications of this term. He compares policy documents on the knowledge economy in the UK, Scotland and New Zealand, and concludes with a series of reflections on the challenges facing educationists and others in the knowledge societies, economies and cultures of the present and future.

I find myself in broad agreement with the general direction of Peters' argument. Before proceeding to the main part of this paper, however, I want to address several relatively minor points of detail in the lectures. The first relates to Peters' comments on the work of Paulo Freire. In the second lecture Peters (20026) notes that Freire has been an influential figure in Maori educational politics. He maintains that "Freire's educational philosophy provides an easy fit with *biculturalism,* understood as an ideology". It is, he suggests, "dependent upon a logic of alterity, of Otherness, that gains its force from the Hegelian dialectic ... , expressed in the slogan 'self as the negation of Other"' (20026: 25). I do not dispute the claim that Freire has been influential for Maori (see Smith, 1999), and I agree with the criticisms of the Hegelian dialectic advanced by Peters in the paragraph

immediately following his comments on Freire. But Freire's ontology and ethic arguably do not fall neatly within this Hegelian tradition. It is undeniable that in his earlier work, and particularly in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972), he tends to speak of the "oppressor" and the "oppressed" in universalist terms. This construction of binary opposites has drawn criticism from postmodern critical educationists such as Weiler (1991), who points out that oppression and liberation operate on multiple levels. Thus, while a peasant male may be oppressed by a landowner, he may at the same time act in an oppressive way toward members of his own family. Freire has responded to such criticisms (see, for example, Freire and Macedo, 1993) drawing attention to the need to contextualise his work and to read it holistically. He does not deny that in earlier writings he was preoccupied with social class relations and that he paid less attention to other forms of oppression. In later publications, however, he responded to the criticisms of feminist writers and started to engage postmodern ideas.

If we take proper account of these extraordinarily prolific later years (1987-1997), a much more complicated Freire emerges (see further, Roberts, 2000). Freire addresses questions of culture, politics and difference at some length. He rejects the certainties of some forms of modernist thought, and supports the radical openness of progressive postmodern politics. He is heavily critical of neoliberal discourses, which he sees as "chock-full of modernity" (Freire, 1994: 41). He confronts the problem of otherness in educational ethics, and asks whether unity through diversity might be possible. The "fit" with biculturalism and its underlying Hegelian logic is thus not as easy as Peters suggests. When Freire's work is read holistically, it is clear that his understanding of oppression and liberation is not based on a clear division between discrete (cultural or other) groups. He certainly does not see any culture as "pure" or "static" or homogeneous (see Roberts, 1996). Freire never abandoned the ideals of unity, solidarity and collective struggle, and he remained committed to an ideal of democratic socialism. At the same time, he repudiated the sloganising, the dogmatism, and the denial of difference sometimes associated with some ideologies and movements on the Left. He was, in short, a complex character who could not readily be lumped into either an Hegelian or a Marxist (or a liberal or postmodern) camp.

I would also like to comment briefly on Vattimo's account of postmodernity, to which Peters refers with approval. Peters explains that for Vattimo, both Nietzsche and Heidegger are, despite their differences, concerned with a critique of foundational thinking in the European tradition. Nietzsche and Heidegger call into question the notion of progressive enlightenment and the idea of critical overcoming that Vattimo sees as underpinning modernist philosophy. They do so, however, *"not* in the name of another, truer, more real, or more enlightened, foundation". This, Vattimo says, is what distinguishes them as philosophers of postmodernity. Postmodernity signals a "taking leave of modernity". It involves a search to "free itself from the logic of development inherent in modernity" (Peters, 2000a: 6; 20006: n.1). Peters goes on to say that he finds Vattimo's observation in the final quotation particularly helpful in distinguishing between neoliberalism and poststructuralism.

It seems to me that there is a tension in Vattimo's account that is only partially addressed in Peters' lectures. Later in the lectures Peters argues, and I agree with him, that there is a danger in portraying cultures as "pure", organic wholes protected from "pollution" or "contamination" by other cultures or social formations. Yet, Vattimo's notion of *"taking leave"* of modernity (its foundationalism and quest to "overcome") as the defining characteristic of postmodernity carries similar risks. If, as Peters suggests, there is a need to acknowledge hybridity and borrowing within and between cultures, the idea of freeing oneself from the logic of a system of thought, even in the specific, restricted sense implied by Vattimo, is problematic. It must be remembered that Nietzsche had a deep knowledge of the Western traditions he was criticising. He was, in his scholarly upbringing, *immersed* within, and to this extent, formed by those traditions. A similar point might be made in relation to more recent postmodern theorists who, while seeking to go *beyond* modernism, that is, to think and write *after* modernity (hence the "post" in postmodernity), are nonetheless dependent upon modernism for their very existence as postmodernists. An

understanding of and engagement with "modernism" is necessary for postmodernists to lmow what it is they are defining themselves against. It has sometimes been said of "postmodernism" that it does not know how to name itself other than in relation to something else (modernism). This sort of characterisation is not especially helpful, partly because there is no *one* postmodernism, but also because it presupposes that we need names that distinguish one philosophy or way of thinking cleanly and clearly from others. On the other hand, just as some critics are quick to lump postmodernists misleadingly into one theoretical camp, sometimes postmodern writers are guilty of equally unhelpful generalisations about modernism. Hassan (1993), for example, lays out a table with modernism on one side and postmodernism on the other, distinguishing between the two by way of a series of opposites: hierarchy/ anarchy, centring/dispersal, purpose/play, and so on. Tables of this kind have their uses, but they can also have the effect of reproducing the binary logic that postmodernists find so objectionable in modernist thought.

There are, it might be said, *multiple* modernisms, just as there are multiple postmodernisms. We must be ever wary of the risks of homogenising complex bodies of work, of glossing over tensions, contradictions, differences between different theoretical positions and worldviews and modes of life. Postmodernists, in my view, do not "take leave" of modernity, even in the sense of trying to avoid the idea of critical overcoming. The very act of presenting one's work as a break from that which has gone before (recall Nietzsche's "transvaluation of all values"), whether this is modernism or anything else, could be construed as a form of overcoming, even if it may not be foundationalist in nature. It might be said that elements of modernist culture and thought remain "in" postmodern scholarship. Our attitudes, ideas and actions are shaped by the social structures, economic circumstances and cultural practices of our time. If, as postmodernists claim, modernist assumptions and values have played such a dominant role in the West since the time of the Enlightenment, we are all, in part, "modems". The same line of thinking might be extended to neoliberalism. However critical we may be of neoliberal philosophy, policies and practices, no one in countries such as New Zealand has been able to entirely escape its influence. Neoliberalism "lives through" us, even as we argue against it and resist its intrusion into social and institutional life.

This leads to a third point I wish to make in response to the lectures, not as a criticism but as a prerequisite for my later discussion. Peters says that he will "define postmodernity, in relation to Aotearoa/New Zealand, as beginning in 1984 with the election of the Fourth Labour government" (2002a: 8). The key to understanding this assertion lies in recognising that postmodernism is, as Peters points out, a multifaceted phenomenon with cultural, political and socio-economic dimensions. It is the third, and to a lesser extent the second, of these two dimensions that apply to the postmodernity in question here. The encroachment of the market into almost all areas of economic and social life can be seen as a shift from modernist (industrialised, Fordist, nationalist, etc.) systems of production, circulation, control and management to new, postmodern (post-industrial, post-Fordist) forms. Peters describes, comprehensively and effectively, some of the major features of the market approach, drawing attention in particular to its implications for social policy and education. The decline of the welfare state, cuts to benefits, the removal of tariffs and subsidies, the selling of state assets, "flexibility" in wages and working conditions, corporatisation and privatisation in health and education, and an emphasis on efficiency, competition and choice are all now familiar themes for social and political commentators in New Zealand. While these can be considered as defining features of a postmodern moment in socio-economic life, our recent history also has a profoundly *modern* character. The emergence of neoliberalism as a political philosophy has been, as Peters argues so well, one of the most stunning examples of a *metanarrative:* a framework within which all other ideas about social, institutional and cultural life are expected to operate.

Neoliberalism has become *the* "big story" of our time, dominating reform agendas around the Western world. In the realm of ideas, our condition is both postmodern and modern. There has been, in New Zealand as much as anywhere else in the world, a growing scepticism toward, or at least a questioning of, some of the legitimating narratives of the past: nationalism, Marxism, Christianity,

and the feminism of the 1970s, among others. Olderstyle industrial action, unionisation, and political activism - based, at least in part, on the call by Marx and Engels (1967: 121) for workers of all countries to unite - has given way a stronger focus on cultural difference and a heterogeneous array of new social movements. At the same time, and this relates to points made in preceding paragraphs, there has been tremendous pressure to fall into line with an increasingly narrow social and economic vision. Such a vision is one driven by principles of competitive individualism and sustained by an aggressive programme of marketisation. The pressures on those working in schools, universities, hospitals, welfare agencies, and a host of other institutions have often been applied quite overtly (for example, through new requirements in employment practices, in the development of charters, and in the measurement of "performance indicators"), but more subtle shifts (for example, changes in the language of everyday institutional life) have been equally effective in cementing neoliberalism as the dominant narrative.

I concur with Peters when he expresses doubts about the alleged demise of neoliberalism. Indeed, neoliberalism has already demonstrated a certain elasticity, allowing for the extremes of Thatcherism and Rogernomics on the one hand and the "Third Way" politics of Clinton and Blair (and perhaps the current Labour-led administration in New Zealand) on the other. I tend to agree with the second and third assessments of the "Third Way" presented by Peters. In the New Zealand context, as in the British, the ethical socialism of "Old Labour" has, it seems to me, been self-consciously abandoned. Of course, as I have argued above, there is no rigid separation between different historical eras or systems of thought. But there) s nothing substantial in current government policy to suggest a genuine commitment to socialist principles. There has been a softening of some of the "hard edges" of neoliberalism, but the dominance of the market as the model for all economic and social activity in this country remains largely unquestioned. The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and other senior government figures have been at pains to point out that they are "pro-business", that globalisation is inevitable, and that New Zealand must be competitive on the world stage. The old socialist ideal of overthrowing capitalism would be viewed as laughable by many within the current New Zealand Labour Party, and no longer appears to be entertained by even the Alliance Party (what remains of it) as a serious proposition. There have been some important changes in industrial relations legislation (with the replacement of the Employment Contracts Act by the Industrial Relations Act), benefit levels have been raised somewhat, and the government has made a significant commitment to programmes of Maori development. But the overall framework within which policy decisions are made has not altered. In the United States there has already been a swing further to the Right with the election of George W Bush as President. Given the power exerted by the US over global economic activity, it hardly seems likely that old-style Labour socialism will make a triumphant return in other Western countries. The ideal of promoting a market economy but not a market society is extraordinarily difficult, perhaps impossible, to implement in practice, for it is the rules of the market that set limits on what becomes possible in social policy.

Recent Developments in Tertiary Education and Knowledge Policy in New Zealand

The continuing dominance of neoliberalism in structuring government decision-making is evident in tertiary education policy, among other areas. There have been a number of new developments in the tertiary education sector in recent years. Four reports have now been completed in the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC) process discussed in Peters' lectures: *Shaping a Shared Vision, Shaping the System, Shaping the Strategy,* and *Shaping the Funding Framework* (TEAC, 2000, 2001a, 20016, 2001c respectively). A primer for the next five years, the *Tertiary Education Strategy* has subsequently been released in draft and final form (Ministry of Education 2001, 2002). A Tertiary Education Reform Bill has been prepared, and some significant announcements relating to tertiary education funding have been made in the recent Budget. A number of other high-profile events, notably the "Knowledge Wave" conference held at the University of Auckland in 2001, have kept

research and education issues in the news. These have followed earlier government initiatives, including the *Foresight Project* (Ministry of Research, Science and Technology, 1998) and the *Bright Futures* programme, both launched under a National-led administration, in which the theme of "knowledge" played a key role.

Many Ministers in the Labour-Alliance coalition government have been quick to distance themselves from both their predecessors in the National-led governments of the 1990s and the policies of Rogernomics instituted by the fourth Labour government in the 1980s. Some important changes in tertiary education policy have been proposed and enacted. The TEAC reports (2000 and 2001) and the *Tertiary Education Strategy* have promoted a "new paradigm" for tertiary education, based on a "shared vision" of New Zealand's future as a knowledge economy and society. The new paradigm adopts an integrated approach of "inclusiveness, partnership and intelligent intervention" in resourcing and coordinating the tertiary education system (TEAC, 2001 b: 12). Six strategies, each with an accompanying set of objectives and outcomes, are proposed for the tertiary sector from 2002 to 2007. The new approach will:

- Develop the Skills and Knowledge New Zealanders need for our Knowledge Society;
- Promote Learning and Research for Maori Development;
- Raise Foundation Skills so that all people can participate in our Knowledge Society;
- Educate for Pacific peoples' Inclusion and Development in our Knowledge Society;
- Strengthen Research, Knowledge Creation and Uptake in our Knowledge Society;
- Strengthen System Capability and Quality for our Knowledge Society.
- (Ministry of Education, 2001: 6-7, Summary).

Under the proposed system, there will be a move away from the ethos of privatisation and a "hands of ' stance by the government. The Tertiary Education Advisory Commission is to be superseded by a permanent entity (the Tertiary Education Commission) with the responsibility of overseeing the entire tertiary sector, and if the Tertiary Education Reform Bill becomes law new powers over fees, subsidies, charters, and research funding will be granted to the Minister. There will be concentrations of research activity through Centres of Research Excellence (COREs), and Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) will be introduced.

The TEAC process has certainly been far more rigorous, democratic and comprehensive than the Tertiary Education Review implemented by the previous government. The Commissioners themselves have impressive credentials. Two members in particular, Ivan Snook and Jonathan Boston, have distinguished records of international scholarship in areas directly relevant to the concerns of the Commission. Linda Smith is a prominent figure in Maori Education. Steve Maharey, Associate Minister of Education (Tertiary Education), is himself an academic by training and worked as a sociologist at Massey University prior to his political career. In many ways then, the prospects for a wide-ranging and well-informed review of the tertiary sector appeared promising when the Commission was formed. The Tertiary Education Review was an officials-driven process; the TEAC reports would be completed by respected academics and others with considerable educational experience. The documents produced in the Tertiary Education Review were insubstantial and lacking in theoretical rigour when compared to reviews undertaken elsewhere in the world around the same time (such as the Dearing Report in the United Kingdom, 1997). The TEAC process has produced four related reports, two of which, *Shaping the System* (TEAC, 2001 a) and *Shaping the Funding Framework* (TEAC, 2001c), are very substantial documents. The reports indicate that in a number of areas not all Commissioners were in agreement. This is not surprising, given the diversity in their backgrounds, and can be seen as a sign of healthy, robust debate by committed individuals on issues of considerable importance for the tertiary education sector. The Tertiary Education Review, by contrast, gave no indication of a diversity of views within the Ministry of Education or

other policy organisations connected (directly or indirectly) with the reviewing process. There has been a genuine attempt in the TEAC process to involve a wide range of participants in the tertiary education system, and the government has placed a special emphasis on the aspirations and contributions of Maori and Pacific groups.

Yet in some senses little has changed. The language of policy development is still largely the same as it was under the previous government. While there is no longer a heavy emphasis on "choice" and "competition", the *Tertiary Education Strategy* (Ministry of Education, 2001, 2002) still contains references to "stakeholders", "providers", "outcomes", "value-added businesses and exports" "performance indicators", "quality assurance", and so on. The notion of the "knowledge economy", discovered somewhat belatedly by National ministers in the last part of the 1996-1999 political term, has not disappeared under the current government; instead, there is now a great deal of talk about the "knowledge economy *and* society". In fact, "knowledge" has become a buzzword *par excellence* in recent years. The new "knowledge discourses", as they might be called, have played a pivotal role in structuring public debate about education, science, research, and the economy under the current government. The term "knowledge" appears frequently throughout the TEAC reports and is particularly prominent in the *Tertiary Education Strategy.* The TEAC Commissioners have, to their credit, been careful to stress that "knowledge" is relevant not just to the economic domain. They take a broader view of knowledge, noting that "no easy distinctions can be drawn between the value of domains of knowledge ... [A]ll fields of learning and knowledge, whether they be in the arts and the humanities or the natural and physical sciences, are of value and can contribute to individual well-being and social progress". Yet, the Commission then goes on to say that "[w]hat is *critical* is how the tertiary education system ensures that each of these areas of knowledge or learning are given the opportunity to develop and support a knowledge society and economy in New Zealand" (TEAC, 2000: 8, emphasis added) . Read as a whole, the TEAC reports and the *Tertiary Education Strategy* still place a premium on the importance of "knowledge" *for* something, and particularly *for* New Zealand's development and competitiveness in a global economy, rather than knowledge as an end in itself.

Lyotard's predictions about the commodification of knowledge, formulated more than twenty years ago, are worth recalling here. Lyotard argues in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984, originally published 1979) that as societies enter the post-industrial age and cultures enter the postmodern age, the status of knowledge changes. This transition, he notes, has been underway since at least the end of the 1950s. The leading sciences and technologies from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s, including cybernetics, informatics, telematics, computers, and data banks, have all been language-based. These technological developments have impacted upon the two major functions of knowledge: research and the transmission of acquired learning. In words we can appreciate after a further two decades of computer and networking advancements, Lyotard (1984) writes:

The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation. It can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language. The 'producers' and users of knowledge must now, and will have to, possess the means of translating into these languages whatever they want to invent or learn ... Along with the hegemony of computers comes a certain logic, and therefore a certain set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as 'knowledge' (4).

These new conditions allow for an exteriorisation of knowledge from knowers. A teacher is no longer required for passing on that which is known to those seeking to know. Knowledge, rather than being seen as an end in itself, is becoming a commodity: something to be produced and consumed, creating an exchange value. Knowledge has become a key force of production, altering relations within and between nations. Lyotard predicts that science will "maintain and no doubt

strengthen its preeminence in the arsenal of productive capacities of the nation-states" (5). In combination with other factors, this will lead to a growing gap between developed and developing countries. In the global struggle for power, knowledge as informational commodity will be crucial; indeed, "[i] t is conceivable that the nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor" (5). Under these conditions, the role of the state changes. Multinational corporations will exert an increasing degree of influence over investment decisions, and the state will no longer be seen as necessary in the learning process. With the commercialisation of knowledge, social progress is measured, in part, by the ease with which information, as one form of capital, circulates. Lyotard envisages nation states reconsidering their relations with corporations and civil society. World markets, he says, will (re)open, and there will be a return to vigorous economic competition.

These prophetic comments allow us to place the new "knowledge" discourses generally, and those associated with tertiary education' in particular, in a wider context. The trends identified by Lyotard are now in evidence around the world. The principles of neoliberalism, whether endorsed and applied in their more "pure" form by governments of the right (or centre-right), or revised and repackaged under "Third Way" politics, have been at the heart of these trends over the past two decades. There has been a push for "free" trade between countries, underpinned by rhetoric about the value of consumer choice and competition. Gaps between the "haves" and "have-nots" have widened, not just at an international level, as signaled by Lyotard, but within nations as we saw in New Zealand in the 1990s. "Knowledge", now indistinguishable from information, has become a commodity. Nations are, as Lyotard predicted, fighting over information, over so-called "knowledge-based" industries which are built on the effective use of new information technologies, new ways of "adding value" to products, and new systems for connecting "sellers" to "consumers". The growing gaps between countries have sometimes been characterised as divisions between "information rich" and "information poor" nations. There is, however, still a strong correlation between economic prosperity in the traditional sense and superiority in the information or "knowledge" wars.

"Knowledge" is now whatever *passes* for knowledge in its commodified form, that is, whatever can be traded on national and international markets. Knowledge in all fields can be acknowledged as important, but what comes to count most is how everything that passes for knowledge contributes to New Zealand's success, or potential success, in this new world market. As the draft *Tertiary Education Strategy* puts it:

> We must forge new ways of thinking and working. Developing a Knowledge Economy and Society is about social and economic advancement, based on continuous innovation and improvement. It is about becoming an instinctively creative country, with a vibrant sense of our own identity and the ability to equip future generations of New Zealanders to confidently take their place in the world (Ministry of Education, 2001: 1, summary).

It is noted that a successful knowledge economy and society is "much more than the technical development and application of new knowledge and skills. Social and cultural development are equally important for New Zealand's growth and prosperity" (1). While recognition of the cultural and social dimensions of development is long overdue, the value of knowledge, or what comes to pass for knowledge, is still indexed against external, national economic goals ("growth and prosperity"). To be fair, it is also noted that the tertiary education system "provides people with the skills and knowledge that enable them to lead fulfilling lives" (1), but this notion remains underdeveloped in both the *Tertiary Education Strategy* and the TEAC reports. Relatively little has been said about the ways in which education contributes to personal growth (and not just economic growth), or about the nature of the educational process itself, or about the distinctive experiences students might gain from tertiary education as compared with other forms of education. The larger, global policy framework within which the ideal of a national commitment to a knowledge society

and economy has been constructed remains largely unquestioned, and extrinsic motivations for pursuing knowledge continue to dominate.

It is acknowledged that there are different domains of knowledge, but readers are given few ideas as to what "knowing" or "pursuing knowledge" within them might mean. In fact, despite all the talk about "knowledge" in the TEAC reports and the *Tertiary Education Strategy,* fundamental epistemological questions remain unanswered. "Knowledge" has traditionally been distinguished from not only "information" but also "opinion" and "belief". Conservative, liberal and radical philosophers and social theorists are often united on one point, namely, that "knowledge" implies something *more* than mere awareness, or simply holding a belief or expressing an opinion, or acquiring and exchanging information. In the TEAC reports, and particularly in the *Tertiary Education Strategy,* "knowledge" seems to be everywhere, but we are left with no basis for distinguishing "genuine" knowledge from "everything that passes for knowledge". Extending Lyotard's point about the exteriorisation of knowledge, we might say that the "knower" disappears in some of the rhetoric about the knowledge economy. There are sellers (or "providers") and purchasers of information, but the process of *knowing* is not necessary for this trading to take place. There is a noticeable absence of any strong sense of history in the TEAC and *Tertiary Education Strategy* documents. The reader is left with no clear sense of how the different domains of knowledge might be properly contextualised. There is little discussion of traditions of inquiry, or of the growth and emergence of bodies of knowledge, or of different "knowledge cultures" (to use Peters' helpful term). Of course, we should not expect policy reports and strategy statements to address these issues, or those relating to epistemology more broadly, in anything like the depth typical of, say, a philosophy text. Yet, the TEAC reports are very thorough in their examination of a number of other key issues relevant to the formulation of tertiary education policy, making these silences on key epistemological issues all the more perplexing.

Concluding Comments

Much more could be said about recent developments in tertiary education and knowledge policy in this country. The brief remarks in this paper may suffice, however, to indicate that while the Labour-Alliance coalition government of the past three years has been much more conscientious and better-informed in its approach to tertiary education than the National-led governments of 1990s, the basic framework for policy formulation and implementation remains the same. Neoliberal principles, softened somewhat by moves towards greater inclusiveness, continue to guide policy decision-making. There has been plenty of talk about the need for tertiary education to contribute to a knowledge economy and society, but surprisingly little has been said about the nature of knowledge itself. Peters' lectures remind us of how important it is to ask searching questions of our policy-makers, and of ourselves, as each new phase of neoliberal tertiary education reform unfolds.

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