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Steve Fuller, ""The governance of science in an age of Knowledge Management"." *Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences*. Paper 10.
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/2001/papers/10>

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THE GOVERNANCE OF SCIENCE IN AN AGE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

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Founder of the research programme of social epistemology.

Author of seven books, most recent of which are:

- *The Governance of Science: Ideology and the Future of the Open Society* (Open University Press, 2000).
- *Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Times* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- *Knowledge Management Foundations* (Butterworth-Heinemann, 2001).

The talk is taken mostly from the last work.

“KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT”

- “KM” has been traditionally seen as a contradiction in terms – that is, unless knowledge is reduced to an object of management.
- In that case, academically based ‘knowledge society’ talk is misleading in suggesting that knowledge changes the character of management.
- Rather, knowledge is now treated as raw material to be tamed and cultivated, not a good to be manufactured or a service to be delivered.
- Universities have thus come to exemplify the **dumb organization**, the wholes of which are less than the sum of their parts – where a smart organization is exemplified by a McDonalds franchise.
- KM diagnoses university dumbness in terms of an organization trying to do too many things at once: e.g. teaching, research, regional service.
- KM focuses on a generalized sense of task efficiency over an understanding of the unique organizational mission of the university.

THE SCOURGE OF KM: “ACADEMIC BULLIONISM”

- The idea derives from Adam Smith’s critique of the fixation on quantity over quality in the economy -- especially the preference for their sheer accumulation of bullion and goods over their investment and sales.
- Typically this fixation on quantity was expressed in the enlargement of universities and libraries:
 - In 1600 Spain had 32 universities in which 3% of males were registered, figures matched by the US and Germany in 1900. It was also the largest publisher of academic books and housed the largest libraries.
 - Nevertheless, Spain came to exemplify the “useless learning” against which the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions defined themselves.
- This image of universities as academic bullionists changed only in the early 19th century when Humboldt re-established the university as producers of teachable research.
- >From an economic standpoint, this amounted to a welcomed emphasis on the **productivity** over the sheer production of academic knowledge.

- However, current measures of academic achievement tend to be open-ended “extensional magnitudes” that stress sheer numbers of publications, patents, students, grant income, library volumes, etc.
- Thus, we are now back to academic bullionism.

A PSEUDO-SOLUTION: CYBERPLATONISM

- The problem of academic bullionism is often treated as exclusively concerned with the commercialisation of knowledge production.
- Thus, Stevan Harnad has called for transferring academia's peer review processes from print to electronic media.
- I have called this **cyberplatonism**. Its motto is "gatekeeping not toll-gating".
- Assuming the possibility of such severance from commercial interests, Harnad's proposal would only reinforce the power of research programmes that had gained ascendancy through capitalization ("big science").
- Moreover, it would neglect the role that publishers have played in encouraging grassroots trends within academia that cut against the dominant powers – e.g. cultural and women's studies.

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF SCIENCE IN AN AGE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Universities must define their goals in ways that transcend both:

- the parochial disciplinary interests of peer review processes (Harnad's pseudo-solution)

and

- the more global tendency to reduce all organizations to the model of industrial firms under free market capitalism (KM's pseudo-solution).