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The Teaching Excellence Framework, Epistemic Insensibility, and the Question of Purpose

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that the Teaching Excellence Framework manifests the vice of epistemic insensibility. To this end, it explains that the TEF is a metrics-driven evaluation mechanism which permits English higher education institutions to charge higher fees if the 'quality' of their teaching is deemed 'excellent'. Through the TEF, the Government aims to improve the quality of teaching by using core metrics that reflect student satisfaction, retention, and short-term graduate employment. In response, some have criticised the TEF for failing to meaningfully evaluate the quality of teaching. This article seeks to explain and justify this criticism. Section II presents Heather Battaly's account of the vice of epistemic insensibility. Section III argues that the TEF manifests two key features of an epistemically insensible policy, namely: it promotes a failure to desire, consume, and enjoy epistemic goods that it is appropriate to desire, consume, and enjoy; and it does so because it is committed to a false conception of the epistemic good. Crucially, it argues that the TEF falsely assumes that epistemic goods that serve to bolster its core metrics are more valuable than epistemic goods that do not. Section IV shows how this relies on an erroneous conception of the purpose of education and thus a false conception of the epistemic good. Section V considers two brief objections and concludes that the TEF advances a conception of the student-as-customer which detracts from desiring, consuming, and enjoying epistemic goods related to edification, civic participation, and the student-teacher relationship.

Keywords

Teaching Excellence Framework; Epistemic Insensibility; Heather Battaly; Student-as-customer; Purpose of Higher Education

Introduction

In the summer of 2015, Jo Johnson, then newly appointed as British Minister for Science and Universities, announced his intention to introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). In the following years, the TEF was developed and implemented, resulting in some surprising results in its 2017 evaluation of the quality of teaching at English universities. According to Johnson (2015), the general ambition of the TEF was to 'rebalance' the relationship between teaching and research in universities and to put 'teaching at the heart of the system' by introducing a metrics-based teaching quality assessment mechanism. In exchange for taking part in this evaluation process, English universities deemed to have 'excellent' teaching are to be awarded the right to increase home undergraduate fees in line with inflation (in practice, that means a rise from £9,000 in 2016-17 to £9,250 in 2017-18). In order to design and define the TEF, the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (BIS) published a higher education Green Paper, (BIS 2015), followed by a higher education White Paper (BIS 2016) and the Department for Education (DfE) published technical guidelines (DfE 2016a, DfE 2017). Lastly, Section 25 of the *2017 Higher Education and Research Act* explicitly permits the Office for Students (the new regulatory body for UK higher education) to 'make arrangements for a scheme to give ratings' to higher education providers 'regarding the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education' (Higher Education Research Act 2017). Taken together these documents outline the TEF's rationale, governance, implementation mechanisms, and legal standing.

As one might expect from such a profound change to English higher education, this policy reform has been met with much criticism, frustration and outright hostility from a significant number of academics and students, as well as the University and College Union (UCU), the National Union of Students (NUS), the House of Commons BIS Select Committee, the House of Lords, the Council for the Defence of British Universities, and some Vice-Chancellors.[1] Much of the push-back against the TEF has focused on its likely effects on the international competitiveness of English universities and on the desirability of raising tuition fees in England once again, with the Labour Party capitalising on the issue in the 2017 General Election by proposing to scrap fees altogether and to reinstate maintenance grants (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). While the British government has sought to depoliticise the TEF, presenting it as little more than process of bureaucratic rationalisation, others have argued that the TEF is the latest in a long line of policies designed to entrench neoliberal practices. Indeed, echoing academic critiques of marketisation in higher education (see, for example, Giroux, 2014) and of universities' embrace of a 'competition fetish' (Naidoo, 2018), critics of the TEF have pointed out that it overly emphasises the private benefits of undergraduate study at the expense of a wider set of values that university education ought to further. These values are sometimes conceived of as ethical (Nixon 2008), democratic (Nussbaum, 2012) or civic (McFarlane, 2007; Dzur, 2014; Arvanitakis and Hornsby, 2016). While these more general concerns occupy much of the debate in the public sphere, defenders of marketisation typically maintain that neoliberal reforms (such as the TEF) are perfectly consistent with a commitment to these broad ethical values.[2] More cuttingly still, they often argue that these reforms are necessary to ensure that all students get the best possible education (see, for example, Johnson, 2015 & Willetts, 2017).

Therefore, opening an alternative discursive flank by showing that neoliberal reforms fail to achieve their purported goals can be a powerful line of rebuttal which largely sidesteps the more empirical discussion regarding the reconcilability of the private and public benefits of higher education. In the case of the TEF, an argument to this effect must show that, not only is the TEF unable to meaningfully measure teaching quality because the metrics it uses are flawed and leave out much that is fundamentally important for evaluating the quality of teaching, but also that it is a policy which epistemically corrupts the practice of university teaching by encouraging the development of intellectual vice (Baehr, 2013; Kidd, 2018). It is this specific line of objection against the TEF that this article aims to explain and justify by drawing on the growing literature on vice epistemology (see, for example, Battaly, 2014; Cassam, 2016; Baird & Calvard, 2018) and bringing it to bear on the philosophy of higher education.

In particular, I contend that Heather Battaly's (2013) account of the vice of epistemic insensibility can help show that the TEF is a corrupting policy, which encourages the development of a serious epistemic vice for pedagogical practices. To be clear, I will argue that the TEF manifests two key features of an epistemically insensible policy, namely:

A- It promotes a failure to desire, consume, and enjoy epistemic goods that it is appropriate to desire, consume, and enjoy; and

B- It does so because it is committed to a false conception of the epistemic good.

Since teaching, minimally, consists in the acquisition and transfer of epistemic goods as well as the development of the appropriate dispositions to desire, consume and enjoy epistemic goods, demonstrating that the TEF is an epistemically insensible policy amounts to showing that the TEF fails on its own terms.[3] That is to say that instead of encouraging the development of virtues (i.e. improvements), the TEF encourages the development of vice in teaching. One attractive feature of Battaly's account of epistemic insensibility is that it does not rely on a full (and thus likely controversial) account of the epistemic good to ascertain what constitutes a false account of the epistemic good; rather she merely aims to show that an overly narrow conception of the epistemic good (that is, one that over-emphasises the desirability of narrow at the expense of wider epistemic goods) is false. Crucially, I will thus argue that TEF is corruptive because it over-values epistemic goods that boost its core metrics and under-values epistemic goods that do not. I will, therefore, articulate a distinctively epistemic argument against the TEF.

To this end, I will begin by explaining the TEF's policy context and its mechanics (I). I will then present Battaly's account of the vice of epistemic insensibility and show how she applies it to two policies designed to evaluate research quality (II). Subsequently, I will draw on Battaly's argument to show that the TEF manifests two key features of epistemic insensibility – namely A and B – (III) and show that the TEF relies on an erroneous conception of educational purpose (IV) before finally considering and rejecting two important objections (V).

I. The Teaching Excellence Framework in Context

> 'For those who have lived through the last few decades in British education, particularly higher education, the changes have been both extensive and profound. In fact for some of those who have taught in universities in Britain between the 1960s and the 1980s, the present system in 2011 is barely recognisable in many of its practices.' (Andrew Vincent, 2011, p. 332)

The TEF emerges out of a distinctive political and historical context. One that has been, as Andrew Vincent evocatively suggests, nothing short of transformed since the 1960s. In addition to devolved powers on higher education policy in Scotland, Wales, and

Northern Ireland, this transformation is explained by three further concomitant trends: the mass expansion of higher education (Wyness 2010, Bolton 2015, DfE 2016a); the privatisation of the cost of undergraduate teaching in England and to a lesser degree in Wales; and the development of an aggressive research environment.[4] Taken together, these have led to a managerialised and marketised higher education environment. What I mean by 'managerialised' is that English higher education institutions (HEIs) have become more internally hierarchical institutions with a growing managerial class of professionals (as opposed to academics) employed to design and implement internal regulations that regiment academic activities to better comply with government regulations and to purportedly maximise efficiency. The term 'marketised' denotes the growing influence of a market logic whereby HEIs compete with one another to attract students (or 'customers', as some institutions refer to them) and seek to demonstrate 'value for money'. I contend that the TEF should be understood as the latest expression of these over-arching developments, because the result of these trends, some have claimed, has been a reduced focused on teaching across the sector.[5] Indeed, Johnson claims that this systemic trend away from teaching towards research has led to a Faustian bargain between university lecturers, giving little teaching hours, and their students, being awarded generous grades in exchange for their acquiescence to poor teaching standards.[6]

The TEF's Rationale

It is against the backdrop of these wider trends that Lord Browne and the Coalition government in 2010-11 claimed that introducing higher fees would 'put students at the heart of the system' once and for all (Browne Report 2010; BIS 2011). Moreover, it is explicitly to accelerate this process of re-focusing universities that Johnson has announced his intention to introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework, designed to 'incentivise excellence and innovation' in higher education teaching. Johnson thus writes: 'For too long, teaching has been regarded as a poor cousin to academic research. The new Teaching Excellence Framework, which we promised in our manifesto, will hard-wire incentives for excellent teaching and give students much more information both about the type of teaching they can expect and their likely career paths after graduation' (BIS 2015, p. 8). The official goal of this policy is therefore to rebalance teaching and research as institutional priorities for British universities by introducing a teaching quality assessment mechanism focused on core metrics and supplemented by qualitative evidence. So, at this point we must ask: What exactly is the TEF? And how does it work?

Explaining the TEF and its Mechanics

The TEF is a metrics-driven evaluation mechanism open to all British higher education institutions designed to measure and classify the 'quality' of the teaching they perform. Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish HEIs can participate in the TEF but only English universities deemed to be 'excellent' will benefit from the right to raise their fees in line with inflation going forwards, since only English HEIs depend on Westminster for decisions regarding Home undergraduate fee-levels. HEIs belonging to the most 'excellent' group receive a 'Gold' award, HEIs belonging to the second best group receive a 'Silver' award, HEIs belonging to the third best group receive a 'Bronze' award. HEIs can also fail to qualify for any of the awards. Although in the first iteration of the TEF all participating English HEIs were entitled to raise fees in line with inflation (for the academic year 2017-18) and the second iteration has permitted HEIs achieving 'Bronze' or higher to do the same for 2018-19, the intention is for each increment to allow English HEI award winners to be able to raise their fees at varying levels (though not exceeding inflation) in the future.[7]

Crucially, participating HEIs are to be evaluated with reference to 'core metrics' as well as contextual data, bench-marking HEIs against the rest of the sector. The TEF's latest core metrics are as follows:

1. Employment or further study (weight: 1) from the Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (or DLHE);
2. Highly skilled-employment or further study (weight: 1) from the DLHE;
3. Teaching on my course (weight: 0.5) from the National Student Satisfaction Survey (or NSS);
4. Assessment and feedback (weight: 0.5) from the NSS;
5. Academic support (weight: 0.5) from the NSS;
6. Non-continuation (weight: 1) from the Higher Education Statistics Agency and Individualised Learner Record data (DfE, 2016 (a), p. 18; DfE 2017, p. 57).

To explain, metric 1 designates the proportion of graduates in employment or further study 6 months after graduation; metric 2 designates the proportion of graduates in managerial and professional employment or further study 6 months after graduation; metric 3, 4, and 5 designate the average score provided by final year students' response to the NSS questionnaire regarding their levels of satisfaction with, respectively, the teaching on their course, the assessment and feedback they received, and the level of academic support they experienced during their studies; metric 6 designates the proportion of students who drop out of their course of study, instead of completing their degree. Differences between an institution's result and sector average are 'flagged' –

positively or negatively - for the panel's consideration and these factors are weighted as indicated and an average 'score' is calculated.[8]

Acknowledging that these metrics are mere proxies for teaching excellence, the Government allows HEIs to supplement these metrics with further narrative evidence. This allows HEIs to provide contextual information and qualitative data to support their submission. While no explicit weighting is given in the guidelines, the general mechanic of the TEF can be visually summarised (see Figure 1) as a series of inputs (confirming institutional eligibility, as well as providing core metrics and contextual data – see left-hand boxes in figure 1) submitted to a panel composed of 'academics, students, employers, and widening participation experts' (HEFCE, 2016) which awards a 'medal' resulting in a financial output (permission or not to increase fees) for eligible HEIs (see top right-hand box on figure 1). The most recent plans involve applying the TEF at subject-level, as the new Universities Minister, Sam Gyimah (2018), claims, to offer 'consumer style ratings for university courses to help drive value for money.'

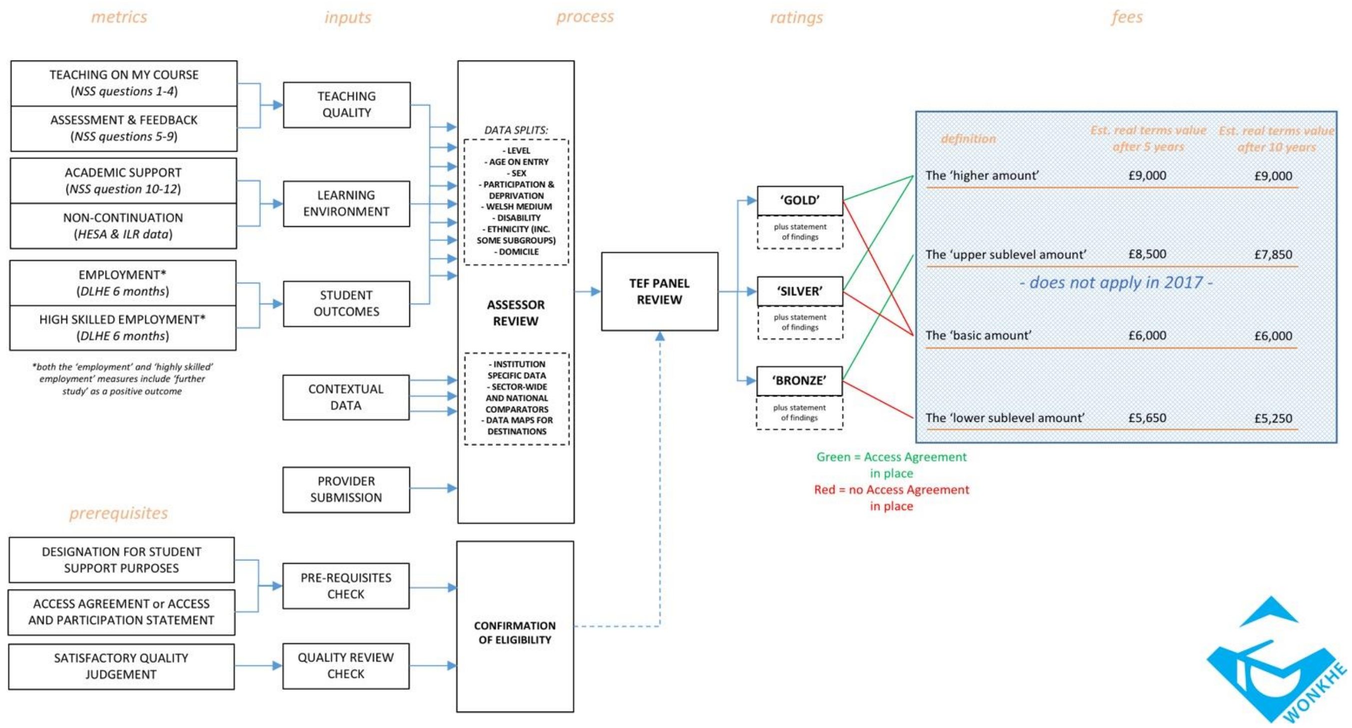

Figure 1: 'The Incredible Machine Mark III: Our visual guide to the TEF' (WonkHE, 2016).

First Hurdle: Mission Confusion?

One immediate worry is that the TEF is not an indicator of teaching *excellence*. The concept of 'excellence' denotes the upper limit on a scale of quality, pointing to the outstanding nature of a cohort member in relation to the rest of the cohort in a particular regard. Excellence, in this sense is a relative not an absolute concept. Thus, universally distributed excellence in a given cohort ceases to be excellence; it becomes merely normal.[9] In light of this, it appears unclear what the TEF aims for. Does the TEF merely aim to raise the bottom bar of teaching quality? Or does it aim to raise the median, or the top bar to new heights? If the goal is to raise the bottom bar, the TEF seems redundant, because British higher education has long implemented teaching quality control mechanisms. Indeed, from internal feedback mechanisms and the external examiners system, to the creation of the Quality Assurance Agency in 1997, the sector has demonstrated concern with ensuring that the quality of teaching meets a minimum standard of quality with solid results. The TEF, we are told, aims to address the purported 'variability' in the quality of teaching provision by introducing a standardised mechanism to encourage all institutions to pursue 'excellence' in teaching (BIS, 2015, p.12). Since, Johnson admonishes the sector for its 'variability', we might infer that the TEF in fact aims primarily to raise the median bar via a process of managerial rationalisation. The danger here is that 'excellence' would become the name for merely satisfactory performance. While the TEF medals are designed to reflect their relative position in terms of supposed quality of teaching, we may still worry that they are failing to do much more than offer varied coloured badges that are so widely shared across institutions of such different natures as to render them all but meaningless. Thus, we may ask: What does the TEF mean by 'excellence in teaching'?

Although the Government admits that '[t]here is no one broadly accepted definition of 'teaching excellence'' (BIS 2015, p. 22), it goes on to state four principles that inform the TEF's understanding of excellence: 'excellence must incorporate and reflect the diversity of the sector, disciplines and missions – not all students will achieve their best within the same model of teaching; excellence is the sum of many factors – focussing on metrics gives an overview, but not the whole picture; perceptions of excellence vary between students, institutions and employers; excellence is not something achieved easily or without focus, time, challenge and change' (BIS, 2015, p. 22). This account says more about what excellence in teaching is *not* than about what actually *constitutes* excellence. In other words, according to the Government, teaching excellence is not uniform; teaching excellence is not one easily identifiable thing; teaching excellence is not the object of an existing consensus; excellence is not the product of mere happenstance.

Although defining something by what it is not can be a method for arriving at a definition, in this event, this strategy leaves us with a hopelessly vague definition of 'teaching excellence'. This is problematic because it does not allow us to assess whether the TEF metrics match up to a clear definition of 'teaching excellence'. Worse still, failing to state the precise nature of the excellence in teaching pursued makes the entire policy potentially counter-productive.

While there have been significant discussions of the TEF's competitive risks and political considerations regarding fees, I will constrain myself to explaining and justifying the worry that it a vicious policy by drawing on Battaly's account of epistemic insensibility.

II. The Charge of Epistemic Insensibility

In 'Detecting Epistemic Vice in Higher Education Policy: Epistemic Insensibility in the Seven Solutions and the REF', Battaly (2013) develops an attractive account of epistemic insensibility and uses it to mount a cutting critique of two policies designed to evaluate and reward research excellence, namely: the Seven Solutions, in the USA, and the Research Excellence Framework, in the UK. I contend that this critique can be extended to the TEF. I therefore must first outline Battaly's central argument before showing how it can be applied to the TEF.

Battaly on Epistemic Insensibility in the Solutions and the REF

To develop her argument, Battaly draws on Aristotle's characterisation of the vicious person. For Aristotle, the vicious person consistently performs bad acts and does so out of choice. Such choice is shaped by the vicious person's desires which are in turn based on that person's conception of the good (in that sense that people believe what they desire to be good). Battaly explains: 'Both vicious and virtuous people choose their actions; but the vicious person's conception of the good is false, whereas the virtuous person's is true. In brief, for Aristotle, vice requires one to consistently perform actions that are in fact bad; and to do so because one has a false conception of the good.' (Battaly, 2013, p. 264-5). Moreover, Aristotle holds that a virtue is a mean between a vice of excess and vice of deficiency. In the case of the virtue of temperance, temperance is the mean between the vices of self-indulgence and insensibility. Self-indulgence consists in a habitual excess in one's disposition to enjoy experiences that are worthy of enjoyment because one *over-values* pleasure, while insensibility consists in a habitual deficiency in one's disposition to enjoy experiences that are worthy of enjoyment because one *under-values* pleasure. The relevant dispositions here are the desires, actions and capacity for enjoyment which relate to the consumption of appropriate pleasurable experiences – such as, food, drink and sex (Aristotle, 1984, 1118a32). Therefore the vicious person holds a false conception of what it is good to desire, consume and enjoy, which results in excess (self-indulgence) or deficiency (insensibility) of desire, action or capacity for enjoyment of goods which it is appropriate to enjoy. Battaly further specifies that the kinds of food, drink and sex that it is good to desire – those that 'the temperate person desires, consumes, and enjoys' (Battaly, 2013, p. 266) – are objects that are 'pleasant, make for good health or good condition' and 'other pleasant things if they are not hindrances to these ends' (Aristotle, 1984, 1119a15-18). In other words, the temperate person desires, consumes, and enjoys goods and proportions of goods that are enjoyable and either actively support continued good health or do not detract from continued good health. For example, the temperate person will desire, consume and enjoy spinach and kale, as well as perhaps jelly beans, but only the latter in such amounts as to avoid detracting from continued good health over time.

Battaly then turns to the epistemic version of these vices. According to her, while in the moral realm we are more prone to the vice of self-indulgence, in the epistemic realm we are more prone to the vice of insensibility. She writes: ‘We are far more likely to fail to consume and enjoy appropriate truths or to consume and enjoy them seldom, than we are to consume and enjoy truths indiscriminately or too frequently’ (Battaly, 2013, p.266). Battaly then points to the fact that we all too often fail to inform ourselves about important issues of the day or to test out our beliefs through rigorous discussion and critique. Much more likely still, we are unlikely to enjoy taking part in such epistemic practices. These are all markers of the vice of epistemic insensibility. Allow me to explain this further.

Building on immediately preceding literature on epistemic vice (Fricker 2007, Baehr 2010, Battaly 2010), Battaly offers a full-fledged Aristotelian account of the vice of epistemic insensibility.[10] According to this account: ‘the virtue of epistemic temperance hits the mean, whereas the vices of epistemic self-indulgence and epistemic insensibility do not; […] the epistemically self-indulgent person exceeds with respect to epistemic objects, occasions, or frequency because she over-values pleasure as an epistemic good; whereas the epistemically insensible person is deficient with respect to epistemic objects, occasions or frequency because she under-values pleasure as epistemic good’ (Battaly, 2013, p. 267). Battaly mentions the contemporary sceptic in epistemology as an example of epistemic self-indulgence. Conversely, we may consider the apathetic learner or, more topically, the systematically ignorant public leader to be epistemically insensible.

To explain, the epistemically self-indulgent person values pleasure as an epistemic good, but does so at the expense of other desirable epistemic goods (like truth); the epistemically insensible person fails to value pleasure as an epistemic good, and as a result 'consistently fails to desire, consume, engage in, or enjoy appropriate epistemic objects frequently enough' (Battaly, 2013, p. 267). Both the epistemic self-indulgent and epistemically insensible person act out of an erroneous conception of the epistemic good. The former because she believes in a conception of the epistemic good where the pleasure of inquiry is overly central, the latter because she believes in a conception of the epistemic good where the pleasure of inquiry is not central enough. The epistemically temperate person, in contrast, holds a conception of the epistemic good where pleasure is in balance with other epistemically valuable objects. 'The temperate person', Battaly explains, 'desires (etc.) beliefs that actively contribute to the epistemic good, and beliefs (etc.) that are consistent with the epistemic good' (Battaly, 2013, p. 270). While she acknowledges the disputed nature of the epistemic good, she asserts that holding true beliefs contributes to the epistemic good and holding false beliefs neither contributes to nor is consistent with the epistemic good. As a result, a conception of the epistemic good which makes it more likely to hold fewer true beliefs and more false beliefs is false. Returning to epistemic insensibility, Battaly (2013, p. 268-9) invites us to consider two worlds:

> 'In the first, epistemic insensibility is prevalent. Many agents fail to consume and enjoy truths about their world. As a result, they are uninformed about (e.g.) current events, history, or science. In the second world, epistemic temperance is prevalent. Many agents consume an array of important truths about their world, and enjoy doing so. The first world is epistemically worse off [because] the prevalence of epistemic insensibility will ensure that the community is largely uninformed.'

By being uninformed, the people in the epistemically insensible world are less likely to hold true beliefs and more likely to hold false beliefs. Epistemic insensibility is therefore inconsistent with the epistemic good.

At this stage, the reader may well wonder how Battaly brings this account of epistemic insensibility to bear on higher education policy. Although she is careful to note that policies cannot be said to be vicious in the same way that people can, since policies do not have desires, she maintains that policies can manifest some of the same properties as vicious people. Critically, she follows Miranda Fricker (2010) in claiming that a policy can be vicious without any of the people involved in the making such policy being vicious. This means that the policy itself – as opposed to the people who made it – is the appropriate object of moral appraisal.[11] In what sense can a policy be said to demonstrate the vice of epistemic insensibility? According to Battaly, an 'epistemically insensible policy [A] promotes a failure to desire, consume, and enjoy some knowledge that it is appropriate to desire, consume, and enjoy. And [B], it does so because it employs a false conception of the epistemic good – it wrongly assumes that such knowledge is not (or is not sufficiently, in the case of the REF) epistemically good' (Battaly, 2013, p. 264). She then goes on to argue that both the Seven Breakthrough Solutions in the US and the REF in the UK (though to a lesser degree than the Solutions) manifest these features of the vice of insensibility.

In the Solutions, solution number three recommends that research and teaching budgets be split and that 'valuable research' be supported via state funds. The policy states that 'valuable research' is research that attracts external research funds (i.e. 'from government, business and private donors'). As I have already mentioned, the REF is a mechanism designed to evaluate and rank the quality of academic outputs in British universities and it allocates a significant proportion of research funds (in 2017-18, the Higher Education Funding Council of England will distribute £1.6 billion quality-related research funding on behalf of the Government) (HEFCE, 2017a). The overall evaluations of research excellence at a departmental level is made on the basis of three criteria: 'the academic quality and number of research outputs (which accounts for 65 percent of the overall ranking); the impact of research beyond academia (20 percent); and the research environment (15 percent)' (Battaly, 2013, p. 273). In 2014, the 'impact' criterion was defined as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' (HEFCE, 2017b). This was to be evidenced through case studies that demonstrated taking part in one or more of the following activities: helping in the development or improvement of a consumer product or service; shaping the policies of businesses, charities, or professional organisations; contributing to the cultural economy; and improving the public understanding of societal issues by appearing in the media. Revenue from sales, public and charitable funding count as evidence of impact, while impact at one's own institution (through one's students or colleagues) are excluded. Crucially, this impact must occur within twenty years of the published research to count in future REFs.

What these two policies have in common is that they define the quality of research as a function (entirely, in the case of the Solutions, and partially, in the case of the REF) of non-epistemic goods. The upshot of this is that highly theoretical areas of research, with less direct avenues to external funding and societal impact, are judged to be of lesser epistemic value than more applied domains of inquiry. In relation to the REF, the worry is that defining the 'impact' criterion in this way makes it more likely for departments with a more applied dimension (or at least, some dedicated specialists working in a more applied manner) to be ranked more highly then departments solely involved in theoretical questions, whether that be in Mathematics, Physics, English or Philosophy. More damningly, in relation to the Solutions, when Battaly asks whether research on the Higgs-Boson, or Byron's poetry, or four dimensionalism is valuable according to that policy, the answer is: 'Not unless it attracts investment from outside the academy' (Battaly, 2013, p. 275). While obtaining external research funds can reflect an academic assessment of the epistemic quality of a given research programme, it often does not. The same can be said about research with 'impact' (understood as the REF does): research with impact can be epistemically valuable, but it also very well can be 'impactful' without making much of an epistemic contribution. The worry here is not so much that research funds or other markers of impact preclude research from having epistemic value, but rather that the Solutions and the REF conflate the epistemic value of research with certain aspects of its non-epistemic value. Battaly thus approvingly quotes Stefan Collini: 'Instead of proposing that 'impact' […] is a social good over and above the quality of research, the [REF] makes the extent of such an impact part of the measurement of the quality of research […] research plus marketing is not just better than research without marketing; it is better *research*' (Battaly, 2013, p. 275 & Collini, 2012, p. 175 – Collini's emphasis). This is all the more problematic, because as, Peter Scott (2013) writes, '[t]hese days, universities' main objective is to achieve better REF grades, not to produce excellent science and scholarship. This has become a subsidiary goal that only matters to the extent that it delivers top grades.'

Ultimately, Battaly rejects this narrow instrumentalism, arguing (i) that there are reasonable theories of epistemic value that are non-instrumental; and (ii) that even a pragmatic understanding of the epistemic value of theoretical true beliefs – one according to which epistemic value is entirely instrumental – requires that we take the long view when assessing the pragmatic value of theoretical knowledge. In others words, even for pragmatists, such as William James and John Dewey, who believe that the value of true beliefs is always in some sense instrumental, the idea of restricting our understanding of such pragmatic value to events that took place in the following twenty years and to receiving external funding, influencing a specific policy, or appearing in the media, while excluding the impact theoretical (or differently impactful) knowledge can have in clarifying or systematising our ideas or the effect it can have on students, lay readers, and the work of the wider intellectual and scholarly community is absurd and objectionable. Battaly powerfully concludes that if we are to take a pragmatic view of the value of knowledge, '[w]e need a pragmatism that is principled – one that does not arbitrarily dismiss some things that are valuable, and one that takes long term value into account' (Battaly, 2013, p. 276). I am confident that James and Dewey would agree.[12]

Thus, in so far as the REF and the Solutions comparatively under-value theoretical and differently impactful true beliefs at the expense of more narrowly 'practical' (in the sense prescribed by each policy) true beliefs, they promote a failure to desire, consume and enjoy epistemic goods that it is appropriate to desire, consume and enjoy (recall A). Moreover, in so far as the Solutions and the REF hold a narrowly instrumentalist conception of the value of knowledge, they rely on a false conception of the epistemic good (recall B). The REF and the Solutions therefore manifest two key features of an epistemically insensible policy. To demonstrate that the TEF is also susceptible to the charge of epistemic insensibility, I now need to show that it also manifests these features.

III. Epistemic Insensibility in the TEF

One crucial but under-explored assumption in Battaly's argument about the Solutions and the REF is that knowledge production (and the way we evaluate and reward it) have an impact on our attitudes, desires, and capacity for enjoyment in relation to knowledge consumption. As a matter of fact, I happen to agree with Battaly that such a relationship exists. However, in the case of the TEF that extra step is not necessary, because we are dealing with a policy that is intended to have a direct impact on the way knowledge is consumed by students at English HEIs. Therefore, the TEF is a policy that at its very core aims to re-shape students' attitudes, desires, and capacities for enjoyment regarding consuming epistemic goods. As a result, I need to show that it is a policy that promotes a failure to desire, consume and enjoy epistemic goods which it is appropriate to desire, consume and enjoy (A). Moreover, I need to show that it is a policy committed to a false conception of the epistemic good (B). At the crux of this discussion lies the thought that the TEF has little or nothing to do with evaluating teaching. Allow me to explain.

The TEF is not an indicator of *teaching* excellence, because it simply does not measure *teaching* quality. In fact, Chris Husbands (2017), the chair of the TEF panel has admitted so much when he wrote that the TEF is a 'measure based on some outcomes of teaching'. Yet, I want to go one step further and assert that the TEF metrics currently used to evaluate 'teaching quality' are divorced from other important outcomes of teaching, because the TEF's core metrics reflect the interests of a student-as-customer and such interests are not necessarily best served by learning or consuming a wide variety of epistemic goods.

Indeed, on the one hand, student satisfaction (captured by metrics 1, 2 and 3) is a poor marker of teaching quality, because 'satisfaction' is a measure derived from the world of business where customers can rate their satisfaction with a product or service after they have consumed or used it, while the learning relationship requires students to undergo a process of learning that is likely to be uncomfortable and thus, by definition, dissatisfying (at least to some extent). As Graham Gibbs (2016, p.14-15) puts it, '[t]he Government must choose between obliging universities to give students what they say they want, even if it is counter-educational, and encouraging forms of provision which are known to be more educationally effective, whether students want them or not.' On the other hand, the other half of the TEF metrics are outcome measures (metrics 4, 5 & 6) that bear no obvious causal relationship with the quality of teaching or learning. As a matter of fact, retention, employment, and highly skilled employment are very likely to reflect other factors than that the quality of teaching or student learning (Gibbs, 2016, p. 16). In studies of pre-university schooling it was found that geography (Chetty, Hendren, Kline, Saez, and Turner, 2014; Chetty, Hendren, Kline & Saez, 2014), and social capital (Kearney & Levine 2014 & 2016; Freeman, Han, Madland & Duke, 2015) were better predictors of access to well-paying jobs than the quality of education delivered to children. While further empirical study is required to ascertain whether the same holds true for university-level education, there is no prima facie reason for thinking that it does not. In the meantime, Gibbs (2016, p. 15-6) warns that 'employability measures are affected by student quality as well as by a wide range of additional variables, many of which are not under the control of the institution. Unmoderated employability metrics are unfair and short-term employment metrics are misleading.' Although 'further study' may appear to be a measure that relates more clearly to a desire to learn, the cost associated with further study for most students (as public funding is limited) makes it a choice heavy with financial consequences for graduates, and likely speaks more to attitudes towards debt and familial financial support than it does to actual thirst for intellectual accomplishment. Moreover, retention might also appear to be a more promising metric because a sense of belonging at university and high grades at university-level have been shown to be significant predictors of retention (Tinto, 1987) and these factors seem to be related to learning activities. However, retention remains largely extraneous to teaching quality, as high levels of belonging depend on a wider host of factors (including students support, mental health provision, good housing, access to social networks) and higher grades are largely indicative of higher student quality (i.e. students who did well in school prior to university). More generally, empirical studies in the USA have shown that predictors of retention include age of study, ethnicity (compounded by gender), residency status, high school grades, financial pressure (including fee-levels), or even individual histories of substance abuse during high school.[13] These wider factors are clearly extraneous to teaching quality. As a result, we must conclude with Gibbs (2016, p.16) that '[o]utcome measures […] are substantially influenced by the quality of students and do not tell us much about the quality of the education they experience.' The TEF's metrics are therefore largely extraneous to teaching quality and yet they underpin the Government's definition of 'excellence in teaching'.

As a result, we must conclude that, far from being neutral proxies of teaching excellence, the TEF metrics are purposeful choices designed to drive HEIs to encourage their students to think and behave in certain ways rather than others. Indeed, the TEF envisions and encourages students to act as customer-investors hoping to make a maximum return on investment while having an enjoyable customer experience. From this perspective, satisfaction and retention rates track customer loyalty, while graduate employment approximates a measure of return on investment for students. This is practically damaging because evidence suggests that adopting an understanding of the learner as customer is pedagogically and epistemically counter-productive for students. Indeed, a recent study of 608 students at 35 English universities found that a higher consumer orientation in students was associated with a weaker learner identity and lower academic performance (Bunce, Baird & Jones, 2016). One plausible explanation is that the student-as-customer model fosters 'a culture whereby students seek to 'have a degree' rather than 'be learners' (Molesworth, Nixon, and Scullion, 2009) because it promotes passive instrumental attitudes to learning' (Bunce, Baird & Jones, 2016, p. 2).[14] In other words, the student-as-customer model of learning is damaging to students' learning because it promotes a failure to desire, consume, and enjoy epistemic goods that it is appropriate to desire, consume, and enjoy (recall A). Students who think as customers appear to be less motivated to learn, not just for the pleasure of learning, but even for the sake of obtaining good grades. This is a problem for the TEF. Since the TEF is wedded to core metrics that entrench this idea of the student-as-customer and since it aims to reward HEIs that outperform other HEIs on these metrics by giving them the right to charge higher fees, we must conclude that the TEF is a policy that promotes in students a failure to desire, consume, and enjoy epistemic goods that it is appropriate to desire, consume, and enjoy.

However, even if the TEF succeeds in promoting in students the desire, activity, and enjoyment associated with consuming instrumentally valuable epistemic goods that lead to better results on the TEF's core metrics (i.e. student satisfaction, retention, employment and high skilled employment), it would still promote a failure to desire (etc.)

other epistemic goods that do not directly contribute to boosting such results. The tragic upshot is that higher education in a world perfectly governed by a successful TEF would primarily reward such learning experiences that serve the instrumental wants of student-customers hell-bent on maximising their temporary satisfaction and future employment prospects. Students in such a world would not be significantly encouraged to desire, enjoy, or consume epistemic goods for the sake of experiencing the delight of learning and inquiring for non-instrumental reasons or to change the ends they pursue. In such a world, TEF compliant teachers would not be particularly encouraged to endeavour to instil in their students the habits of desiring (etc.) truths that are not directly relevant to feelings of satisfaction, passing a class, getting a grade, and eventually obtaining gainful employment. Rather, they would primarily aim to satisfy their students' immediate desires and focus on exposing them to narrow instrumentally valuable truths. By rewarding universities and departments that give students' satisfaction and employment while discouraging them from dropping out, the TEF makes it likely that departments will veer away from encouraging students to learn for the sake of learning, and will focus instead on encouraging students to merely feel satisfied, pass tests, earn credits, and succeed in the employment market. Therefore, by its very design the TEF promotes a failure to desire, consume, and enjoy epistemic goods that it is appropriate to desire, consume, and enjoy. Thus, it manifests A.

Crucially, as in the case of the Solutions and the REF, I need to show that the TEF promotes a failure to desire (etc.) certain epistemic goods, *because* the policy is committed to a false conception of the epistemic good (recall B). I believe that it does, because the TEF's conception of the epistemic good emphasises the epistemic value of truths and skills that serve narrowly instrumental purposes (i.e. satisfaction, accreditation, and short-term employment), at the expense of all other purposes.

IV. The Question of Purpose

The question of purpose in education is a recurring motif in classical philosophy. For example: Socrates warned against those who would receive their learning from sophists for, though they would learn how to be convincing, they would not learn how to be wise (Plato, 2007, 505a-518e; Brickhouse, & Smith, 2000, p. 30); Plato (2007, 369a-520d) thought that the social purpose of education was to train wise and just rulers as well as to maintain social harmony by training subordinates to obey their masters; and for Aristotle, education aimed for the development of the virtues, such as to induct the youth into responsible citizenship (Curren, 2000).

In the face of neoliberal reforms and a growing loss of public trust in universities, recent scholarship in the philosophy of higher education has sought to re-affirm the manner in which they provide public rather than private benefits. Indeed, Willetts explains that undergraduate education provides public economic benefits (in the form of higher tax receipts, higher levels of exporting, and improved productivity) as well as non-economic public benefits (such as reduced crime rates, higher propensities to vote, volunteer and tolerate others, as well as generating more dynamic cities) (2015: p. 8-9). Ronald Barnett (2017) contends that universities richly contribute to interconnected 'eco-systems' – understood metaphorically to include the realms of knowledge, social institutions, persons, the economy, learning, culture and the natural environment – and can provide unique exemplars for transformational institutions. Simon Marginson (2016) maintains that higher education systems can contribute to the common good, ‘understood in terms of social solidarity, social relations based on human rights and equality of respect’ (2016: p.16). However, none of these visions of the public role of universities express a distinctly pedagogical aim.

In contrast, the 1963 Robbins Report offers a strikingly compelling account of the purpose of undergraduate education, as follows:

- the “instruction in skills”, because “[w]e deceive ourselves if we claim that more than a small fraction of students in institutions of higher education would be where they are if there were no significance for their future careers in what they hear and read; and it is a mistake to suppose that there is anything discreditable in this” (Robbins, 1963, p. 6);

- “the promotion of the general powers of the mind so as to produce not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women” (Robbins, 1963, p. 6);

- the advancement of learning, since “the search for truth is an essential function of institutions of higher education and the process of education is itself most vital when it partakes of the nature of discovery” (Robbins, 1963, p. 7);

- the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship, “[b]y this we do not mean the forcing of all individuality into a common mould: that would be the negation of higher education as we conceive it. But we believe that it is a proper function of higher education, as of education in schools, to provide in partnership with the family that background of culture and social habit upon which a healthy society depends" (Robbins, 1963, p. 7).

Although we may wish to add to this list that undergraduate education might also aim to help develop (however humbly) self-understanding and personal growth students, the framework offered by the Robbins Report helps in characterising what is fundamentally problematic about the TEF. The most fundamental concern with the proposed TEF is that overly emphasises the development of the skills which will lead to employment and pecuniary gain, at the expense of all other purposes, because it understands such skills to be fundamental to the epistemic good as opposed to standing in an equal relation to 'promoting the general powers of the mind', 'the search for truth', and the 'transmission of a common culture'. Since the TEF seeks to reward universities that ascribe to an overly narrow and marketised conception of the epistemic good, it relies on a false conception of the epistemic good. Reflecting on the Browne report, David Marquand remarked:

> 'At its heart lay the assumption that a university education is a private good, enjoyed by individual consumers, like an expensive car or a generous annuity. For its authors, the point of university teaching was not to introduce young people to the life of the mind, to foster critical thinking or to turn out responsible and public-spirited citizens. It was to make the taught richer than they would otherwise have been.' (Marquand, 2015, p. 92-3)

I contend that the TEF reflects a similar assumption and is therefore committed to a narrowly instrumentalist conception of the epistemic good, which systematically over-values epistemic goods that serve satisfaction, retention, and short-term employment, and under-values epistemic goods that do not. Much like with the Solutions and the REF, the TEF assumes a narrowly instrumentalist conception of the value of knowledge. Indeed, since the TEF purports to evaluate and rank the quality of teaching by focusing on metrics that reflect limited instrumental considerations, it therefore defines the value of teaching as being primarily derived from such narrow instrumental considerations. Moreover, since the proper object of teaching is, by definition, the transmission of epistemic goods, the TEF thus relies on a conception of the epistemic good that denigrates less immediately instrumentally valuable epistemic goods and is therefore false. The TEF therefore manifests B.

V. Objections

At this stage, the critic might object that I have not yet shown that the TEF's conception of the good is false, because I have not yet shown that it is appropriate to desire (etc.) the epistemic goods that are under-valued by the TEF. In response, I contend that there are three crucial reasons to give more value to wider epistemic goods than the TEF allows, namely: edification, civic participation and the pedagogic relationship. I will consider these in turn.

(i) Edification: Character formation is a legitimate purpose of education. Knowledge which can be dissatisfying, hard to understand, and of little economic instrumental value can be of remarkable value to an individual in pursuit of moral self-improvement. For example, consider W. E. B. Dubois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1996). It is a deeply moving, complex and disturbing book, which portrays in detail the individual and systemic oppression of black Americans during the Restoration era. If this book is not the object of a test or an examination, consuming the truths pertained within is unlikely to contribute to satisfaction, academic progression, or one's employment prospects. But these truths invite us to contemplate who we are, where we come from, and who we want to be in a world so deeply scarred by what Dubois calls the 'color line'. It is appropriate to consume knowledge that helps us reflect upon these questions, even though such knowledge may be disturbing and of little help in passing a class or securing gainful employment, because education and knowledge present us with the opportunity not just to grow in instrumentalities but to become ever more judicious selectors of the ends we wish to pursue. To explain further, the author, David Brooks, draws a distinction between résumé virtues and eulogy virtues: 'The résumé virtues are the skills you bring to the marketplace. The eulogy virtues are the ones that are talked about at your funeral — whether you were kind, brave, honest or faithful. Were you capable of deep love?' (Brooks, 2015). If higher learning is to contribute to the development not just of the 'the résumé virtues' but also of the 'eulogy virtues', it must promote in students the desire for and the disposition to consume and enjoy encountering truths that are not of immediate instrumental value to them. Fostering the right kind of dispositions towards enjoying non-immediately instrumental epistemic goods is critical to help students think for themselves about what makes their work, their learning, and their lives ultimately meaningful to them. Therefore, a conception of the epistemic good which ignores or under-values these kinds of epistemic goods is false.

(ii) Civic Participation: One of the reasons Battaly worries about policies that promote a failure to desire, consume, and enjoy epistemic goods is that such policies contribute towards producing poorly informed citizens who eventually 'influence policy, locally and globally' (Battaly, 2013, p. 269). Being appropriately disposed towards enjoying relevant epistemic goods plays an important role in fostering the conditions of healthy democratic deliberation. By laying a groundwork of general knowledge, as well as introducing the practices of reasoned debate, dialogue, and discussion, responsible problem solving, and critical thinking, undergraduate education can help instil civic-minded habits of thought and action. Such knowledge and habits are central to the practices that support effective civic engagement, public trust, and democratic institutions – that is why Amartya Sen (2010) calls them 'public reason' and John Dewey refers to the over-arching deliberative process as 'social inquiry' (Forstenzer, 2012). The TEF, in contrast, puts a premium on epistemic goods that serve a narrowly conceived self-interest in satisfaction, accreditation, and short-term employment, at the expense of epistemic goods that might serve the common good. The TEF is therefore wedded to a conception of the epistemic good which under-values epistemic goods that are relevant to good democratic functioning. In a democracy, this is politically dangerous and inconsistent with civic responsibility. The TEF's epistemic conception of the good is therefore false.

(iii) The Pedagogic Relationship: A highly mechanistic model of teaching excellence, like the TEF, threatens to reduce the learning experience to an accumulation of mere instrumental relationships. This is problematic because it reduces the learning exchange to a transaction: one where the educator provides certain types of experiences (those that lead to satisfaction, continuation, and employment) in exchange for a salary. Yet, this transactional model occludes a fundamentally important part of the learning experience, namely, the co-creation of the subject-matter by learning about one another and jointly selecting which epistemic goods to pursue. This requires a kind of

> nurturing, supportive, and challenging interaction that cannot be reduced to mere financial exchange or instrumental service provision. Rather, it is a thoroughly human experience of collective transformation that requires that both student and teacher learn about one another more meaningfully than a mere business relationships demands. In other words, part of what it means to meaningfully learn about a given subject matter is to learn truths about those that would teach it to us. Or as Cardinal Henry Newman once put it: 'The general principles of any study you may learn by books at home; but the detail, the colour, the tone, the air, the life which makes it live in us, you must catch all these from those in whom it lives already' (Newman, 2008, Lecture 4, § 4) To my mind, it is in no small part out of this reality that the ideal of a university as a community was first imagined and it is in this irreducibly human experience of inter-personal learning that undergraduate education, as well as the vocation of teaching, finds its full significance. Since the TEF's conception of the epistemic good is content with reducing the quality of teaching to student satisfaction and outcomes measures, it under-values the epistemic goods contained within the inter-personal relationship between teacher and student.

Therefore, to summarise, the TEF is wedded to a false conception of the epistemic good because it assumes that epistemic goods associated with edification, civic participation and a rich pedagogic relationship are of a less epistemic value than epistemic goods associated with student satisfaction, retention and short-term employment. This assumption is false because edification, civic participation and a rich pedagogic relationship are appropriate pedagogic goals that yield important epistemic goods for students.

Still, at this point, the critic may object that I have unfairly characterised the TEF. While the policy relies on the core metrics I have discussed, it also allows for narrative institutional submissions to accompany this data. Moreover, the TEF has been rebranded as the 'Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework' (still abbreviated as 'TEF', presumably for aesthetic reasons) in the hope of adding transparency regarding its awkward relationship with measuring the actual quality of teaching. Therefore, in principle, the TEF will be able to account for the wider goals of undergraduate education thanks to these institutional submissions and avoid implying that its results entirely define the quality of teaching. In reply, I must point out that (1) the change in nomenclature regarding the TEF's full name does nothing to change the fact that it remains the only mechanism used to evaluate and rank teaching activities in HEIs – it therefore functionally aims to define the quality of teaching; (2) there is no guarantee that HEIs will address these wider dimensions of learning in their submissions, since the policy makes no requirement regarding their content; (3) my over-arching claim is not that the TEF necessarily ignores epistemic goods that are unrelated to the core metrics, but merely that it ascribes comparatively less value to them than to epistemic goods that are related to the core metrics. The very fact that the core metrics do not attempt to reflect wider epistemic goods is what I think is ultimately objectionable.

Conclusion

In sum, I have explained that the TEF is a policy intended to evaluate and rank the quality of teaching at English HEIs based on core metrics reflecting students' satisfaction, retention, employment and high skilled employment 6 months after graduation. I then introduced Battaly's account of the vice of epistemic insensibility, making clear that, in the case of a policy, it manifests itself by demonstrating two key features:

A- The policy promotes a failure to desire, consume, and enjoy epistemic goods that it is appropriate to desire, consume, and enjoy; and

B- The policy does so because it is committed to a false conception of the epistemic good.

I presented Battaly's argument to the effect that both the REF and the Solutions demonstrate these features of this epistemic vice, because they over-value narrowly instrumental epistemic goods and under-value broader theoretical goods. I then went on to argue that the TEF manifests these two features of epistemic insensibility because it over-values epistemic goods that serve to bolster high levels of student satisfaction, retention, and graduate employment, and under-values all other epistemic goods. I argued that this leads the TEF to promote a failure to desire, consume, and enjoy epistemic goods that it is appropriate to desire, consume and enjoy (A). Moreover, I argued that it does so because it is wedded to a false conception of the epistemic good (B). I therefore concluded that the TEF manifests the two key features of epistemic insensibility identified by Battaly. I then considered and dismissed the objection according to which the TEF's conception of the epistemic good is not false, on the grounds that it under-values epistemic goods derived from edification, civic participation, and the relationship between teacher and learner. Finally, I briefly addressed the objection according to which the TEF could allow for these wider epistemic goods to be considered through the narrative institutional submission before dismissing it because such consideration is very likely to be given less value than the TEF's core metrics. Ultimately, I have argued that it is the over-valuation of epistemic goods associated with the core metrics and the under-valuation of all other epistemic goods which makes the TEF's conception of the epistemic good objectionable. Returning to wider public discussion, since teaching consists in the transfer of epistemic goods as well as the development of the appropriate dispositions to desire, consume and enjoy epistemic goods, by demonstrating that the TEF is an epistemically insensible policy I have shown that TEF fails on its own terms. Moreover, since the TEF does not meaningfully evaluate the quality of teaching, it is unlikely to drive genuine improvement in teaching quality in English HEIs.

The policy-oriented critic, however, may well ask: How could we improve the TEF? Here, I can only hope to provide three brief elements of response:

(1) Ideally, we would abolish not reform the TEF. I do not know of a teaching evaluation mechanism that best approximates the full richness of the diverse epistemic goods provided by undergraduate education. However, I think that peer-observations, examiner's reports, student feedback, as well as satisficing the demands of the Quality Assurance Agency provide meaningful and robust indications of the quality of teaching at any one university. The problem here seems to me that many policymakers no longer trust members of the academic community to exercise their best judgment in making these evaluations and they therefore require a measurable – i.e. metrics-based – evaluation of teaching quality. This metrics-based approach seems wrong-headed to me, because, as one

research group puts it, "[w]hen we choose to use a particular quantitative metric to assess and guide policy, we risk downplaying, trivialising or simply ignoring value considerations which the particular metric does not measure, and which, perhaps could never be quantified at all" (Newfield & Gosh, 2015, p. 3). Indeed, I have shown in this article that the TEF does just that.

(2) Yet, in the realm of second-bests where one must compose with current political pressures, learning gain measures (such as, for example, what is provided by the Collegiate Learning Assessment in the USA) might appear seductive to those that believe that evaluating the quality of teaching should have something to do with evaluating the quality of the knowledge acquired by students. However, recent research into the use of learning gain measures in the United Kingdom has suggested that they are not well-suited to establish institutional comparison at a national scale because learning occurs in a non-linear fashion (which would be lost on a standardised capture of learning gain) and the diversity of pedagogical content in British universities makes inter-institutional comparisons difficult to sustain (see McKie, 2018).

(3) Minimally, if it is to have a chance to be taken seriously as a measure of the quality of teaching in universities, the TEF should: be entirely separated from the issue of tuition fees (as it stands, it appears to many as little more than a Trojan's Horse to justify their rise); abandon metrics based on graduate employment or earnings (as these are entirely extraneous to the task of learning); replace NSS scores that measure student satisfaction with UK Engagement Survey (based on the National results which measure how students are engaging with their studies and how hard they are working, since evidence suggests that 'engagement' is much more

closely associated than ‘satisfaction’ with learning (Gibbs, 2010, pp. 33-4). Ultimately, however, I am not convinced that such policy reforms would suffice to ensure that the TEF is no longer epistemically insensible and this for the reasons outlined in (1).

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[1] See for example: UCU (2017a): 'Three-quarters of survey respondents (76%) also said the bill's plan to link the Teaching Excellence Framework […] to tuition fees would have a negative impact on higher education'; also see UCU (2017b), Jack Grove (2017a & 2017b), House of Commons BIS Select Committee (2016), Chris Havergal (2017) & Dorothy Bishop (2017).

[2] Indeed, it was only in June of 2015 that David Willetts (2015: p.7), the former Minister of State for Universities who lifted the cap on tuition fees in England to £9,000, encouraged his readers to follow Stefan Collini (2012: p. 99) in accepting "that there is a public not merely a private benefit from higher education that can be characterised in various, not merely economic, terms".

[3] While I must acknowledge that the language of 'acquisition' and 'transfer' might raise unfortunate metaphorical associations with the language of business (see Hader and Hodinson 2009), I will use this language for the sake of distinguishing the kind of knowledge production that occurs during teaching activities from the kind of knowledge production that occurs in research activities (as these are plainly not the same type of activity). Moreover, using the traditional words (or metaphors) regarding learning allows for a tighter conceptual fit with arguments developed in virtue and vice epistemology, since this literature typically draws on classical sources, and a stronger engagement with the policy debate as it stands. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging further clarification on this point.

[4] Although the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and Research Excellence Framework (REF) have led to increased research outputs and have given a chance to lesser renowned universities to demonstrate their capacity for research, Lewis Elton contends that they have also have had the effect of creating a British version of the American 'publish or perish' culture, where academics "no longer [have] a free choice to see their main role either as a research or as a scholars and teachers"(Elton, 2000, p. 276). This has been compounded by the introduction and subsequent growth in popularity of world university rankings (such as QS World University Ranking and the Academic Ranking of World Universities - also known as the 'Shanghai Ranking') largely focused on research outputs and research funds, because these rankings are seen to signal prestige and to drive international student applications.

[5] On the relationship between research and the quality of teaching, see Gibbs (2010, p. 29): 'institutions with a strong orientation towards research often reveal a weak emphasis on teaching and vice-versa – there is a strong negative relationship in relation to institutional priorities and this has measurable effects on educational gains'; and Astin (1993, p. 363): '... a college whose faculty is research-orientated increases student dissatisfaction and impacts negatively on most measures of cognitive and affective development.'

[6] See Johnson (2015): 'David Palfreyman and Ted Tapper describe as a 'disengagement contract' with their students: 'This goes along the lines of 'I don't want to have to set and mark much by way of essays and assignments which would be a distraction from my research, and you don't want to do coursework that would distract you from partying: so we'll award you the degree as the hoped-for job ticket in return for compliance with minimal academic requirements and due receipt of fees'(Palfreyman & Tapper, 2014, p. 140).'

[7] While this has been the Government's intention for some time – see NUS (2017) – Theresay May, at the 2017 Conservative Conference, announced that there would be a freeze on lifting fees beyond £9,250 in 2018-19 (Morgan 2017).

[8] In TEF's third year, the following additional metrics are considered by the panel but are not attributed a specific weighting: Grade inflation (provider declaration); Sustained employment or further study from the Longitudinal Education Outcome (collected 3 years after qualification); Above median earnings threshold or further study (LEO).

[9] Although the TEF does not aim for this, the term 'excellence' can also be defined in terms of 'self-transcendence'. One could, in principle, understand 'teaching excellence' as 'teaching students to overcome themselves'. In this view, 'teaching excellence' would not be a quantifiable measure of teaching, for there can be no metric that reflects self-overcoming. And yet, one might claim that it is an essential goal of education to overcome oneself (i.e. to continually go beyond one's sense of one's own limitations) and that it is all the more crucial for students and graduates in contemporary, highly fluid, societies. The TEF presents us with a conception of the goals of education where considerations of this sort remain entirely foreign. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this further distinction.

[10] The point here is not so much that Battaly adopts an Aristotelean conception of the good rather than a Neo-Aristotelean, Utilitarian, or Kantian one; instead, the point is that she sees Aristotle as providing the necessary conceptual framework to make sense of virtue and vice epistemology. While one does not require a full account of the conception of the good to engage in virtue and vice epistemology, one will need a conceptual account of the nature of virtues and vices that permits evaluating our character *qua* epistemic agents. Aristotle provides that for most virtue epistemologists, yet some have also begun to turn to Confucius as well (see, for example, Kidd, *forthcoming*).

[11] This is not to say that people who make vicious policies are never vicious people – clearly some people who make vicious policies *are* vicious people. Rather, the relevant claim here is that the appropriate object of ethical scrutiny is the character of the policy itself and not the character of the policy-maker.

[12] Crucially, both James and Dewey accepted Charles Sanders Peirce's following formulation of the pragmatic maxim: 'Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of those effects is the whole of our conception of the object', (Peirce, 1992-9, p. 132). Note that 'conceivability' is significantly more open-ended then the narrowly 'pragmatic' considerations designated by the Solutions and the REF.

[13] See, for example, Edward St. John, Shouping Hu., & Jeff Weber (2000, 21–32), Astin (1975 & 1997), Gary Peltier, Rita Laden & Myrna Matranga (2000), Paul Murtaugh, Leslie Burns & Jill Schuster (1999), Megan Patrick, John Schulenberg, Patrick O'Malley (2013).

[14] See for example Treena Finney, and R. Zachary Finney (2010), Rajani Naidoo and Ian Jamieson (2005), Joanna Williams (2010 & 2013) & Woodall, Hiller, and Resnick (2014), 'Making Sense of Higher Education: Students as Consumers and the Value of the University Experience'.