

## **Pecuni(versitas) non olet: The Jeffrey Epstein Ranking of university funding**

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*Ridiculum acri fortius et melius magnas plerumque secat res*

Horacio

Let me confess at the outset that I did not believe in university rankings. Neither did I believe in the indexes of journal impact nor other scientometrics methods on trend in recent years. Indeed, it became increasingly obvious that there were significant parallels between some of them and the fraudulent *modus operandi* of the so-called capitalist financialisation (Cabello & Rascón, 2015) or, to use the terminology of David Graeber (2018) of the “managerial feudalism”. Even the dates seemed to support the thesis that such “metric tide” (Wildson *et al.*, 2015) was in essence a way to clear the path for the so-called *neoliberal academy*. The main impact factor, published in the *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR) dates back to 1975 and the first ranking of universities, published by *US News & World Report*, appeared in 1983 (O’Neil, 2016: para. 1).

But today it is unfeasible to level such outdated criticism, one that goes against the grain of the only path consistent with this era of global competitiveness: *entrepreneurship*. Thus, I will dedicate the following lines to introduce my own ranking of universities, the JER™ (Jeffrey Epstein Ranking) of university funding, which is freely available at the official website <http://www.epstein-ranking.xyz>. It is a classification based on my monitoring of the donations that several universities accepted from the financial circle nurtured by Jeffrey Epstein since the early 90s until the end of 2017. I will start explaining where the JER™ comes from, what it is and how it is calculated; then I will present the capital findings extracted from it and I will conclude with some recommendations for university public policies.

### **Who is Jeffrey Epstein:**

#### **Too big to jail**

Back in 2002, Bill Clinton (as cited in Thomas, 2002: para. 10) described the financial broker, cultural patron and scientific philanthropist Jeffrey Epstein with these words: “Jeffrey is both a highly successful financier and a committed philanthropist with a keen sense of global markets and an in-depth knowledge of twenty-first-century science”. Born in Brooklyn in 1953, Epstein died on August 10, 2019 in odd circumstances in the Federal Prison of Manhattan, where he was held since July 6, 2019, charged with sex trafficking dozens of minors (Shallwani *et al.*, 2019). Epstein had already been investigated for similar charges from 2005 onwards, although he was granted a secret plea deal by the former Miami Attorney Alex Acosta (Brown, 2018a), who eventually had to resign as Trump's Secretary of Labor due to these disclosures.

As a result, on June 30, 2008 Epstein pleaded guilty to procuring an under-age girl for prostitution<sup>[1]</sup> and was sentenced to 18 months incarceration in the private wing of the Palm Beach County stockade (Brown, 2018b), as well as 12 months of community services at the Florida Science Foundation that he founded during the plea negotiations in November 2007 (Brezel, 2019). This allowed Epstein to enjoy long work releases at his West Palm Beach office (Brown, 2018b), where he allegedly kept receiving women from his sex trafficking network (Katersky & Hill, 2019), before his early release on probation after serving 13 months.

It is Epstein's legal *Dream Team* who should be credited with this plea deal, with a special mention to Alan Dershowitz and Ken Starr: The former, a distinguished Law Professor, involved his Harvard colleague Steven Pinker to assist him in Epstein's defense (Aldhous, 2019a); the latter, was Dean of the Pepperdine University School of Law and then President of the Baylon University until he was forced out over accusation of covering up sexual assaults in the campus (Weston Phippen, 2016), all of which did not prevent him from rejoining Epstein's legal team in 2019 (Starr *et al.*, 2019). As I write these lines, Dershowitz and Starr are back at the informative frontline as part of the legal team that helped overcome the impeachment of Donald Trump, who chose these visionary words to describe Epstein: "He's a lot of fun to be with. It is even said that he likes beautiful women as much as I do, and many of them are on the younger side" (Thomas, 2002: para. 8).

### **What is JER™:**

*Pecunia non olet*

With such a background, some will find it impossible (or even undesirable) that something like the JER™ could ever exist. Based on the naive assumption that no respectable university would accept money channelled through Epstein given his role in such murky matters, they will wonder: What could be worse for any educational institution than lending itself to be part of the maneuvers of reputation (not to mention money) laundering of an alleged trafficker of girls for sexual exploitation?

Nevertheless, anyone who thinks so will be getting it wrong: the competitiveness of the global university market turns those Pollyannaish scruples futile. Furthermore, for several élite universities Epstein showed throughout these past years a much kinder face, that of a generous provider of funds (both own and third-party capital) for their cutting edge scientific programs and equipments, donations usually granted with a 100% tax exemption in USA.

This reference to taxation provided me with the moral key to overcome my initial misgivings and convince myself to capitalize Epstein's philanthropic work to forge my JER™. Indeed, if we dust down the classics, we will surely remember how Roman emperor Vespasian responded to his son Titus's complaints about the tax imposed to tanners and launderers for using urine collected from the Roman *Cloaca Maxima* (Greatest Sewer): "*Pecunia non olet*" ("Money does not smell").

Inspired by this clo-academic maxim, the JER™ ranking quantifies the pecunary smell of élite universities funded by Jeffrey Epstein with a view to contributing to the "total bureaucratization" that stems from the "Iron Law of Liberalism" (Graeber, 2015: 3–44). In my view, this is particularly important in Europe, where universities still lag behind USA, because of their constraining conception of public education as an universal right, of public scrutiny, of students' and workers' right to participation or of the universal suffrage itself (even with weighted voting) for the election of academic leaders. Nevertheless, the greatest market distortion keeps coming from public subsidies, which still allows to get a college degree or even a master's degree for free in many European countries.

In short, my JER™ ranking is aimed to provide the university and philanthropic executives with a classification of higher education entities (American for the most part) according to the donations received via the scientific broker Jeffrey Epstein. Such classification not only takes into account the total amount of gifts, but breaks them down to show the quantities accepted before and after Epstein's pedophile conviction in 2008. Wherever possible, the JER™ also provides information about donor and recipient institutions, date of donations, return of funds (when appropriate) and the reflection of all this in Epstein's philanthropic websites.

### **How is the JER™ assessed:**

*In dubio pro reo*

Those accustomed to the populist public universities where any student group, trade union or digital media feels entitled to demand explanations to university presidents, might disregard as insignificant the data mining required for the elaboration of this index. What they ignore though is that we are talking about elite universities (most of them private, including more than half of the Ivy League members) with the highest confidentiality standards for donations.

Hence the reservations with which the spokepeople of both leaders of JER™ answered to the first inquiries: on one side, Jason Newton stated that “Harvard does not comment on individual gifts or their status” (Aldhous, 2019b: para. 17); on the other side, Kimberly Allen pointed out that “while donors, including foundations, may confirm their contributions to the Institute, MIT does not typically comment on the details of gifts or gift agreements.” (ibid.: para. 26).

In his remix of confession and vindication of former Media Lab director Joi Ito Harvard Professor Lawrence Lessig (2019) exonerated such secrecy in a very original way. To begin with, Lessig resorted to his piece “Against Transparency”, where he claimed that the demand for transparency in private donations to politicians could lead not only to misleading situations but also to distraction from the most imperative democratic requirement in his view: “A system of publicly funded elections would make it impossible to suggest that the reason some member of Congress voted the way he voted was because of money” (Lessig, 2009: para. 54). Nonetheless, instead of seeking plaudit by transferring his thesis to the academic world in order to further “a system of publicly funded universities” as an antidote to the controversy surrounding the murky origin of the donations, Lessig made the argumentative pirouette that all universities accept them just to land in the following conclusion:

I think that universities should not be the launderers of reputation. I think that they should not accept blood money. Or more precisely, I believe that if they are going to accept blood money [...] or the money from people convicted of a crime [...], they should only ever accept that money anonymously. [...] Everyone seems to treat it as if the anonymity and secrecy around Epstein’s gift are a measure of some kind of moral failing. I see it as exactly the opposite. [...] Secrecy is the only saving virtue of accepting money like this. And rather than repeating unreflective paeans to “transparency”, we should recognize that in many cases, secrecy is golden. I suspect MIT takes similarly severe steps to keep the academic records of its students secret. Good for them, for here, too, transparency would be evil. (Lessig, 2019: para. 15, 17)

Given the secretism surrounding the recipient institutions, I have shifted the focus to the donors, applying to them the classic principle of *In dubio pro reo*. Thus, taking to its logical extreme Lessig’s argument that the purpose of these donations is the laundering of criminal reputations, I have concluded that *for Epstein transparency was indeed golden*. Consequently, I have given his boasting about scientific philanthropy the benefit of the doubt, just as several universities claimed they did when accepting the New York billionaire’s funds.

Once this methodological choice was made, the next obstacle lied in the *memory holes* that sometimes affect the Internet. Indeed, I could soon verify the sudden vanishing of certain websites, not just of recipient institutions but also of Epstein’s foundations. In order to overcome the information gaps of this corporate-philanthropic tangle, I have resorted to the journalistic investigation (as well as to some scholarly contributions) that delved into the Internet Archive Wayback Machine to rescue some illustrative websites that in certain cases represent the only trace left of the alleged donations. Those journalists have gone even further by using the Freedom of Information Act to get donation records from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) over the last decade, which they sometimes complemented with documents leaked from the universities themselves. Among these muckrackers, there are four especially remarkable:

a) Nicholas M. Ciarelli (*Harvard Crimson*), who shortly after the accusation against Epstein was revealed in July 2006, inquired whether Harvard would return the \$6.5 million the philanthropist gave to set up Martin A. Nowak's Program of Evolutionary Dynamics (PED). Harvard's spokesperson response that "Mr. Epstein's gift is funding important research using mathematics to study areas such as evolutionary theory, viruses, and cancers" (Ciarelli, 2006: para. 4) represents the first trace of the *Pecunia non olet* argument guiding my ranking.

b) Julie K. Brown (*Miami Herald*), whose 2018 series "Perversion of Justice" covers all legal, political, police and criminal maneuvers deployed by Epstein and his partners, revealing the magnitude and influence of the circle of power he built over the years. After being awarded several times, on April 3, 2019 she was accused of publishing "fake news" by the aforementioned lawyer Alan Dershowitz (2019). It should be noted that in January 2020 Lessig followed suit and sued *The New York Times* for "clickbait defamation" (Lessig, 2020) over an article titled "A Harvard Professor Doubles Down: If you take Epstein's Money, Do It in Secret" (Bowles, 2019).

c) Peter Aldhous (*BuzzFeed News*), whose 2019 five-part series on Epstein's links to élite universities and scientists becomes an indispensable reference in order to understand the academic ramifications of the aforementioned corporate-philanthropic tangle.

d) Ronan Farrow (*The New Yorker*), whose 2019 article on the MIT Media Lab secrecy in managing Epstein's substantial contributions caused an institutional commotion leading to the immediate resignation of Joi Ito (and also to Lessig's article mentioned above) and whose consequences are yet to be fully seen.

In fact, the last source to be highlighted is the fact-finding report concerning Epstein's "interactions" with the MIT commissioned by its President L. Rafael Reif shortly after Farrow's article appeared. This report, produced by the law firm Goodwin Procter (Braceras, Chunias & Martin, 2020), conducted a thorough analysis of the database, 610,000 emails and other corporate documents linked to Epstein's financial contributions to MIT, as well as on 73 interviews with 59 witnesses to the events. Based on this data collection, the report probes into the donations made directly by Epstein or his foundations (discarding those whose intermediation is attributed to the broker) and the MIT executives that were aware of them and, where applicable, approved them.

As of this writing, no other university has reacted to the journalistic revelations with a report similar to that of MIT. Only four of them have issued brief official statements about the donations they obtained via Epstein (OSU, 2019; MSHS, 2019; Bacow, 2019; SFI, 2019). Taking this into account, the JER™ presented here is a beta version of what must necessarily be a work in progress. For that matter, in addition to committing to update the database as the investigations of the Epstein case continues, I hereby offer all universities that might not find themselves faithfully represented in the ranking to include them for free if they send me their updates to [fcabello@uma.es](mailto:fcabello@uma.es).

### Capital findings of the JER™

Although many readers will prefer to splash directly into the JER™ database, I consider it essential to delve into the main preliminary findings of my investigation. To present them, I will go from the first to the last universities included in my ranking:

#### 1) Harvard: ...and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed

No surprises in the first position of the JER™: Harvard takes the gold, as it usually does in other university rankings. Without being strictly pioneer in receiving gifts from “Epstein and his affiliated foundations” (Bacow, 2019: para. 3), Harvard started building its leadership as early as 1998, and by 2007 it had already amassed \$8,9 million, of which \$6,5 million helped establish the Program of Evolutionary Dynamics (PED) directed by Martin A. Nowak.

Although these donations preceded Epstein's conviction in 2008, the acknowledgements for them by PED members continued up until 2012, according to Jonathan Eisen (as cited in Salmon, 2019b: para. 9). However, these mere formalities are nothing compared to the hagiography of Epstein Nowak included in his bestseller *Supercooperators. Altruism, Evolution and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed*, published four years after his conviction:

In 2003, after negotiations between him [Epstein] and our then president Larry Summers, I was able to set up the Program for Evolutionary Dynamics, PED. Summers, who went on to become the economic adviser to President Obama, gave me some blunt advice on how to do this within limited resources: “Spend it. There will always be enough money”. [...] Some students called my program “Nowakia”. For us, Nowakia was an academic paradise. (Nowak & Highfield, 2012: 119–120)

Another indication along this line is that, despite PED's efforts to throw it into the web memory hole, the Wayback Machine shows that, at least until May 19, 2014, the only name included in the “Friends of PED” web section was “Jeffrey Epstein”, along with a very favourable profile [\[2\]](#).

In any case, the Harvard official statement dated September 12, 2019 insisted that Epstein's millions arrived before his sentence, ignoring that the first warning about the controversial origin of the funds came shortly after Epstein was charged for unlawful sex with a minor in 2006, and that Harvard decided to keep the money anyway. Thirteen years later, Harvard dug in its heels and merely announced that, “in an unusual step for the University”, it would redirect “a total unspent balance of \$186,000” to “organizations to organizations that support victims of human trafficking and sexual assault” (Bacow, 2019: para. 4).

Nonetheless, Harvard's undisputed leadership in the JER™ is based on rather conservative estimates, according to the spoiler President Bacow slipped in his statement: “The issue of the gifts given to institutions by donors at Jeffrey Epstein's suggestion, is also one that has emerged in recent days, and we are looking into this as part of our ongoing review” (idem). To be continued...

## 2) #MIToo

Undoubtedly, the silver medal goes to MIT in spite of its fact-finding report only acknowledging \$850,000 in donations (Braceras, Chunias & Martin, 2020: 5). This figure ignores the evidence that Epstein also facilitated donations from the Black Family Foundation led by Leon Black (\$5,5 million) and the venture capital firm bgC3, owned by Bill Gates (\$2 million) (Aldhous, 2019c; Farrow, 2019; Salmon, 2019a). Taken as a whole, these donations amount to \$8,35 million, a sum that places MIT close on the heels of its neighbor Harvard, proving the benefits of competitiveness in the global university market.

In fact, a key argument to convince MIT responsables to accept Epstein-facilitated donations to the Media Lab after his conviction in 2008 (\$8,25 million of the total amount) was that Harvard already did it: #MIToo. Thus, on March 2, 2013, just one month after meeting Epstein, the then MIT Media Lab director Joi Ito asked his team to review the information about the scientific philanthropist as follows: “Wealthy individual. Gave 30M+ to Harvard, I think...” (Braceras, Chunias & Martin, 2020: 14). Likewise, on June 13, 2013, after the first donation to the Media Lab arrived, the Vice President for Resource Development Jeffrey Newton sent an email to the Vice President and General Counsel, Gregory Morgan, and to the Executive Vice

President and Treasurer, Israel Ruiz, saying: “What do we do? He has funded a \$25M center at Harvard, but under Larry Summers. [...] Do we give the money back? On what grounds?” (ibid: 23).

It must be noted that these emails referred to the founding capital of Nowak’s PED, although they mentioned amounts far exceeding the \$6,5 million acknowledged by Harvard. Someone might think that MIT leaders exaggerated in their bid to convince themselves and other, but in fact they were merely citing the sums Jeffrey Epstein made sure to air both in the press (Ward, 2003: para. 107; Scharnick, 2003: para. 1) and on his website[3]. In this sense, Epstein proved to be a genius in the management of (symbolic) capital: for every dollar donated to the Harvard PED, he obtained almost five times more in reputational revenues.

The question is that MIT finally followed in Harvard’s footsteps and accepted the Epstein-facilitated gifts *after his 2008 conviction*. To do so, however, Farrow (2019) revealed that they designed a system preserving what Lessig (2019: para. 17) called “the only saving virtue” of secrecy. Thus, in June 2013, three members of the MIT Senior Team reached the “consensus” that the Media Lab could accept money from Epstein under three conditions: “(1) each donation would be recorded as anonymous, and Epstein could not publicize it; (2) the donations would be relatively small; and (3) the donations would be unrestricted” (Braceras, Chunias & Martin, 2020: 26). Furthermore, such consensus was periodically renewed by those same managers until September 2018 (ibid: 30–40), although it was an open secret that Epstein immediately publicized his gifts to MIT through the press (PRWeb, 2013), his website[4] and even requesting an interview in *Science*, only published *post-mortem* (Mervis, 2019). As if this were not enough, prominent figures at Media Lab (most specially Ito) regaled Epstein with at least nine visits to the MIT campus, where he used to be accompanied by young female collaborators, causing discomfort or outrage among women knowledgeable about his criminal record (Braceras, Chunias & Martin, 2020: 45–55). Although I left this out of the ranking to avoid qualitative distortions, I believe that Epstein’s pleasure in reviewing the staff he funded represents a boost to my commitment to the *In dubio pro reo* methodological principle, as it makes clearer that the best way to measure Epstein’s donation is to assume that *for him transparency (and not secrecy) was golden*.

Despite Ito’s dedication, from December 2017 on his fundraising efforts became unsustainable: after the latest of Epstein’s donations arrived, the Media Lab staff rejected Ito’s proposal to hold a meeting with the philanthropist “to brainstorm a big idea” (ibid.: 52); later, the whims of fate made Julie K. Brown’s “Perversion of Justice” series about Epstein’s alleged outrages appear just one day after Media Lab gave its 2018 Disobedience Award to three leaders of the #MeToo and #MeTooSTEM movement[5]; finally, the financial deathblow for Ito came in February 2019, when a \$25,000 donation from Epstein was rejected by his staff without any consultation (ibid.: 44).

In July 2019 the arrest of the tycoon and the public scrutiny of his philanthropic ties precipitated the end of the story, triggering a cascade of apologies at MIT (Ito, 2019; Lloyd, 2019; Reif, 2019a). Among these, two remarks of Ito represent for me the *summum cum laude* of the MITcoin mining described above: first, not only did he confess to have accepted Epstein’s gifts for the Media Lab, but he went even further: “I also allowed him to invest in several of my funds which invest in tech startup companies outside of MIT.”; following this, Ito vowed to “to raise an amount equivalent to the donations the Media Lab received from Epstein and will direct those funds to non-profits that focus on supporting survivors of trafficking”, as well as to “return the money that Epstein has invested in my investment funds.” (Ito, 2019: para. 4–5).

Given the disparity between the figures handled by MIT and those disclosed by journalists, sequels should be expected here too. In any case, Selam Jie Gano (2019a, 2019b) has pointed to some sort of prequel of the MIT series that should be definitely revisited: the “Barriers to Equality in Academia: Women in Computer Science at MIT” report co-authored by an anonymous women collective (MIT, 1983).

### 3) Ohio State University: The Secret of the Victory, by Lexlie H. Wexner

Who said the first places in university rankings are solely the preserve of private centers? Who said that public universities cannot compete on equal terms in the main financial markets? The fact that a state-owned research institution like Ohio State University (OSU) has made it into the JER™ podium with over \$5 million should serve as a lesson to all those university officials that hide their financial negligence behind the rhetoric of public service. More precisely, the secret of the victory of OSU to claw its way up to the third place can be attributed to three key aspects:

a) First and foremost is their recognition that the link with Epstein was indeed a privileged shortcut to access to Lexlie H. Werner. Born in Ohio and graduated in OSU, Werner is the founder and president of L Brands, of which Victoria's Secret is its flagship. In this respect it should be pointed out that donations from alumni are not only vital in themselves, but they are also one of the proxies for success that *US News & World Report* magazine picked to build their pioneering ranking (O'Neil, 2016: para. 8–9).

Indeed, Epstein became part of Wexner's inner circle in the late eighties and soon acquired responsibilities as his financial advisor. Then, in July, 1991, Epstein got from the tycoon a power of attorney that made him a “manager of fortune” with “full power and authority to do and perform every act necessary” for Wexner (Steel *et al.*, 2019: 34).

b) According to the available data, OSU is the first university to have obtained a gift from Epstein, who donated \$1000 for the foundation of Wexner's Visual Arts Center in 1990. In light of the above, this could be interpreted as a symbolic contribution, with which the New York broker supplemented the bulk of funds Leslie Wexner devoted to build a new cultural building in OSU as a tribute to his father.

This pioneering character was also reflected in its being the first university to react to Epstein's new arrest on July 6, 2019. Dated just ten days later, the OSU statement (OSU, 2019) is thus the *ante-mortem* official declaration, as the rest of them arrived after the philanthropist's death on August 10, 2019.

c) As a result of the above, OSU successfully applied the maxim “He who gives quickly gives twice”. Hence, unlike MIT, OSU did not need to receive Epstein's gifts in instalments to reach the top of the JER™. On the contrary, in May 2017 they managed to match the \$2,5 million donated by Epstein's C.O.U.Q. Foundation with another \$2,5 million from Leslie H. Wexner Charitable Fund to fund the Lex Wexner Football Complex.

The odd thing is that, although this information emanates from a gift record included in OSU's official statement, the university only takes into account the \$2,5 million donated by Epstein. Such modesty stands in stark contrast to the official records showing that Epstein managed most of Wexner's investments, including his charitable organizations. Thus, a 2003 tax record shows a \$10 million transfer from the Wexner Family Charitable Fund to the C.O.U.Q. Foundation, both entities linked to the 2007 donations to OSU (Bacha, 2019). Furthermore, by the time Wexner claimed that he had severed all ties with Epstein after his 2007 conviction (Williams, 2019), Williams and Feran (2019) proved that in January 2008 the New York philanthropist transferred some \$47 million to a nonprofit established a month before by Abigail Wexner, wife of Victoria's Secret owner.

To conclude, OSU (2019: para. 4) also claimed to be “conducting a complete review of the giving history to the university by Epstein and known associated entities”, but did not publicly committed itself to reallocate the collected funds for purposes of redress.

#### 4) Arizona State University: The most original indifference

The fourth place of the JER™ is for another public research institution, the Arizona State University (ASU), which between December 2010 and April 2017 raised \$2.25 million through Epstein (Aldhous, 2019b: para. 8). Those funds were devoted to the Origins Project, shuttered in 2018 after the ousting of its director, Lawrence Krauss, hastened by an investigation showing he had violated ASU's harassment policy in an incident occurred in 2016 (Aldhous, 2018).

Once again, the bulk of donations did not come directly from the Brooklyn billionaire (who gave \$250,000 via his Enhanced Education foundation) but flowed through his intermediation with Leon Black and his wife Debra, who contributed the remaining \$2 million. As with the Wexners, the ties between the Black family and Epstein's foundations were very close: until 2012 the scientific broker was listed as a director of the Leon Black Family Foundation, and in 2015 Epstein's Gratitude America foundation received \$10 million from a company with the same address as Black's family investment firm (Aldhous, 2019c: para. 9). In the same vein, a spokesperson of ASU assured that after the Origins Project was shuttered the university returned \$25,000 to Enhanced Education and \$460,000 to the Blacks "at the donor's request", which reflects their close relation (ibid.: para. 27).

Thus, while OSU got on the podium via gifts prior to 2008, ASU earned its fourth place entirely through donations made by Epstein after his 2008 conviction. Considering that the Origins Project defined its goal as an exploration of fundamental questions concerning human origins, its indifference towards the sources of Epstein's money is most original.

#### 5) Princeton: "Passage to paradise"

Martin A. Nowak reappears in the fifth place of the JER™, as before moving to Harvard he received \$500,000 from Epstein for his Theoretical Biology Initiative in the Institute of Advances Studies of Princeton University. Hence, who better than Nowak himself to recount the prequel of Nowakia in a passage of his book *Supercooperators* titled "Passage to paradise":

The phone rang one day, when I was at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Within a minute or two I found myself explaining my research to a stranger who had introduced himself as Jeffrey Epstein. He turned out to be a Wall Street tycoon. The next day, his office wired my administrator a generous donation to fund my research. Later came an invitation to visit him in New York, and I found myself in a former school that had been converted into a magnificent mansion. I had been invited for dinner and I was flattered to find that I was the only guest. We talked for hours. He loved my work on cooperation and wanted to know every detail. [...] He often challenged my perspective with new ideas. It was an engaging discussion and would be the first of many.

Epstein wanted me to organize a conference on the evolution of language. This event took some planning and would eventually take place a year later at the Institute for Advanced Study. Epstein himself turned up at the start of the gathering. His private jet was on standby at Princeton Airport and, even though he would make a quick getaway to Paris after a short while, the meeting seemed to whet his appetite for my research. Some time later, he invited me to visit him again.

A female member of Jeffrey's household rang to make the arrangements. There would be a ticket to fly me to San Juan, Puerto Rico. From there, I would be picked up by helicopter. She casually added that she would be the pilot. Now I felt like an extra in a James Bond movie. [...] Jeffrey's tropical island consisted of only 110 acres in all and was ringed with reefs. [...]



Every day I breakfasted with Jeffrey as the sun rose. We would have endless conversations about science, about my work, what it meant and where it was headed.

Jeffrey was the perfect host. [...] When the British cosmologist Stephen Hawking came to visit, and remarked that he had never been underwater, Jeffrey rented a submarine for him. On the last day of my visit, Jeffrey said he would build an institute for me. (Nowak & Highfield, 2012: 117–119)

The Institute for Advanced Study claimed that they “had searched their financial records and could find no evidence that the donations were ever made” (Aldhous, 2019c: para. 104).

#### **6) Santa Fe Institute: A Nobel Prize *chez* Epstein**

On December 2, 2019, the Santa Fe Institute (SFI, 2019) announced a \$25,000 donation to an entity devoted “to prevent sexual violence and empower survivors of all traumatic experiences through restoring dignity, strength and resilience.” It was the same amount they had accepted from one of Epstein's foundations in 2010, two years after this conviction.

However, if SFI reaches the sixth place in the JER™ it is because in July 2019 a spokesperson of the institution confirmed that “before 2007, before his crimes were known” Epstein had donated another \$250,000, for a total of \$275,000 (Aldhous, 2019b: para. 29).

According to Aldhous (2019c: 90–91), the winner of the 1969 Nobel Prize in Physics and co-founder of SFI Murray Gell-Mann was the bridge-builder between this institution and the scientific philanthropist. Indeed, Gell-Mann acknowledged Epstein's sponsorship in his 1995 book *The Quark and the Jaguar* and was quoted by Vicky Ward (2003: para. 20) devoting him these words:

When these men [Nobel Prize winners Gerald Edelman and Murray Gell-Mann, and mathematical biologist Martin Nowak] describe Epstein, they talk about “energy” and “curiosity,” as well as a love for theoretical physics that they don't ordinarily find in laymen. Gell-Mann rather sweetly mentions that “there are always pretty ladies around” when he goes to dinner *chez* Epstein...

#### **7) Rutgers University: “Who else does that?”**

Another public university climbs up into the seventh place of the JER™, the State University of New Jersey, commonly referred to as Rutgers University. Like ASU, all the donations Rutgers received from Epstein (amounting to \$165,000) came after his 2008 conviction. This money helped fund the research of evolutionary biologist Robert Trivers, who came clean in a 2020 article that renders any additional comment of my own superfluous:

I first met Jeffrey Epstein in 2004 when he threw a party in my honor at the Institute for Theoretical Biology, which he had set up at Harvard to the tune of a \$6,000,000 grant. [...]

Regarding jail I told him that he should in general be cautious and stick to himself—avoid the male/male hell, live the solitary monk's life as much as you could—and be aware, as he surely was, that as a child molester he was especially vulnerable. In prison to murder a molester was often a badge of honor. [...]

Why did he ask me? He knew that I had been imprisoned multiple times, usually for short intervals, and often connected with manic/depressive episodes but including my time with Huey Newton and the Panthers and time jailed in Jamaica—so I had experience with that world. [...]

How he came to offer support of my research I can't remember. I thought of it as being mutual but I believe he took the lead. Perhaps saying, "Could you use \$20,000?" or something like that.

He was notably generous. [...]

He had promised me \$30,000 for my knee symmetry work, but had then forgotten to send the check. [...] After a month I wrote suggesting the check may have gotten lost in the mail. At once came the check and an apology but better yet the check had grown from 30 to 40 thousand, so he had imposed a penalty on himself to my benefit for late delivery! Incredible. Who else does that? [...]

Stories about Jeffrey proliferated. There was the time in London when Jeffrey visited the Royal Society in order to meet the head of the Society, Robert May, a famous Evolutionary Ecologist and Crafoord Prize winner. [...] Bob May, in turn, got right to the point. "I hear you have made all your money through illegal means." Jeffrey: "They were not illegal when I did them." [...]

I MAKE A BIG BAD MISTAKE.

Around 2014, I was being harassed over the phone by a hostile interviewer—what had Jeffrey done, when and why, over and over? [...] However, this is what I chose to say: "By the time they're 14 or 15, they're like grown women were 60 years ago, so I don't see these acts as so heinous."

This is a very stupid statement on multiple grounds. First, I was suggesting that age of sexual consent is set by age of sexual maturity. Second, there is no reason to assume that a sexually-mature 14 year old is less harmed by sexual molestation than one without. No relevant theory or data. Third, the argument tended to minimize Jeffrey's sin—from "heinous" to "not so heinous". [...]

When I read that a judge had vacated an earlier Federal ruling that had protected Jeffrey years before from imprisonment I wrote him a brief note of compassion. Trump had appointed the judge (Acosta) with the original ruling to a Cabinet post (Labor), so the immediate implications for Epstein were going to be publicly underscored.

He wrote back a surprising message saying, "no problem, everything under control". Shortly thereafter he sent me [a NY Times op-ed piece a by four top-level defense lawyers](#) arguing why the Judge's ruling left Jeffrey completely safe. I doubted it on the spot. Sure enough on July 6 at Peterboro Airport, NJ, after his return from Paris on his private jet, he was arrested by Federal agents to be taken to a NYC/Super-Max where El Chapo was held.

In reaction to his death, guilt by association and the cancellation culture sprang into action. [...]

No, I did not receive "millions", but \$160,000. Why do I owe it to anyone? The money was put to good scientific use, none of it biased regarding women. Nor was there any connection between the money received and Jeffrey's sexual activities. (Trivers, 2020: para. 1, 7–8, 10–12, 14, 17–18, 22, 26–27, 30, 32)

## 8) Stockholm School of Economics: The Best Male Support

The only European representative in the JER™ is the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), a private university that should get extra praise for surviving in the Swedish hostile social democrat environment of free public universities. According to Briquet (2019b: para. 18), SSE received \$25,000 from the New York tycoon between 2001 and 2002, and at least \$125,000 between 2005 and 2010. Nevertheless, this figure might actually be higher considering the donations listed on Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation website for the years 2011 [\[6\]](#) to

2014[7].

While so far I have been underscoring the gifts accepted after Epstein's 2008 conviction, here I want to look back to the circumstances surrounding his first \$25,000 contribution. Indeed, Briquet (idem) suggests that this gift could have bought him the 2002 Best Male Support prize, annually awarded after the Female Economist Year prize with which SSE promotes graduated women to become leaders in the financial world (idem). This award was created in 2001 by Barbro Ehnbohm, a former student at SSE described by the Swedish-American Chambers of Commerce as **"one of the first female executives in the U.S. pharmaceutical industry as well as the first female executive analyst on Wall Street"**, as well as founder of the "network for young ambitious women" Barbro's Best and Brightest"[8].

#### 9) New Mexico University / Columbia University (*ex aequo*): Financial appetizers

The ninth position of the JER™ is shared between another public institution, the New Mexico University (NMU), and the private Columbia University, both with Epstein-facilitated donations amounting to \$100,000.

a) Regarding NMU, its link with Epstein dates back to 2001, when the scientific broker funded Ben Goertzel's fellowship at the NMU Science Computing Department, as can be seen in his 2002 curriculum vitae[9]. Although Goertzel's connection with NMU ended there, it is worth noting that this was merely the beginning of his philanthropic relationship with Epstein, to whom he devoted these fine words in the acknowledgements of his *Engineering General Intelligence. Part 1* book (as cited in Aldhous, 2019c: para. 66):

Jeffrey Epstein, whose visionary funding of my AGI [General Artificial Intelligence] research has helped me through a number of tight spots over the years. At the time of writing, Jeffrey is helping support the OpenCog Hong Kong Project.

b) According to Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation's website, the gifts to Columbia went to its College of Dental Medicine and were all accepted after his 2008 conviction, more precisely between April 1, 2011[10] and 2014[11]. Shortly after a new complaint against the scientific philanthropist for trafficking of children for sexual purposes was announced in 2015, Ira Lamster, former Dean of the aforementioned college, alleged that after receiving \$100,000 from Epstein's years ago, he did not ask him for further funding, adding: "Am I glad I didn't go back for additional funding? I guess I am, but in my interactions with him, he was always a gentleman" (Reuters, 2015: para. 32–33).

#### 10) Stanford / Mount Sinai Icahn School of Medicine / University of Arizona (*ex aequo*): Financial consciousness (I)

There is a triple tie of \$50,000 in the tenth position of the JER™, with the public Arizona University rubbing shoulders with Stanford and the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York.

a) Stanford is one of the universities that, shortly after Epstein's death, rushed to deny its links with him, claiming that it "had searched their financial records and could find no evidence that the donations were ever made" (Aldhous, 2019c: 104). A few days later, though, a Stanford spokesman admitted having received \$50,000 from Epstein's C.O.U.Q. Foundation to fund the university's Physics Department (McBride, 2019). The same spokesman added that the money was received in 2004 and spent a little later, underscoring that everything happened before the first allegations against the tycoon were known. However, years later Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation website showed donations to Stanford in the period 2010–2012[12].

b) For its part, the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai did not impose any *cordon sanitaire* against the scientific philanthropist after his 2008 conviction. Hence, Aldhous (2019c: para. 88) could obtain an IRS record showing a 2016 donation from Gratitude America of \$10,000 [13], which was preceded by others amounting at least to \$40,000 between 2010 and 2014 (Reuters, 2019: para. 5).

After Epstein's death, the institution officially stated (Mount Sinai, 2019: para. 1) its commitment to “contributing a sum equal to the donations we received from Mr. Epstein and his foundation to a charity focused on preventing human trafficking and sexual exploitation, as well as providing financial support for the work of our Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Program”. By doing so, they rectified Doris Germain, a professor who had initially declared she could not return the money because it was already spent on a breast cancer research, adding: “I don’t think I would accept money from him anymore, but then you sort of wonder: We happen to know what he’s done, but what about all the other people who are giving money to foundations? We don’t know what they’re doing. Is it all clean? I don’t know” (Reuters, 2019: para. 24). If anyone *did* know exactly what he was doing was Epstein, whose press releases’s headlines of that period were of this sort: “Jeffrey Epstein, Mount Sinai Patron, Backs Major Discovery for Triple Negative Breast Cancer” [14].

c) The most lagging fundraiser of the three is the Center for Consciousness Studies at the University of Arizona (UA), who spent \$50,000 donated by Gratitude America [15] in a conference on consciousness held in La Jolla (California) in 2017 (Aldhous, 2019c: para. 94). The university’s Vice President for Communications, Chris Sigurdson, stated that it was “a one-time anonymous gift” (Briquelet, 2019a: para. 67), despite the fact that Epstein's foundation is clearly listed as sponsor on the book of abstracts of the event (ibid.: para. 51). Shortly after Epstein's arrest in July, 2019, UA Associated Vice President for External Communications, Pam Scott, dissipated any residual doubts in this regard: “At the time the donation was made by Gratitude America Ltd., Jeffrey Epstein was not listed on the board of directors and the university was unaware of his involvement. We have no plans to repay this contribution” (Moreno, 2019: para. 5).

## 11) University of British Columbia: Financial *consciousness* (II)

The last institution listed on my ranking with a specific figure, the Canadian University of British Columbia (UBC), has the double merit of being public and of being the second non-American university (after the Swedish SSE) in the the JER™.

According to Aldhous (2019c: para. 100), three years after Epstein's conviction, one of his charitable organizations, Enhanced Education, donated \$25,000 to the American Foundation of UBC, which used the money for to the Sea Around Us project. Kurt Heinrich, UBC’s spokesman, claimed that “none of the documentation provided to the American Foundation of UBC, nor the university’s due diligence, indicated any links to Mr. Epstein” (Siegel, 2019: para. 5).

The most remarkable of Heinrich's statement, however, is that, instead of falling into the cliché of returning the donation, the commitment for compensation of the UBC is actually a commitment to technological innovation in the thriving field of the *smart screening of donors*: “As with the rest of the technology industry, the breadth and depth of electronic research resources are rapidly expanding. Accordingly, the quality of our research is continually improving and we are better able to conduct our duty of care to the university with each year” (ibid.: para. 13).

## 12) *Emerging JER™*: 12 candidates to swell the ranks of the JER™

Apart from the aforementioned fourteen universities of the official JER™ I have included a further twelve appearing as recipients of Epstein's philanthropy on his websites, even if no specific figures of donations are available. Unable to fully apply my quantitative approach but faithful to my methodological principle *In dubio pro reo*, I opt for their inclusion in alphabetical order in what I call the *Emerging JER™*:

- a) *Cornell*: Part of the distinguished Ivy League, this private university appeared as recipient of funds from the Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation at least between August 16, 2013 [16] and January 12, 2015 [17], that is, long after his 2008 conviction. Likewise, the billionaire's website specified that Cornell received funds from Epstein between 2010 and 2012 [18]. Cornell is among the universities that declared they "had searched their financial records and could find no evidence that the donations were ever made" (Aldhous, 2019c: 104).
- b) *Duke*: The Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation website listed Duke as another recipient of its funding in 2013 [19]. Like Cornell, Duke also responded to Aldhous (idem) that they "had searched their financial records and could find no evidence that the donations were ever made".
- c) *Georgia Southern University*: This public university is also mentioned on Epstein's philanthropic website as recipient of gifts between 2010 and 2012.
- d) *New School University*: Also listed among the universities that received Epstein's funding between 2010 and 2012.
- e) *New York University*: Although it also claimed to have "eached their financial records and could find no evidence that the donations were ever made" (idem), Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation's website mentioned both "New York University" and "New York University School of Medicine" as recipients of its funding [20]. Inquired by Aldhous (idem), this university answered in the same way as Cornell and Duke.
- f) *Penn State University*: The penultimate university in the JER™ is Penn State University, cited on Epstein's philanthropic website as recipient of donations in the period 2010–2012.
- g) *Pepperdine University*: This private university appeared as beneficiary of donations from Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation at least between August 16, 2013 and January 12, 2015. More precisely, Pepperdine is mentioned as recipient of funds between 2010 and 2012. As noted above, another Pepperdine figure linked to Epstein is Ken Starr, former Dean of its School of Law (2004–2010) [21] who achieved the deal for Epstein's conviction in 2008 and defended him again in 2019.
- h) *Rockefeller University*: Apart from including this institution as another recipient of funds between 2013 and 2015, the Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation website still emphasizes that the billionaire was designated as a member of the Rockefeller University Board of Trustees [22]. Re-reading now what Vicky Ward wrote about his ephemeral period in that board, it is beyond doubt that Epstein's gift for maximizing symbolic capital was unparalleled:

Epstein's appointment to the board of New York's Rockefeller University in 2000 brought him into greater social prominence. Boasting such social names as Nancy Kissinger, Brooke Astor, and Robert Bass, the board also includes such pre-eminent scientists as Nobel laureate Joseph Goldstein. "Epstein was thrilled to be elected," says someone who knows him.

After one term Epstein resigned. According to *New York* magazine, this was because he didn't like to wear a suit to meetings. A spokesperson for the Rockefeller board says Epstein left because he had insufficient time to commit; a board member recalls that he was "arrogant" and "not a good fit." The spokesperson admits that it is "infrequent" for board members not to be renominated after only one term. (Ward, 2003: para. 104–105)

i) *South University*: This is another of the institutions which received Epstein's gifts in the period 2010–2012, according with the billionaire's philanthropic site.

j) *Stetson University*: Thanks to the Wayback Machine, we can consult a 2012 version of Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation website where an economic contribution to Stetson dated September 20, 2011 is listed [23].

k) *UCLA*: Despite the absence of quantitative information about UCLA, I could include this leader *par excellence* of many university rankings in the Emerging JER™ due to its mention on the Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation website as recipient of donations between 2010 and 2012 [24].

l) *University of Pennsylvania*: As an epilogue to this Emerging JER™, we find the fifth and last Ivy League university of this ranking. At least between April 14, 2013 [25] and April 7, 2014 [26] Jeffrey Epstein boasted about having funded their Quantum Gravity Program in the “Founder” section of his philanthropic bsite.

### Conclusion: Tainted money to burn(ish)

Once the beta version of the JER™ has been presented and its preliminary findings detailed, I conclude with some policy recommendations for the executive class of universities and philanthropic investment funds.

### I. Positive accountability

In the face of the picture exposed above, there is no doubt that the easiest thing to do would be to scream blue murder at this (always alleged) *paedophilantropy* harbored by the US university élite (with both Swedish and Canadian exceptions). A good example of this fainthearted approach can be found in Lessig's new pirouette to wash his hands of the capital accumulation for universities, while at the same time assuming it as inescapable within the new scientific *ethos* of our time:

I thank god that I've never been obligated to raise money for an institution like MIT, because I know that in every moment of that existence, I would be forced to confront a gap between what I believe is right and what *every* institution does. And yet, as a person charged with fundraising, I would be pressed to adopt the ethics of the institution, not the ethics of myself. (Lessig, 2019: para. 7)

Even more comfortable is the position of Evgeny Morozov (2019b: para. 5), who quickly denounced that “the ugly collective picture of the techno-elites that emerges from the Epstein scandal reveals them as a bunch of morally bankrupt opportunists”. To make matters worse, he concluded that instead of finding a scapegoat like the New York broker, we should advance “a more radical transformative agenda”, namely “close the Media Lab, disband the Ted Talks, refuse the money of tech billionaires, boycott agents like Brockman” (ibid., para. 21), someone to whom he dedicated another diatribe few days before (Morozov, 2019a).

And what can I say about Paz Peña, a feminist researcher “completely stunned” (Peña, 2019: para. 13) at Lessig's “On Joi and MIT” article who went so far as to maintain that “we are in a patriarchal system that is de facto a violent imposition, where 'gender violence' is not an exception to the rule” (ibid., para. 27). Not content with that, Peña concluded by proposing an agenda even more radical than Morozov's:

That is why we have to rescue the creative and liberating power of feminism, so that we can conceive and develop a digital technology that is different and collective. We do not necessarily need more women, we need more feminism in technology. We need a technology that does not simply rest on the destruction of bodies that do not matter, like those of biowomen and girls, queers and trans. (Ibid.: para. 28)

Contrary to these outbursts that just take the criticism of Epstein's philanthropy to its extreme, I think we should reaffirm our commitment to the neoliberal academia and ask ourselves this: What lessons can be drawn from the Epstein case in order to move beyond the individual and reflect at the systemic level about the profitability of our universities?

Hence my determination to provide the academic market with a positive *corporate accountability* instrument like the JER™, meticulously designed to reinforce the hierarchy of the university system and to move towards the self-funding horizon imposed by the global market of higher education.

## II. Funding *sexy science*

Let's go back to 2002 to quote how Thomas (2002, para. 1) started his description of Epstein: "He comes with cash to burn, a fleet of airplanes, and a keen eye for the ladies — to say nothing of a relentless brain that challenges Nobel Prize-winning scientists across the country — and for financial markets around the world".

The question here is that if we were able to ignore everything about "the ladies", we could exploit Epstein's "keen eye" to identify the scientific *trending topics* more prone to attract global philanthropic capitals. With this in mind, I include below a brief and undoubtedly generic compendium of scientific subjects of Epstein's taste. By doing so, I aim to stimulate a debate of *philanthropic autopsy*, one to which *Science* itself contributed with its *post-mortem* publishing of an interview requested by Epstein to flaunt his scientific collecting:

a) *The science of the 1%*: In the preamble of the abovementioned interview Epstein exposed his global vision of scientific philanthropy, declaring that his donations sought to compensate for "the Trump administration cutting back on pure research" (Mervis, 2019: para. 8). Once he had distanced himself from his former friend, Epstein embarked on a tribute to scientific excellence with no concessions to the liberal rantings on inequality:

I'm making a bet that certain people, not a lot of them, can do great things if they simply can be freed up to think [...] Now, [the MacArthur grants] are sort of a good citizen award, for being exemplary citizens, as opposed to for being a great scientist. [...] Again, I'm trying to reach the smartest of the smart. It's the same issue in terms of money. My clients are not in any way near the middle, they're at the tippy tip of the top of the pyramid. (Ibid.: para. 9, 13, 27)

b) *AI, Transhumanism, Singularity & co.*: It can be assumed that MIT earned its second place in the JER™ by satisfying Epstein's "natural bent to move toward the maverick and rebels who don't fit in" (ibid.: para. 30).

Hence, along with the abovementioned Joi Ito and Seth Lloyd, another historical beneficiary of the tycoon's donations was Marvin Minsky, one of the founding fathers of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) who shortly before his death was accused of having sex with a trafficking victim (Brandom, 2019). For his part, Minsky suggested Epstein to sponsor Joscha Bach, who originally researched at Humanity+ (which under the name World Transhumanist Association received Epstein's funds in 2010), later moved to Harvard's PED and MIT's Media Lab (where he received another \$300,000 from Epstein) and is currently Vice President of the AI Foundation (Aldhous, 2019c: para. 100–102). In line with this intelligent acceptance of Epstein's gifts after his 2008 conviction, in 2009 the aforementioned C.O.U.Q. Foundation donated \$50,000 to the Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence [27], which around the same time supported the foundation of Ben Goertzel's OpenCog Project (ibid.: para. 103).

c) *(Eu)genetic Engineering*: Beyond his funding of Harvard geneticist George Church [28], who later apologized for it claiming "just a lot of nerd tunnel vision" (Begley, 2019: para. 3), the link between Epstein's transhumanist leanings and his flings with genetic excellence was clearly exposed by *The New York Times*:



On multiple occasions starting in the early 2000s, Mr. Epstein told scientists and businessmen about his ambitions to use his New Mexico ranch as a base where women would be inseminated with his sperm and would give birth to his babies, according to two award-winning scientists and an adviser to large companies and wealthy individuals, all of whom Mr. Epstein told about it. [...]

The idea struck all three as far-fetched and disturbing. There is no indication that it would have been against the law.

According to Mr. Lanier, [a] NASA scientist said Mr. Epstein had based his idea for a baby ranch on accounts of the [Repository for Germinal Choice](#), which was to be stocked with the sperm of Nobel laureates who wanted to strengthen the human gene pool. (Only one Nobel Prize winner has acknowledged contributing sperm to it. The repository discontinued operations in 1999.) (Stewart *et al.*, 2019: para. 19, 21, 23)

d) *Gender-free Evolutionary Psychology*: one month after Epstein's death, Alexandra Walling, a researcher at the American Museum of Natural History, wrote an article addressing the question of “why Epstein loved evolutionary. and why evolutionary psychologists loved him right back”:

In the last half of the 20th century, biologists and psychologists working in the related fields of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology claimed that natural selection could explain much, perhaps most, of the complexities of human behavior [...]. evolutionary psychologists claimed natural selection could explain vast swathes of human behavior. Male adultery, gendered differences in achievement, and sexual violence were among the phenomena described as the product of genes shaped by our evolutionary origins. [...]

For 30 years, the geneticist Richard Lewontin and the paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould sparred with Pinker, Trivers, and *Sociobiology* author EO Wilson [...] Gould and Lewontin attacked the sociobiologists for their overreliance on adaptationist just-so stories, which considered natural selection as a driver in evolution to the exclusion of random processes like genetic drift or the evolution of traits as a byproduct of genuinely adaptive features, and for hypothesizing without presenting direct genetic evidence that natural selection had actually shaped particular human behaviors. [...]

Gould, who died in 2002, was a Marxist, and Lewontin, at 90, presumably still is one. This has made it easy for their critics to describe them as blinded to the truths of evolutionary psychology by their outré politics. That the evolutionary psychologists might themselves be influenced by political values, like patriarchy or neoliberalism, is never considered. [...]

That we know as much as we do about Epstein's social milieu is in large part due to one of his victims' battle for justice in the courts. Virginia Roberts Giuffre, who was employed and abused by Epstein as a teenager, [...] describes [that] when she complained of a boyfriend's infidelity, Epstein responded, “I'm going to save you a lot of grief with this one tip. Never expect a man to be faithful and you'll never be let down. It's just the way us men are genetically imprinted.” [...]

Evolutionary psychologists have naturalized, and even at times excused, male sexual violence, but evolutionary biology is not the sole province of reactionary white men. Those of us working in this field must push back on both the corrupt funding system at elite institutions and flawed ideas these institutions have produced. (Walling, 2019: para. 2, 14–16, 18)

### III. Innovating in fundraising



Another priceless lessons offered by the JER™ come in the form of innovative best practices in university fundraising, of which I highlight three especially disruptive:

a) *Immersive reputation laundering*: Contrary to Lessig's implausible argument that accounting secrecy would be enough to deter criminals from laundering their reputation via donations, the MIT Media Lab case shows us that universities have much more to offer. Thus, if you have a *Cicerone* as reputable as Joi Ito, it is possible to offer philanthropists in trouble an exclusive service of immersive reputation laundering fitting the discretion and distinction required for the circulation of their symbolic capital: *off the record* visits to campuses where donors can impress their companions by opening the doors to elite labs for them or by hobnobbing with great minds in sponsored brainstorming sessions.

b) *Pay-Per-Academic-Prize*: In an academic world excessively attached to the outdated tradition of awards offering prestige and money to outstanding scientists, it is much appreciated the breath of fresh Swedish air brought by the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE) with its 2002 Best Male Support prize. Indeed, everything suggests that the SSE, and more particularly Barbro Ehnborn, trailblazer for women in Wall Street, deemed much more rewarding to reverse the equation, exchanging the funds donated by Epstein between 2001 and 2002 for an award that, in its combination with the “Female Economist of the Year” prize, appears today as an example of purplewashing *avant la lettre*.

c) *Mathwashing of donors*: But what can be done if both the immersive laundering and the purplewashing become untenable to the public? Make way to the *mathwashing*, an innovation with the added bonus of being originated in a public institution, namely the University of British Columbia (UBC). Here is how a supposedly democratic university avoided demagogic temptations and *responded to failures in financial innovation* (accepting money from someone convicted for sexual abuse of a minor) *with more financial innovation*, rather than with vacuous debates and restitutions of money. Indeed, as the UBC abovementioned spokesperson explained, at the end of the day there was no university policy issue, but just the need for more investment in Big Data to conduct the required “duct taping” (Graeber, 2018: 41–45) of the donor screening algorithms.

#### IV. Embracing the “down-size-fits-all” in public funding

This mention to the public UBC leads me to revisit an unavoidable question already noted in the introduction: What can we say about the complete absence of non-American public universities in the JER™? How long must the university executive elite cry in the wilderness about the financial unsustainability of higher education conceived as a publicly funded universal right for a whole bunch of subsidized students?

I will be told that in Europe the demolition of the “one-size-fits-all” approach in scientific funding has been hampered by decades of philo-socialist stasis, but I really think my ranking can offer an important empirical contribution in the opposite direction.

How much longer will we trip over the same stone of mistaking the neoliberal academy project with the mere aspiration to nominally privatize higher education centers? The findings of the JER™ in this regard are beyond question: if the adequate incentives for public sector downsizing and student indebtedness (Ma *et al.*, 2019), total bureaucratization (Graeber, 2015: 3–44) and de-unionization are applied, public universities may end up embracing competitiveness as strongly as private ones. The figures speak for themselves: nine out of the twenty-five universities that received Epstein's donations are public (36%); among these, the Ohio State University and Arizona State University (ASU) are third and fourth, respectively, only surpassed by Harvard and MIT. Besides, their public nature did not prevent ASU and Rutgers from clawing their way up to the second and third positions (with \$2,25 million and \$165,000, respectively) as main recipients from the scientific philanthropist after his 2008 conviction.

And should anyone think that the democratic excesses of public universities would finally make them succumb to the pressure to reinvest the donations in organizations supporting survivors of sexual exploitation, the JER™ also challenges such Pollyannaish prejudice: in contrast to the steps taken by private entities such as MIT, SFI and Mount Sinai, as of this writing no public university has rejected the donations received or channeled them to support the people affected. Only ASU returned a fraction of unspent sums, and did so because the donors (Epstein and Leon Black) requested it.

#### V. *Coming out: Tainted money to burn(ish)*

We are finally at the fifth and last of my recommendations and it is high time to lay our cards on the table. Hence, let me return once again to Lessig's "On Joi and MIT" article to identify what I consider *the epicenter of the financial earthquake generated around Epstein*. To that end, I suggest we dodge Harvard professor's twists to defend the *status quo* of private university funding by introducing the sole safeguard of secrecy for donations from criminal sources, and ask ourselves instead: Why don't we abandon secrecy for good and come out of the financial closet?

I refuse to accept that a free software expert like Lessig really believed that the "security through obscurity" paradigm underlying his "secrecy is golden" motto would really stand up (in a formal way, without going into ethical considerations). First of all, in order to apply such secrecy there should previously exist explicit criteria to classify certain philanthropists as *tainted*. However, MIT (Braceras, Chunias & Martin, 2020: 60) and twenty other elite universities acknowledged that they did not have them (Greenberg, 2019: para. 21–29). In fact, when questioned by Ito about Epstein, Nicholas Negroponte, founder of the MIT Media Lab and of The One Laptop Per Child project, answered as follows: "I would take Berlusconi's money, so why not Jeff?" (Braceras, Chunias & Martin, 2020: 16). The point here is that if we officially considered pederasty a taint, we would be opening up the Pandora's box of the scientific *fundraising* with the risk of turning it into a "minefield" (idem). As Adam Rogers (2019: para. 7–8) puts it:

**Depending on how** you feel about billionaire plutocrats, their money is always tainted. The Media Lab's building is just a few minutes' walk from the Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research and the Koch Biology Building, named [...] for the recently deceased David Koch. [...] Koch was an MIT alumnus and, by some accounts, a smart and decent guy, if you can put aside the planet destruction and the LGBTQ rights obstruction. Which, don't.

Sticking to sticking it to MIT, what about the \$350 million donation that put Stephen Schwarzman's name on a [college of computing](#) there? Schwarzman, head of a private equity firm called the Blackstone Group, gave \$150 million to Yale in 2015, but [faced opposition](#) at MIT because of his association with President Trump and Blackstone's [ties](#) to Saudi royal family, especially after they were involved with the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Nothing illegal about any of that, right?

That's not all though. Let us assume that universities could afford discriminating clean money from tainted money to camouflage the latter. What incentives would their donors have to keep the secret? Furthermore, wouldn't such *omertà* leave universities with their hands tied to report potential indiscretions or exaggerations from their unspeakable benefactors? In Epstein's case, it has been proven that since the turn of the century he applied to the management of his (venture) symbolic capital the same rapacity he used with the rest of his investment portfolio. Moreover, his 2008 conviction only exacerbated such quest for reputational profits, as reflected in the MIT fact-finding report: "Epstein repeatedly ignored the requirement that he not publicize his support of MIT [...]. Epstein also publicly claimed credit for donations to MIT that he did *not* make" (Braceras, Chunias & Martin, 2020: 28).

It is precisely the acknowledgment of these invoicing mistakes caused by secrecy which paves the way for my final defense of the JER™ as a key resource for a fully open global market for tainted money. All in all, if we are to deprive our universities of public funding and turn them into elite reputational laundries, we had better square accounts with the financial vultures that will be circling.

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[1] See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUylMcXT2pI>

[2] See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140519032243/http://www.ped.fas.harvard.edu:80/people/friends>

[3] See: [http://www.jeffreyepstein.org/Jeffrey\\_Epstein.html](http://www.jeffreyepstein.org/Jeffrey_Epstein.html)

[4] See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140323014059/http://www.jeffreyepstein.org:80/Recipients.html>

[5] See: <https://medium.com/mit-media-lab/announcing-the-winners-of-the-2018-mit-media-lab-disobedience-award-921d58548dcb>



- [6] See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20120625165955/http://www.jeffreyepstein.org:80/RECIPIENTS.html>
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- [18] See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140324053157/http://www.jeffreyepstein.org:80/Recipients.html>
- [19] See: Idem.
- [20] See: Idem.
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- [22] See: [http://www.jeffreyepstein.org/Jeffrey\\_Epstein.html](http://www.jeffreyepstein.org/Jeffrey_Epstein.html)
- [23] See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20120625165955/http://www.jeffreyepstein.org:80/RECIPIENTS.html>
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- [26] See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140407092735/http://www.jeffreyepsteinscience.com/Founder.html>
- [27] See: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6346750-COUQ-2009-990.html#document/p18/a520891>
- [28] See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150112181841/http://www.jeffreyepsteinscience.com:80/About.html>