

Background.

A bit more than a year ago, I decided to take a long sabbatical leave from my tenured associate professor in computer science position in France. If you are interested in learning more about the reasons of my departure, and I guess that you should if you intend to read the rest of this document, please consider taking a look at the previous TwitLonger. It was listing, not without a few mistakes, my feelings at this time https://www.twitlonger.com/show/n_1ss38as. Since then, I joined the Samsung AI Center of Cambridge as a research scientist and took an affiliated lecturer role at the University of Cambridge. Indeed, and as you will read later, some really good things about academia can simply not be obtained from the industry alone. As a general background, I entered the field of deep Learning seven years ago, completed my PhD in 2019 and did a post-doctoral period at Oxford in 2020. I only applied to French assoc. prof. positions following the standard national and synchronised hiring process. I was lucky enough to be ranked 1st to become in my two choices: the University of Paris-Saclay and the University of Avignon. I went for Avignon due to the extremely low salary of starting assoc. prof. making it hard to live decently in Paris with my family (only income). I stayed as an assoc. prof. for two years, received an ANR (National Grant) project in year two, and received the RIPEC bonus in year two as well. Both of which I never benefited from as I left before.

Motivation.

This new document aims at providing a more balanced view for young researchers that may have just joined or want to join academia. The previous TwitLonger was really critical towards academia, with some good reasons that still hold or have even worsen, and here, I wish to provide a contrasting view with what I have experienced in the industry to the many young researchers in CS that feel alone while facing the academia vs industry choice. I received many testimonies from the last TwitLonger and I hope to show that yes, there is a world outside of academia, and it might actually be much better for you. This will be achieved following seven axes: Research, Academic service, Funding, Salary, Environment toxicity, Political views and government and society consideration and work-life balance.

Of course, my answers will be really directed towards what I experienced at Samsung AI, but also towards what I can see from my very close colleagues that followed the same path with other companies. Hence, we are talking about a research-oriented position, and not about the many other jobs that you can get in the industry and that may lead to very different conclusions. All the bellow discussed points may vary from one company to another, and that's also one of the great strength of the industry: you can certainly find something that will suit you.

The following text expresses my personal point of view and may contain generalisations solely based on my personal experience that represent a ridiculously small fraction of what can be lived out there. Some people will never experience any of the elements that I will expose, while others will have seen much worse – like any personal opinion based on experience, it is nicely biased ;-)
My domain is Computer Science, it is worth considering that the story may change drastically with another domain (in good and/or bad).

Research.

In an industrial research lab, we do research. If you are a research scientist, then your mission will be to plan and execute various research projects. We expect you to actually do the research, produce the code / theory, publish patents or scientific publications. For young associate professors, this may sound like a dream, as only researchers at CNRS or INRIA may actually be able to really do research. In the last year of my associate professorship, I was not able to submit or even start to work on a single main author contribution to the field. This is to be compared with 3 papers as a main author since I joined Samsung 10 months ago. The administrative and teaching pressures around associate professorships make it simply infeasible to do research. You'll have never ending meetings to manage the university, the department, contracts, the school and your students (Master's, PhD etc). The moment you'll feel

like you have enough time to implement this idea that you had 2 years ago, then you'll also need to consider applying for a grant instead, because you need the money and the fame to reach higher ranks (and better salaries). Conversely, in the industry, you have a project and you execute it. All the rest is a bonus that **you** can do if **you** decide to do it (and if the management agrees!!). Of course, the administrative overhead always is around, but it absolutely is nothing compared to academia. As an associate professor, I felt like an underpaid super-administrator, while now, I feel like a PhD in Computer Science doing my best to help the field moving forward. A common fear among young researchers lies in the research freedom. Here, two aspects must be considered: 1. What it is like in the industry; 2. What it is **really** like in academia. Let's start with the second point. In theory, research freedom in academia is unbounded. If you want to work on the weirdest and craziest idea that you came up with, you can do it, in theory. In practice, if your end goal is to evolve in your career e.g. reach full professorship or directorship, then this freedom reduces quite drastically. You will need to work towards specific goals, linked to academic services, administrative duties, and grants, that will ultimately drive you towards focusing on low-risk yet highly hyped topics to ensure a quick return in grants or visibility. So, unless you are a genius aiming for a Turing award, which is quite far from being my case, then you will end up multiplying the tasks that are not linked to research to accelerate the grind towards acceptable salaries, and focus on topics that may seem less interesting but that are most likely to be well seen by grant reviewers. Ultimately, if you want PhD students, post-docs or even just interns, you will need money, because universities and government will not give you any. And when you start your academic journey, you do not have the name or the network to attract funds, you will have to fight and be very careful with the people surrounding you to minimise the number of rejections. When you put all this together, you can easily see how your freedom becomes "indirectly" restricted. But of course, if you do not care about all this, are ok with having a PhD student every 10 years, never being able to reach higher ranks (and salaries!!!), then you are 100% free to do whatever crazy idea you may have. The only barrier that will remain is your lab, as you might need to change if the new crazy topic that you want to explore is out of the scope of the lab. Indeed, the latter artefacts are not well seen by national evaluation committees of research labs (e.g. HCERES in France). In the industry, the research freedom is really tied to the context and the project, and this might also partly explain the high mobility of people choosing this path. You join a team for a project, you execute the project, and then you might propose a new one, or evolve in the company, or leave for another one. Within this project, however, you quite often will be completely free of exploring whatever direction you want, as long as you can scientifically justify this choice – which is also something that you need to do for grants. Companies, however, may behave quite differently compared to academia – they may change quite rapidly depending on the context. Money issue? You might be asked to change your project, or to rethink the timeline, or even to move to more production-oriented things. Change of management? The new manager does not believe in that direction, and you might need to either re-defend it or change for something else. However, I would tend to say that most of the time, you are just sticking to your research direction and executing your ideas! One very interesting aspect of researching in the industry is, in my humble opinion, that you have enough time to spend on your research that you may actually be glad to sometimes help product teams in chipping features to real-world products. In academia, you often have to do this to secure private fundings, and it's not really rewarding outside of the signed contract and potential PhD students that you will get out of it. Overall, think of the research in the industry as a more focused and clear way of executing a research plan, while in academia, it is intimately linked to a myriad of others obligations that prevent you from executing the plan as you initially wished.

Academic service.

The feeling of being part of the academic world is absolutely marvellous. It definitely feels like a big family, and with all the issues that can come with it. When you work in academia, even if you are tenured, academic services may be seen as actual academic duties. The big difference between academia and the industry on that very specific topic is that once in the industry, and **if** your management agrees, then you get to decide what you give as a service to the community. Examples include organizing

conferences, workshops, scientific societies, managing open-source tools, participating in university activities — the whole lot of it, going from lab seminars to deciding who will be the next printing shop of the lab and drafting a contract with them, supervising students or post-doc etc. In the industry you get to decide what you want to do, and most importantly, what you feel like is valuable to do both for you, but also for the quality of execution of what you decide to do. In academia, you should also be free to choose, but again, this is only in theory. In computer science, the vast majority of the newcomers HAVE to take as much responsibilities as possible. They MUST have as many students and post-docs as possible. They MUST be seen in all conferences / workshops / talks of the domain. Simply because this is necessary to get fundings and to reach higher academic ranks, and, ultimately, decent salaries. If the young researcher is in a tenure track, it gets even worse. Hence, here, the difference is that you can go for quality over quantity. When I was an associate prof., I was absolutely overwhelmed by the amount of things that I HAD to do as necessary steps for my career. Don't get me wrong, most of these things, when taken separately and with the appropriate amount of time, are enjoyable. Unfortunately, when they are all stacked up randomly, stretched in an agenda going from Monday to Sunday, you end up doing a poor job and getting a bad experience of the process. Not to mention the harm caused to the people around you! There is a stupid amount of things that assoc. prof. or researchers have to do in academia that have nothing to do with their job. Basically, at least in France, support people are just disappearing from universities, hence tenured research people are managing everything. Want to fix a light bulb in your office? Yeah, you better take care of it. But this also goes up to simply making the university live, with all the economic and political management of it e.g. Endless meetings multiple times a year to try and understand what are the new structures of the lab units or of the teaching units; Endless chats and e-mails threads about how you can get your researchers to have a physical access to the lab because it's now a restricted area; You will have to read, amend and potentially draft contracts; You will have to manage the teaching schedule of the students for the program that you may end up directing; You will have to deal with hundreds of CV of really good foreign high-school students that want to join you university, and select maybe a single one out of the pile, and this, multiple times in the year; You will have to manage your compute cluster and experimental stuff by yourself, because it will all be fucked up anyway and you won't get any money to hire a new system admin; You will have to wait endless amount of time to get things done or fixed properly. The level of bureaucracy will be absurd and it will be part of your **daily** routine. But most importantly, in the academic world, all these activities will be considered as being mandatory for your career. Becoming a full professor (hence accessing a decent salary) will require that you went through all these tasks, and that you ended up producing excellent research at the same time. The bureaucracy does not go away in the industry world, but it is nothing to compare with public institutions. Also, in the industry (big labs, I am only talking about big labs), you have expert people doing all the things that you should not be doing. Then of course, you don't need to do all these things for your career. In the end, your academic service will only be a matter of what you accept to do and what your manager let you do (note that the latter point might be quite problematic). For instance, I am still at the head of one of the major open-source tool of my field, teaching / supervising at the university of Cambridge and organizing conferences. But all this time spent « for free » for the academic world is now carefully aligned with what I CAN do, and not what I MUST do. Certain people will come and say that you are absolutely free to do whatever you want in academia. This is absolutely true. I know a few assoc. prof. that are actually saying « fuck » to all this pressure. But they will also stay assoc. prof. forever and are, for the vast majority of them, despised by their colleagues. Because don't forget that any duty that you don't take will end up on the desk of your closest colleague! Do you remember this feeling that I was talking about at the beginning? There you are: it also includes guilt. In short, academic services in academia are turned into academic duties that are basically increasing government after another reducing inevitably the quality of the output and pushing more and more colleagues towards a nice and big burn out. Other things may push you towards burn out in the industry, like the pressure coming from your management, but you won't get any from serving in academia, because you will decide what to do, and when to do it. This can be seen as a selfish take, especially from people that decide to endure this. However, I stopped seeing this

as a selfish decision as soon as I started to witness degradations in the quality of my output. If you folks can keep up with all this crap without affecting your students, the quality of your production or your mental health, then I just have a mad respect for you. To end this section, I still wish to say one positive thing: the feeling of being part of an academic family is absolutely incredible. It certainly is one of the major reasons explaining why so many people are enduring this global degradation of work conditions. Because we all love what this work is about. We all know that we all love it, and that we are somehow alike in that respect. We also all know that very close to us, there are dozens of colleagues that are ready to work 50% extra to cover us if we just can't keep up anymore. Finally, being academics makes us proud. And if you are not, then you should be. Being part of this fraction of the population, that composes a massive world-wide institution and conveys principles that have existed for centuries towards advancing Humanity is something, in my humble opinion, exceptional. I mean come on! you are at the same level, at the same place, and following the same missions than great women and men that have built this world! This is seriously amazing! Although they most likely weren't filling endless LibreOffice forms listing all the papers produced by their lab and checking if everything was properly open-sourced on the national platform to be 100% sure that the national ranking agency will give them a good score so that they finally obtain 1 PhD stipend for the whole department and for the next three years. In fact, I believe that there is a point where it's not worth it anymore, and where you are better backing slightly off, without leaving it totally. This point will certainly be different from one person to another and I can definitely say that some people will even never reach it. They will just keep going forward for the sake of the public service. You folks are amazing people. For the others, just jump into the industry or give up on higher salaries at your university.

Funding.

Here comes an important part of our lives: money. Let's first start with how it relates to our work depending on whether you are in academia or in the industry. In academia, if you lack funds, and if you are tenured, you'll most likely end up being alone and working on very small scale issues (that may be of utmost interest). You won't lose your job or need to change completely of topic, especially if this situation is not an issue for you. In the industry, you'll get fired or moved to another team or project. Again, in this document, I am only talking about fundamental research labs, applied labs are slightly different as they have to deal with customers, marketing and sales expectations. In the industry, you'll plan for your research project ahead. If the company does not have the money to do it, you'll notice, or they will tell you. Most importantly, in most cases, you will not be responsible for finding or attracting the money. This is at the opposite of academia, where you are expected to find funds and manage them. You can summarize this as follows: In the industry, a lab hires you because they have money to conduct your research plan as long as it sounds relevant to their market. In academia, they don't have any funds to conduct their research, but they hire you because you have what it takes to attract funds. The industry gives you money, while academia expects you to find some and split it between them (the administration) and your research project. In exchange, you get a lifetime position (in most cases, not all). On a daily basis, these statements imply important changes. First, from day one in academia, you might simply not have any resources to execute your plan: no compute resources, no tools, no human resources. It also implies that once you found all this, you'll devote a significant amount of your time making sure that this situation (i.e. you having funds) lasts as long as possible. Very importantly, a good aspect of this is that you are "somehow" allowed to "fail" in your research. If your findings do not lead to any significant real-world impact but still are valuable to the scientific community, you'll most likely still be able to apply for grants, or find private contracts. In the industry, if you fail to deliver a few times what you promised, the management will most likely come and talk to you. The latter thing, however, seems to change quite rapidly, notably in France, where the government clearly gives priority to short-term and low-risk science. However, academia and the industry are quite similar in one aspect: if you want to go bigger, you must convince a few people. In academia, you'll have to get big grants, like European ones. In the industry, you'll have to convince your management. I personally think that it takes much less time and effort to do it in the industry. For instance, it took me 2 months full-time to

write an ERC proposal that ended up being rejected in the first phase, while it usually takes a week or two to try and convince your boss. Also, you are not competing against thousands of other professors. But this remains an important aspect: if you want more to grow, you'll have to do the same kind of job in both worlds. I think that finding money for your research in academia can easily take up to 15% of your working time. Then you'll have to manage it, of course, write reports, prove that you are actually doing something etc. But this is honestly similar with what the management expects from you in the industry. The only difference being pragmatism. In academia, the metrics and reports often are completely fucked up and taking way too much time for the purpose of the reporting. In the industry, it's quick, and you got to talk directly with the people that are evaluating you (most of the time). Where you get the money from might also be a quite problematic question that must be aligned with your personal beliefs. Some industries have blurry lines when it comes to ethics, or the way they interact with societies and the planet. Some have pretty clear goals and aspirations. What I want to say here is that everything is situational. The mistake would be to think that working in academia means that your science will be supported by more ethical income streams. This is simply not true. Your research could totally be funded by institutions that are bombing people or selling lethal weapons somewhere in the world. Your research can totally be analysed, and controlled by the army. People don't realize that this is more and more common in a lot of countries, such as in France. Yes, more and more labs are basically being screened to make sure that research projects are not "detrimental to the security of the nation". You don't get to talk with them, you don't get any justification from them, but any project or people that you want to recruit must be screened by them, and they can say no. Simply no. In practice, I wouldn't say that you get much control over the impact of where your funds come from in academia compared to the industry, simply because you can choose your company, but you can't choose your government. Most academic labs in France are surviving because they have a shit ton of contracts with private companies – now it's up to the PI (and a few blurry academic instances) to decide whether it's ethical or not to work with them. It's up to you to decide who are your collaborators to pursue your research, but it's also up to you to decide for what company you want to work. It would be a pure mistake to think that "public money" is actually cleaner than industrial money, simply because it all depends on many factors.

Salary.

Unless you are working as a full professor in Switzerland, you'll almost always make much more in the industry. For this part, it is important to remember the context of this document: I am working in computer science, in the very rich field of artificial intelligence and I am French, hence **initially** wanted to work in France. Another important point: I do not care about having a lot of money. The only thing that matters to me is to live without having to wonder if I will be able to afford taking a week of vacation in a standard place, like everyone should be able to do. Due to academia, we only have a single salary for the family. My wife decided to pursue academic research in Law and has been working for basically 5 years straight without a single salary (starting with the PhD). Recently (before moving from France), we faced important medical and personal issues leading to serious financial troubles. When friends that left for the industry at the end of the Master were thinking about buying their house, we needed to consider getting a loan to make sure that we could face everything that was coming in front of us without issues. Now let's talk about numbers. In France, if you finally get this tenured position, you'll be paid around 1,900 euros after taxes (after **all** taxes except vat over products that you buy). A lot of people will say that this is far from being a bad salary, and I totally agree. But I also must point that people appointed at this salary are supposed to be the best experts in the world in their domain. In my case, we also needed to make the little family live with this, and 1,900 divided by two starts to be seriously little. Not impossible, of course, but nothing comfortable enough so that you can endure all the shit coming from academia without ever thinking about money issues in top of it. With a good 10 years of experience, you can go up to 2,800+ after all taxes. Once professor, or with higher administrative duties, you can certainly reach 3,500+ euros after taxes. I was at 2,100 euros after taxes (counting bonuses) when I left. Now try to live in Paris, or Lyon or any big city with such an entry-level salary. You can

do it, sure, but it's not comfortable. And thinking that you can attract really talented people with such financial conditions while being in a competitive market is **utter bullshit**. Yes, in computer science at least, the level of the recruited people (when they are, since more and more positions are basically left empty), is dropping. This is a long-term bomb that we will pay in the upcoming years. Entry academic salaries in France, and honestly almost everywhere else, are absurdly low. People saying that this is not one of the most important issue are, in my humble opinion, simply wrong. Keep recruiting people with a level dropping year after year for a lifetime position, sure, you won't have any competitive and innovation problems in the near future. The same people will often tell you that salary is one of the only thing that you know in advance when entering academia and therefore not a valid reason for leaving. First, who decides what a valid reason for leaving is aside from the person actually leaving? Second, knowing that a salary is bad does not make it more acceptable. An acceptable salary at timestep t might become really problematic at $t+1$. Of course, other problems exist, and big ones, such as the lack of support people or tenured positions, and again, I am talking about my field – computer science. But all this does not excuse the ridiculously low wages at the entry level. The situation in Humanities is a bit different, simply because the pressure from the industrial market is not the same. Compared to this situation, I wish to highlight that my net salary has been multiplied by 3 to 4 times when moving to the industry. Now just take a step back and think about all the talented and young researchers that we have in the country. Think about what I described in terms of job differences in this document and the one before. People are not crazy, and when they can choose between a cool job and a comfortable life versus a cool job and a difficult financial situation, they decide fairly quickly. In my personal case, a net salary of 3,000 euros would have prevented me from moving to the industry. This will never happen with the current government, and will certainly not happen with the next one as their target only is to reduce the cost of universities. This strategy has been around for a good 20 years. These CPJ (just think of this as a French tenure-track equivalent) are a good example of that. The government knows very well that the salaries are shit. They introduced these tenure-track contracts to “attract talents”, and the pay scale starts at the Full Prof. level. They know very well that all the people payed at the Assoc. Prof. level are simply being shitted on. They know very well that on the French public servant scale, Assoc. Prof. and public researchers are the less paid of their whole category. They obviously don't care, so young scientists move to the industry, so that they can rent the house or apartment that they want, in the city that they want, and can afford going in vacation once or twice a year, like absolutely everyone should be able to do. Depending on your university, you may be able to claim a very small percentage of the research contract that you get for yourself. This can maybe scale to a few thousands euros a year if you can get significant collaborations. In my case, it was more like a few hundred euros. You can also get a supplementary bonus as a part of the RIPEC process (in France). This should add around 250 euros net a month to your salary. However, it usually is quite competitive as only a small % of the tenured people can get it. You can also work on the side, if your university agrees, as an auto-entrepreneur for instance. However, the rule is that you what you earn should be significantly lower than what the university pays you. Also, being a tenured academic, if done properly, is a freakin' amount of work – so also running your own business on the side certainly will lead to the degradation of your service, which is not acceptable in my point of view, knowing that your salary comes from public funds. To summarize, **in France**, if you are recruited as a fresh Assoc. Prof., you'll get 30,000 to 34,000 euros (gross) a year. If you have the CV to land one of these positions, it means that you can very easily expect from 60,000 to 150,000 euros a year for an equivalent job in an industrial lab. This can of course scale to ridiculous amounts outside of France going above 200,000 euros. The crazy thing being: you either have too much, or too little.

Environment toxicity.

Finding the right mind-set for you in a workplace is a challenge. This is true in both worlds. Hence, I will only talk about a few specificities that I have encountered and wished to know earlier on. In short, a job in a big industrial lab is just a job, while a job at a university “feels” like your whole life. This concept is very important here, university feels like family, and this is how they get you. Colleagues

are sometimes not just colleagues; they may be actual friends or enemies. Your university is like your home, where you get to feel like an auto-entrepreneur trying to make it shine, to make sure that everything holds properly while everyone outside of it (and sometimes inside ...) is attacking it. University work-life is extremely political. Much more than in the industry. We already know that science is a place where people usually know each other's. Academia is the ultimate stage of this concept, where who you know is more value than what you do. This is important, because your name is entirely associated with the quality of your interactions with your institution and colleagues. Doing a bad move during a national evaluation? The whole community, reaching outside of your actual university, will know about it. A bad word against an advisor during a thesis committee? Same story, you better not be on the run for a Full Prof. position. In academia, a lot of people are what I may call "followers". They would gather around "big" names, in the hope of getting some light and career boosts, and this of course, may have some crazy impacts on the overall environment ranging from harassments, trash student and researcher supervisions, direct attacks to the career or research plans of others etc. Yes, the life of an academic is highly political. If one wants to grind the path up to higher salaries, one will need to be extremely careful with the people surrounding them. I've seen countless of crying students, depressed researchers and burned-out colleagues, and this is only within 7 years of career. Academia also has some absolutely marvellous moments, but my point here is to clearly state what is different from one world to another. In the industry, things are also political. However, the degree and complexity of this internal politics is absolutely nothing compared with academia. An example? Are you having a bad relationship with your supervisor during your PhD? Is he/she a bully and everyone knows it but don't do shit about it because he/she has a big name (this is actually really common)? Did you decide to spoke about it? Then you can simply and purely say goodbye to any academic career in the research fields closely related to you. Now the same thing happens in the industry? The company doesn't care? You just change and you're done. Academia is a family, with all the issues that usually come with it. Overall, you will find much more people 150% invested in their job in academia than in the industry. New academic people work constantly, during the evening, during the week-end, during vacations. This is much less common in the industry, and when it happens, this is for a fixed and targeted common goal. It will never be considered as the norm, and something that people are pursuing. People in the industry actually look like they are having a life outside of their job, and this is definitely not true in academia. As a talented researcher, you are a precious resource for your company. If you are exhausted, they are losing money. In academia, if you are exhausted, well, it does not matter as everyone is exhausted anyway. In that sense, you can't really say from the industry that they care more about you – it's interested and because money is money. But at least, when it's time for being off, it's actually time for being off. If you are having a mental breakdown, you can talk to specialised people, to the management, and they will make sure that things get fixed as quickly as possible. In the industry, I almost got yielded at by my colleagues while I was on our internal communication tool during my vacations. Working during off-time in academia is almost a requirement when you are starting. Things are changing a bit lately regarding this statement, but as I said above, everything is highly political. If the ones with big names think that you should be overworking, and if they see that you are not, it's bye bye for the next hiring or grant committee. In this regard, some universities may be much better than others, but as of now, it is very clear that academia is much more toxic than the industry. Good examples of this are the typical lab or group fights. Strong names are creating groups, that are then fighting each other for access to resources. Then you have fights within the groups, as new names try to become the big names, or simply because they don't agree with the big name. Since these jobs are life-long jobs, these fights are building insane amounts of tensions and stress for the workplace. And in the middle of these ego wars, **you have all the non-permanent people suffering from a literal game of thrones.** A single tenured opening this year for 5 groups of research? Let the fight begin. Who better knows the big boss of the university? Who knows the guy that will go into the hiring jury to make sure that candidate X does or does not get the job? Who can make sure that Y won't be elected at this position? To me, good supervisors are also the ones that are able to protect their researchers and student from all this, while clearly exposing them what is happening, so that everyone understand how public labs are run.

In the industry, most of the toxicity will come from two factors: management and/or colleagues. However, at least in our field, none of them will imply long-lasting damages. Indeed, you quit or change of group, and you are done. In academia, it will follow you. The gossips will ALWAYS follow you and impact the whole decision tree ahead of you. As I said, earlier, the relations between academics are much tighter than the ones between colleagues in the industry. This can also lead to some marvellous professional relationships and even to strong friendships, but from what I have witnessed, and as usual with Humans, dramas are always preferred over nice stories. The industry, by design, does not want to see this. Again, money is money, and I even tend to think that bad companies are quickly identified and blacklisted by the community – this is not true with professors and researchers. To conclude, feeling well in the workplace is a real challenge. And you might end up having horrendous experiences in the industry while being happy in academia. This is all a matter of preferences, context and luck. I am just mentioning here, for newcomers, that academia is by design and politics much more prone to toxicity.

Political views and government and society consideration.

This point is quite country-dependent. The following comments are valid (from my perspective) for France, as I am already experiencing different behaviours in the UK, for instance. In France, politics in charge **despise the whole university**. The vast majority of them never approached a university degree or even just the building from which it comes from, as they all are educated in private schools or “les grandes ecoles”. The increase in the public budget attached to French unis isn’t even coping with the inflation while the number of student is skyrocketing and they absolutely don’t care. In my 5 years of PhD and Assoc. Prof. I’ve heard the government talking about universities only to tell everyone that we are a bunch of islamo-leftist-wokiste perverting the society. Our last minister even requested, in front of the National Assembly, the CNRS (largest French public research institution) to open a study on how the “islamo-leftism” was infesting French universities. Of course, the CNRS simply replied, gently: “What the fuck?”. Except from a few left-minded politics and medias, any intervention of the ones in charge usually aim at destroying the perception of French universities by the civil society. In particular, French universities are seen as a huge waste of money that is somehow perverting the public debate as well as our youngster’s mind. The civil society mostly follows what the medias and the politics say – and universities are therefore poorly considered. Being an Assoc. Prof. or a full prof. in France isn’t prestigious, except among people that are familiar with the concepts, it’s almost more of a shame, because you know, most people will tell you that we have way too many vacations, that we have a decent salary for the work that we do (what the fuck?), that we are bad at science, or that we are instilling woke-ideas into our society. Social sciences, among the others, are under constant fire. The overall perception is that they are useless, worthless, and should be reduced or replaced. All this constant shaming is particularly difficult to endure, especially when absolutely no one supports you. At least, the French police is supported by the minister, openly. The university is alone. This is a major issue as academic positions come with a political aspect to the job. We must run a public institution that shapes the future of the nation. If you contrast this challenging mission with all the forces that try to make it fail, you end up in a pretty tricky psychological / professional situation. In short, you can only witness the overall degradation of all the services that you can offer, and no one will hear you scream, except your colleagues, or others universities. France had and still barely has the most beautiful university mind-set. Education and research are of excellent quality and accessible to absolutely everyone. Universities are a pillar of the social ladder, and leaders hate that. If, just like me, you are convinced that this mission must be preserved at all cost, then the reality will hit you pretty strongly and you will have to add this constant fighting for your values to your list of things to do. Because, oh boy, you will receive political and administrative orders going in the opposite direction of your beliefs during every single term of the academic year. The obvious real-world manifestation of this phenomenon is a lot of very “hot” meetings / discussions about how screwed we are and the actions that could be taken without also putting the students in a challenging situation. Worst, it is quite clear that the overall French political system will not go any time soon in a direction that will help the university. Entering academia now feels like entering a sinking ship. All these issues go away when you join the industry. For some

evident reasons, politics are usually quite gentle with companies. Also, and as said before, you get to decide what company you work for – and you usually end up choosing one that is aligned with your personal beliefs. Also, the civil society is interestingly more positive about people working in the private sector. People around me are somehow much more impressed when I tell them that I work for Samsung than when I used to work as an assoc. prof. My guess simply is that they have strictly no idea what being an academic involves or even means – true for my family, for instance.

Work-life balance.

The work-life balance is directly linked to your management or company policy, but I believe that it can be quite-well generalized. In academia, unless you are already at a top position (e.g. full prof.) or not interested at all in progressing (salary and research-wise), then you can clearly maintain a good work-life balance. If you wish to succeed in any of the two previous objectives, then the struggle will become real. An academic is like an auto-entrepreneur – your invested time will payoff later, and with a non-linear return over time. You'll work a lot, and earn nothing. You can very quickly get overwhelmed and end up in a nice burn out. I don't know many young prof. that did not burn out at least once. Simply because we are not trained or helped to face this issue. We are constantly told to do more, on a billion of different fronts. We know that young academic researchers are sending e-mails or working in the middle of the night, or every single day of the week-end, or during their "vacations". I am no psychology expert, and I can only relate to my personal case. I was happy to endure all this up to the burn out mostly because I felt like not doing it would cause me to fail. Academia, in my field, has become absurdly competitive, and maintaining yourself as a "promising / marketable" scientist is costly. Physically and emotionally costly. Do not make the mistake to think that overworking on a topic that you love won't mark you for a long-lasting period – because I can promise you that it will. I personally believe that grinding the academic ladder while maintaining a sustainable work-life balance is extremely challenging. I couldn't do it. In "work-life balance", we can clearly see a distinction between "work" and "life", academia will challenge you every single day in fusing both terms into "life of work". If you don't prepare yourself, or properly build your relationship with your work, it will occupy your brain 100% of the time. If you add all the emotional elements that I described before, you can easily end up in a situation of distress, and you, will, be, alone. Simply because the people that you are working with are, most of the time, struggling with the same inner-battle. I know that universities are more and more aware of this issue, and that things start to emerge to help staff members. It was too late for me, and for my delicate wife, and I believe that it's still largely insufficient. Of course, if you are not interested by the ladder, or not interested by remaining marketable, then academia may offer you one of the best work-life balance that you could dream of. As stated earlier, you are an auto-entrepreneur. Need a day off? Take it without even mentioning. No boss. You decide when your next deadline is. You decide when your next meeting is. You decide how, where and when you will work. You don't like this colleague? Just don't work with them. You particularly like the work of this colleague? Then collaborate. You wish to change of subject? Just do it. The industry has a different approach to this question, at least for most start-ups and big labs – burn out are a huge cost when you value the expertise of your employees. A lot of companies have internal structures or mechanisms that can help you face your struggles. Your managers, if they do properly their job, will carefully verify that what you have on you isn't too much, or at least not for too long. Overall, across my different connections with the industry, I felt like constant overworking was not well-seen. I've been reminded enough times to not connect to the internal Slack while out of office, or to not answer e-mails. Most of the time, the industry is aiming at efficacy and burn out are not good at achieving this. It is also evident that my co-workers have much much much much stricter rules when it comes to work-life balance. Work is work, and life is life. The feeling of auto-entrepreneur obviously isn't around anymore, and the boundaries are much more visible. Some internal policies may even prevent you from working when away e.g. not being able to bring your laptop in vacations. Really, the industry sees you as an asset, that must be carefully handled and nurtured to ensure profit. In academia, you are your own limit. From my perspective, if progress along the ladder is important to you, the industry will offer much better

guarantees about work-life balance. Honestly, I barely see how one can quickly evolve in academia without a sustained overwork (at least on my field) or a lot of luck/exceptional networking skills. In short, academia offers you flexibility, while the industry defines boundaries. It is up to you to choose your path, but it's important to keep in mind that such a flexibility obviously induces strong trade-offs – no free lunch!

Conclusion.

By looking back, and taking a very pragmatic approach, going for the industry now appears as a no-brainer to me. This is, of course, my personal opinion and some people may have a very different one. I will certainly come back to academia, once my family global income will stabilise sufficiently to absorb the 200% reduction. I will come back because academia feels like home, which is not true for the industry. But for the sake of living an enjoyable life, for now, I'll stay in the industry. To PhD students and post-doc, talk with young assoc. and assist. Prof. Do not limit yourself to your PI or older professors. Times have changed. The smartest move simply is to talk openly with the one that you wish to become during your next step professional step. They will tell you the truth, because they are enduring it and won't be able to hide or forget about it.

As a last note, I wish to strongly encourage people that want to interact, share or comment this publication to remain smart, gentle and Human. This is my personal point of view. Yours might be different, and I, above everything else, respect that – so please do the same.