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ONLINE OR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION **EDUCACIÓN ON-LINE O EDUCACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA**

Abstract

The meaning is clear: The Student is submitting to the will of the higher authority, for the sake of making more money. Will that behavior also just as easily transfer to the political will of higher authority, to induce the Students to unthinkingly repeat the painful atrocities of the past, because they were not taught them?

Keywords: Higher education, on-line education, power, history, didactics.

Resumen

El significado está claro: El estudiante está sometándose a la voluntad de la autoridad superior, con tal de hacer más dinero. ¿Ese comportamiento trascenderá tan fácilmente también a la voluntad política de la autoridad superior, para inducir a los estudiantes a repetir, sin pensar, las dolorosas atrocidades del pasado, porque no se las enseñaron?

Palabras clave: Educación superior, educación on-line, poder, historia, didáctica.

JEL: A29, H75, I23, I29, N30, N40.

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Other works in *Entelequia*: "Identities: How Governed, Who Pays?", <http://www.eumed.net/entelequia/es.lib.php?a=b002>, book review at: <http://www.eumed.net/entelequia/es.art.php?a=02r07>; "Governance on Mars ", <http://www.eumed.net/entelequia/es.art.php?a=09a05>; "Leviathan: Identity Interactions between Society and Technology "; <http://www.eumed.net/entelequia/es.art.php?a=02a09>

“I did not say that;” or “the Instructor said it was not necessary to learn that” are no longer valid assertions. In the ‘On Line’ mode, everything is written, recorded and instantly available to all responsible parties within a given institution. That is especially important, when a Student asserts one line to his/her classmates, and another, opposing line, to the Instructor or the College Administration. The discrepancy is there for the reading. Yes, it still happens.

It is suggested that an education is what a Student makes of it. That suggestion is also valid and true for the online mode. Knowledge acquisition requires first hand experience, be that by doing or by reading (dependent on the objective). Yes, Kantian, but, one cannot expect to successfully program a computer, or extract a tooth without first learning how to do it. That, “doing” part, tends to raise eyebrows: how can one “do” mechanical tasks online? A quick response is: nowadays, a computer can perform surgery online. If one needs a house painter, one can hire one locally, without an university degree. The online mode will not solve all the plumbing needs of an old mansion.

How can the Students perform their tasks online? Most on-the-ground university courses require sitting exams, and some assign papers to be written. Online courses are conducted via specialized software platforms, with specific ‘tabs’ for downloading lectures as well as links to upload completed assignments. If the Students have access to video-cam equipped computers, an instructor can choose to hold a “live” session. Or, the lectures can be loaded to the ‘assignment tab’ for web casting. So can the addresses of supplementary videos; or even the copyrighted videos themselves. Courses that require the use of mathematical symbolae and notations are accommodated by even more specialized modules of software that can handle them. Generally, for the sake of convenience there is the “24 hour” rule: A Student must respond to the Instructor’s questions within 24 hours. The same applies to the Instructor, when a Student asks a question.

Since the establishment of University of Bologna (c. 1088 A.D.), the duties of faculty members have been threefold: teaching, research and publication, public service. As the city state needed a means of peaceably resolve conflicts among merchants, who provided the backbone of the polity, Faculty of Law served the purpose in all three branches of duties.

Over time, other medieval universities such as Sorbonne, Oxford, Complutense, *et al* were also established, and began their contributions to the society at large. Eventually, the offerings were expanded. Specifically, *Studium Generale* of Complutense was a pioneer. One of those general tasks was the learning of languages beyond those spoken in the immediate vicinity, and even beyond Europe. That language facility, in addition to the experiences gained from culture contact during the Crusades, brought new scientific information to the fore. For example, John Greaves, Savilian Professor of Astronomy, had the *Star Catalog* of Ulugh Bey (d. 1449) translated from Chaghatay and published in Oxford during 1652. That catalog was utilized by NASA in the 20th century for spacecraft navigation purposes.

Experience over the past eight centuries also have shown that, research leading to publication has led the development of knowledge, which is then passed on to the Students in coursework. That activity is the primary means of preventing stagnation among faculty, as well as serving the public for supporting education with their tax dollars in various forms. Those aspects do not necessarily differ from the ground based institutions to the online universities. That is: if the faculty is full time, and not hired on an adjunct, per course bases. If the Instructors are part time, they usually resist publishing or conducting public service. This does not vary between non-profit (public or private) and for profit universities.

Types of online institutions

The for-profit institutions have been around for decades. Some of them used to conduct correspondence courses (such as accounting, electronic repair), and began establishing on-the-ground night schools for trades. During the past couple of decades, a portion changed their names to university, and began buying vocational schools nationally and internationally. They have shareholders who expect a decent return on the stock shares they hold. Most have stock-market registrations. And, increasingly they are also entering the on-line mode of offering diplomas.

Another type of on-line institution has also emerged over the past fifteen years. This time-frame is important, and corresponds to the wider usage of 'Internet' becoming the norm. They are established new, primarily to offer degrees online. They have only one building, housing the servers containing their course offerings (if the servers are not managed by an outside vendor). They hire instructors by the course, do not offer tenure and the courses require shorter time periods to complete. For example, one can complete an online doctorate in a humanities subject within a year or two, as opposed to five to ten years (depending on the subject) within an older, on the ground university. Yes, the online institutions cater to employed individuals who wish to earn a graduate degree for promotion and advancement. Quite a few teachers take that route in order to comply with the requirements of their School Districts, those that prefer high school teachers to hold a master's degree.

Naturally, a number of older, established, not-for-profit universities (public and private) also began offering online courses. Though not all those not-for-profits who offer online courses, also offer diplomas or degrees; only courses. In most cases, those online courses offered by the long established universities are for personal enrichment, enjoyment; and attract mostly their own alumnae and their friends.

So, what encourages a segment of the Student population to enroll into degree programs at online institutions? The most popular answer is "because it is convenient. True, one need not drive an hour or two one way to sit in a class for forty-five minutes. One can spend that traveling time with family or friends. On the other hand, there is the "homework" part of the equation. Since the online semesters are only six weeks long (instead of twelve to fifteen weeks on-the-ground), the assignments are at a minimum double that of on-the-ground institutions. When the reality finally dawns on the Students, the semester is typically half over and the instructors begin to receive frantic messages. They are a variation of: "will I be able to pass?" Especially at a "Right to Try" institution, that is a difficult question for the instructor to answer. Even at highly selective universities, the attitude and efforts of a Student is the primary beginning point, let alone at an institution which will welcome all learners without exception. If the Student in question has no college going examples in the family, or have not been exposed to studying with a critical thinking bent, usually the outcome is failure.

Large proportion of failing Students are never to the liking of educators. So, true-and-ried methods of 'helping' Students may be pressed into service by administrators. Depending on the nature of the online institution, these begin with Student tutors (to help the failing Students 'learn') to Writing and Learning Centers (teaching grammatical rules, research methods) to pressing instructors to issue higher grades. Some institutions will not renew teaching contracts with instructors who insist that their Students learn the material and fail half the class for

not doing so. Other institutions will not renew faculty contracts because the instructor may have issued all A's to the entire class, whether or not they earned it.

One effective method of ensuring high proportion of Student success is to design the course for the purpose. Oxford is well known for the "tutorial" method. A Student is assigned to a Faculty Member (regardless of the dizzying array of titles held by this category J of 'Dons') to be tutored. The Tutor sits the Student down, assigns a topic on which the Student must produce a research paper in one week: "The Rise of the Mahdi Army in Sudan." The Student will go to the library, find the books, read the contents, understand and organize the information, write the paper. Then he will go to the Tutorial to present it to his Tutor, who, most likely, will tear apart the arguments. At the end of the session, the Tutor will assign a new topic for next week: "Mosquito Indians' relations with the Mexican Government." The Student will go through the same mechanics.¹ On the side of the online institution of the equation (in some institutions), the Students are advised to buy one or two textbooks for a course. They are provided with five to ten questions from those textbooks to answer. And the questions may vary from "What is IMF?" to "What is Communism?" If the instructor objects to the answer because it was copied and pasted from a website, essentially plagiarized, some of those institutions' administrators will become angry even before the Students.

General Education Divisions

One of the present-day dangers of education is over specialization. Whether a Student is working on an associates degree to become a dental assistant or a CPA, they wish to learn enough to do their titular job. But, no other knowledge. Most of the Student reaction is observed in the General Education courses. Their argument is almost always the same: "Why do we have to learn this?" Some feel the defense of their position is necessary, to avert the efforts to teach them: "I will be counseling job seekers as a Human Resources specialist. How will this help me?"

The contents of a General Education Division varies slightly from one institution to the next. Mostly, a 'GenEd' Division in the online domain serves the purposes of an Arts and Sciences Faculty in on the ground universities. That is, subjects taught range from language to history; math to zoology. It is the division that separates a "university" from a technical or vocational school. It is the essence of "higher education." And, it is also the division where the Students are expected to acquire the basic tenets of the freedoms won by humans, and the tribulations endured in the process. When Students complain that they are studying for a technical degree, and have no need to know what is on offer, an Instructor can easily specify:

Historical evidence shows that, there has been, throughout history, it is possible to observe a continuous contention between the individual and the polity identities. This intra-communal bifurcation manifests itself in all activities of human endeavor, including economic, political and personal versus sovereign states rights. However, never before the role of technology has been elevated to the present level, contesting all comers, to reach absolute supremacy. This contention is not only to replace previous holders of levers to rule or dictate, but to reach levels of control heretofore unknown. Obviously, technology, without human guidance cannot achieve a result. Left unchecked, any gov-

¹ Although, recent quiet rumors indicate, even some Oxford Students may be trolling the web for at least some good lines, to insert into their tutorial papers

*erning strata can utilize the technological means to deny any segment of society the individual rights that have been at least philosophically established.*²

In other words, are the Students ready to identify what is in the best interest of humans, and serve humanity, and, in the end themselves personally? Or will they sell their technical services to the highest bidder or salary payer? Have their Instructors and institutions who granted their degrees and placed them at the controls of pain inflicting devices, done their job of instilling humanity in the graduates? Who will win; the empire building ambitionists or humanists who argue for equality?

Continuing Issues of Past and the Present

Let us take a look at the lessons that can be drawn from the summarization of the above mentioned struggle. For example, what are the impellents of a polity to become an empire? Perhaps they can be summarized as follows:

1. To obtain natural and food resources not otherwise available;
2. Chance to obtain immediately usable materials, such as gold, silver;
3. To reach a particular geographic/climactic location;
4. To pursue an ideological or a religious ideal.

Given the population increase of the world, who is to say that, what concerned the governing strata of a nation four thousand years ago in Egypt will not be on top of the agenda tomorrow?

Throughout human experience, there have been standard methods utilized by an invading administration to control the subject people, in order to become an empire:

1. control the food supply
2. killing/incarcerating leaders who can organize opposition
3. co-opting influential individuals to create collaborators

All these attributes were present in the Roman Empire of two thousand years ago, as well as during the 20th century. If one is to look a bit more closely, kindred if not exact methods are also in use in the 21st century. As such, attached to the population growth, they are likely to make their presence known in the father future as well.

Over time, as the economies have grown, refinements have been introduced, to be applied:

1. control of the financial systems
2. redesign of the educational system
3. constitute a new ideological outcome
4. introduction of non-seeding hybrid plants

2 H. B. PAKSOY, "Leviathan: Identity Interactions between Society and Technology", *Entelequia. Revista Interdisciplinar*, 2006, issue 2, pages 157-162.

5. engineered diseases

Does this mean that an empire is a “bad choice?” The answer depends on A) if one is in the ruling strata of an empire; or, a member of an engulfed polity by that empire. B) Moreover, no empire is eternal. They all fall, under rather painful circumstances to all they control. Once the empire virus is out of the bottle, there will always be someone else who will also wish to pursue it. And, no, victory over all others is never final.

The redesign of the educational system has been ongoing throughout the ages. Even the redesigns have been subjected to many revisions. We encounter the early educational systems in the empires of Egypt and in China, with schools accepting young men. The objective was to train and educate (the differences are critical between train and educate) the future administrative functionaries of the related empires.

At the time taxes were being collected, and labor levies were ordered in order to build whatever the emperor or the pharaoh wished or saw a need. In all cases, organizational skills were needed, in unison. The royal treasurer needed to not only know the chief engineer and architect, but also had to communicate with them in order to carry out the royal orders. Same format was also in effect with the various branches of the army in question. All had to possess the same basic information, remain on the same page for the necessary progress. Schooling was the obvious answer.

So, China established a university which admitted two young men from every district within the empire. Egypt opened a palace school for ‘scribes.’ Neither was using an alphabet based writing system. But, they managed, and trained not only bureaucrats but also capable administrators, army commanders, artisans to create the artwork that was necessary to communicate with the masses. That was rather important, since the population at large was illiterate, and could only see the images. Those depictions had to convey the majesty of the emperor, under the shadow of God, and what he wanted his subjects to do in order to be faithful. Yes, before nationalism, there was the cult of personality. Much later, Stalin and successive Secretary Generals of the USSR complained about that personality cult, all the while working hard to establish their own version, for their own, personal benefit. Not much different than the royalty and nobility of the earlier eras both in the earlier Russian empire and a multitude of European entities.

The renaissance era masters did something very similar in Europe. They created vividly colored frescoes within public spaces and churches to convey the majesty of God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, since most of Europe was also illiterate. The peasants had to be won over, if not by written word, then by images. When the monopoly of the priests in reading and writing was broken –by independent capitalistic means– the progression of events led to Reformation. Printing allowed the masses to learn how to read and write, and Luther’s messages reached a much larger audience.

All this is quite similar to what has been happening in the world, with respect to the utilization of the electronic space known as the ‘Internet’ during the past fifteen years. Or, we can project back, and call Gutenberg the early inventor of web based instruction! He made money by disseminating information, so are the institutions teaching online today. But the critical part of all that is, humans, by means of widely printed works, began understanding the broader view of historical progress: the inherent struggle between the ‘ruler’ and the ruled; the methods utilized by the rulers to rule, and the ‘natural’ rights of the governed. “What makes humans think

they have rights?" I always ask my Students and the question, most semesters, give pause to all. If we cut the progression, say, by not teaching the sequence of the past four thousand years, what may and will happen? What can happen to democracy, pluralism if their tenets are not taught in perspective? For example, at the time of the creation of democracy in Athens, we are told, nine out of ten residents were slaves and had no rights whatsoever. And, the U.S. replicated the process about two thousand years later pretty much on the same grounds. Why?

Existence of a ready military was the ultimate insurance to obtain the royal results desired; no uprisings were allowed. Mind you, the security forces in a given settlement were not necessarily the "police" we know today. It was the army that yielded the ultimate weapon. Napoleon famously stated that "One can do everything with an army/bayonet, save one: One cannot sit on it." He knew what he was referencing, especially since the Roman Emperors were made and unmade by the praetorian guard whose duty it was to protect the emperor. Much later on the calendar, the Moslem Khaliphs were also treated the same way by the Memluks, who were recruited from Central Asia to protect the Arab Khaliph from the Arab populations. That is one of the primary reasons for Western Democracies to assign the highest military command structure to elected politicians. Not that the politicians make good soldiers, but a civilian at the head reminds everyone of the responsibilities attached to the military forces.

Naturally, the applied cases of the above summarized principles will bear more complex marks.

Some current examples

The Global Warming is testing the will of the Earth bound population.

One group of proposals include spraying the upper levels of atmosphere with a light substance, so as to reflect back a certain percentage of the heat source, the sun rays. Hence, we see high flying aircraft overhead, as the substance they are spraying streams out, mimicking the jet engine condensation trail. Except, of course, the regular contrail does not linger longer than seconds, whereas the material sprayed spreads and occasionally forms clouds. We do not know what those sprayed materials are. We do not even know if reflective material is being sprayed or what the medical outcome is or will be on the humans below. At present, nobody publicly claims ownership of the task.

Another group is keen to utilize the same sun rays to generate electricity, high above the earth; then transmit the proceeds to a central point on earth for sale to eager customers. Naturally, this electricity will be called 'green' as no fossil fuels have been combusted to generate it, nor gasses have been emitted. But, the application also will centralize the output; as one result, all consumers may have to deal with a monopoly. And, a legislated monopoly is rarely to the liking of the populace.

The Students need to know when to ask questions, and understand the nature of the responses. All that is a critical learning outcome of an university education. A polity cannot hope to survive without a rational educational system. And many an error has been committed in search of an answer. The Founding Fathers of the American Republic sought to avoid the errors of the old Greeks and the Romans, but went a step further. By establishing liberal arts institutions of higher learning, the Founders pursued a policy of educating the American masses, thereby ensuring the continuance of what was established; the Republic. Thus, in 1753 Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) helped found [among others], the College of Philadelphia, later to

become University of Pennsylvania. Thomas Jefferson (1743- 1826) led the establishment of University of Virginia in 1819. George Washington not only gave his name to at least one college, but also supported the creation of others. These initiatives were followed by the founding of Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago. These institutions were devoted to the development of Liberal Arts, as opposed to the training of clergy. Almost all colonial American colleges prior to 1776 were designed after the European model, including Harvard (1636), Yale (1701), Princeton (established in 1766 as College of New Jersey), and were first and foremost training institutions for preachers. The newly created Liberal Arts Colleges were to soon require the older universities and colleges to revise and reform their curricula, and adopt the liberal education approach. Most other institutions followed that lead.³ Yet, today, the effort to receive an education has been divided into “training” and “liberal arts.” Those who receive a university diploma are either trained to do a repetitive job, or to do the thinking for the nation to compete against other nations on earth. Those two categories are experiencing difficulties understanding each other. When there is miscommunication, there will be opposite end reactions.

At the moment, the entire earth is facing a common cold, with an uncommon set of origins. The microbe does not exist in nature, but was manufactured in a laboratory. Why?

Is there a real demand for purple tomatoes, that cannot replicate themselves through their own seeds? How about grains, that particular foodstuff which allowed humans to become what they are, that will not germinate?

Can a war be waged on an unseen enemy? Not until the invention of computers, and the necessary set of instructions understood by computers. Once there is a weapon, there will be someone who will wish to utilize it. Therefore, as soon as computers were able to, that war with the unseen began. The “war” we are referencing can be renamed as “bending the will of the other side, to accept ours.” Therefore, what begun as ‘spam’ from companies touting their products, was eventually extended to attempts at gaining control of enemy’s logistics systems. More worrisome is the weapons’ fire control systems falling under that category. And the methods of programming all are being taught at universities. Often without the education that must accompany, that of morals and logic. Life is not only about making more money. After a war, there might not be anything left money can do.

Or, is the war actually on the citizens of a country that is deploying the armed forces? Many an example of this phenomenon may be historically recalled, where the national armed forces, with-or-without the participation of outsiders, have been utilized against the population from whence the armed forces came. Why? Mostly due to a single difference: ideology. That can be political difference: monarchy versus republic or one belief system against another. Until the advent of the computers, the armed force had to be utilized physically, in order to secure the compliance demanded by the commanding strata. Now, the computerized “web” developments make it possible to target individuals more silently and effectively. A specialized unit can even track a potential dissident well in advance of any action by that individual, thereby eliminating any legal and legitimate opposition to current governance policies.

What about the governance of a polity? Is to be elected and “be in power” more important and above all the moral clauses and responsibilities? And, is being in power a license to arrange the affairs of the entire world, or at least a continent? What happens to plurality and individual human rights? There have been and still are political philosophers writing on these issues. But, what happens when the readers of those volumes and essays, misunderstand the contents? That

3 HB Paksoy, *Lectures on Central Asia* (Florence: Carrie/European University Institute, 2005)

misunderstanding can be by error or intentional. Is not the dissemination of knowledge widely the responsibility of universities (not to mention Instructors), regardless of their flavor, the best defense against possible misrepresentation? An idea, once articulated, never goes away. It only awaits for a more fertile time to flourish and take over others. At times, to the detriment of all, without exception.

Students' take on online degrees versus what they need

At “right to try” institutions, most Students are already employed. They wish to earn more money and attain higher rank or ‘power’ within the organizations employing them. In most cases, the higher management would like to see a college diploma as an evidence of qualifications, in addition to years of service and other factors they may arbitrarily set. This causes some distortions in the minds of the Students. They come to believe that, everything needs to work lock-step so that they (Students) can reach their goals on their own schedules. For the purpose, the Students fall into the deadliest educational trap: expecting set answers to set questions. The meaning is clear: The Student is submitting to the will of the higher authority, for the sake of making more money. Will that behavior also just as easily transfer to the political will of higher authority? To induce the Students to unthinkingly repeat the painful atrocities of the past, because they were not taught them?

All this reminds me of the retired Provost at one of the institutions where I taught, who always insisted:

“Never in doubt, always in error.” He liked this phrase so much, he had it inscribed above the ‘common table’ at the Faculty Club, for everyone to see, whenever they entered the establishment to eat.



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