

Chapter 2

The Changing University, Lifelong Learning, and Personal Fulfilment

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Introduction

When the original version of this paper was published in 2001, we argued that the concept of lifelong learning (as distinct from the rather ill-favoured phrase itself) has a long and honourable history and should be actively promoted. However, this is on the important assumption that the concept is interpreted in such a way as to imply self-fulfilment through education, rather than in a narrowly utilitarian way that looks through an economic lens and sees no further than skills and training.

Certainly, the idea of lifelong learning must have seemed a given to Plato, and the suggestion that it is intrinsically tied up with personal fulfilment would surely also have occurred to him. In the most literal sense, the education advocated for the Guardians in the *Republic* is a lifelong process, with explicit reference being made to the (adult) ages appropriate for various studies. Indeed, Plato states unequivocally that ‘education... commences in the first years of childhood and lasts to the very end of life’ (*Protagoras*, 325). It is also clear that, whilst recognising, even emphasising, the social utility of well-educated persons, as we shall do below (for the careful attention to the upbringing and education appropriate to all citizens in the *Republic* is intended to contribute to the harmony and happiness of the whole), for Plato, a crucial part of the point of all this education is to realise or fulfil the individual to the utmost (Barrow 1975, 2007). What particularly characterises and distinguishes Plato’s view, especially judged in the context of his times, is his argument that education is an intellectual and character-forming business, rather than a mere acquisition of skills or mastery of a trade, and that its ideal length or scope is not to be estimated by reference to any amount of information to be ingested, but to the need to ascend to ever higher and more abstract levels of understanding. It is true

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that Plato's epistemology inclines towards the idea that ultimately the world and all things in it can be known and hence that, in principle, there might be a finite limit to the time it takes to become educated. But the fact remains that, in practice, Plato saw the business of education as a thing of wonder and of the first importance, and something that would never actually be complete in this life.

The idea, then, of lifelong learning is nothing new.

In preparing this revised version of the paper, we see no reason to change our view as expressed above. However, we believe that a major difference between the situation 10 years ago and the situation today, and a source of major concern, is the rapidly changing nature of communications. Two things in particular seem apparent: first, the resources, particularly technological resources, that were to be relied upon to facilitate lifelong learning and which were perceptibly emphasised as long ago as the late 1960s by a number of educators as capable of changing the nature of schooling (e.g. Illich 1971; Goodman 1971; Reimer 1971; Postman and Weingartner 1971), are now with us, but have proved a very mixed blessing. Knowledge is at students' fingertips, but their ability to make use of it is considerably less so. The result is a great deal of misinformation, misconception and misunderstanding, which, it can be argued, is more worrying than simple ignorance or lack of knowledge. Second, it is surely undeniable that, at the same time, as the information explosion and the technological changes that have led to it have occurred, the nature of the University has changed, as a plethora of books suggest, many arguing that it is a change for the worse, especially in respect of education as we conceptualise it here (e.g. Graham 2002; Kronman 2007; Woodhouse 2009; Kolody 1992; Proctor 1998; Smith 1990). Amongst the many problems that have been identified, we may note in particular the following trends: the rhetoric surrounding globalisation lends itself to an emphasis on skills and training rather than education, whilst at the same time placing emphasis on various social, economic and political objectives rather than academic ones; there is a widespread tendency for governments to re-label a variety of post-secondary institutions 'universities' without regard to distinctions of purpose or practice; the increase in the number of professional, technical and applied schools indicates a further weakening of commitment to education for its own sake; there has been an obvious increase in the energy and financial support devoted to public-relations, fund-raising and bureaucracy generally, at the expense of the academic mission. These and other contemporary trends have undoubtedly led to an increased student enrollment in universities, but it has come at a huge price: in essence, it has broken down the distinction between education and training and between development of the individual and preparation for the world of work. To advertise your university with the slogan 'Come to university and be a plumber' (as one Canadian university, in fact, does) reminds one of various army recruitment slogans and leads to the question of whether universities can any longer be distinguished from other institutions such as the army. Whether or not it is fair to say that 'more has meant worse' (Amis 1971), expanding student enrollments have unquestionably changed the nature of the university experience for many students, and an increasing number of students have difficulty in communicating ideas and arguments fluently. Arguments have, of course, been advanced in support of the expan-

sion of higher education, notably the claim that it is in the interests of social justice. But whether this is plausible or not, and whether education should be governed by concerns of social justice or not, there is nonetheless considerable evidence of academic ‘dumbing down’ even before the UK Court of Appeal recently upheld the claim that the University of Bournemouth had artificially raised the grades of weak students, without the knowledge, let alone consent, of the experts in the field.

The concept of personal fulfilment appears to have become narrower. It is a further question whether today’s universities merely reflect this phenomenon or contribute to its existence; certainly, the market economy and other social forces also contribute to it. But the fact remains that for all the widespread talk of happiness, citizenship, life and social skills amongst contemporary pundits, schooling in general is now conceived of more in terms of economic utility than anything else. Paradoxically, the university is more open than ever, yet less open than it was in respect of providing a path to education.

Our concern will now be with the role of lifelong learning in a contemporary context.

The Economy and the Knowledge Explosion

The phrase ‘lifelong learning’ is still a part of contemporary educational discourse, and, as an idea, it still plays a significant part in a great deal of planning and practical activity, though less so than was the case 10 years ago. To this extent, at least, our views are closer to Plato’s than to those entertained at many other historical periods and in many other cultures. There seems to be a general sense, if not necessarily a well articulated claim, that, just as Plato thought, we should be doing a great deal more than apprenticing people to a trade, initiating them into a priesthood, conditioning them, indoctrinating them or equipping them with various mechanical skills; we should be nurturing the personhood and cultivating the minds and manners of individuals, and this is not something that can be done by and completed in formal schooling alone. But given the ubiquity of the phrase and the popularity of the idea, it becomes important to examine and argue for a defensible interpretation of the concept. To make sure, in particular, that the general sense referred to becomes a reality when we put lifelong learning into practice, so that what we are subscribing to is truly worthwhile and educational.

Why should there continue to be, at this time, explicit and widespread concern with lifelong learning? In large part, the impetus behind the emphasis on the idea is surely a consequence of various social, in particular economic, arguments. Cynics may no doubt attribute it more to the self-importance of theorists and the self-serving of educationalists. But, whatever the tendency of academics to latch on to some temporarily forgotten idea and run with it until it has turned to cliché, there are some fairly obvious reasons why we should be focusing on lifelong learning: many, perhaps most, individuals today change their job more than once during a lifetime; their circumstances in other respects (personal, social and economic) are equally likely to vary. To put it simply, it is no longer the case (if it ever was) that the body of

understanding acquired by the end of formal schooling can possibly hope to see the individual through life. Paradoxically, lifelong learning becomes more important as a goal, even as the popularity of the idea to some extent lessens.

In addition, the so-called explosion in knowledge, the rapidity with which our understanding in certain fields advances, equally quickly renders yesterday's learning obsolete. Development in scientific knowledge is most commonly cited as the example here, but even archaeologists or historians can be left behind if they fail to come to grips with new modes of collecting, sifting and analysing data.

That having been said, it is, in our view, possible, and in fact quite common, to overplay this particular point. First, it would probably be useful to distinguish between knowledge and information here. There has certainly been an explosion in the amount of information generally available. It is not quite evident that we know massively or even much more than we did 50 years ago. Second, and rather more importantly, there are clear differences between various disciplines or types of inquiry, most notably that between those that are in some way necessarily progressively developmental and those that are not, such that it barely makes sense to talk of an explosion of knowledge, or even (which is very different) a deeper understanding, in respect of some of them. Science, for example, does build upon and advance on its past in a linear way, so that it both makes sense and is true to remark upon our vastly greater scientific understanding as compared with, say, that of the Greeks, and to point out that there is simply a whole lot more (and for many of us probably a whole lot too much) to be known. But mathematics is in a slightly different case: here our understanding is (we believe) refined and improved as we advance from our past; it is, we may say, a greater understanding. It may also be the case that this greater understanding implies in a literal sense something more to handle and that to rise to the heights of mathematical knowledge now takes longer than at any earlier time in our history. It may be the case, but it is not actually obvious that it is, and it does not seem to be logically necessary that it should be. When we turn to a form of inquiry such as philosophy or the performing arts, talk of an explosion of knowledge seems very inappropriate. Of course, in a trivial sense, there is more knowledge: the historians of philosophy, or painting, or practically anything, have more data or material to sift through. But philosophy should not be defined in terms of the books written on the subject, but rather of the ideas that are its subject matter. In this sense, whilst some would say that our philosophical understanding was greater than Plato's, others would not, and, in either case, there is absolutely no reason to suppose that it must have taken A.J. Ayer longer than Plato to master the subject, or that the former's task was somehow more demanding than the latter's. (Both claims might be true, of course, but not for the reason advanced.)

The above digression seems to us worth making in order to deflect a rather too glib and misleading tendency to assume that, such is the state of the 'knowledge industry' today, the sheer amount of what there is to be known is a sufficient reason for investing time and money into lifelong learning. The claim is generally vastly exaggerated and, in any case, pushes us down a dangerous path on which we identify education with acquiring knowledge in the sense simply of acquiring information. This conflation of education with information is a major problem in contemporary society and is the source of much misguided policy and practice. It therefore has to

be emphasised that it is understanding rather than knowledge in the sense of information that is our goal in education, and whilst there is in general probably more that is understood today than there was 2,000 years ago, and whilst some subjects at least are considerably more complex and require more subtle understanding than before, it is not at all clear that it makes much sense to claim that the trouble is that it will obviously take a person longer today than 2,000 years ago to educate themselves. To become a poet or a philosopher does not obviously take more time today than it did before. That having been said, and with this corrective in mind, it may of course be acknowledged that, broadly speaking, such facts as the ubiquity of new ideas and information, changing modes of communication, developing understanding and the sheer extent of activity in some intellectual areas may make one in some respects outdated in one's understanding in a conventional sense, if one ceases to advance at the end of formal schooling. Furthermore, it is the case, though it is not clear that it is primarily, if at all, for justifiable epistemological reasons, that the formal curriculum is under constant pressure to include more. In general, increasing demands are made by the various professions as well as by the perceived needs of the wider work place. In particular, there is a distressing tendency towards what can only be called a 'knee-jerk reaction' to various perceived social crises, such that, if, for example, there is an increase in teenage pregnancy, racism, driving accidents, drug taking or knife crimes, the school is expected to lay on 'lessons' to reverse the trend (and, as often as not, the school is also blamed for contributing to the problem in the first place). But, it is far from convincing to argue that responsibility for these and other such social problems can be laid at the door of the school. It is furthermore a very poor line of reasoning that assumes that the way to combat such problems is to devote curriculum time to the explicit study or discussion of them. Individuals who carry knives and use them to threaten others do not normally do so because they have not been taught that knives are dangerous and violent threats are frowned upon.

Be that as it may, the need to develop new understanding, the advances in understanding in some areas, the tendency for new emphases and approaches to be widely disseminated and increasing demands on schooling (both formal and informal) combine to place the individual (where learning ceases with the completion of formal schooling) at an obvious disadvantage.

This is not only fairly uncontentiously the case, but it is, in practice, also probably the main reason for the current emphasis on lifelong learning. Pressure, whether direct or indirect, conscious or otherwise, from industry, business and government has led to the orthodoxy that individuals need to continue to learn, retrain and retool throughout their lives, if they are to serve their purpose as economic units.

Skills

Bearing the argument of the previous section in mind, one can say that during the twentieth century, there was a change of emphasis from the idea of specific training and the development of particular skills, through a belief in so-called generic-skill development, to the current focus on lifelong learning. This amounts to a shift from

the assumption that acquiring a trade (whether manual or intellectual) would suffice for life by way of an assumption that one could learn how to be adaptable to the assumption that one needs to continually learn new trades or re-learn one's trade (at the same time, keeping one's data base up to date).

Thus, at the beginning of the last century, the broad assumption was that one learnt enough to be a bricklayer, an accountant, a priest and a classics Don, and that, combined with learning certain social behaviours, attitudes and so forth appropriate to one's condition in life, would see one through. Little would change sufficient to render one's learning out of date. It is worth noting that adult education, which became a serious matter at the end of the nineteenth century, does not represent any real departure from this generalisation and is therefore not properly to be seen as the precursor of today's interest in lifelong learning. It was essentially no more than the provision of education to adults who had missed it (or part of it) as children, whether it involved instruction in literacy, handicrafts or whatever.

Perhaps the first major step in the twentieth century towards something like a concept of lifelong learning in a broader sense came with the widespread adoption of a belief in the possibility of cultivating generic skills such as that of 'learning how to learn' or critical thinking. American psychologists of education seem to have been subconsciously wedded to the idea of generic skills for the longest of times, but it was in the 1960s that the idea became more or less a part of progressive educational orthodoxy. Part of the thinking that was common at the time is not to be scorned: this was an ardent desire to replace the view that the learner was a passive receptacle into which the teacher placed information, with a view of the learner as an active agent who needed to be helped to process information and understand; a learner who thought critically about the material in question. And the idea that schools should be concerned primarily to cultivate such general abilities as that of being critical, of being caring and of learning how to learn certainly suggests some belief in education as an on-going business; for, presumably, the main purpose of focusing on learning how to learn is so that individuals will be free to go on learning for themselves through life. Indeed, much of the broader rhetoric of child-centred education at the time echoed the view that schooling was but a step on a journey that lasted for life and that the individual was a natural being (rather than a passive receptacle) that could and would continue to grow in a favourable environment such as the educative society it was hoped would be.

This is not the place to go into a detailed critique of a body of thinking that might be crudely summarised as 'right idea, false premise, wrong conclusion'. But the 'false premise' in question is the idea that there is such a thing as a generic skill of learning how to learn (or critical thinking or caring) that can meaningfully be taught to people. Broadly, as has been argued in detail elsewhere (Barrow 1990), there are serious problems in seeing intellectual abilities as skills (at any rate in anything like the same sense as say, discrete and physical skills) and, more importantly, in the idea of them as generic skills. There is also very often a confusion between tendencies or dispositions on the one hand and abilities or skills on the other: part of what it is to be a critical thinker is to have the inclination and tendency to look at things critically. This inclination, this disposition, is certainly neither an ability nor a skill

in any sense, and is, incidentally, quite compatible with being very bad at actually thinking critically (as anyone who has taught undergraduates probably knows).

The argument in essence is as follows: the ability to think critically about, say, art is not some monolithic quality, some single indivisible attribute. The ability consists in various dimensions or facets. Second, some at least of these facets are clearly not skills such that they can be developed, exercised and trained on analogy with a physical skill (or set of skills) such as serving at tennis or riding a bike. For example, as already noted, the tendency, the disposition to think critically about art is clearly not a skill in this sense, but something to be nurtured by some means or other, as distinct from trained. Third, and for our purposes, much more crucially, the ability to think critically about art is one thing, and the ability to think critically without qualifiers is quite another. In fact, the latter is well-nigh incoherent. To think is always to think about something. It simply does not make sense to conceive of someone thinking critically without reference to what they are thinking critically about. But, though that is true, the more important point is that, assuming critical thinking is good critical thinking and involves such things as understanding, being logical, and being clear, and then critical thinking about art will be different in form from critical thinking in, say, science, politics or philosophy. In each case, the thinking needs to be logical, clear and so on, but what constitutes logic, clarity, coherence, etc., the form they take, are determined by the nature of the discipline or type of inquiry in question. In other words, in order to develop someone's capacity to think critically about art or science, it is logically necessary that they exercise their critical disposition whilst studying art or science. The idea of a generic ability such that wherever I go, whatever the subject, even if completely new to me, I can be critical (other than in the different sense of disagreeable or antagonistic) is absurd.

There is still debate revolving round some of these views, but provided that it is understood that we are here only concerned with a partial verdict, we may say that the debate is effectively over. To put the matter in positive terms – the desire to develop individuals, who are both inclined to or have an aptitude for continued learning and critical thinking and are able to continue learning in a critical fashion – will require developing understanding of both generic points of logic and reasoning and also disciplined understanding of various types of inquiry and conceptual frameworks.

Thus, on this account, the 1960s saw a movement towards the goal of a society of learners (particularly when we consider more specifically political educationalists' views such as those of the deschoolers), but it failed to deliver much, largely because the central ideal that there is some specific way(s) to equip the individual to carry on learning is incoherent (and, it may be added, the practical proposals to turn society into an educational environment were naive and unrealistic).

But whilst the view that one can 'learn to learn' may have been in various respects confused and misconceived, and whilst the main impetus towards lifelong learning may be socio-economic, the paradox is that today we have a great opportunity to achieve the aims of those who believed in generic intellectual skills. For it is the idea that a mental quality such as imagination, creativity or critical acumen is a skill akin to a physical skill and can be developed in one context and then deployed in any other that is misconceived, whilst the aim of developing individuals who are

imaginative, creative and critical in relation to important matters is to be wholeheartedly endorsed. Educationalists may now reasonably argue that it is not the direct utility of learning that should be considered, but the intrinsic value of education, its value to the educated person and its indirect utility that matters. (Indirect utility is not the less useful for being indirect: what could be more useful than being able to read and write, though they are only indirectly useful?) The forces that have put an emphasis on lifelong learning have provided us with the opportunity to ensure greater and more prolonged personal fulfilment for the individual.

Personal Fulfilment

Personal fulfilment is obviously desirable in that, by definition, it increases the sum of individual satisfaction. It is one of those concepts, like happiness or anxiety, which necessarily implies that the individual senses or appreciates the emotion; notwithstanding certain psychiatric views and practices, it makes no sense to insist that someone is anxious when they do not feel or recognise their anxiety. (It may make sense to observe that they exhibit anxiety behaviour; it may even make some kind of sense to refer to a subconscious anxiety, but that cannot be equated with being anxious in the normal, everyday sense.) In the same way, an individual's degree of fulfilment is logically tied up, not with objective criteria of achievement, but with a subjective sense of satisfaction.

Yet, there is a dimension to the idea of personal fulfilment which takes us beyond mere satisfaction. Whilst fulfilment is not to be defined in terms of a set of objective criteria of achievement, it is bound up with the idea of quality. We do not recognise an individual as fulfilled merely on the grounds that their basic lusts were satisfied; more importantly, nor would the individual himself. To be fulfilled means to feel satisfaction in achievement relating to aspects of life that one values. Further, being human, we should expect personal fulfilment to be tied up with peculiarly human achievement.

Thus, there is a strong and straightforward link between education, the development of mind and personal fulfilment. In continuing to educate oneself throughout life, one increases one's understanding. This is not a question of amassing new information nor, necessarily, of exploring new subject matter, so much as of increasing one's grasp of the nature of various distinct types of inquiry. That more sophisticated and deeper understanding in turn allows for a development of appreciation and engagement. And it is in the capacity to understand, appreciate and engage with the world that we most fully realise our human, as opposed to our animal, selves.

That personal fulfilment has intrinsic value we have already seen. It is the flowering of the individual, or the 'telos' as Aristotle would have it. But it also has considerable extrinsic value. A general tendency in life today is to equate extrinsic value with simple and direct utility. Thus, money has extrinsic value, because we can use it to acquire whatever we want. A car has extrinsic value because it is useful to us in an obvious way. But to emphasise direct utility is to ignore the many things in life that

have enormous value as indirect (and perhaps intermittent) means to greatly desired ends. My knowledge of driving has more direct utility than my knowledge of classical Greek, but the latter may nonetheless have greater extrinsic value to me, because I am more interested in the pleasure to be gained from studying Greek than from driving. The extrinsic value of education (as opposed to training) generally and of personal fulfilment in the sense of a developed mind and emotions has been consistently underplayed throughout history. A contrast is again and again drawn between training, which is useful (though to some vulgar), and education, which is for its own sake. The distinction between education and training needs to be drawn, but this aspect of it (the view that education being valuable for its own sake is not useful) has no warrant: in most times and most places, education, meaning a developed understanding, is of greater potential use both to the individual and to society, than training, meaning the development of a particular skill or set of skills, could ever be.

This general point has particular application in a democracy, or any form of society where individual and general good depend to any marked extent on the ability of individuals to share understanding and take responsibility.

It is of course true that there is no necessary relationship between self-fulfilment and lifelong learning. The logical relationship is between self-fulfilment and education, but there is no necessary reason to suppose that those who continue their education through life will be any more personally fulfilled than those who do not advance their education beyond the current end of formal schooling. There is nonetheless a relationship, even if it is not a logical or necessary one.

In the first place, for many, the mere business of continuing to educate oneself, which is to say to continue exercising and developing one's mind, will provide a source of considerable satisfaction. This obvious truth is increasingly underlined by numerous empirical studies of such things as dementia and Alzheimer's, which suggest that the better educated are less prone to debilitating and demoralising diseases. In the second place, it is a contingent and no doubt qualified truth, but, nonetheless, a reasonable generalisation that a society which emphasises and promotes a continuous interest in education through life is likely to increase the general level of education in individuals and society, and to increase the overall recognition of and respect for education.

Changing Technology and the Changing Nature of the University

As we remarked in our introduction, the last 10 years have produced major and rapid changes both in technology and to the nature of the university, and these changes do not bode well for a concern with a lifelong concern for personal fulfilment through education.

As noted above, in the late 1960s, a number of thinkers argued that any system of schooling was in itself damaging. According to the wider thesis (echoing Jean-Jacques Rousseau), institutionalisation was inherently evil. In particular, schools taught servility

and acceptance, blunting the critical edge even when they did not indoctrinate. Schooling served to 'gentle the masses' into acquiescence and destroyed individuality. Overall, the argument was not perhaps convincing, but some of the detailed points were telling. We certainly need to be aware of some of the dangers that such critics were alive to, such as the danger of stifling autonomous thought and of killing off any sense of awe and wonder at the world in students. On the positive side, such thinkers argued that learning could become more widespread and more enthusiastically embraced, if it was freely acquired through various 'open' or freely available resources such as libraries and fellow citizens. In particular, they emphasised the possibilities that technological advances were beginning to open up. But what has technological change actually meant? What are its implications for lifelong learning?

The technological tools that they thought would be the means of our liberation are now with us in spades, as they say, the rate of change and development having been faster even than anticipated. At the time, some sceptics argued that the technology could not deliver as promised and that anyway it could be misused (e.g. Ellul 1964). Today, it is probably fair to say that the technology can and has delivered in the sense that computers and related technological wizardry is capable of even more than was generally anticipated, in purely technical terms. The problem is learning how to make good use of it, and it can reasonably be claimed that it is potentially far more open to abuse and misuse than was ever envisaged, for it is now possible to use technology as a way of avoiding having to think and as a path to dangerous misinformation. It is difficult to avoid caricature on this topic, tempting as it is to depict an ipod-eared individual ploughing a lonely, not to say solipsistic, furrow through life. But the fact remains that there are some very worrying features of our engagement with technology today. Knowledge tends to be presented and taken up in extremely fragmented form, whether this be a matter of interrupting with advertising breaks on television every few minutes, quick-fire diversionary messages on the net, the reduction of complex material to sound-bites or the channelling of sophisticated issues through ten-step programmes and other forms of popular psychology. Not surprisingly, researchers tell us that attention span can now be measured in minutes, but it does not seem to occur to people that this is not because of some innate limit on human capacity so much as because we no longer train our powers of concentration. In addition to the fear that contemporary technology may be encouraging us not to think, there is the fear that the rapidity and widespread nature of modern communication encourages a kind of 'virtual' mob rule.

Though there is no disputing the fact that the possible replacement of books with e-books and the like does not prevent anybody from reading, it is at least arguable that the book as an artefact has advantages that electronic alternatives cannot compensate for. Certainly, there is little evidence yet that reading and learning are likely to improve if conducted through electronic means. A much more obvious and grave concern is the evident fact that, however sophisticated they become, computers remain programmed storage and calculating machines. As such, they obviously give us access to information on a wholly new scale, but they do absolutely nothing to help us engage meaningfully and intelligently with the material. The mere fact that gathering information from the internet is now referred to as 'research' and that

'Cut and Paste', which used to be a jesting term of criticism, is now a key part of composition on a computer should warn us that something is wrong. The medium, intrinsically bound up as it is with personal rather than public communication, with speed rather than depth, and with information storage and retrieval rather than thought processing, in itself does nothing to help us make sense of material, evaluate or critically examine it.

Paradoxically, whilst technology tempts some to focus on alternative modes of teaching (running the risk of mistakenly putting concern for pedagogy before concern for understanding and knowledge), the possible potential for innovative teaching provided by technology is currently unrealised, if we are to judge from the thousands of identical power point presentations to be encountered at most conferences and in many a university class. Of course, some of these concerns could be met by a more judicious use of technology. The fact remains that at the present time, other resources such as public and school libraries, books and media are either facing severe cutbacks or abandoning their educational role, and technological innovation has not to any noteworthy degree provided an alternative. Obviously, technology itself cannot teach us how to use itself wisely, but in practice, we would suggest, we are teaching ourselves 'not to think' by our uncritical use of it.

Universities have done little to combat such trends and dangers in respect of technology; indeed, they could be accused of having wasted large sums of money in over-investment in technological change without having really thought out what they wanted to use it for. But more generally and perhaps more importantly, it seems to many that the university has done a very poor job in upholding its integrity as a place of learning in the face of recent social and economic challenges. On the face of it, this is paradoxical, for one thing that has expanded in the last several years is the provision of distance learning in various forms. (The University of London, e.g., today has some 46,000 students who are not resident in London, 40,000 of them living overseas.) Institutions such as the Open University were founded partly simply to increase the number of university graduates at a relatively low cost, but also partly to facilitate lifelong learning. But whilst it is undoubtedly true that it is now easier than ever to study from home and that means of study that accommodate the needs of the working person are widely available, and that the Open University in particular has contributed much to the education of many, it is far from clear that overall distance learning contributes greatly to educational ends. It is, for example, noteworthy that the courses that are available in distance form tend to be such things as business studies, development economics and health care. Little comfort here for those seeking to provide opportunities for all to engage with the 'best that has been thought and said'. Beyond the surface value of encouraging distance learning, the universities have done a poor job in defending the notion of education, let alone showing a commitment to lifelong personal fulfilment. Whatever the reasons (political, financial, etc.), the fact is that institutions that used to place emphasis on teaching and scholarship – keeping alive our understanding – now place their emphasis on funded research, globalisation, increasing the student numbers and public relations. The link between all such priorities is of course money, and money is indeed needed to run a university. Scientific research is inherently expensive and important. It is far from clear however that the

extension of the scientific model to the social sciences and humanities makes sense. One does not need lavish funding to pursue one's scholarly inquiry into Keats, even though it would be nice to travel to Rome to see his grave; whether most of what passes for scientific research in the social sciences really is scientific or worth engaging in is another important and controversial issue (Shapiro 2005).¹

Nor is it simply that universities have allowed economic and political forces to overwhelm them. There is also the charge that they have failed to uphold their own academic integrity in the face of 'politically correct' and other forms of ideological thought and what might be termed the narcissism of various fashionable theoretical poses. On this issue, the titles, and sometimes the subtitles, of various books written about the university are revealing; for surely, it is significant that leading academics feel the need to write of such things as 'The Killing of History' (Windschuttle 1997), 'Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus' (D'Souza 1991), 'Fraud: Literary Theory and the End of English' (Washington 1989), 'Education's End: Why our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up On the Meaning of Life' (Kronman 2007) and, bluntly, 'Selling Out' (Woodhouse 2009) (see references).

Indeed, the very commitment to lifelong educational provision that was once quite widespread amongst universities (in some cases, even allowing tuition waivers to senior citizens, e.g.) is now low on the list of priorities. It is readily apparent too that when cuts need to be made, as recently they have needed to be made in most universities, it is programmes such as Liberal Studies and the Humanities that tend to suffer rather than, for example, business, education or social work or the increasing number of work-related courses. Today's university reminds one of Herbert Spencer and his economic utilitarian approach to education, basically providing the knowledge deemed necessary for survival, employment and meeting social obligations. And that is a long way from any aspiration to provide individual fulfilment through lifelong learning. The contemporary concern with 'presentation', 'spin', 'selling oneself' or, generally, Public Relations is of course also counter-productive to the aims of lifelong learning, since, rightly or wrongly, it is believed that such indices as 'completion rates', which are totally at odds with idea of lifelong learning, have significance. Whereas, the two criteria that ought to count in evaluating an educational institution, namely its educational quality and its students' perception of such, are notable for their absence on all such checklists (because, of course, they cannot be 'measured' and hence to today's way of thinking are not 'real'). The concerns that we sketch out here need and deserve much fuller treatment, and we have attempted to provide that in a separate paper in the second volume of this work (Keeney and Barrow 2012). For the present, we simply note that the hopes and

¹ The cost of running a university is frequently cited as the reason why so many of our universities seem to resemble a veritable United Nations. Foreign students generally pay significantly higher tuition fees and so, it is claimed, offset the real cost of a university education for local students. However, it is far from clear that encouraging extensive foreign contacts and bringing in overseas students really is cost effective when all costs are truly taken into account, and it is questionable whether on balance such policies improve the educational standing of an institution. Furthermore, it is becoming evident that increasing the number of foreign students is often done at the expense of local students.

expectations that we and others held out for lifelong learning in the past have not found much comfort in recent events.

Conclusion

To emphasise the lifelong aspect of education is, amongst other things, to attest to its value; it is to attest to education being the sort of thing that cannot be quantitatively distributed; it is also to attest that it is not ultimately a private business (although obviously there is such a thing as self-education), but an ongoing interaction between individuals and traditions of thought and inquiry. Whilst practical necessity often dictates an end to formal schooling or study, education by its nature can never be complete nor equated with the end of any formal programme(s). Learning can never be complete, because the nature of reality is always to some extent in transition. What we know changes and develops; what we think we know changes even more; how we perceive and understand is not static. Circumstances change and, partly, as a consequence of that, agents change.

The danger is that 'lifelong learning' may become an excuse for further unwarranted and unnecessary credentialing and skill training, and it is the fear that that may be a very real danger that leads us to emphasise lifelong *education* (rather than simply *learning*) and the importance of self-fulfilment.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the contemporary emphasis on lifelong learning, whilst it may have come about for certain specific, limited reasons and may imply, very often, a rather limited conception of learning as training, is nonetheless to be welcomed and, if possible, taken advantage of. The emphasis on 'lifelong' helps to dissociate education from formal schooling to some extent. But, most of all, provided we seize the moment and emphasise learning as education, rather than as training, the political momentum that already exists can be channelled towards maintaining society's interest in education.

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