

A Critical Philosophy Reforming Higher Education The Case of Life-Long Learning, Knowledge Society

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Abstract

This paper provides the framework of a critical philosophy of education that could assess the merits of new trend in Higher Education, in particular trends like (a) Life Long Learning associated with Open Universities and Distance Learning as well as (b) the emergence of a so-called Knowledge Society that is linked to Life Long Learning.

Key Words: Foundation Principles; Operational Processes; Reforms In Higher Education; Formation of a *Knowledge Society*; Assessment of the Greek Educational Reform.

1.

Higher Education (HE) has witnessed a significant expansion at the end of the 20th century both in terms of a widening of its organizational spectrum and student body as well as in terms of a deepening of its institutional presence and mushrooming of educational schemes. This is especially true of Europe as is attested by the relevant statistics. The widening of HE has taken many forms but the basic idea seems to be that, compared to its dominant 19th century form of a Humboltian institution of *Bildung*, HE has turned from a secluded-cum-selective tertiary education aimed at specific social classes to a ‘mass’-catering institution. The other major change, in concert with the widening of its social structure, is the introduction of various schemes of Life Long Education (LLE) and their contemporary proliferation. The presence of the central state, as a result, has changed accordingly: witness the debate on the introduction of tuition fees currently underway and the attendant issue on the ethics of ‘participation’ of citizens in the financial burden of HE. More generally, the use of HE in order to advance social and political schemes towards socio-economic equality and political or social cohesion appears as a definite political goal internationally.

Eastern Europe is one geopolitical area currently undergoing the major changes in HE first introduced in Western Europe, privatization and LLE being two prominent changes in this respect in ex-socialist countries. The types of structural or organization changes that HE is exhibiting are various, encompassing those of institutional differentiation (e.g. LLE or Long-Distance or Open Universities vs. conventional ones), new forms of higher institutions of Further or Vocational Education and of course new forms of Study Programmes and Bachelor Degrees, new methods of teaching (primarily LLE and student-orientated forms of learning-how-to learn), widening access to education, flexibility of modular structuring or self-made customized study programmes, or even new types or research institutions in which the presence of the European Union is central (e.g. such examples are the EU-planned “European Knowledge Centres” (EKC), singularly focused university ‘mega-centres’, explicitly specialized research institutes, at the periphery of which will lie the multi-faculty traditional ones).

One theme that is becoming quite prominent in educational debates nowadays is the link between education and enhanced or ‘deep citizenship’, i.e. the link connecting education and especially new trends in HE with the forming of responsible active citizens and moral agents, thus enhancing democracy; in fact, one of the challenges in current debates on this theme is aiming at a further goal, namely the formation of new citizens whose increased moral awareness encompasses issues that relate not just to internal state or social policies of their own country but, perhaps more importantly, issues relating to global justice and international humanitarian aid, as well as to the emergence of a new type of ‘cosmopolitan citizen’.

Another major development in discussions about new trends in HE has to do with the widespread realization and its increasingly public avowal that HE is or must clearly be related to economic

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factors at several levels. That is, economic developments and new financial realities cannot be ignored either at the level of analyzing the causes of any relevant changes that must accompany HE (e.g. why the introduction of LLE is inevitable and what it must offer, why must employability be an imperative and what it means for people's lives, or why we need altogether new schemes of HE) as well as at the level of structuring specific study-programmes and degrees within particular universities with an eye at economic goals that can be served by connecting university courses with the outside economic sector (mainly the private one). This is of course not without its severe critics.

Thus new trends in HE that to some critics seem to fall victim to economic considerations only, such as LLE in particular, are seen as one-sided or merely instrumental-vocational in scope and not strictly-speaking educational – failing, that is, to measure up to the Humboltian idea of *Bildung*. Such trends in HE are seen as only caring to meeting skill-shortages or introducing new or continuously evolving skills driven by demands in labour markets. To others, who are less outright critical of such new trends in HE, that is, to those who see HE as a place where it is possible to accommodate economic considerations with educational-cum-cultural aims within universities that assume a new structural form, it is imperative to underline the need for social changes that must be linked to economic desiderata. That is, for the latter, economic goals and their causal influence can indeed be doubly reconciled both with a cultural policy that would not allow universities to be transformed into mere labour-market addenda, i.e. catering for businesses only, and reconciled also with the idea that economic causes demanding new types of HE do not have to be completely devoid of socio-political or economic goals in favour of those being educated by these economic-driven schemes: in the latter case, some thinkers point to the fact that combating social and economic exclusion or simply educational exclusion or widening the class range of the recipients of the benefits of HE is not incompatible with free market. It is, however, quite clear that, as policy has developed over the years, it is linked with what is known as the 'knowledge society'. Opening-up access to education – even if as a result of simply economic-driven changes – can be seen as a means that has positive benefits, too: “ensuring that those most at risk for reasons including geographical location, socio-economic situation, ethnicity and disability are afforded greater opportunity within new trends in HE” (Osborne 2003). It is therefore quite crucial to decide as to whether social and economic justice can accompany new schemes of HE that are clearly instrumental in their reception, or decide upon which such schemes can indeed effect such a double benefit and which not, especially in the case of LLL. Widening and/or deepening access to HE, it has been said, may or may not have this beneficial double objective. It is one thing to show that economic expediency or labour or business demands may lead to humanitarian results, to put it rather provocatively, yet it is quite another thing to evaluate the moral criteria of such accidentally beneficial causal chains. In addition, empirical studies in some European cases show that widening access, for instance, has not been attended by concomitant structural institutional changes that would have been necessary for effecting the double objective. What is more, it also claimed that some times this double objective may be structurally 'dichotomous' from the very beginning: i.e. it is not simply the case of not being empirically possible to attract and include wider audiences to HE traditionally excluded, i.e. social strata that prove recalcitrant to new trends that would open up HE to them, too, but, rather, being impossible by definition right from the start. Mass-education does not necessarily imply overcoming subtle internal distinctions regarding socio-economic divides that new forms of HE, like LLE, should have been more sensitive to (as opposed to merely mechanically raising the numbers of those participating in HE without exercising any 'positive discrimination' schemes or changing the attitudes of traditional universities of even social classes or of whole student bodies who readily react against any LLE schemes for instance).

One way to see this 'dichotomous' structural results that some critics point to, is by bringing in the concept of democratic participation. On the one hand, it is said that LLL opens up inclusiveness, as we have seen, or even integration into the benefits of society of larger population numbers, as some claim, while on the other, it is said that inequalities, exclusion or stratification are not uncommon as a

result of certain economic path-dependencies. Some critics claim that, appearances to the contrary, LLL is not promoting democracy because wider access to HE does not always square with economic growth that is beneficial for wider strata of the thus educated workforce.

As Osborne (2003) has summarized criticisms found in the relevant literature: “Improving access is one thing, but ensuring progression both within and beyond higher education is another. It is clear that many more people in Europe now benefit from increased and wider participation. However, the gains may not be as widespread as the champions of access would wish, and equity in terms of entry to higher education is differentially spread across Europe within the panoply of institutions offering HE and within discipline areas. ‘Getting on’ and ‘getting beyond’ are another matter, and even if some aspects of access are ‘solved’, attention now must be turned to questions of retention and progression if the gains of access are to be consolidated.”

2.

LLL, together with adult education more generally, form one prominent area of changes in HE, the other being that of ‘knowledge society’. That LLL plays such a prominent role as a kind of new social force is evident in the fact that its widespread institutional presence in an increasing number of countries is considered a crucial and indispensable lever of social change or even a potent social remedy. It is therefore imperative to be clear about the concepts involved. In the case of adult education and LLL, there usually are two sets of concepts being employed, both having in common the ‘life-long’ element but each set differing from each other as to whether these new schemes of HE must be understood as ‘education’ or, alternatively, as ‘learning’ – whereby in the latter case the emphasis is on educating people to be able to learn in the sense of acquiring a method or operational skill of “learning-how-to-learn” as opposed to traditional education whose form can be summarized as the imparting of a given stock of previously discovered, developed and acquired knowledge-information. Here, we may say, there is a contrast between open forms or creative forms of learning and self-evolving methods on the one hand, as opposed to a closed form of conventional educating, on the other. Mainly the former puts the emphasis in the learner rather than on the teacher, the opposite being the standard form of the latter. This alternative new trend that defines LLL is sometimes put as “an emphasis on demand (pupils) rather than on supply (teacher)”. In addition, being a self-evolving method or ‘open form’, as I called it here, the institutional structure as well as method and general philosophical outlook of LLL can be expected to be self-evolving and open-ended in the sense that, compared to traditional HE, the concept itself is evolving. New LLL trends in HE, though here introduced by me in tandem with ‘adult education’ as forming one area of major change, must nevertheless not be confused with each other. LLL is to a certain extent a sub-case of adult education – though it does not have to be so from the point of view of the criterion of age – but the main point is that adult education schemes where in a crucial sense prior to fully-fledged LLL in its contemporary forms. The older schemes of adult education were standardly not part of conventional HE. LLL, by contrast, is by definition part of the changing landscape of HE, i.e. LLL, despite its other forms, is assuming its own institutional site, that is, its own type of universities. This is a significant social and cultural change. It is not simply a case where economic demands necessitate continuing training for the workforce or lower white-collar staff but, rather, it is a case where the very idea of university education and of the institution of the university itself being altered significantly so as to include the form of LLL. In fact, some critics of LLL point to this fact in order to castigate it, i.e. to the dangers it poses for university education, as they see it, or to the philosophical implications for HE.

In addition, it is claimed that LLL should be understood even more radically as involving a “process of conscious learning from childhood through to active retirement with emphasis on creativity responsiveness, initiative and the ability to handle and synthesise knowledge on the part of the individual” (OECD, 1996). According to (OECD, 1996:89), such characteristics could be summed up as follows: a) a strong emphasis on the intrinsic as opposed to the instrumental value of education and

learning; b) universal access to learning opportunities regardless of age, sex, or employment status; c) recognition of learning in diverse settings and not only in educational institutions; d) great diversity of methods of teaching and learning unlike conventional education; e) promotion in learners of personal characteristics useful and/or required for subsequent learning including motivation to engage in self managed independent learning; g) LLL «as a critique of, and an alternative to, conventional ‘front end’ educational philosophies».

Two levels are sometimes distinguished as jointly defining LLL: (a) wider access to HE (as we have said) implies the emergence of a new type of student and even of a new – hitherto neglected – types of life-long acquired knowledge (see e.g. work-based postgraduate study programmes offered by Long-Distance Institutions of HE); (b) a turning away from teaching towards learning, a turning away of strict disciplinary-based courses and discipline-defined education to wide-domain or interdisciplinary learning practice, from conventional academic knowledge to the acquisition of ‘personal and professional skills’, an abandoning of regimented curricula to self-made, customized or student-selected and student-designed degree programmes made of modular courses.

According to the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first century, LLL must encompass four pillars, which are the foundation of education, namely: learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together (UNESCO, 1996: 85-110).

Taken from a source that summarizes conceptual and theoretical variations on the theme of LLL, ingredients in its definitions that are usually put forward (and can be found in all the relevant literature) include the following: an emphasis on education as a lifelong process; systematically enhancing the individual’s ability of learning to learn; development of autonomous flexible thought; ability for synthetic and creative handling of knowledge and information; encompassing formal and informal educational influences, including experience, with the ultimate goal of promoting individual autonomy and self-fulfilment; encompassing all individuals and being demand rather than supply-led. Compared, thus, to conventional formal education, LLL is different both in content and character and it is usually along such lines that it is defined and discussed. In a European international research project undertaken some years back, the definition of LLL learning had to be broad in order to encompass different forms of educational provision and different forms of LLL existing in several different countries. As a result, the authors of one such national report, the one on Greece, Kokosalakis and Koniordos (2000), adopted the following definition «*Those novel forms of teaching and learning that equip students (learners individuals) to encounter with competence and confidence the full range of working, learning and life experiences*».

In that Report we read the following (attesting to some of what I have claimed on theoretical grounds so far): “The study of LLL at university level carries with it profound theoretical and methodological implications, which concern the nature and status of university education itself in contemporary society. Conventionally, university education *has not been for everybody*. In principle, and to a large extent in practice, university education has been elitist. Certainly only persons with specific qualifications and certain intellectual quality need apply for such education. Also university education in its traditional form has been strictly characterised by disciplines. In LLL, by contrast, educational philosophy and practice is radically different. LLL within the «learning» and «information» society *is potentially for everybody*. Indeed, the cohesion of «knowledge society» demands that as large sectors of the population as possible are educationally competent. So, the OECD Education Committee at Ministerial level met in Paris in January 1996 with the specific aim to discuss «broad strategies for making lifelong learning a reality for all» (OECD, 1996:13). But for the researcher, LLL in this sense presents special problems not just in defining it but also in finding it. As we have seen, the morphology and the application of the concept of LLL covers such a broad and variable spectrum of educational provision and practises that it is impossible to encompass them within a single conceptual and empirical framework. The logic and philosophy of LLL, thus, poses acute

problems for the universities and this was obvious to us at a methodological level as we had to decide which types of curricula to investigate. Conventional undergraduate studies, apart from the special disciplines that they impart, they also equip students with special critical competence. In that respect such studies endow students with an aptitude for LLL. ... [N]ew types of programmes ... fall under the umbrella of LLL beyond undergraduate courses. At the conceptual level our definition served also as a guide for the empirical directions of the research and includes the following parameters:

- ! universalism - wider categories of students
- ! lifetime learning
- ! focal point, the individual learner not the institutional provider
- ! shift in balance from learning substance to learning process.

Following our definition we adopted four operational criteria, which set the framework for the fieldwork, the type of courses to be investigated, as well as the literature and documents to be examined. These criteria are:

- ! new conceptions of curriculum content
- ! new modes of delivery
- ! new access policies
- ! new accreditation and quality assurance procedures

Not all criteria may apply to all forms of LLL”

3.

(a) We are witnessing today contemporary demands to train people or the workforce in a way that is conducive to social and economic changes. At the same time we hear, by contrast, contemporary castigations against LLL as being harnessed to the demands of the economically dominant interests of either state capitalism or transnational corporations. Similarly, what were at the time of the rise of modern experimental science criticized as responsible for the lack of scientific certainty (which the modern age was lamenting) were none other than the medieval universities, being seen as ‘the seats of learning’ where the wrong type of learning was taught, i.e. the non-empirically-driven, logico-deductive ‘disputatious’ sort rather than the experimental or realistic. We are witnessing something analogous nowadays. Modern universities, too, are now blamed for the same kind of supposed inadequacies and distorted vision by the advocates of utilitarian vocational training asking to replace the ‘University of Culture’ by the ‘University of Excellence’. The ability to implement an educational scheme that would not simply train people but would also provide them with moral formation was quickly seen to imply a corresponding social and institutional change that would be able to accommodate it. Otherwise it would obviously remain chimerical. This is not something that has escaped the attention of modern writers on LLL both pro and con.

For many philosophers of education, HE that would aim at enlightening people and forming them into good citizens and the like, must be under the control of the state, which means that the political state itself must evolve. This shows that any argument in favour of a specific content that education must have necessarily involves a reform cast wide enough to encompass political changes. In this sense, contemporary positive assessments of LLL are following the same pattern more or less demanding corresponding adjustments to government institutions including financial or welfare schemes that would empower individuals undergoing such education throughout life. Conversely, it shows the danger of letting political and economic developments dictate what is to count as ‘enlightening’ people or ‘forming civic virtue’ in accordance with interests which, far from letting individuality flourish or allowing people to enhance their talents or shape their way of life, stifle autonomy. Instead of Enlightenment’s simultaneous, coterminous, evolution (of state and individual), we witness a one-sided kind of development.

(b) The initial concern behind LLL arose out of the structural economic and social needs that demanded a workforce that could not be stuck with a singular job or skill. However, it has become increasingly apparent that the blue-collar workers are not the only targets of these changes and that, consequently, LLL is expected to be the required staple in the work life of even the upper echelons of the labour market (all this assuming of course that Rifkin's thesis about the end of work does not turn out to be true). Not to be ignored is the danger that as long as universities do not adapt themselves to the requirements for a lifelong training of people (to satisfy the demands of knowledge-based and service-based industries, let alone the blue-collar workers' constantly changing skills), traditional universities will be replaced by corporate universities or multinational firms' learning institutions explicitly geared to that purpose (the latter have already appeared). Notice here the criteria of rapidity of job- and skill-change as a result of constant technological as well as organizational innovations plus the criterion of globalized form that an increasing number of job-types take on. Obviously, the humanistic educational principles have gone by the board, for the objective now is global business sustainability while responsibility is firmly turned towards the shareholders despite the rhetoric in terms of stakeholders itself a controversial theory within academic business ethics.

Let me say a few things in advance of KS a propos the rapidity of knowledge change: LLL is aiming at curriculum changes that privilege the development and acquisition of skills, and what is more of new skills that are specifically transferable. Globalized conditions of labour plus the rapidly changing knowledge that becomes quickly obsolete is usually thought of as necessitating LLL that is constantly adjusting accordingly (though in section 4 below I shall raise the point of whether we can be so clear about the relative causal priority of changes between education and work). That is why emphasis is put on the motto "learn how to learn", i.e. no stock of substantive content of knowledge is important since it is rapidly changing but the formation of a skill to learn. But see further critique in section 4.

(c) LLL's educational objectives seem authoritarian in the sense that the goals and need for such continuous learning are set from without – that is, the source of value lies outside the subjects themselves: it may well be an ideal such as justice or something more prosaic like the sustainability of the global economy or some narrow economic interest, but always something that the recipients of such learning have not chosen nor even discussed themselves. The objectives are directed by those who are somehow 'enlightened' or knowledgeable.

It has been claimed as a criticism that LLL does not bother about virtuous character or moral reflection at all, of course. By contrast, as we saw the thinkers of the Enlightenment and its immediate aftermath were predominately preoccupied precisely with this. But they had a more complex manner in deciphering what the character formation must involve. They relied heavily on the theses on the importance of knowledge or imagination

Let us briefly look at the notion of '*diversity*' so prominent in recent discussions of LLL. We must first distinguish between two notions of 'diversity'. First, there is what can be called normative diversity referring to any social, moral, or cultural diversity exhibited in the modern world. This type of diversity as a social fact requires what can be called civic education. The latter would include, perhaps in pride of place, such curriculum subjects as cultural studies and the humanities, and it would further require to successfully integrate extra-school as well as extra-university education (this is close to what people like I. Illich envisaged as the 'learning society'). Second, there is another type of diversity which we may call structural and refers to the contemporary peculiarities surrounding the status of employment in a globalized economy. This requires, obviously, another type of education this time with emphasis placed on scientific learning and skills-acquisition — again, the universities must evolve accordingly some having already done so turning exclusively to this goal, others less so. Similarly, we can ask whether a civic education needed by the first type of normative diversity could possibly paralyse or thwart scientific education needed by the second type of diversity. One way of answering this is by insisting on the absence of any logical incompatibility between the demands of

multiculturalism and pluralism on the one hand, and the acceptance of a realism of truth, on the other. (Some thinkers end up by espousing a civic core of values and commitments but he is not saying how these may be successfully integrated (a) with the demands of vocational LLL, and (b) the relative absence of the state in LLL and the curriculum, and its simultaneous take over by multinationals.)

(d) But there are a second couple of questions we may ask. In liberal democratic societies of advanced globalized capital flow and industrialization: (a) could LLL turn out in the end to conflict with the liberal acceptance of normative diversity? And (b) is it possible to have civic education without violating the demands of privacy, freedom and the autonomy of individuals or diverse social, ethnic or cultural groups? In the former case (a), we may easily envisage the possibility that certain types of jobs may contradict cultural, religious, etc. principles. In the latter case (b), normative diversity poses a problem for a civic education that must remain in congruence with a liberal polity – in which case the university ought to be reflecting the diversity and multifariousness of the society.

(e) First we encounter continuing education as an ancient theme in some philosophies of education. Then the Church of Christendom was the first such embodiment of an institution of this sort enclosing in its centre the doctrines suitable for reflecting the whole in it, namely, the theological teaching and the practice of faith which, because they were designed to reproduce authentically the truths describing the encompassing world, were themselves such reflecting mechanisms. But the Church was not to remain such an undisputed locus of authoritative reflection of reality: it did not carry on being unchallenged either from within its contours (the teaching was disputed by Protestantism from within), nor from without (wherever the State, its antagonist, was ominously in ascendancy). Besides, in one way or another, either freely acting as the sole protagonist, or severely constrained by the other pole (i.e. the political), the Church had to carry out its role of an educator as *microcosmic* synthesizer in an *indirect* way, and only after it had managed to base its theoretical aspect, that is, the underpinning theological dogmas, on an already formulated *micro-macrocosmic* relationship.

It was not until the modern age that the two ingredients, hitherto separated, i.e. certain mainstream schools of philosophy of education on the one hand and Christianity, on the other, united, as it were, the first procuring the concept of a synthesizing drive to cause the human mind reflect the world, the second furnishing the institutional backcloth absent in the first. This successful fusion was realized in the formation of the modern University, the apex of such a long historical development. Freedom, as the autonomous and creative employment of rational thought, on the one hand and institutionalization, i.e. a *legitimized* specific organizational structure of schools and universities that grants them *sovereignty*, on the other, were fused with each other for the first time – or rather, that was the aim. Alone this particular historical juncture at which this fusion took place had brought into relief certain political–cum–philosophical issues, powerful agents of change, that could not be ignored: namely, the political idea of humanity having the right to emancipate itself together with the philosophical search for secure knowledge based on unassisted human reason— regardless of whether the results of the latter, i.e. modern science, could, strictly speaking, be either apodeictic or stochastic, but not both; this did not matter as far as the use of only rational means for the attainment of either was safeguarded. The combination of these two ‘grand narrative’ ideas (humanity emancipated plus knowledge by unassisted reason), I claim, in effect defined neo-humanist *Bildung*. They got supplanted, however, in postmodern conditions by the narrative of ‘*performativity*’ in the era of ‘*delegitimation*’. We can say that once the two initial modernist narratives cease (i.e. when knowledge is no more ideally defined as an end in itself), then utilitarian LLL or adult education begins, since the transmission of knowledge is no longer the exclusive responsibility of a legitimized particular site, namely the specifically organized sovereign university. One remark is whether there is really no fundamental (i.e. substantive) impact of this change towards performativity and delegitimation on the content of education and knowledge, something that post-modernist ‘relativistic’ analysis leaves unanswered. A substantive principle may be formulated as a corrective against the dominance of a discourse exclusively carried out in terms of the principle of ‘performativity’ in learning. The latter’s

managerialist and vocational pedigree can be further seen as affecting the shift from the ‘university of *culture*’ to the ‘university of *excellence*’ as a necessary result of globalized economies.

Moreover, both of the two powerful historical processes or ‘narratives’, the political and the epistemological, could not but appear as ultimately *moral* concerns. This elemental similarity of the two processes should certainly have appeared quite surprisingly implausible from a Platonic or Christian standpoint. Yet, it was precisely the superseding of such a logical surprise that marks the modern attitude. The modern university of humanism is not conceived in practical or utilitarian terms: thus, the university itself becomes the centre of legitimation because it produces — via one of its poles, i.e. pure research — ‘thought’, and thereby ‘thinks’ the world *not* one single aspect of it as in those EKCs envisaged in contemporary EU policy circles. LLL, by contrast, has no privileged site in which it needs to be located: it is meant to be flexible and thus dispersed spatially and temporally, ‘all over the place’, i.e. through all kinds of institutions (even ‘learning institutions’ installed by multinational business conglomerates). Analyses of LLL-tasks in late modernity’s ‘risk societies’ issue a reminder of a growing diminution of public (i.e. state responsibility) for the provision of ‘start qualifications’ to enter the labour market and a simultaneous growth of companies’ assuming this responsibility for themselves (cf. ‘learning organizations’). But the important point is that despite the generalised distribution of threats in risk societies, individuals have been adopting differentiated, personal, strategies to cope with learning requirements. According to this so-called ‘*biographicity*’ approach, individuals are now employing, autonomously, new individualized methods of learning (even autodidactic) and these extra-institutional strategies must not be overlooked (people can cope without the help of adult education). Apart from the fact that such an approach cites only very few findings as evidence, one may additionally ask as to what kind of educational designs it might allow. The learner is also the teacher.

One last point in this respect that links up with criticisms about the democratic deficit of LLL as mentioned in section 2 above is this. While critics point to LLL as non-democratic whereby wider inclusiveness does not necessarily imply economic benefits democratically spread out, LLL is also criticized as being undemocratic in forging people’s lives in ways that are clearly ideologically inspired and external to those educated themselves who are thus fall victims to instrumental handling for economic reasons – a point I have made above via another route. This is another way for saying that the double claim of wider inclusiveness to HE *and* personal economic growth may not be achievable in LLL as is widely believed.

4.

‘Knowledge Society’ (KS) has been directly linked to LLL. Conceptual muddle is also present here as is the case with defining protean concepts involved in LLL itself. This is not unnatural given that both KS and LLL are themselves by definition constantly evolving.

I would say that what we are witnessing in KS is a kind of ‘*Copernican Revolution*’ in education: instead of human beings or society producing and using knowledge as a ‘tool’, *now knowledge acts on and produces society and particular social structures*.

It is usually said that KS is the result of post-industrial or post-modern economic and technological changes that transformed the status of knowledge from an implicit tool-bearing intellectual enterprise to an explicit arbiter of social change. Knowledge produces society. Knowledge becomes publicly available but also it also acquires an independent political status, becoming an autonomous social power being thus separated from the erstwhile classic bearer and originator of knowledge: i.e. the human actor. The latter – according to some thinkers of KS – is absent as an analytical tool. If knowledge is *productive* of systems on which the transformation of society and work will be based, it is thus, it is said, also *intervening*. Paraphrasing Ian Hacking’s book-title, we here have a movement from “producing to social-intervening”. Others, on the other hand, claim that KS involves

breaking of traditional boundaries while yet others point to the new fact of knowledge being produced in order to be directly applied to further knowledge. I see these two claims as antithetical: while the former emphasizes a view of knowledge as time-bound and flexible or totally pragmatic, the latter sees KS as a kind of loophole or feedback system, as I would call it, whereby the aim of knowledge is the production of further knowledge in information-driven societies. That is, there is a distinction between knowledge being seen as unregulated vs. regulated production and transmission of it. Obviously in either case the link with LLL and new forms of HE remains intact. In particular, the basic tenets of LLL we have seen above are reinforced by this new type of knowledge promoted and sustained by KS: i.e. knowledge is *active*, as opposed to simply teaching in the conventional manner and hence new modes of HE are needed like the ones found in LLL where the distinction between theory and practice is dropped. In this sense education is not simply the tool of KS but one important ingredient of it.

The connection between LLL and KS is further evident in the following. The often cited 1996 OECD Report speaks of a 'generic paradigmatic shift from education to learning' (as we have seen). KS is thought to be a society in which this is central. One critical point I would make here is this: if we follow the view of knowledge as flexible and constantly changing in a self-avowedly pragmatic way, as one of the views we encountered above, i.e. knowledge as time-bound, then this would accommodate a KS in harmony with LLL's educational dictum just mentioned. That is, there will be no conflict between this conception of demand-side learning in which the student 'dictates' and the teacher offers with a conception of knowledge in a KS being necessarily evolving in accordance with the demands of the moment – to put it crudely. If, however, we follow the contrary view of knowledge in a KS as being strictly regulated in order to be applicable to further production of technoscientific knowledge, as serving that is well-regulated knowledge-based demands internal to the systemic nature of knowledge, then we cannot expect a 'woolly' type of an extremely flexible learning pattern found in LLL where the student is the original source or 'client'. This conflict or duality is also present if we see knowledge from the standpoint of an activity – as we mentioned above – that is something hailed as revolutionary in the case of the new KS: here, too, the needs of those who approach LLL can be re-channeled by dominant ideological forces within LLL (in the sense mentioned in previous sections in this paper where the democratic element of LLL was at stake). That is, if we wish to re-forge knowledge as activity and at the same time wish this to be our educational philosophy, the LLL system congruent with this cannot be other than those work-based models where, however what is regarded as knowledge is not exactly left to the whims of the learner or his needs – though it certainly appears as so – but to the ideological overseer that KS itself turns to. From a different point of view the democratic element at stake here can be approached by underlying the distinction between old-fashioned traditional educational systems where the amount of knowledge imparted and acquired and its successful absorption and ability to apply it is judged by a superior, i.e. the teacher, whereas in the case of the alternative new forms of LLL where the demands and needs of the learner influence the whole learning-process the power-structure is inverted. For some commentators, the former presents an unequal power-relation whereas the latter opens up ways of gradually transmitting power differentia towards the erstwhile receiving-end, i.e. the learner, and even, I would say, allows the emergence of a reinforcing relationship where the feedback metaphor I have used is pertinent here again: a to-and-fro of power in terms of knowledge-increments as I would put it, bits of information being dialectically changing when passed from pupil to teacher and back again for re-evaluation and re-forming. At each stage in this exchange the bits of knowledge-information are being 'aufgehoben' and re-formed leading constantly to a higher stage, there awaiting another round of re-forging.

The way in which KS may conflict with LLL as I have said can be further seen when the independent client-led educational system of LLL, whereby this independence involves outright forms of non-traditional cutting-away the transmission of knowledge or the learning process within HE institutions that are completely unrelated to specificities of time, place and traditional ways of checking whether knowledge has been achieved. That is, if we follow this model, then obviously we need to drop

the conception of knowledge as regimented and as produced in accordance with the technical criterion of its continuous applicability. Here, though, lurks the twin danger of thus letting learners enjoy a nominal power of being the arbiters of what they wish to learn while at the same time this independence from the formal educational structures of yore leads to a state of economic conditioning. The latter means that powerful economic agents, i.e. the employers' side, will be in a position to dictate its terms if all older forms of formal educational preconditions are abandoned (e.g. the need for humanities courses) – witness LLL colleges run by multinationals as I have mentioned. Widening access policies that we have encountered here do not leave out the employers or other unequally more powerful agents; on the contrary widening inclusion to HE may be the direct result of demands to that effect by employers or the EU, for instance, in which case the so-called demand-led LLL is not clearly led by the demand, as is usually made out to be, this demand itself being not what it is thought to be: I.e. it is not always clear whether this demand originates from the learners themselves and not from outside them, from economic exigencies. This of course has to do with the general social-philosophical question of freedom: is a labour force really free when its turning to LLL or continuing education or further vocational or professional training and even its biographicity-led learning and its self-made modular courses are all dictated by the necessity of finding employment? Clearly, one crucial distinction I would make here is between types of learners coming from different strata or different hierarchies of jobs: the model of dialectical transmission of knowledge I pictured above or the self-made flexible study courses constantly evolving to meet the needs of the learner herself or the bringing together of disciplines in order to help the ever changing professional requirements of the learner are obviously not the case for lower- or semi-skilled work forces, but quite applicable to higher echelons of job types, the latter being in a position to initiate these changes in what is to go into a given curriculum. Another point this brings forth, that I want to underline, is that talking about such educational 'changes' and 'alterations' in new disciplinary connections demanded by a certain job type (e.g. financial director in a bank) obscures the question of what comes first: are these educational changes phenomena attendant to prior changes in the type of work that western societies experience or are the two chains of changes (in systems of work and in those of education) parallel, or even interwoven reinforcing each other? (I have made the same point in section 3 – end of subsection (b) – above when I mentioned the criteria of rapidity and globalizing).

A critical point promised there in 3 (b) must now be made: the rapidly changing conditions of knowledge making thus obsolete all types of erstwhile content-led education, and the replacement by the imperative of an acquisition of a skill-to-learn implies that we move from a content-full or 'ontology-containing' education to a form-based or formal or epistemological model of learning. I learn the form of how to learn. I am ready to forget past knowledge. I am ready to accept that current knowledge is possibly false and certainly falsifiable. This, it appears must be the task of future trends in HE. This is what people must be taught and it appears to be highly democratic: a critical rationalism the vehicle of which is LLL. But learning-how-to-learn as a result of content-full knowledge being made rapidly obsolete implies that the cause of this constantly out of date knowledge must be somewhere. Either it is a matter of mere technological obsolescence which is understandable where the traditional conception of tools is involved. But it may well be something more serious: a thoroughly epistemological reason for knowledge being made *essentially* (and not simply operationally or instrumentally) false at various times. This is something not unknown to modern philosophy. But I wish to claim that in the latter stronger case the model of knowledge shifts from technical to technoscientific: it is technoscience, not just science, not even applied science, which is by definition false at time and thus changing. The explanation of obsolescence rests on a philosophical thesis about technoscience with an attendant realist vs. anti-realist debate like the ones familiar from debates in the philosophy of science. The distinction between a weak and a strong case of explaining why the constant change in knowledge is inevitable is important for LLL and KS. It is crucial, I believe, to be clear about what we are talking about. The deep reason of the stronger argument may not be related to

the prospects of LLL, at least as a constant vocational refreshing of skills. It may be that LLL as we know it is only related to the weaker case and only caters for that.

If so, that means that traditional HE has nothing to fear. It is still with us.

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