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Discussion

Contradicting the Market

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In 'Education and the Market Model', John McMurtry shows quite clearly why education and the market are incompatible activities. The strength of his arguments should alert universities and schools to the dangers of their being assimilated into the marketplace. Multinational corporations, as well as different levels of government, are constantly demanding that Canadian universities and schools make their "products" more skilled and efficient so as to become "more competitive in the world market."[1] Too rarely do faculty, senior administrators, teachers, or school boards assess these corporate demands critically. When, indeed, was the last time that they said 'No!' to any of them? Yet they entail both the disbanding education and its transformation into a corporate training camp.

Beginning with a conception of education that is derived from its Latin root *educare*, meaning 'to cause to grow', McMurtry establishes that the goals, motivation, methods, and standards of excellence peculiar to education distinguish it from any of the market's activities. Indeed, he argues that these characteristics are opposed to those of the market and, in this sense, contradictory to them. He underlines these arguments with a chart accompanying his article in which the salient contradictory features of education and the market are contrasted with each other. Whereas the central goal of education is to advance and disseminate knowledge that is shared among one's fellow inquirers, the overriding goal of corporate activity in the marketplace is to maximise profits in the form of money. Similarly, while the determining motivation of education is to develop those forms of understanding that are afforded by the subject matter of education, the dominant motivation of the market is to satisfy the wants of anyone who has the money to purchase the goods they desire. Furthermore, the method of education is not to buy or sell the good that it offers but to demand of all who would have it that they fulfil the demands of gaining that good for themselves. In contrast, the method of the market is to buy or sell the goods that it has to offer to anyone for whatever price that they can get. Finally, the measures of excellence in education are twofold: (1) how disinterested and impartial are its forms of understanding; and (2) how deep and broad are the problems that education poses to those who have it. However, the standards of excellence in the market are: (1) how well a line of products is made to sell; and (2) how problem- free the products are, and remain, for the buyer.

These clearly articulated logical inconsistencies between education and the market constitute sound reasons for questioning corporate and government proposals for, among other things, university-based research projects that have goals targeted by industry, co-operative education programs, and university-industry research parks. Since the logic of education and the logic of the market conflict with each other, it is irrational to try to bring them together in a process of assimilation. Yet, this kind of irrationality continues to thrive because the social and economic interests that are served by it are very strong.[2]

As a discipline concerned with understanding different kinds of discourse and their underlying logics, philosophy is particularly well placed to com-

prehend the contradictions to which McMurtry draws attention and move ahead with them towards a deeper synthesis. The clear, thoughtful analysis contained in his article would then act as a spur to a process of ongoing, critical inquiry. Yet, certain philosophers refuse to acknowledge any validity to the analysis. In response to a shorter version of the article, published in a recent edition of the *CAUT Bulletin*, I.C. Jarvie and Joseph Agassi, two philosophers at York University, claim that McMurtry's table "contains not one single contradiction" and that his belief "that all educators should force challenges on their charges ... is excessive."[3] These distinguished philosophers thereby overlook the contradiction, for example, between the sharing of knowledge in a process of open inquiry and accumulating money for the purpose of private profit maximisation. Yet, this is a contradiction that, if presented to their first year students in informal logic, would probably be uncovered very quickly. Similarly, their objection to McMurtry's emphasis upon the need for educators to challenge students to question accepted views flies in the face of the distinguished history that it has known in the Western philosophical tradition.[4] This critical approach is also acknowledged in Canadian universities, including the University of Guelph, whose *Learning Objectives* state unequivocally:

> At the lowest level students are shown the possibilities of independent thinking, by an instructor who, in the classroom and elsewhere, challenges orthodoxies and criticises received opinions.[5]

In other words, questioning received opinions in an independent and critical manner is considered the basis of education at the University of Guelph. Why then, is it rejected by Jarvie and Agassi?

The most probable explanation is that they accept the market model of education at a fundamental level and are hostile to those who criticise it. As a result, they are willing to commit logical, philosophical, and pedagogical errors in defence of their preferred system. In doing so, they show themselves willing to abandon the notion that education should be an autonomous activity capable of enlightening people in distinctive and valuable ways. Rather, they would see it assimilated to the market whose logic is totally opposed to the practice of education. When eminent philosophers are willing to go to such lengths to abandon rationality, it is probable that the message of McMurtry's article has illuminated a deeply hidden truth that these men would rather not countenance: namely, that the market model is indeed anti-educational.

Notes

[1]A phrase that emanates from the Prime Minister's Office. See Charlotte Gray, "High-Tech Blues," *CAUT Bulletin*, (November)1990, 4-6.

[2]Howard R. Woodhouse, "Legitimation or Transformation: The Role of the State in University Education," in Cicely Watson (ed.), *Readings in Canadian Higher Education* (Toronto, OISE Press, 1988), 1-29.

[3]I.C. Jarvie and Joseph Agassi, "Education: Economic Enterprise or Intellectual Challenge?" *CAUT Bulletin*, (December) 1990, 28.

[4]John McMurtry, "The History of Inquiry and Social Reproduction: Educating for Critical Thought," *Interchange*, 19 (1), 1988, 31-45.

[5]*University of Guelph Learning Objectives (December 1986)*, in Chris Nash (ed.), *Collaborative Curriculum Planning at Universities: The Proceedings of an Invitational Conference* (Guelph, University of Guelph, 1989), 10.