



**The Marketplace, Academia and Education:
A Philosophical Assessment of the Bologna
Process**

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Abstract

Since education, among its various aims, is expected to prepare learners for the marketplace, it must pay attention to what is occurring in society. A major development today is the phenomenon of globalisation and the development of the knowledge-society. There is also a greater awareness of the importance of competitiveness in education. As a consequence of these developments, there has been a shift in emphasis in university education in Europe effected by the Bologna Process. The impact of this climate of change regarding the need to prepare learners for a demanding and competitive knowledge-society has already been felt and continues to be experienced. There has been an urgent demand on educational institutions to be alert and responsive to this change in the workplace. As is to be expected, there have been implications in terms of academic programmes, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods, and so on. This essay first discusses the emphasis put by the Bologna Process on learning outcomes and on knowledge, competence and skills and then offers a critique which draws on A.N. Whitehead's views on education. While acknowledging the urgent need to prepare learners for the marketplace, it argues nevertheless that this aim has to be contextualised: education is about enabling the human being, not just the worker, to develop and flourish. The essay then outlines some of the implications of this view on education.

Keywords: Education, Bologna Process, marketplace, human flourishing

Developments in Society and Education

Developments in society present a constant challenge to the educative process. Those of us who have been tasked with educating future citizens know only too well the age-old adage that education is about preparing them for the future, but it is not as straightforward as it appears to be. It can be helpful, of course, to make the distinction between their immediate future and their long-term development. Consequently, one can focus closely on the job-market, further training (postgraduate education), the more long-term process of facilitating the learners' entry into society or even on their personal development. The responsibility of preparing for the future through education can also benefit by taking into account not only different age groups (hence, there are different levels) but also natural abilities (hence, the distinction between technological and academic institutions).

But in addition to all of these—and there are others—educating for the future must also be cognizant of the kind of society in which the learners are expected to live and to play a role. It is vital therefore that educators become aware of any developments in society. Preparation for the future thus entails that the educative process also address the needs which arise from these developments.

One such development in contemporary society has occurred in the marketplace. Since education, among its manifold aims, is expected to prepare learners for the marketplace, an important consideration for educators is how to meet the changing demands which have occurred and may occur. While the marketplace has featured at all times in any consideration by education of preparing for the future, today the phenomenon of globalisation presents a particular challenge. Furthermore, it has been linked to what has become known as the knowledge-society and to the importance of competitiveness in education.

In this respect, as a consequence of these developments, there has been a shift in emphasis in university education in Europe effected by what is referred to as the Bologna Process¹. Indeed we have already been feeling the impact of this climate of

¹ The Bologna Process intended to create the European Higher Education Area in 2010. Launched on 19th June 1999, with the signing of the Bologna Declaration by 29 Education Ministers of Education, and preceded by the Sorbonne Declaration of 1998, it aimed, among others, to make academic degree standards and quality assurance procedures more comparable and compatible throughout Europe. The Bologna Process has increased from the original 29 countries to 47 countries in 2010. Since 1999 subsequent meetings took place in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), and Leuven /Louvain-la Neuve (2009). The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was launched along with the Bologna Process' decade anniversary, in March 2010 during the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference. In April 2012, a Ministerial Conference and Third Bologna Forum took place in Bucharest. The EHEA's strategy for the next decade is consolidation. Its official website is: <http://www.ehea.info/>.

change² and the need to prepare learners for a demanding and competitive knowledge-society³. There has been an urgent demand on educational institutions to be alert and responsive to this change in the workplace⁴. As is to be expected, there are implications in terms of our programmes, learning outcomes, teaching/learning, assessment methods and so on.

The Marketplace

This attention by the Bologna Process to the demands of the marketplace is hardly surprising, given the nature of education as mentioned earlier. To some extent, all these changes are inevitable and even necessary, and one wonders whether academics and institutions should simply accept the situation and adapt accordingly whether enthusiastically or grudgingly. For some, however, the crucial question here is whether the marketplace or the labour arena should serve not only as the context but also the criterion for our educational task. There has been much criticism of the so-called “business model” being imposed on the academic community⁵.

Before probing into that criticism, however, we may need to examine, first of all, whether the basis for the call to academic institutions to focus more sharply on the marketplace or the labour arena as they review their role and place in contemporary society is really contrary to what university education is about. After all, universities and institutes of learning—whether funded publicly or privately—originate, develop and flourish within society. Consequently, they do have a social role and responsibility⁶. That

² This is definitely the case in Ireland. See HEA document, “Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape” 13th February 2012. Also, A. Hyland for HEA and NCCA (2011), Entry to Higher Education in Ireland in the 21st Century, www.heai.ie.

³ The Bologna Process (Berlin 2003) communiqué states: “Ministers take into due consideration the conclusions of the European Councils in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002) aimed at making Europe ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’...”. The Sorbonne Joint Declaration (1998) maintains that “Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and economy” and asserts the desire that “it must be a Europe of knowledge as well”. This is reiterated in the Bologna Declaration (1999): “A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space.” This emphasis on a knowledge-based society is reaffirmed in subsequent communiqués.

⁴ The important role of universities is duly acknowledged from the very beginning in the various documents of the Bologna Process. The European University Association (EUA) as well as the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) have been actively involved. Cf. <http://www.eua.be>

⁵ This is a reference to a perception by some academics rather than to a deliberate policy of the Bologna Process.

⁶ The “Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education: Realising the European Higher Education Area” (Berlin 2003) reaffirms the notion that “higher education is a public good and public responsibility.” The Bergen 2005 Communiqué stresses the “social dimension” of

society to which they belong and are accountable, whether we like it or not, includes the marketplace and the labour arena. In fact, it may even be argued that it is predominantly of that nature since finance and business are what regulate our daily lives. It would be unimaginable to survive without them. The marketplace and the labour arena are indeed the context in which we play out our roles in academia.

But does that mean that the so-called “business model” of such a context should also regulate and evaluate our schedules, our performance and our outcomes? To this question, let me offer a typical philosophical answer: yes and no. Yes, because to some extent that context directs us to our co-players, as it were; namely, the business world. Academia needs to be able not only to live with but also to dialogue with these co-players in language to which they are attuned. To resort to Wittgensteinian-speak, the specific language games we academics play should be matched by family resemblances that we ought to discover. And it seems to me that much of what is happening as a result of the Bologna Process and the changes we are expected to implement are facilitating that situation. As Americans (and others) are fond of saying, we “need to walk the walk, not just talk the talk!”⁷ The second part of my answer to the question as to whether the business model should also regulate and evaluate us was “no”. Simply put, academia is not the business world. It has a distinctive status in society and a specific contribution to it. Earlier I had referred to academia’s responsibility to society. The value of that word “responsibility”, aside from its common meaning as accountability, is that it also reminds us that it is a “response”, not merely an “implementation”. Academia, in its endeavours to fulfil its role within society, may need to challenge and critique the marketplace, the labour arena and the business world⁸. While academia needs to address common concerns, it can offer another valuable perspective framed by its traditions, widened by its studies, and grounded in its values. I will return to this claim a little later. It is worth noting at this stage, however, that the distinction between training and Bildung is particularly appropriate to this philosophical assessment of the Bologna Process.⁹

education: “The social dimension includes measures taken by governments to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access.”

⁷ The London Communiqué “Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in the global world,” words it differently: “As we look ahead, we recognise that, in a changing world, there will be a continuing need to adapt our higher education systems, to ensure that the EHEA remains competitive and can respond effectively to the challenges of globalisation.”

⁸ An interesting article which describes the situation regarding how all these have affected private education in Britain is “Is it worth it?” *The Economist* March 1st -7 th 2008, 36-37. See also how these changes are affecting French higher education, “Under threat of change,” *The Economist* June 7th -13th, 2008, 35-36.

⁹ This distinction is associated with Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose views on education are particularly relevant in the context of this essay. Cf. “Wilhelm von Humboldt”, *Prospects: the Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*, XXIII, 3/4 (1993), 613-623.

Standardisation and Distinctiveness

The Bologna Process is seeking to bring about a certain amount of standardisation among universities in Europe¹⁰. The different levels of our academic programmes—in Ireland, we refer to the NQAI (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland)—ensure a practical uniformity, and the diploma supplement issued by the host university is recognisable by the other universities¹¹. Consequently, there can be a certain amount of mobility, enabling our learners and teachers to echo Erasmus' description of himself: *Sum civis mundi* (or at least, *Europae*)¹². But is this truly a welcome development in universities in Europe? Do standardisation, uniformity and mobility as envisioned by the Bologna Process really promote the interests of universities today? Let me make a few observations.

The reality of globalisation reminds us of the need to take account of this important challenge to university education. This was highlighted in an interesting and informative article which appeared in *Newsweek* (August 27, 2007) on what it called “the common university system in Europe” and what it referred to as “the urgency of being competitive in the global scene”. This is indeed the situation, and we would do well to heed the challenge. In addition, we could examine the word “university” (rather than its usage to describe an institution comprising a number of schools, colleges or faculties): *universitas*. A university should indeed be such that it extends further than its own campus and prepares its learners to assume a rightful place not just in the local community but much further afield. And this can be achieved by co-operation and collaboration among universities, nationally and internationally. In some cases it might even be integration. All these would indicate a positive reply to the questions that I have just raised.

But there is a legitimate concern here. If the Bologna Process were to be implemented fully, what happens to the distinctiveness and autonomy of the universities? “Academia” is a generic term, and like all generic terms, it does not communicate the vibrancy or the richness of its individual constituents. Here is probably where John Henry Newman's “sense of place” as set out in his *Idea of a University* is especially appropriate when he not only describes the university as “a community of learning” but also specifies its details. For him, and for many, today and in the past, the university is a place apart. In

¹⁰ The statement on the EHEA website, created following the Bologna Process, refers to “comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe”.

¹¹ The Berlin Communiqué set as an objective that every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically. This is intended to foster employability and to facilitate academic recognition for further studies.

¹² In the Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education “Towards the European Higher Education Area” (2001), there is specific reference to this point: “The choice of Prague to hold this meeting is a symbol of their will to involve the whole of Europe in the process in the light of the enlargement of the European Union.”

the context of the Bologna process and standardisation, one is inclined to ask: what sets a university in Ireland apart from one in Italy, or in Ireland, in Hungary, or anywhere else in Europe?¹³

For a possible answer I should like to suggest a concept that has been used in different contexts: ethos. Ethos, as I should like to use it here, is the specific context in which an individual or an institution, finds itself in and develops itself. The ethos, in the form of values, traditions, beliefs and so on, nurtures individuals or members. It is the distinguishing feature that marks off an institution. That ethos—whether religious, interdenominational, or secular—is articulated by the institution's vision, the overarching understanding of itself and what it stands for. It is that vision that articulates and drives its mission, the specific objectives that it has set for itself. Thus, while aligning itself with similar institutions, in itself a worthwhile goal, a specific university can nonetheless, through its chosen ethos, be distinctive and to some extent autonomous. Here we can learn from the academic institutions in the USA. And, among others, it is this awareness of the distinctiveness of one's university or college, spurred on by one's loyalty, that makes the alumni in the USA create space for their alma mater in their hearts—and pockets! And aligning themselves with an institution's vision and mission, many benefactors translate that support to monetary realities.

It seems to me then that Newman's "sense of place" as portrayed in his model of the university as a community of learning would be better translated into, and understood as, a "sense of identity". As with other models or paradigms, one could ask whether it is the model or the paradigm itself that can serve a valuable purpose. Thus, the suggestion of a need to adapt to the changed and changing demands of contemporary society leads me to examine the underpinning of the model proposed by Newman, rather than just the model by itself, for that may well be what could still be valid and valuable in presentday society.

Knowledge, Competence and Skills

Since we are being asked in university education in Europe to specifically state the knowledge, competence and skills that we expect from all our programmes—the so-called "learning outcomes" that somehow have become the objectives of education today—we need to look more closely at how all that relates to what we are doing in education, particularly in our present context. When the end products seem to have become more important than the process itself, then there is a need to take stock. When the success of educational endeavours is measured in terms of empirical evidence, the so-called "hard outputs", that the learning outcomes have been achieved—all of which justify the academic award—one begins to wonder to what extent we are committed to simply ensuring that we reach our targets. All along one would be forgiven for wondering whether education has become too oriented towards producing the right

¹³ The later Communiqués affirm autonomy, but of the different national systems.

products—as indeed some, whether in the printed media or in academic circles, have already been alerting us to.

Those of us who have looked at education as the process that begins in wonder but ends in wisdom—no doubt, influenced by ancient Greek philosophy’s conception of itself—can become disoriented and even aggrieved at this changed focus of education. And if you add to that view the claim that education itself, *educere*, is about “the leading out” of the learner from darkness to the light, then one begins to have misgivings about the emphasis on the actual results rather than on the attempts or the efforts of both the educator and the educand. And one will suspect that the destination has become more important than the journey, robbing all of the excitement, the ups and downs as one moves towards the light.

Nonetheless, as I have already indicated previously, there are good reasons for this shift not only because it is called for and even required by the authorities to whom, among others, our educational task is accountable but also because it is crucial that students are prepared by their academic institutions with appropriate knowledge, skills, and competence to enable them to meet the present demands of society. The task of educating our students today takes place in a society that is fast changing, complex, and diverse, features which present significant challenges to educators. Every society and every generation, of course, have their own set of characteristics and problems that require different responses from educators throughout history. But it seems to me that today’s society, with the values that it upholds, has a particular challenge to those of us who are involved in educating today’s students.

I have defended as the context of our academic work the marketplace (or if you prefer, the agora, just as it was in ancient Greece). The reasonable demand that we take account of the labour market or that we consult our stakeholders whenever we propose or review our academic programmes rightly forces us to remain relevant and competitive—a justified concern of the Bologna Process.¹⁴ It is very much worth our while to keep the end-result in sight. The same can be said of the view that life-long learning, also affirmed by the Bologna Process and which is what education is really about, should be marked by recognisable stages. Each stage is a definite goal, and a goal is worth pursuing when there are tangible features. In insisting that we clearly identify the learning outcomes for each of these stages, we are recognising and acknowledging the achievements at each stage of the learning process. Knowledge, competence and skills are important to enable our students to take their rightful place in society. And it is our responsibility as educators to facilitate that process.

On the other hand, education is much more than that. And with all the call for a “knowledge-based society” we are in danger of forgetting that point. I believe—and this is a conviction that comes from more than 30 years of being involved in education in

¹⁴ Bucharest Communiqué (2012) recognises as an important concern, among others, “investing in higher education for the future” as an important solution to the present economic situation.

Ireland, Britain, the USA, and in shorter stints in various other countries—that this wider vision of education is just as true for students in the sciences, business, engineering, and other professional schools as it is in the humanities.¹⁵ This is because I firmly believe that education, in whatever form or context, should ultimately be grounded in the development of the human person.¹⁶ It is a belief that has been nurtured, tested and developed by my philosophical pursuits and contextualised, facilitated and deepened by my involvement with the various academic institutions throughout the world.¹⁷ Alfred North Whitehead talks of the need for “the liberal spirit” in technical education and science.¹⁸ This observation is rooted in the claim that human nature, rather than simply culture, is the basis of education. It is interesting to note that the Bologna Seminar on Qualifications Structures in Higher Education in Europe (March 2003) had placed personal development as the first purpose of higher education and training (the second as “preparation for life as citizens in a democratic society”, the third as “development and maintenance of an advanced knowledge base” and the fourth as “preparation for the labour market”).¹⁹

Education and the Pursuit of Wisdom

Education for me—and I would hazard the assumption that many would agree with this understanding—is first and foremost the pursuit of wisdom.²⁰ It is a view that requires some qualification as well as clarification. I have already remarked on the present tendency, one that is particularly evident in our market-driven and technological society,

¹⁵ Von Humboldt puts it this way: “...this whole education system therefore rests on one and the same foundation. The commonest jobbing worker and the finest graduate must at the outset be given the same mental training, unless human dignity is to be disregarded in the former and the latter allowed to fall victim to unworthy sentimentality and chimera.” “Guiding Ideas on a Plan for the Establishment of the Lithuanian Municipal School System,” (Gesammelte Schriften: Ausgabe Der Preussischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften (Berlin, 1906-1936), XIII, 278.

¹⁶ I have illustrated and developed this point in an article “Teaching Ethics in a Core Curriculum: Some Observations,” *Teaching Ethics*, II, 1 (Fall 2001), 69-76. Reprinted in my *Ethical Contexts and Theoretical Issues: Essays in Ethical Thinking* (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). In that article I argue that in our exploration of ethical cases, we need to develop our moral sense as human beings and not just as engineers or scientists.

¹⁷ Personal experience, rather than an a priori claim, backs this point.

¹⁸ cf. *Aims of Education and Other Essays* (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1967), 43-59.

¹⁹ The Bologna Seminar sets the scene for the evaluation of the programmes at university/college level throughout Europe. Compare these priorities with those in *The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué* (April 2009) titled “The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade” which takes stock of the achievements of the Bologna Process and establishes the priorities for the EHEA for the next decade.

²⁰ This concern for the pursuit of wisdom within the context of academia has led to our writing of a novel on this theme, cf. M.S. Sia, *The Fountain Arethuse: a Novel Set in the University Town of Leuven* (U.K: The Book Guild, 1997). It is about the search of various fictitious academics and others for the source of wisdom.

to associate college or university education with the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills. Let me repeat that this is not only understandable but also crucial if the education an institution provides is to be found appropriate and relevant. Nonetheless, something is amiss if the entire focus of the educational task becomes narrowly directed at this consideration, important though it may be. The pursuit of wisdom as the educational task, understood as the active participation in our full development as human persons, highlights certain essential features that do not always stand out with the other conceptions mentioned earlier. It is also something that needs to be repeatedly emphasised today, while taking into account contemporary needs, as we reflect on “what it is that we are doing when we are educating our students”.

Because the term “wisdom” itself is understood in different ways, I should like to explain how I understand it in this context. Wisdom, as will have been noted from my earlier comments, is not just the acquisition of knowledge or the development of skills and talents although these are an integral part of the pursuit of wisdom itself. Nor is it, as is sometimes narrowly interpreted, the development of one’s individuality, particularly when one associates it with the description of “a learned individual”. These interpretations fail to take into serious account the fullness of our humanity—which is the basis of education. Wisdom ultimately is rooted in our nature as human beings and the various dimensions of our humanity: intellectual, emotional, ethical, spiritual, aesthetic, social, creative and others. The pursuit of wisdom is the attempt to recognise, integrate and develop all those dimensions; or as Wilhelm von Humboldt puts it, “the complete training of the human personality”.²¹ It is also an awareness that our identity as human persons is shaped by and nourished by the community to which we belong. In turn, our own activities, decisions, and commitments have an effect on the community.²² Plato, Confucius, and Buber, among others, drew our attention to this understanding of wisdom when they wrote about the importance of the development of one’s moral character in connection with the search for wisdom. Education towards wisdom is thus a holistic process because the goal and its foundation are themselves holistic.

If indeed the educational task consists in the pursuit of wisdom as described above, I regard the role of an educator as one who enhances, that is to say, evokes, provokes,

²¹ GS, XIII, 266. He also states in “Theory of Human Education” that “the ultimate task of our existence is to give the fullest possible content to the concept of humanity in our own person...through the impact of actions in our lives”, a task that “can only be implemented through the links established between ourselves as individuals and the world around us.” I, 283.

²² Wilhelm von Humboldt argues that “self-education can only be continued...in the wider context of the development of the world.” GS, VII, 33. He also wrote that “the education of the individual requires his incorporation into society and involves his links with society at large.” Also, GS, XIV, 155.

invokes and convokes, that process among the learners.²³ In and outside the classroom, in informal and formal contacts with the learners, in creative and scholarly activity, one should strive to keep that task in mind. For this reason, teaching is neither a “pouring of information” nor merely “an intellectual exercise”. Nor should it be seen as primarily preparing learners for the exams that will lead to an award.²⁴ Rather, it is a journey or an exploration whereby the learners and the educator address the questions that they are asking, evaluate their significance and draw on various resources for possible answers.²⁵ Moreover, the process (of searching for answers) is just as important as any answers that they may arrive at because the very act itself of pursuing wisdom already enhances our development as human beings. The process is also important because hopefully it transforms us into better human beings because we have taken the time (inside and outside the classroom) to delve deeper into those questions and to face up to their implications. If wisdom is indeed the development of the whole person, then the spiritual dimension cannot be ignored. There is a transcendent side to the human person, and if we are to do the human person justice, then it becomes an important factor in the pursuit of wisdom. The various service activities and the active cultivation of an ethos, an integral part of the programme of education, further the pursuit of wisdom. Moreover, they contextualise that pursuit as we broaden our vision of what it means to be a human person in the diverse and multicultural community that we find ourselves in and serve today.

This understanding of one’s role as an educator should thus inform and substantiate the objectives, content and the methodology of one’s teaching. Because an educator has journeyed towards wisdom, and continue to do so, he/she can be an effective guide in the learners’ pursuit of wisdom. Whitehead talks of the importance of taking into account what he calls “the rhythm of education”²⁶ as well “the rhythmic claims of freedom and discipline”.²⁷ Moreover, that role can be complemented and supported by scholarly, creative and professional endeavours. The questions we ask and the answers we gather from various sources need to be pursued even further. They need to be

²³ These are stages in my methodology of teaching: evoke (gaining the interest of the students), provoke (critically reflecting on possible answers), invoke (drawing on the sources) convoke (enabling them to think through and develop their answers) resulting in the acronym: EPIC.

²⁴ Given this emphasis on their personal development, the issue of autonomy and pressure on students because of course assignments/examinations inevitably arises. Admittedly, there is always a tension. On the other hand, part of the educational process (and thus of the student’s personal development) is to help students to cope with pressure and to organise their work accordingly. Moreover, in the workplace performance review is regularly carried out. What is crucial, in the light of the argumentation in this essay, is that that aspect does not become the most important consideration.

²⁵ The humanities subjects particularly lend themselves to this task of linking the students’ concrete experiences with the academic study.

²⁶ AE, 15-25

²⁷ Ibid., 29-41.

investigated with rigour at a deeper level.²⁸ What prompts scholarly and creative work is similar to that which motivates teaching: the pursuit of wisdom. An educator wants to share with others the excitement, as well as any discoveries, as he/she undertakes his/her own journey. As Whitehead puts it, “it is the function of the scholar to evoke into life wisdom and beauty which, apart from his magic, would remain lost in the past.”²⁹

Learning Outcomes or Learner Outcome?

This leads me to make the claim that in highlighting the need for identifying and achieving learning outcomes at various stages, as the Bologna Process expects us to do, we should not forget the fundamental reason for this task; namely, the development of the person. So perhaps we should be describing the “learner outcome”, awkward though that phrase may be. The question which I believe should be addressed by academic institutions is: “What kind of a learner do they want to leave their trusteeship?”—inasmuch as these institutions have been entrusted with their education? Rather than seek to attract certain individuals (to gain greater prestige) academic institutions, if they are really intent on showing their worth, should concentrate on the kind of graduates whose education they have had the responsibility of providing. Lest this be misunderstood, my point is not so much the compiling of graduate data showing the jobs, careers, achievements or further opportunities of their graduates, but rather supporting the kind of persons who have “emerged from their portals” as it were. An ancient inscription over a library captures my point succinctly: *Intra sapiens, exi sapientior*.

In this instance, let me return to an earlier point which I had made—that academic institutions have also an important role in challenging and critiquing society. We have already noted the changing expectations of academic institutions as a result of a changed society. But we need to be forcefully reminded that education is not just about outcomes, performance, and standards. Ultimately and fundamentally, it is about the learning process, one that involves the learner and the educator. It is about the human person, individually and collectively, and the human condition. Here is where academic institutions are particularly in a strong position to bring to the notice of society and to work for its well-being—and I should like to think, what was behind Newman’s model: that education is about the person, not just the worker, the labourer, the technocrat, business individual, and so on. Focusing on the humanity of the learner reveals a multi-faceted task since the human person is a multi-faceted reality.

As we celebrate our creativeness and genius in the changing emphasis in education, we can lose sight of humanistic values. We can exploit others to our advantage so as to further our interests, unmindful of their dignity as human beings. This is what Moltmann means when he wrote that “we have created a bureaucracy which condemns the

²⁸ We tried to illustrate this in M.F. Sia and S. Sia, *From Question to Quest: LiteraryPhilosophical Enquiries into the Challenges of Life* (U.K.: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

individual to impotency”³⁰ and echoed by Eric Fromm when he asks whether we have to produce sick people in order to have a healthy economy.³¹ For though “science has made possible many marvellous things...[it] has helped to produce a technological society wherein man is reduced to the level of machines.”³² Unless we succeed in putting human goals in this technological society of ours, so that we do not remain fascinated exclusively by the accumulation of economic potencies which urge us to “produce more—consume more” then, as Moltmann rightly observes, the very progress we witness today will devour our very humanity and leave us slaves adjusted to prosperity.³³

In what way can we deal with this challenge? What distinctive contribution to society today can those of us who teach philosophy and related subjects (which underpin Newman’s model) make? How can the study of these subjects—traditionally the preserve of universities—convincingly show that the knowledge, competence and skills (the standards set out by the Bologna process) acquired by the learners are relevant? To what extent can all these be made credible to the marketplace, the labour arena and the business world?

One of the valuable lessons that I learned during my long stint in the USA teaching philosophy was the clear message coming from law schools, medical schools, institutes of technology and so on: what we need, they told us emphatically, are graduates who can think critically, communicate effectively and relate to others. The whole Fall 2007 issue of *Conversations in Jesuit Higher Education*, the magazine of the Association of Jesuit universities and colleges in the USA, was devoted to this issue with the theme: “Philosophy and Theology: why Bother?”. The answers given by various alumni in different professions are illuminating and reassuring. Repeatedly in Ireland, one hears from IBEC³⁴ of the need for students who are grounded in the humanities and the arts because of the flexibility and adaptability of the graduates in these areas. More recently, the *Guardian* (20 Nov., 2007) carried an article tantalisingly titled “I think, therefore I earn” claiming that philosophy graduates are suddenly all the rage with employers. According to the writer, “It is in the fields of finance, property development, health, social work and the nebulous category of ‘business’ that those versed in Plato and Kant are most sought after.” Why? Here are a few quotes in that article: Lucy Adams (human

³⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, “Christian Rehumanization of Technological Society,” *The Critic*, May/June, 1970), 13.

³¹ Eric Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanised Technology* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968), 2.

³² David Bradley, “The Western Crisis and the Attraction of Asian Religions,” *Concilium: Theology in the Age of Renewal*, IX, 6 (November 1970), 136.

³³ Moltmann, “Christian Rehumanization,” 13.

³⁴ Irish Business and Employers Confederation. IBEC “promotes the interests of business and employers in Ireland by working to foster the continuing development of a competitive environment that encourages sustainable growth and within which both enterprise and people can flourish.”

resources director of Serco, a services business and consultancy firm) states that, “We need people who have the ability to look for different approaches and take an open mind to issues. These skills are promoted by philosophical approaches.” Fiona Czerniawska (director of the Management Consultancies Association’s think tank) claims that, “A philosophy degree has trained the individual’s brain and given them the ability to provide management consulting firms with the sort of skills that they require and clients demand. These skills can include the ability to be very analytical, provide clear and innovative thinking, and question assumptions.” Deborah Bowman (associate dean for widening participation at St. George’s, University of London) observes that, “Graduates of philosophy who come in to graduate-entry medicine, or to nursing courses, are very useful. Growth areas in the NHS include clinical ethicists, who assist doctors and nurses.” It is good to hear from that sector of society regarding what we are doing in philosophy in particular, and with the humanities in general.

Concluding Comments

In this essay, I have acknowledged the importance of the marketplace, resulting from changes in society, as the context of education today. However, I have also argued that the process of education, while heeding the call and the proposals of the Bologna Process which accepts that context, should not neglect a very fundamental consideration; namely, that education is about the development of the human person. It is for this reason that I have reminded ourselves that wisdom, and not just knowledge, skills and competence should dominate our considerations and strategies.³⁵ To put it in another way, academia (and that, by the way, includes our subject disciplines) indeed needs to adapt. But it should continue to transform society and not just serve it. We need to acknowledge the climate of change, but we would also want in some respects to change the climate. We have transitioned from the information-society to the knowledge-society. Let us hope that we will soon move to the wisdom-society because of the work that we do in academia, especially in the humanities. Society will then, perhaps only then, be a community—with learning.³⁶

³⁵ A particularly helpful and relevant book in this respect is the collection of essays by Sjur Bergan in his aptly titled book, *Not by Bread Alone* (Council of Europe Publishing, 2011).

³⁶ Newman’s description is a “community of learning”.