

Higher Education Post-Covid 19:

Will the Future Ever Come?

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My argument

- My argument takes the form of a question (two actually):
- Will the future (for higher education) ever come?
- And if it comes will it be a worse future or a better future?

Getting our bearings (1)

- ***Horizon for our conversation?***
 - St Mary's – a faith-based institution (Cathedrals' Group)
 - UK
 - Europe
 - World of HE
- ***Timeframe***
 - Immediate – during the pandemic
 - After the pandemic
 - (I'll come back to this)

Getting our bearings (2)

- The old *is/ought* issue:
 - (i) what *is* likely to be the case;
 - (ii) what *ought* to be the case (and is unrealistic) but also
 - (iii) what can realistically be *hoped for* – a feasible utopia!
 - I'll focus on (i) and (iii)

So what's new?

- The Coronavirus – **reminding us** of things we should have already learnt
 - (Climate crisis, env'ntal degradation, impact on natural world, impact of humanity)
- Lessons: **interconnectivity** of the world – natural world and humanity
- World is **in motion**
- Difficulties of understanding the world – **conflicting accounts**
 - (The scientists don't agree.)
- Politics/ human **interests** – ever present
- 5 ▪ ie, Nothing new!

Timeframe

- In the phrase 'Post-Covid 19' – *what's meant by 'Post'?*
- We are still 'in' Covid 19

- Assume some kind of order is restored say in 2 years' time

- **So 2 situations:** DC and AC
 - DC: turbulence
 - AC: back to normal (?)
 - *'Nothing could be worse than a return to normality'* (Peters & Rizvi)

Fragility of Higher Education

Fragility of HE systems –

- students (home and international);
 - staff;
 - Systems as such
-
- Fragility of financing systems
-
- Fragility of humanity – in an internet space

Reflection

- The world is in motion
- The university is both in the world – part of it
- And reflects on it; tries to understand it
- In an age of authoritarianism and populism, the university is a threat.

Higher education: Worldframe

- ***The World:*** *Wariness towards the West* – and greater reliance on home HE system
- ***Within the West:*** scepticism towards HE
 - Both students and wider society

Both:

Even greater celebration of STEM and neglect of non-STEM areas.

National frame

- Rebalancing of the education system (FE/ Adult Ed)/ Training)
- Greater efficiencies – more learning/ action off-site
 - Slimmer
 - Selling-off of estate or (more likely) sharing of facilities
- Greater calls for Universities to demonstrate their public goods

The internet

- Power/ reach of the internet
 - Positive *and* negative possibilities:
 - More interaction/ reach – both T & R
 - But more surveillance – both T & R
 - Loss of conviviality

The university as a moral agent

- Values – universal or specific?
- Values of compassion/ concern – for the total world
- Issues/ problems thick and fast
 - Prompt an *ethical imagination*

The university as an institution

- ***Distinguish*** being *global* from being *international*
- ***Networking*** (NB: cyber security)
- Identifying the ***public goods*** of a university – a profile
- ***Interdisciplinarity***

The idea of the university will evolve beyond ‘the entrepreneurial university’

Imaginative possibilities:

- Reaching out
 - Near – ‘communiversity’
 - And far – the public sphere
 - *Every event a public event*
 - The world & the Earth: ‘The Ecological University’

Higher education as educational process - *principles*

- Facing *difficult issues* (no absolute answers)
- *Authoritative commitment* – in a changing/ uncertain world
- Seeing things *whole*
- *Criticality* – rethink critical thinking

Curriculum

- ***Curriculum***: parsimonious/ pared down
- The big picture – cross-disciplinarity (‘transdisciplinarity’)
- Connect with their lives (lifeworld/ lifewide learning)

Pedagogy

- ***Pedagogy:***
- Give it *emphasis* as such
- Student *support* – mentoring, being there, wellbeing
- *Collective* learning
- +
- *Independent* learning (+ support!)

- ***Global citizens*** – take seriously – C as a transnational space
 - Michael Sandel – ‘*The Public Philosopher*’
 - Cross-national engagement

Conclusions: The university is on a cusp

- Post-Covid, the university is on ***a cusp***
- Its ***malign aspects can increase***
 - Skills/ surveillance/ narrowness/ ac freedom diminished
- ***OR***
- Its ***positive aspects can increase:***
- Concerns for
 - Wholeness, persons, the Earth, interconnectivity, and a more rational society.
- The ***likelihood:***
 - these tensions will grow into the post-Covid culture wars of the university



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