

## OPINIÓN

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### **“Aware, Committed, and Responsible”: Future Professionals, Higher Education, and Social Values**

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#### **Organizations, Institutions, and Values**

Not long ago I was introduced to the classic work of Philip Selznick, an eminent professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. In an important study on administrative leadership, Selznick draws an analytical distinction between “organizations” and “institutions.” Although many organizations do become institutions, and while all institutions reflect some kind of organizational structure, Selznick offers an analysis that I find helpful when discussing the role of universities in society.<sup>2</sup>

What Selznick calls an “organization” has very specific goals—the production, for instance, of a washing machine or the financing of loans, or an app on your iPhone that can find you a hotel room tonight. An “organization,” he says, is a “no-nonsense system of consciously coordinated activities.”<sup>3</sup> What he calls an “institution,” on the other hand, is “a natural product of social needs.” Rather

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<sup>1</sup> Fordham University, New York.

<sup>2</sup> Philip SELZNICK, *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> SELZNICK, 5.

than a “rational instrument engineered to do a job,” an institution responds and adapts to the actual human beings who do that job or who benefit from it in a real social context. To institutionalize, in other words, is “to infuse with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand.”<sup>4</sup>

Let me say that again: *institutions infuse their environments with values beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand.* Selznick notes that “pure organizations” rarely exist. Rather different organizations are found at different points on a spectrum of institutionalization. In general, businesses tend toward the organizational end of the spectrum. They have more precise goals and well-defined product lines; they are expected to run with efficiency; their lifespans are often shorter than other social institutions. To lead a business requires the skills of administrative management. Universities, on the other hand, find themselves at the more “institutional” end of the spectrum. They have goals that are more difficult to define with precision, and their operations are more pluriform. Because they advance a deeper set of social values, universities usually last longer than most businesses. Moreover, the effective institutional leader is not simply a good administrator but “is primarily an expert in the promotion and protection of values.”<sup>5</sup>

At a general level, this analytical distinction between “organizations” and “institutions” may be useful to us as we consider how universities help achieve the goal of educating future professionals to be aware, committed, and responsible. Again, as institutions universities infuse their context with values beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand, and ESADE presents an exemplary case in point. For instance, ESADE’s mission statement declares the clear purpose to train professionals in business and law. But it does so with the explicit intention “to build a more human global society—that is, a society that is more just, solidarity-minded, sustainable and respectful of differences.”<sup>6</sup>

In the very impressive and thoughtful orientational framework of ESADE’s educational model, you speak of values that “permeate the competency map.”<sup>7</sup> The framework names four sets of values: first, the values of professionalism; second, the values

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<sup>4</sup> SELZNICK, 17.

<sup>5</sup> SELZNICK, 28.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.esade.edu/en/about-us/what-is-ESADE/our-values>.

<sup>7</sup> “Orientational Framework for ESADE’s Educational Model” (2010), 2. See <https://www.esade.edu/itemsweb/wi/documentos/marco-orientador-eng.pdf>.

of justice (or ethical, social, civic, and political values); third, the values of human quality; and fourth, the values of the inner life of the individual, whether they are expressed in religious or non-religious terms. This range of values clearly reflects the ongoing Jesuit educational tradition. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a collaborative federation of university centers linked to the Society of Jesus in Spain (UNIJES) set forth an excellent plan, called the “Ledesma–Kolvenbach Model.” It argued that higher education in the Jesuit tradition had four final aims: *utilitas*, *iustitia*, *humanitas*, and *fides*.<sup>8</sup> I stand in great admiration of the comprehensive quality of this paradigm.

As we come to the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, some of these aims may not be obvious to everyone. From Selznick’s strictly organizational point of view, they may seem superfluous. What interest, for example, would a student of international finance have in attending an academic institution that stresses the value of the interior life? Is that necessary? At my university in New York, all students completing a baccalaureate degree must take more than a full year of courses outside their specialty. They include classes in ethics and the philosophy of human nature, classes on sacred texts and the complementarity of faith and critical reasoning. Students must even take a course in a second language besides English! (As you know, some Americans may ask why that is necessary! J) Unless they are specialists in the humanities, many new students complain they must take such courses. And because the price of a Fordham education is over \$52,000 *per annum*, some resent that they have to pay for something they don’t want in the first place!

Obviously both the disciplinary and the fiscal practices of higher education are different in Spain and in the United States. But the economics do raise an important point. The price of an education in values is often quite high! Nor is there a universal willingness to pay the price. Again, in my country state support of higher education has decreased in recent years, and emphasis has been given to what the Ledesma–Kolvenbach model calls *utilitas*: preparing students for jobs in the current marketplace. The prestigious University of California at Berkeley, for instance, where Philip Selznick had a distinguished career in sociology, provides an excellent example. When Selznick began his career, the State of California covered more than 50% of the university’s annual operating budget; today only about 13% of UC Berkeley’s budget comes from the State of California.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> MELECIO AGÚNDEZ, S.J., “El paradigma universitario Ledesma-Kolvenbach,” *Revista de Fomento Social* 63 (2008): 604-5.

<sup>9</sup> <https://calparents.berkeley.edu/the-funding-conundrum-cals-dwindling-state-support/>.

## Education in Values

We might ask the question in a provocative, yet very literal, way. *What is the value of values?* Or what does educating in values mean? And why is it important to educate in values? Or, using the paradigm from UNIJES, we might ask more specifically: Aside from *utilitas* (the practical dimension of higher education) why should societies invest so much in universities as places that cultivate *iustitia*, *humanitas*, and *fides*?

The simple answer should be that such values contribute to a better society. At least where I come from, not everyone believes that. The investment in higher education for the larger good of society requires belief in goods that cannot be reduced to the private enjoyment of individuals. The novelist Marilynne Robinson worries that institutions such as universities have lost their influence in public life. “There has been a fundamental shift in American consciousness,” she writes. “The Citizen has become the Taxpayer.”<sup>10</sup> Whereas people who imagine themselves as citizens have noble aspirations for society as a whole, people only *regret* being taxpayers. Perhaps it is just a North American phenomenon, but confidence in institutions that claim to serve the “common good” has deteriorated. And yet, if there is no common good, there is no society.<sup>11</sup> Not only does society depend upon shared values of what we owe each other, but very few values are strictly private.

For the purposes of our discussion, a good working definition of “values” may be the following: *values are basic, fundamental beliefs that motivate attitudes and actions, help us determine what is important, and indicate the sort of persons we want to be.*<sup>12</sup> Yet values seldom, if ever, appear *ex nihilo*. The fundamental beliefs that motivate a person are most often learned and assimilated from others in one’s environment. Because values are learned, either intentionally or not, educational environments have an enormous influence on who our students become.

Sometimes values are tacit and assumed. But it is best when they are named and discussed, shared and debated, confirmed and contested. Inevitably, we can find ourselves in positions where there are conflicts of values—either within an

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<sup>10</sup> Marilynne ROBINSON, “The American Scholar Now,” in *What Are We Doing Here?* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018) 84.

<sup>11</sup> See the essay by the former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert REICH, *The Common Good* (New York: Knopf, 2018) 18.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from <https://www.ethicssage.com/2018/08/what-are-values.html>.

individual or in a community. Therefore, if life in a society is to be possible, much less desirable, we need to build up the capacity not only to reflect consciously and intentionally on our personal values but to discuss them in ways that reflect discernment and discipline. Historically, universities are institutions where robust big-picture conversations take place and commitments are made. In that context, future professionals increase their ability to face the challenges of their times in ways that are “aware, committed, and responsible.”

I have argued for the social importance of conscious and intentional reflection on values as well as discussion that manifests discipline and discernment. Let me offer one timely example of why these qualities are important. Although I was born and raised in San Francisco and spent the first fifteen years of my professional life at Santa Clara University, the Jesuit University of Silicon Valley, like many people, I have seen how technological developments affect larger social values. More recently I have witnessed how they can influence national elections. Although digital technologies have brought great benefit to virtually every field, including higher education, increasingly we are aware of darker aspects.

In 2013 Tristan Harris, a former designer at Google, co-founded the Center for Humane Technology. Based on the conviction that technology platforms have often exploited human vulnerabilities, the mission of this center is to “realign technology with humanity.” (Please note this mission statement does not explain what is meant by “humanity.”) The problem, as it is stated on their website, is that: “While companies have been upgrading technology, they have been downgrading humans.” Results include: “Shortening attention spans, rewarding outrage over dialogue, addicting [users], breaking down the democratic process, [and] turning life into a competition for likes and shares.” To combat these problems, Harris and his colleagues advocate for a new generation of technology to: “Help us focus, build common ground, support democracy, protect the development of [young people, and] align our lives with our values.”<sup>13</sup>

Although coming from the tech industry that has so much influence in our times, he is arguing for the priority of a deeper understanding of human values as a control over technological development. Tristan Harris did not (I think) ever attend a Jesuit university. But in his own way, he is making a strong appeal to what Jesuit education has always done over its nearly 500-year old tradition. And while he might not know Latin, he is effectively arguing that in addition to *utilitas*, even an industry

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<sup>13</sup> <https://humanetech.com/>.

as innovative as high tech needs to observe the values of *iustitia*, *humanitas*, and *fides*. How *fides*? He writes a great deal about the concept of “time well spent,” which includes practices to cultivate the interior life. “People’s attention is sacred,” he says.<sup>14</sup> And in making that claim he echoes spiritual writers from many traditions, from the Stoics to Origen of Alexandria, for whom attention (Gk. *prosoche*) was the key to spiritual understanding.<sup>15</sup> The cultivation of attention was one of the key aims of meditation among ancient ascetics, and its current popularity among Silicon Valley executives has been well noted in the press.<sup>16</sup>

WIRED Magazine observes that Tristan Harris is often called the “conscience of Silicon Valley.”<sup>17</sup> But his alarm sounded a few years *after* the message of the former Superior General of the Jesuits, Adolfo Nicholas.<sup>18</sup> In his famous 2010 address in Mexico City to leaders at Jesuit institutions of higher education, Nicholas coined the term “Globalization of Superficiality” to describe a condition affecting young people around the world. He urged universities associated with the Society of Jesus to promote “depth of thought and imagination.” This alone would counteract the trends he noted. Almost ten years later, in 2019, Nicholas seems especially prescient. The breakdown of truth, the ideological and economic polarizations that lead to political manipulation, the mental health concerns that include digital addiction, rising isolation, and the consequent fracturing of communities are all phenomena we have seen more frequently since Fr. Nicholas’ speech.<sup>19</sup>

Again, a university serves the common good by promoting conscious and intentional reflection on values and by modeling discipline and discernment in conversations about values. In addition, it takes seriously what Ignacio Ellacuria, the slain rector of the University of Central America in El Salvador said many years ago: that a

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.tristanharris.com/tag/time-well-spent/>.

<sup>15</sup> See Pierre HADOT, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford, 1995) 131–132.

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.wired.com/2013/06/meditation-mindfulness-silicon-valley/>, <https://www.businessinsider.com/effects-meditation-brain-changes-health-science-2017-8>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.wired.com/story/tristan-harris-tech-is-downgrading-humans-time-to-fight-back/>.

<sup>18</sup> Adolfo NICOLÁS, S.J. “Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today” (2010). [http://www.sjweb.info/documents/ansj/100423\\_Mexico%20City\\_Higher%20Education%20Today\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/ansj/100423_Mexico%20City_Higher%20Education%20Today_ENG.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> On these “problems,” see <https://humanetech.com/problem/>.

university is unescapably a social force.<sup>20</sup> When it holds up crucial challenges of our day (such as climate change, migration, racism, gender inequality, to name only a few) and encourages thoughtful reflection, a university advances the cause of justice by forming the consciousness of future leaders. Faculties of universities must be careful not to indoctrinate our students. Respect for their own freedom of inquiry is paramount. Yet as ESADE's "Orientational Framework" states quite clearly, "Knowledge is not neutral." Rather (as you affirm): "Universities must be places for debate on the fundamental questions that concern people and the human community in the areas of economics, politics, culture, science, theology and the search for meaning."<sup>21</sup>

## Pedagogies of Personal Development for Public Responsibility

If institutions infuse their environments with values beyond the technical requirements at hand, the Jesuits have always infused their institutions of higher learning with a consistent emphasis on the personal development of young people. But that development always moves on toward public responsibility. The historian John O'Malley writes that an ancient text the Jesuits constantly had students read in their early schools was that of the first century Roman orator, Cicero, "*De Officiis* (On Duties)."<sup>22</sup> It is worth quoting at length.

1. We are not born for ourselves alone... We as human beings are born for the sake of other human beings, that we might be able mutually to help one another. We ought therefore to contribute to the common good of humankind by reciprocal acts of kindness, by giving and receiving from one another, and thus by our skill, our industry, and our talents work to bind human society together in peace and harmony. (1.7.22).

<sup>20</sup> Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J., Santa Clara University Commencement Address (1982). <https://www.scu.edu/ic/programs/ignatian-tradition-offerings/stories/ignacio-ellacuria-sjs-june-1982-commencement-address-santa-clara-university.html>. See too my own application in the North American context, "A University is a Social Force," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (November, 2014) <https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2014/11/07/a-university-is-a-social-force/>.

<sup>21</sup> "Orientational Framework," 1, citing Peter Hans KOLVENBACH, S.J.

<sup>22</sup> John O'MALLEY, S.J., "Jesuit Schools and the Humanities, Yesterday and Today," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* (Spring, 2015): 25–26.

2. The duties prescribed by justice must be given precedence over everything else, including the pursuit of knowledge, for such duties concern the welfare of other human beings, and nothing ought to be more sacred in our eyes than that. There are some people who, either through absorption with their own self-advancement or through some other more basic coldness to others, claim that all they need to do is tend to their own business, and thus they seem to themselves not to be doing any harm. But this means that while they avoid any active injustice, they fall into another: they become traitors to the life we must all live together in human society, for they contribute to it none of their interest, none of their effort, none of their means. (1.9.29)<sup>23</sup>

For Cicero, what was important was the Citizen, not the Taxpayer. There is a strong moral claim here: one has a natural duty to promote the welfare of others, and that duty remains preeminent. Moreover, Cicero’s understanding of the human person is distinctive. A person is not a highly individualistic atom: indeed, “we are not born for ourselves alone.” The words of this pre-Christian Roman are strong, but they have clear echoes in famous speech of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit Superior General Pedro Arrupe, S.J., who insisted on an education that forms students to be “Persons for Others.”

I know that we will be discussing what are some core values to pursue with students, as well as what are important subjects and pedagogies to be employed today. Obviously, I am not in a position to prescribe what is best in your context. But I would argue broadly for the importance of *advancing pedagogies of personal development for public responsibility*. In recent years I have spent a good deal of time trying to develop programs in what we call “community engaged learning,” and I would be happy to talk about that. I believe, however, that virtually any subject or academic program can be directed toward our students’ personal development for public responsibility. What is central is not just that faculty members and administrators are committed to the goal of cultivating in students a solid sense of agency. They also need to be able to talk about it in an intentional, reflective way.

Throughout my own time working at universities, I have often found some faculty colleagues timid in speaking about values. And all too often, because I am a Jesuit, I am called upon to talk about the educational values of the university, as if only Jesuits are capable of doing that. The title of my current position at Fordham, Vice President for *Mission Integration and Planning*, presumes that everyone has

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<sup>23</sup> Translations by O’MALLEY in *Studies*, 25–26.

an ownership in mission. Our mission needs to be integrated into *everything* we do: it is not just the business of the few Jesuits around. But to do that we must plan avenues for colleagues to understand and articulate how they may contribute to that mission in ways that are appropriate to them.

What faculty colleagues need most, I find, is simply the opportunity to discuss how their particular field contributes to the mission of the whole. Secondly, they need the support to carry it out. And third they need a community that can sustain them in their efforts. Language shapes reality, and finding a language sufficient to the complex educational issues we face is an important task. But a common language —that has the depth and texture to address our multiple commitments— is also necessary for the development of a sustainable community.

For these reasons I am very pleased to have the opportunity to talk to you about your own sense of mission and values. I am eager to hear how these guide your own educational and social innovations. And I am ready to learn how we can together exercise institutional leadership, whose chief function (as Selznick says) is the promotion and protection of common values.