

**BEWARE THE FUTURE !  
FREETHOUGHT MAY, EVENTUALLY, BE BANNED**

For many a decade, academics have been debating the pros and cons of university syllabuses, especially the syllabuses of those institutes, advocating essentialism as opposed to fundamentalism.

For academics, they place a much-greater emphasis on reading and studying than on technical or practical work.

In respect of fundamentalism, it is commonly characterised by strict literalism as it applies to certain specific scriptures, dogmas and ideologies.

For fundamentalists, their thinking is, for the most part, pejorative rather than wearing the mantle of a neutral characterisation.

Fundamentalism differs from essentialism in that essentialists claim that all students should be taught along the tried-and-true traditional lines, the ideas and methods, regarded as being '*essential*' to the prevalent culture of the day.

Although fundamentalism has its traditional roots in strict, religious connotations, being unresolute in its affinity to a set of beliefs, today, it has taken on a much-more widened connotation, especially in the field of pedagogy.

Today, fundamentalism has come to advocate, inter alia, an emphasis on '*purity*': The desire to return to previously held beliefs from which students, as well as tutors and mentors, appear to have strayed, for the most part.

Essentialist thinking, on the other hand, maintains that most students tend to want to learn that which will result in a proficiency in a specific discipline, one that may be applied to a set of exercises, leading, with comparative ease, to obtaining meaningful – as well as highly remunerative – employment.

Thus, obtaining a university degree in that which used to be called Baccalaureus Artium – Bachelor of Arts – is likely to be considered, in the minds of many students, as being utterly useless in today's world, other than, perhaps, presenting documentary proof of a former student, having accomplished a certain degree of skill in a specific discipline.

But the fundamentalist may well rebut this essentialist proposition by stating that a study of the historic application of the human creative skills and imagination, of music, of astronomy, of geography, of geology, of physiology, of animal welfare, of pre-Socratic philosophy, of history, etc, etc, etc, is, over time, much-more meaningful and rewarding than any specific discipline, advocated by essentialist thinking, could ever hope to achieve.

In today's world, there is the matter of politicians and/or certain senior managements of many a corporate entity/firm that make the claim of having, directly or indirectly, the overall responsibility of a private, for-profit institute, hiding behind the public façade of being a university, or college, or the like, in their narcissistic attempt to constrain, or surreptitiously banning freethought.

Such personages, who would dare to sit at the same table of intellectuals, fail to understand that a university (in Latin, *'univseritas'*, defined as *'a whole'*), aside from being the entity in the issuance of sheepskins to students on their successful completion of courses of studies, have a duty to open wide the gates, for and on behalf of their charges, to the much-wider world than that which students might never have appreciated, prior to their entrance through the hallowed doors of an edifice, supposedly devoted to higher education.

Purveyors of dogma may fail to appreciate that one of the most-important ideals of a university is academic freedom, as was made evident at The University of Bologna (in Italy) with its academic charter of *Constitutio Habita*, enshrined forever in the middle of the 12th Century.

### **About Freethought**

Freethought has survived the past 400 years by holding fast onto the belief that matters with regard to truth should have, as its firm foundation, logic, reason, and empiricism.

Truth has long been defined as being the existence of the real; correspondence with the facts; agreement with reality.

This classical definition, in today's world, may well be taken to task, especially with the many advancements in such disciplines as psychiatry and neurosurgical techniques, but be that as it may, putting aside mental illnesses, many of which are still in the process of being studied with a view to finding corrective procedures and/or the applications of medicines as treatments, where visual forms are, clearly, distorted in a person's brain, logic, reason and empiricism may come to the fore in order to steer the affected onto the correct course.

Freethinkers, the cognitive application of Freethought, are vehemently opposed to authority, tradition, revelation or dogma as the foundation stones, leading to the universality of the acceptance of truth.

In particular, freethinkers reject systems, based on traditional social or religious beliefs.

As a child, a mother, holding the firm belief that Jesus was/is the son of the one God, will instruct the child, fervently, to believe in monotheism, regardless of the fact that, if she were correct, then, for what reason could she hold with a family of gods, the trinity, if you will: The Father; the Son; and, the Holy Ghost?

As the child begins to mature, he or she may well wish to launch a challenge with regard to his/her mother's dogmatic religious teachings, but without the honing of his/her mental skills, the child is quite apt to fail in its quest to arrive at the truth.

That which may cause a person to become a freethinker may not, necessarily, be his/her belief(s), per se, but in the innate individual's need to direct his/her steps in the direction of the mental ground in order to arrive at the conclusive deduction by way of the production, due to the discovery of facts in order to prove a general statement – induction.

Initially, the conclusions of a freethinker may not, in their totality, be correct or be considered satisfactory to the freethinker on careful reflection and, as such, he/she may wish to cause previous conclusions to be modified, either in part or in substance – or even be completely discarded, replaced by determinations that have been more-comprehensively tested and proven.

As an individual matures to the point that, with the passage of time and with the refinement and more appreciation of mental skills, brought about by the induction of logic and experience (empiricism), he /she is forced to modify the individual's previous character of opinions that may have been held sacred in days of yore.

Slavery to dogma does not whet the taste buds of a freethinker.

## Plato's Academy

The Greek philosopher, Plato (c.427 B.C. – c.347 B.C.), is considered among the most-important, single person in the development of Western philosophy.

His works have, thus far, survived 2,265 years after his death.

Plato founded the first institute of higher learning. It was appropriately named, '*The Academy*', and it was located at Athens, Greece.

Plato laid the foundations of philosophy, of science and of mathematics.

This intellectual giant of his day discovered what is, in today's world, a systematic examination of ethics, politics, metaphysical and epistemological issues.

The Academy that Plato founded was never open to the public. It, also, did not charge members any fees. There, also, was no formal curriculum.

There was no clear distinction between tutors (teachers) and students, however, there was a distinction between senior and junior members of The Academy.

As with many of Plato's written works, he employed dialectical argument in order to guide and to encourage members of The Academy to find solutions to suggested problems.

Plato, however, was not the '*father*' of Western philosophy. That title was reserved for Thales of Miletus (c.624 – c.546 B.C.).

Little is known of Miletus, other than it was an Athenian Greek city from the Pithus deme: A political division of Attica in ancient Greece. It was a suburb of Athens or a subdivision of Attica, the region of Greece, surrounding Athens.

Thales was said to have maintained that there must have been a single substrate from which the world was derived.

He determined that that substrate was water.

It is not really understood that which this philosopher meant by the sentence, said to have been coined by him: '*Water is Best.*'

One may only surmise its true meaning at the time of this extraordinary thinker of his day.

Thales left little, if any, of his writings on his death, but Aristotle grudgingly accepted that Thales attempted to find answers to such questions as: '*What is the reality behind phenomena?*'

In the days when Thales was in his prime, there existed sophists, men who roamed Greece and other parts of Asia minor, claiming to have specialised knowledge of one kind or another.

Many of these sophists were charlatans, to be sure, but some, probably due to their travels, had managed to acquire a smattering of knowledge of rhetoric, philosophy, music, athletics and even mathematics.

By wile, these sophists expected to be highly remunerated by those who agreed to engage them to teach the employment of rhetoric in matters germane to their benefactor's lives.

Thus, only the rich could afford to employ these sophists.

That which, most likely, evolved, due in large part to Thales's inquisitiveness and his search for a substrate, and the sophists' wanderings, leading to their finding employment with the rich families of the day, was the birth of that which man has come to regard as philosophy (philo + sophia '*love of wisdom*') – the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline.

Every march begins with the first step.

### **What Did The Pre-Socratic Philosophers Leave To Posterity?**

The Pre-Socratic philosophers left behind so much material that a large part of it, probably has been lost forever.

That which survived the centuries of enlightenment is miraculous, however.

The following is just a smattering of the greatness of only a few of these geniuses of centuries past, dating back more than 2,470 years:

#### **Zeno of Elea**

Zeno of Elea (c.490 B.C. – c.430 B.C.) is credited with having been the founder of the dialectic: The art of investigating or discussing the truth of opinions; enquiry into metaphysical contradictions and their solutions.

Elea, during the time of Zeno, was a city in Lucania, Italy.

One of Zeno's most-famous arguments, directed against pluralism, is that of '*the Many*'.

On the assumption that '*things are a Many*', Zeno's contradictory conclusion proceeds:

1. If things are a Many, they must be the number they are, neither more nor less. If they are the number they are, they will be finite in number.
2. If things are a Many, then they are infinite in number; for there are always other things in between them, and again others between those; and thus, they are infinite in number.

Today, one may refer to the above as being reductiones ad absurdum.

Based on the same hypothesis, Zeno went on to suggest: Things that are a Many, must be (1) infinitely small; and, (2) infinitely great.

Zeno, also, maintained that one cannot traverse a given length because the length is always divisible into two; and, thus, one must reach the half-way position before one can reach the end; and, thus, one is left with another length, also divisible by two, and, for one to reach the half of that length first ... and so on and so on, ad infinitum.

#### **Melissus of Samos**

The Latin phrase, '*ex nihilo nihil fit*' (from nothing, nothing comes) was first expounded by Melissus of Samos (470 B.C. – 430 B.C.) – and it could not have been written in Latin, but in Greek.

Samos is a Greek island in the eastern Aegean Sea. In the days of Melissus, Samos was a rich and powerful city-state, particularly known for its vineyards and wine.

About one century after the death of Melissus, European theologians used the same logic – as well as Melissus's same wording – as proof of the existence of God; and, they transcribed Melissus's postulatory theory into Latin.

Melissus was a member of the School of Eleatic Philosophy, as was Zeno.

He concluded that the Parmenidean theory of Not-Being was flawed and that Being must be everlasting, without a beginning and without an end.

He maintained that if Being had a beginning, that is, a coming into being, it can only have come from Not-Being.

But nothing can come from Not-Being – which is nothing.

He went on to state that a beginning implies an end and, it follows that since Being has no beginning, it has no end, either.

Not a great deal is known of Melissus, but that which has survived suggests the great depth of this ancient philosopher's thinking.

God and logic: God help us, one and all!

### **Empedocles of Acragas**

Empedocles of Acragas (c.495 B.C. – c.444 B.C.) was intrigued by the idea of democracy – a government for the people and by the people, as one defines it, today.

Acragas was an ancient Greek city on the site of modern Agrigento, Sicily. Agrigento is a hilltop city on Sicily's southwest shore.

It is known for the ruins of Acragas – now spelt Akragas – in the Valley of the Temples, a vast archaeological site with well-preserved Greek temples.

It is said that Empedocles opposed civil strife in Acragas and prevented the establishment of a tyranny, persuading the citizens to choose a government by a democratic process.

It has been suggested that he was once offered the post of monarch, but declined the great honour.

He advocated, among other things, that the control of nature could be achieved by means of science.

He scorned the everyday affairs of men, turning his interest to natural science, especially medicine.

He is credited with the statement to a man who said, '*I cannot find anyone wise*', to which he replied, '*Naturally! The man who seeks a wise man must himself first be wise.*'

Like to like.

Empedocles was far ahead of his time.

### **Pythagoras of Samos**

Pythagoras of Samos (c.570 B.C. – c.495 B.C.) is best known for his theory of numbers: Numbers prove; and, all things are numbers.

Today, every child is taught that the angles of a triangle are together equal to two right angles; and, that the

square of a hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides.

Pythagoras's finding, about 2,500 years ago, have been encapsulated in that which is called, The Pythagorean Theorem.

Aside from mathematics, Pythagoras also believed in the transmigration of souls (metempsychosis) and that, on the death of person, the soul may enter any body.

Pythagoras was somewhat of a mystic, according to historians. It was said that he had '*commandments*' that included:

Do not eat beans;  
Do not turn aside when going to a religious ceremony;  
Do not eat holy fish;  
Do not sacrifice a white cock;  
Sacrifice only those animals into which man's soul cannot enter;  
Do not eat bread; and,  
Do not have (sexual) intercourse with a woman wearing gold.

The distance between genius and mental derangement is often said to be a very thin line.

### **Leucippus of Miletus (or Abdera)**

A little soupçon about Leucippus of Miletus (or Abdera) (c.480 B.C.– c.420 B.C.).

There is little that is definitively known of Leucippus other than his earth-shattering theory that, long after his death, the world gave thanks to the life of this Greek genius.

It is confirmed that he was the founder of a School at Abdera on the coast of Thrace, near the mouth of the Nestos River.

However, Protagoras of Abdera (c.485 B.C. – c.415 B.C.), who was known to have been born in Abdera, a city that was almost directly opposite the Island of Thasos, was a contemporary of Leucippus.

Aside from this small piece of intelligence, the most-important and dazzling determination, discovered by Leucippus, was that of '*imperceptible, individual particles that differ only in shape and position*'.

Leucippus went on to state that the mixing of these particles gives rise to the world that we, all, experience.

Leucippus called these particles: Atoms.

Democritus of Abdera (c.460 B.C. – c.370 B.C.) has mistakenly been given credit as the '*father*' of the atomic theory, as we know it, today, although it has been recorded that Leucippus was the mentor of Democritus and, as such, it is highly likely that Democritus poached the atomic theory from his mentor.

From Leucippus came forth the modern atomic theory:

*'In chemistry and physics, the atomic theory is a scientific theory of the nature of matter.  
It states that matter comprises discrete units called atoms.'*

Leucippus's philosophy stated:

*'Both matter and void have real existence. The constituents of matter are elements infinite in number and always in motion, with an infinite variety of shapes, completely solid in composition.'*

The only quotation of the words of Leucippus that have survived are:

*'Nothing happens in vain, but everything from reason and of necessity.'*

*'Give credit where credit is due.'* (Samuel Adams, a Founding Father of The United States of America, October 29, 1777).

### **Ars Gratia Artis**

The above-mentioned, five Pre-Socratic philosophers, as well as that which they discovered, by observations, geometric and/or numerical calculations, and objective reasoning and/or their attempts to answer questions of great pith and moment, are not meant to be comprehensive, by any means, but these great men of letters, none of whom have ever been awarded a sheepskin, have all, to this day, contributed a great deal to modern thought, indirectly, perhaps, but their discoveries are very worthy of mention – and attention.

It should be noted that none of the above philosophers had had any formal education other than their (perhaps) scant meetings with roaming sophists upon whom they may have come in contact, while the sophists were looking to find a wealthy benefactor.

None of these Pre-Socratic philosophers, according to historical documents, were greatly interested in the amassing of great wealth: They only had a resolute quest for knowledge and enlightenment.

The poet and the musician compose and know not the reason for their sacrifice of time in the attempt to perfect the art for which they are forced to search for perfection.

But onward they do go they, without the thought of recompense.

Ars gratia artis (Art for art's sake).

While cancer continues to be the scourge of many a man's life, scientists continue to try to find a method by which uncontrollable, bodily growths can be contained and, eventually, eliminated from the body, forever.

But the cure for the '*cancer*', for which many a man suffers throughout his life, that other '*cancer*', to amass copious quantities of today's medium of exchange in order to obtain power over his fellow, appears to have been almost totally neglected.

### **Lucius Annaeus Seneca**

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, also known as Seneca the Younger (c.4 B.C. – 65 A.D.), was a Roman stoic philosopher, having been born in Cordoba in Hispania (the Roman name for the Iberian Peninsula).

In his book on '*Morals*', Seneca vivisects many of the horrors that many a man has fallen, (and continues to fall) foul.

In the section of *Morals*, labelled as '*Of a Happy Life*', Seneca wrote, about 2,000 years ago:

*'The wit of man is not able to express the blindness of human folly, in taking so much more care of our fortunes, our houses, and our money, than we do of our lives; everybody breaks in upon the one, gratis, but we betake ourselves to fire, and sword, if any man invades the other. There is no dividing in the case of patrimony, but people share out time with us at pleasure: So profuse are we of that (the) only thing, whereof we may be honestly covetous. 'Tis a common practice to ask an hour or two of a friend, for such or such a business, and it is as easily granted; but parties only considering the occasion, and not the thing itself.*

*‘They never put time to account, which is the most valuable of all precious things: but because they do not see it, they reckon upon it as nothing; and yet these easy men, when they come to die, would give the whole world for those hours again, which they so inconsiderately cast away before; but there’s no recovering them.’*

Seneca was, obviously, correct: Time is the most-valuable of all assets, bestowed gratis, upon man.

It should not be wasted in the pell-mell pursuit of today’s medium of exchange.

If the essentialist has his way – as seems, in today’s world, as being very likely – it would result in the theft of time for the youths that have been seduced into believing that financial reward is the road to the apotheosis of one’s career.

Governments of the strongest economies of the world are, blatantly, steering institutes, regardless of their nomenclature, be they universities, colleges, or entities, recommending and advocating apprenticeship schemes, to encourage students to follow certain academic paths, based almost entirely on the singular interests of the state.

These institutes, by so agreeing to become surrogates of the state, will cause great harm to the generations of youths that follow.

An example of the above statement was, recently, contained in a prospectus of a company, seeking a listing on the premier equity market of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China.

At Page 97 of this Global Offering Prospectus, it was stated:

*‘Our employment-oriented curricula are focused on equipping our students with practicable skills that meet the demand of economic development in China. The effectiveness of our practical curricula and training programmes is reflected in our high graduate employment rates. For the 2014/2015, 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 school years, the average initial employment rate of our higher education programmes was 96.1%, 96.4% and 94.1%, respectively, substantially above the overall average for higher education in China, which was between 77.4% and 78.4% from 2013 through 2017.’*

Then, at Page 99, the Global Offering Prospectus went on to state:

***‘Our practical curricula and training programmes help our students achieve high employment rates.’***

*‘Our employment-oriented curricula focus on equipping our students with practical skills that meet the demand of economic development in China. Since our inception, we have emphasised on practical training, aiming to increase the competitiveness of our graduates in the job market and smooth their transition from students to employees. We encourage our students to seek internships, and we have established collaborative relationships with over 200 enterprises to provide our students with ample internship and training opportunities. For example, our colleges have established cooperative relationships with many well-known companies, including Tarena Technologies Inc. and Zoomlion Kaifeng Industrial Park. We have designed a series of training courses customised for specific enterprises to meet their personnel needs, and these enterprises in turn provide our students with venues for studies and internships. We also invite technical experts from enterprises to teach classes at our colleges, and send our teaching staff to attend training programmes at enterprises.’*



And this company, while claiming to be beating the drums of advancement in pedagogy, makes the claim, in an ‘**OVERVIEW**’, contained at Page One of its Global Offering Prospectus:

*‘We are a leading provider of private higher education in China. We ranked first in Central China and fourth nationwide among providers of private higher education as measured by total student enrolment in the 2017/2018 school year, according to Frost & Sullivan. Since our inception in 2004, we have grown to operate three colleges in Henan Province, namely Shangqiu University, Anyang University and Shangqiu University Kaifeng Campus, and participate in the operation of one college in Hubei Province, namely Hubei College.’*

The resultant effect of the modus operandi of such entities could well lead to legal constraints, being placed on freethinkers by dictatorial governments that maintain a myopic attitude toward any curriculum that does not, immediately, benefit the state.

Freethinkers, who continue, openly, to advocate the search for truth via the disciplines of logic, reason, and empiricism (the belief that knowledge is based on experience, derived from the senses and stimulated by the rise of experimental science), might one day be labelled as a part of a cult – a misplaced or excessive admiration for a particular thing or idea – in a dystopian future.

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