

PEOPLE OF SCIENCE IN THE FACEBOOK ERA

Gil Troy



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Universities in the West remain the centres of scientific progress. In many ways, especially in North America and Western Europe, universities have become even more effective as technological change agents over the last two decades. Earlier on, it often occurred that a professor would invent something and reap the profits personally. Now, universities see themselves as partners, and are often willing to provide 'seed funding' upfront in hopes of not just expanding knowledge but also of reaping some financial benefit. It is also worth noting that **members of the emerging middle class in India and Brazil have been well-trained by their universities.** Those graduates that we observe

migrating to the US — which still remains the best centre for post-graduate training in the world — make a very strong impression.

It may sound strange, but I would say today that **today's universities are simultaneously more politicised and depoliticised.** In universities in North America and Western Europe, there exists some kind of public policy in the university (to generalise broadly) that can be characterised as being to the far left of the mainstream — this is especially noticeable in the US. In the universities, "normal" or „mainstream“ opinion is gauged as being to the far left — and this has a significant impact on the opinion of the elite, media coverage, etc. And yet, the power of careerism, the lure of investment banks, Hollywood, and Ivy League universities have fostered a conformity that is rather conservative. The end outcome is that, in a sense, there is a lot of political posturing to the left. At the same time, there is a fundamental commitment to the way things are and to the status quo, which mitigates against the possibilities of social change. Overall, to use American terminology that applies more broadly, a student of the Reagan era tends to be more conformist and more pro-establishment than a student of the 1960s — although the radicalisation of students of the 1960s has certainly been exaggerated. As well, many professors has spun further to the left.

The level of the education of the population is definitely an indicator of the development of society as a whole. For a modern society to thrive in the

ever before, due to the increasing complexity of our technological world, and a society that seeks to develop needs to allow universities to grow.

A well-educated citizenry is essential both in terms of the objectives of democracy and to those of a functionally technologically sophisticated society. So I'm all in favour of 40% or even 50% of the population having the chance to attend university. Nevertheless, the very best education must still remain elitist. High standards must be maintained and there should be universities that accept many, just as there should also be elite universities that only accept select candidates. **While democracy is of high value, it should not undermine the high standards that are necessary in higher education.**

Teaching methods have to change in the 21st century, as much of it has become outdated. We, and especially those in the humanities, have not fully acquired the skills to use or assimilated the implications of the videotape, let alone the internet. Professors have to figure out what they can bring to the table, where the human educational interaction has come to function in a world of high quality DVDs and internet sites with the best educators in the world are just a click or two away from everyone else in the world.

As society becomes more technologically and entertainment oriented, **universities tend to become more necessary but, alas, further removed from reality.** Universities have to hone their missions to bring them closer to perfection, to understand the importance

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21st century, there must be massive investment made in cultivating great universities, both with respect to the humanities and the physical sciences. Universities are more important than

of being a positive social force, and to be both the centre and protector of certain values, even now in the age of Facebook. ■

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