

SOME DISSATISFACTION WITH SATISFACTION: UNIVERSITIES, VALUES, AND QUALITY

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Perhaps John Stuart Mill best captured why some people find the ideal of attaining satisfaction repugnant. Said Mill, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."¹ Worlds collide when Total Quality Management, with its agenda of creating a population of satisfied customers,² comes to the university with a population presumably of dissatisfied Socrateses.³

However much one can imagine these entities being permanently at odds, one can also inquire into what their proper domains are and how they might coexist. In this regard, I wish to establish two claims. My first claim is that TQM's goal of attaining customer satisfaction is inadequate generally as a moral philosophy and hence unable to guide the university in its efforts to contribute to the moral education of its students. My second claim is that TQM, which strives for quality and gauges it with customer satisfaction, can learn something from universities which demonstrate well that we secure quality as a byproduct of a complex network of values and value-laden activity. Put differently, TQM cannot assist universities with moral education, but TQM does have something to learn from the university about quality and its connection with activity in a moral community.

I.

Certainly TQM addresses a primary problem of ethics and moral education, namely, how we should treat people. And TQM offers a clear and unambiguous solution; we should satisfy them. Although this advice is usually stated in terms of customer satisfaction, with "customer" understood in the usual business sense,⁴ it is often qualified by broadening the notion of customer to include

those people whom our work affects.⁵ So let us think in these more general terms for the moment. This approach of satisfying people does rectify some of the ill treatment which people encounter. In the university, students are dissatisfied when someone at the cashier's office or the cafeteria treats them rudely or with disrespect. They are likewise dissatisfied when professors treat them in these ways or when professors simply fail to take account of their interests, like those of having their assignments graded in a timely fashion or of having the significance of the subject for their lives made clear. If we satisfy these students, we correct these problems.

So, with a general commitment to satisfying people, TQM instructs the university on the correct treatment of people. But as soon as the university embarks on fulfilling its responsibility to contribute to the moral education of its students with this teaching of TQM, the university abdicates its responsibility. The university in effect adopts for purposes of moral education and development an ideology of the business world for effective marketing. (TQM is predicated on the notion that, if we aim to satisfy customers, we must rely on the marketers to ascertain the wants of customers.) And the university, through its unreflective endorsement of TQM's teaching, provides not a moral education but, in effect, an indoctrination; TQM offers no alternatives for how we should treat people and known deficiencies with the only alternative of satisfying people are not countenanced.

Put differently, an essential ingredient of the educational process is an ongoing presentation and critical examination of views about moral right and wrong.⁶ Moral philosophy investigates how such considerations as happiness, fairness, equality, dignity, and utility figure into an adequate approach to morality. The university either fails to facilitate this process and investigation when it adopts TQM complete with its moral teachings, or the university puts itself in an absurd position when it rightfully opens its doors to inquiring about the nature of morality and at the same time adopts TQM which

closes the door to considering further how we should treat people.

And there are other good reasons why universities should not adopt TQM in so comprehensive a fashion that it offers a glib answer to all of the central issues of ethics. Many of these criticisms hinge on our using "customer" in its normal business sense but sometimes apply with equal force to the bloated generic use which we have focused on to this point. Whether or not purveyors of TQM intend us to use "customer" in some very general sense, they cannot control the ways in which its standard meaning influences how we think about people whom we call customers. Our normal and usual discourse about customers is exclusively about people who are buying goods and services in the business world, so this use will always tug strongly for exclusivity. It is therefore relevant to investigate the shortcomings of a moral theory which seeks customer satisfaction in this narrower sense.

Let us turn now this next batch of considerations about why a university should not turn to TQM for the moral dimension of its educational mission. When we draw on the business model of treating people like customers, we obscure a primary goal of fostering the development of mature, moral agents. This obfuscation can take a number of forms all of which are objectionable. If we draw on this business model without realizing that ultimately what we are seeking is moral treatment of others, we are criticizable for our ignorance. If we draw on this business model by thinking that we can best get people to become a little more moral by not telling them that that is what we are trying to accomplish, then we are criticizable for manipulating others which itself is wrong. If we draw on this business model because we believe that people like to think of themselves as agents whose primary reality is the business world and to identify with business types rather than with moral agents, we are criticizable not only for making this assumption without evidence but also for pandering to the

interests of people who putatively have little regard for their identity as moral agents. And if we draw on this business model thinking that the people with whom we deal at work are identical with customers because they share common features, we are criticizable for committing the logical error of false analogy. Although we can find similarities between customers and, say, patients, for example, the comparison fails to guide our thinking in an adequate fashion given very significant dissimilarities. In the matter of the analogy's defect, John R. Silber brings out that ". . . the professor, if he has the knowledge and character to merit his position, has some notion about what students will need and is prepared to offer his students guidance in the professor's area of competence that will contribute to the student's greatest development. The professor guides and aids the students, but he does not try to please the students by giving them what they *want*. Instead the professor encourages students to develop in the direction they *need*. There are similarities between the relation of the professors to students as between shopkeepers and customers, but there are also very important differences."⁷

Let us explore further aspects of this last observation about how the notion of a satisfied customer fails to guide us in our disparate work settings. The professor - student relationship is a paradigm case of how the business model of relationships falls far short of capturing the nature of specific roles and the obligations and responsibilities associated with them. Professors provide guidance and counseling for students who seek advice in selecting who and what they become.⁸ As representatives of a community which is dedicated to reason, professors serve as models for ordering one's life with reason as they instill an appreciation for the discovery and creation in their respective fields. They represent the intellectually and morally mature as much as the students represent the maturing.⁹

Edward Long offers an especially good account of this relationship and how it differs from other models of interaction which vary according to the degree to which people must become involved with

the provider of the good or service. Merchants and entrepreneurs strive to give customers what customers want. This relationship occupies one end of a spectrum where involvement is at a minimum, a simple purchasing and dispensing of goods or services. The next level of involvement is illustrated by the relationship between health clubs and their members, where the members must take some responsibility for acquiring the benefits which the club offers. Long designates such people participating members to distinguish them from consumers. The relationship which people have with professionals represents the next level of interaction. According to Long, this relationship is characterized by mutual cooperation with both parties acting responsibly. The good doctor is one who does not merely diagnose and prescribe but one who develops in the patient an understanding of the problem; this understanding enables the patient to participate fully in the treatment. We come now to the student - teacher relationship. Says Long: ". . . learning involves a still more crucial level of interaction. . . . In order for teaching to function well, the student must become the agent of learning, one who acts not only in response to the guidance and stimulation of mentors, but who basically takes full responsibility for accomplishing what is desired. This means that the relationship between teachers and students involves covenant, the highest form of interaction. Teaching is not directly dependent upon fees for services (although it has sometimes been), but upon tuition that is paid to establish a special community to which both teachers and students belong. This suggests why we shouldn't speak of students as 'clients,' let alone as 'consumers,' nor think of our relationship to them as merely commercial or contractual."¹⁰

These concerns which surround the professor-student relationship are not the concerns which marketers and salespeople have with customers whose wants are of paramount concern. Conversely, as customers we have no expectation that salespeople have any regard for our personal growth and

development, for the cultivation of our intellects, or for holding themselves out as models for leading the good life. On the contrary, we expect from salespeople, and indeed usually receive from them, onesided statements and claims geared toward promoting and inducing us to purchase their product or service. If this treatment is of the essence of the salesperson's conduct, this treatment is essentially not worthy of imitating as a model for how we treat other people.

What about cigarette companies adding nicotine to cigarettes to augment the addiction of their customers? What about fast food companies cooking french fries in beef tallow or movie theaters popping corn in tropical oils all to the ill-health of their customers. These scenarios call out to us *not* to treat people as businesses have treated customers whether it be because of manipulative practices or because of practices which gratify only narrow ranges of consumer interests and appetites; each practice demonstrates a lack of concern for the overall well-being of the customer. Even in more benign circumstances, we do not want to be treated merely as customers, since this treatment can diminish an aspect of our identity which is more important to us. When the hospital refers to its patients as customers, it frightens us with its suggestion that our money means more to it than our health.

I focused above on the professor-student relationship to illustrate clearly how these roles entail behaviors that the business model cannot account for. Similar illustrations could be developed for the other roles which I mentioned, but let us press on to the next claim, since our primary concern, to this point, has been one of revealing TQM's inadequacy for assisting universities with contributing to the moral education of their students. A study of the professor-student relationship is no less relevant for establishing my second major claim, that universities can inform TQM about the nature of quality and its connection with activity in a moral community. As we address this issue, we fill a lacuna which

some commentators observe to be quite evident: "We have never found a quality company (school, hospital) that was not also an ethical company. We do not know precisely which comes first or how they are related; indeed there is no proof that they *are* related, and if they are, we do not know what the relationship is."¹¹

II.

In the university the interaction of students and faculty gives rise to a connectedness of lives which takes on a vitality of its own.¹² The myriad of ways in which students and faculty organize for interaction and for discovering and creating -- seminars, tutorials, lectures, labs, studios, performances -- all develop their own distinctive characters. But whether one seminar has as its nature a quiet and contemplative manner and another class, a contentious way, and yet another characterized by gaiety or wonderment, however different their complexions, the university, these organizations within it, and the participants are all of a like nature. The essence of their vitality is a network of values¹³ including those of inquiry and creation and the knowledge and art which result. Another part of this system is the value of community¹⁴ and of organizing in ways which promote these primary activities of inquiry, discovery, and creation. These activities presuppose honesty, toleration, cooperation, and sincerity. No knowledge comes from falsified or fabricated data any more than it does from indoctrination or the unwillingness to consider that things might be otherwise than one has always believed to be the case. That openness and tolerance are the stuff of which cooperation within our organizations is made becomes evident when we try to imagine people cooperating when they are intolerant of each other or when candor gives way to legerdemain and skullduggery. And sincerity is a necessary companion to honesty, tolerance, and cooperation; for it tells us that the person or institution indeed values those values which are essential for the functioning

of the university. The person who is insincerely tolerant is the same as the person who does not really value toleration and that person is none other than the person who has rejected a value which is essential to the vitality of the university. So, a whole nexus of values is essential to the normal operation of the university.

What happens when this normal operation proceeds? Truth and knowledge emerge in part by weeding out error as much as beauty does by eliminating sour or wrong notes or by editing cumbersome locutions. This process has not worked its course when error and confusion are present any more than it has when manuscripts still need editing or lines are still unlearned for a performance. But when these activities at last culminate in the production of knowledge or beauty, they have secured for us quality and excellence. This analysis shows that quality and excellence are the natural outcome of the inquiry and creation which is carried out in a work setting which is thoroughly infused with values. These people, their activity, and their environment, the university, are the ingredients for a complete vision of how quality and excellence enter human experience.

A few more points are in order about these interconnected values. Universities serve their students first by making them a part of their communities where behaviors tied to these values are modeled and where opportunities for acquiring them are thereby afforded. They also do so by drawing attention explicitly to what is occurring in this process through such mechanisms as value credos, mission statements, and freshman seminar and orientation programs. In effect, as universities conduct business as usual, they contribute to their students' moral development; and universities can augment this development as they highlight the specific nature of this process.

Further, the values which are essential for the emergence of quality in the university are no less important for other work settings; the analysis renders not just a restricted example of how quality

is connected with other key values but serves as a paradigm for understanding the connection. One can readily imagine how any work environment lacking one of these features would improve with its introduction. What would it mean to say that we can reach higher levels of quality in manufacturing furniture, dispensing drugs, marketing food, cleaning clothing, repairing cars, or making touchdowns by reducing the honesty, tolerance, cooperation, sincerity, or sense of community among the workers?

This analysis is also instructive for the framework it provides for evaluating certain business practices. Consider the current and popular practice of downsizing when it entails the involuntary termination of workers. Proponents of this innovation can readily connect it with efforts to secure quality; it allows for a more efficient use of resources. But a management which first adopts a view that certain members of its workforce are expendable in the name of securing quality, and then proceeds to demonstrate the cogency of this maxim with layoffs and the elimination of positions, ends up constructing a work setting which is inimical to the production of quality. For the maxim conflicts with and undermines values which foster quality. The threat of expulsion from a job tugs at a community's cohesiveness as much as it turns any apparent cooperation on the part of the workers into a pretense bred by fear. Any claims about management's valuing its workers ring hollow and serve to undermine community as much as sincere statements, verified by a secure environment, promote it.

We now have a deeper understanding of the shortcomings of any universal push to pursue quality by aiming for satisfied customers. We first observed how this teaching interferes with the university's role in the moral education of its students. Now we have seen how such a view not only isolates quality and excellence from the complex system of values of which they are a part, but it also

conceives quality and excellence as independent objects toward which we strive rather than identifying them as byproducts of value-laden work. Universities can thus assist these programs which purport to have universal application for the human pursuit of quality by demonstrating how quality should be understood and attained in connection with other significant values.

1. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1957), p.14.
2. T.Q.M pioneer, W. Edwards Deming, recounts the essentials of what he passed along to Japanese management about quality: "Necessity to study the needs of the consumer, and to provide service to product, was one of the main doctrines of quality taught to Japanese management in 1950 and onward. Foremost is the principle that the purpose of consumer research is to understand the consumer's needs and wishes A second principle is that no one can guess the future loss of business from a dissatisfied customer." *Out of Crisis* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Center for Advanced Engineering Study, 1992), p. 175. *See also* Association of School Administrators' *Creating Quality Schools* (Arlington: AASA, 1992), p. 3. This work places "meeting and exceeding the needs of 'customers'" at the top of its list of characteristics of quality.
3. Gary Bonvillian and Terry L. Dennis, "Total Quality Management in Higher Education: Opportunities and Obstacles," *Total Quality Management in Higher Education: Is It Working? Why or Why Not?*, edited by Serbrenia J. Sims and Ronald R. Sims (Westport: Praeger, 1995), pp. 38-43. The authors bring out that, however impractical it may seem to define quality in academia, faculty must be involved in this process as they grapple with maintaining academic standards and respecting consumer rights.
4. *See, e.g.*, David Entin, "Whither TQM?" *AAHE Bulletin* (May 1994), pp. 5-7. Entin observes a greater student-centeredness resulting from the introduction of talk of students as customers. His subscription here to the traditional notion of customer in the business world is just as clear as it is

later in the article where he rejects the suggestion of one commentator that we think about TQM's advice as amounting to the general teaching of the Golden Rule.

5. Joann Neurath, Peter Plastrik, and John Cleveland, *Total Quality Management Handbook: Applying the Baldrige Criteria to Schools* (Lansing: On Purpose Associates, 1992), p. 10. This manual identifies "customer" as a "TQM term" for "the person who needs the work" but invites the adoption of an alternative vocabulary, since some people "find its commercial, business flavor distracting and not helpful"

6. See, e.g., Robert Kane, *Through the Moral Maze: Searching for Values in a Pluralistic World* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1994), pp. 123-124. In this recent attempt to reconcile absolute values with the panoply of seemingly diverse value systems, Kane endorses Plato's goal of teaching goodness in the academy. But Kane diverges from Plato as he finds goodness to be aspirational in nature. This finding leads Kane to argue for an open, democratic exchange of ideas to be the proper method for pursuing knowledge of this sort in the university.

7. John R. Silber, "Press Conference with the Community on Values and Morals in the University," *Morality and Values in the University*, edited by Jeffrey Gordon, Vincent Luizzi, and Marion Tatum (San Marcos: Southwest Texas State University, 1996), p. 68.

8. Hazel Barnes, "Learning Who You Are and Teaching It to Others," *Values and Morality in the University*, pp. 11-12. Barnes here clarifies how a professor's identification of his or her special interests and standpoints adds an important dimension to teaching and to the intellectual maturation of students. She made this point on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of her book, *The University as the New Church* (London: Watts and Co., Ltd., 1970). In this book Prof. Barnes argues for the university's being the ideal setting for young men and women growing intellectually. (p. 35)

9. See Jacob Neusner, "Learning and Growing Up," *How to Grade Your Professors and Other Unexpected Advice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) pp. 15-21. Neusner depicts professors as bringing an objective stance to a subject while students, from a subjective stance, want to know its significance for their own lives. Students grow up as they free themselves from small conceptions of self which are void of the teachings of a liberal education.

10. Edward L. Long, "Promises and Predicaments of the Learning Experience," *Morality and Values in the University*, pp. 17-18.

11. Lloyd Dobyns and Clare Crawford-Mason, *Thinking about Quality: Progress, Wisdom, and the Deming Philosophy* (New York: Times Books, 1994), p. 230.

12. See *Campus Life: In Search of Community*, with a foreword by Ernest L. Boyer, (Princeton: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990). This work characterizes the special nature of the university community as one that is purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. See also Edward L. Long, Jr.'s *Higher Education as a Moral Enterprise* (Washington,

D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992), pp. 45-55. Long investigates how the communal aspect of higher education can coexist with the private.

13. Another commentator identifies the essential values as freedom, community, and safety (prevention of harm). David Hoekema, *Campus Rules and Moral Community* (Lanham, Maryland: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1994), p. 134. Robert Maynard Hutchins isolates freedom --of inquiry, discussion, and teaching-- as the preeminent value of the university conceived as a community of scholars in his "What is a University?" a radio address of April 18, 1935 and published in Hutchins's *No Friendly Voice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936), pp. 5-11. While Hoekema's and Hutchins's projects are related to mine, neither investigates, as mine does, what values are connected with the production of quality in the university.

14. J. Victor Baldridge is well known for his critique of the model of the university as a community. He laments how widely this "utopian projection" is accepted as a panacea to the problem of depersonalization in the university. In doing so, he paves the way for his own proposal, the political model, which likens the university to political systems with their special intertests and conflicts. J. Victor Baldridge, "Organizational Characteristics of Colleges and Universities," *The Dynamics of Organizational Change in Education*, edited by J. Victor Baldridge and Terrence Deal, (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1983), pp. 38-59. Now, Baldridge's concern is with developing a realistic model of the university for governance within the university. As such, it is irrelevant whether the model of university as community is utopian as a model of governance if the model serves to guide us in understanding the connection between community and quality as is our concern here.