

# Of Two Contrasting Philosophies That Underpin Openness in Education and What That Entails

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# Of Two Contrasting Philosophies That Underpin Openness in Education and What That Entails

Peter B. Sloep and Robert Schuwer

## Openness in Education

We are now faced with numerous examples of the use of the word ‘open’ in the context of education. There are open schools, open universities, open participatory learning infrastructures (OPLI), open courseware (OCW), massive open online courses (MOOCs), open educational resources (OER), open educational practices (OEP) and so on (see, e.g., Atkins, Brown, & Hammond, 2007; Schuwer, van Genuchten, & Hatton, 2015). What these terms at face value seem to share is their reference to the removal of barriers to the access of education. Open universities have relaxed entrance requirements, open courseware and MOOCs allow for free access to courses, as do open educational resources and open educational practices at the levels of materials and practices, respectively, although the kinds of barriers removed and the extent to which they are removed differ widely (Mulder & Jansen, 2015). However, there is more to openness than this *prima facie* characterization in terms of the removal of barriers reveals. A brief overview of some existing definitions of openness in education can help to make this evident.

An early definition was framed in 1975 by Brian Hill in a book devoted to the philosophy of open education (Hill, 1975; Nyberg, 1975). He discerned *procedural*, *normative* and *revolutionary* openness, which in turn refer to attendance, a learner-centered perspective and, in Hill’s own words “the availability to oppressed classes of genuine openness in curriculum choices and learning procedures as a means of accelerating cataclysmic social change” (Deimann & Sloep, 2013, p. 4). This threefold characterization is still recognizable, although at present a different wording is chosen and nuance is added. Thus under the heading of *classical* openness, Fred Mulder and Ben Janssen (2013) discerned six dimensions in which learners can take responsibility for their own learning:

- *Freedom of time, pace and place*: Learners can begin a course or programme at any point during the year and study at any time, determine their own pace and study wherever they like.
- *Open access*: Anybody is admitted irrespective of prior education.

- *Open to a wide variety of target groups:* There is no or at least very little prior selection of learners who can be admitted and learners who can't.
- *Open programming:* Learners can mix and match courses at their liking.

This classical openness seems to be a mix of the technical, normative and revolutionary forms of openness of Hill, if we leave out his revolutionary agenda. Sloep and colleagues (2012) and Deimann and Sloep (2013) subsumed freedom of place, pace and time under the heading of *logistic* openness and added *didactic* openness into the mix, which subsumes open programming but also refers to the freedom to choose a didactic arrangement (solitary versus group work, for example) of one's choosing. Another aspect that is absent from Hill's definition is technology, which at present is prominent in education but at the time was virtually absent. Mulder and Janssen (2013) referred to this aspect as *digital* openness, which encompasses a number of forms of openness, *domains* as they called them. Not all of these forms have educational significance except for OERs, which, according to the authors, are modelled after open software code (one of the other domains).

This brief and eclectic overview shows that openness in education comes in various guises. But it also underscores our initial assumption that openness is about the freedom that learners have to take control of their own education, to access education in ways that they themselves see fit. However, we believe that this is not the entire story; indeed, a more trenchant story may be told by focusing on a deeper layer of analysis. To advance on the story we want to tell, we intend to show that such an analysis reveals the existence of two philosophies that result in radically different kinds of openness. These philosophies embrace either a *humanitarian* system of values or a *utilitarian* one. Our claim is that open education is currently at a crossroad: In designing open education, one should consciously and overtly subscribe to either a humanitarian or a utilitarian system of values, lest values that we hold dear may surreptitiously disappear from the open educational table.

### **An Extremely Short History of Openness in Education**

In exploring and defending our thesis, in this section we first succinctly cover the postwar history of openness to better flesh out our main thesis in the next main section. Rather than attempting to straddle the full breadth of all types of educational openness mentioned earlier, we limit ourselves to only two types: *openness in universities* and *openness in MOOCs*. This is done for reasons of manageability, but more importantly, we also believe that these two forms of openness allow us best to tell the story we want to tell. In our final discussion, we briefly go into the justification of this assumption.

There is one more preliminary issue: Openness in universities seems to attach to the institutional level and openness in MOOCs to the level of individual courses. It would therefore seem that by comparing the two, we commit a category mistake. However, we believe this not to be the case.

Universities offer programmes through distinct courses, and many of their institutional policies will carry over to these courses. A policy of no entrance requirements, as is characteristic of many open universities, affects the admittance to individual courses. Conversely, MOOCs are individual courses, but they are offered by MOOC providers, which all impose their own rules and regulations on the courses they offer. The comparison we are about to make is grounded in both of these mutually tied levels.

### Open Universities

The Open University was founded in Britain in 1969, after a four-year planning period. It was arguably the first genuine open university,<sup>1</sup> in that it had relaxed entrance requirements (Peter & Deimann, 2013). It set the stage for a great many others. To name a haphazard few, Athabasca University in Canada (Alberta) followed a year later in 1970; The Open University of the Netherlands opened its doors for students in 1984, the same year in which the Universitas Terbuka of Indonesia was founded; the Indira Gandhi National Open University of India—according to Wikipedia, the largest open university of the world—was established in 1985; the Hellenic Open University of Greece was founded in 1992; and finally, the Open University of Catalonia began its activities in the academic year 1995–1996.<sup>2</sup> This brief overview, which fails to do justice to the many other initiatives in the world to erect open universities, suffices to establish that the idea of an open university caught on in various places, in Europe but also in the world at large. It seems that open education conceived of as a form of education that seeks to widen access, particularly relative to extant formal higher education systems, was widely embraced in the final decades of the previous century.

Open access is not to be confused with the absence of any monetary charges. Open universities have different arrangements for recovering their operational costs. These may range from being paid for in full out of public funding to no public funding at all, although we are not aware of any examples of the latter. Using the case of The Open University of the Netherlands as an example, about 80% of its operational costs are covered by government funds; the remainder comes out of the enrolment and tuition fees the students pay.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, this requirement to pay for

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The University of South Africa was already established in 1873. It did and does embrace open distance learning, but it never advertised itself as an open university.

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This type of information can be verified at the universities' web sites, the pages that Wikipedia features on them and in part also at the site of the *European Association of Distance Teaching Universities* (EADTU; <http://www.eadtu.eu/members/current-members>) and at the site of the *International Council for Open and Distance Education* (ICDE; <http://www.icde.org/institutions>).

3

At The Open University of the Netherlands (OUNL), the total fee each individual student pays to obtain a degree is roughly equivalent to the tuition students in traditional universities pay. But there are lots of assumptions here. Students at OUNL pay per course, whereas students at traditional universities pay per year or semester. A slow student at a traditional university therefore quickly ends up paying more

access amounts to erecting an obstacle to access, particularly if the monetary compensation asked is high relative to the average standard of living and no compensation programmes are in place. But it is only one of the many obstacles one may encounter; requirements with respect to prior education is another, perhaps more difficult one to overcome. The presence of compensatory measures, paid for out of public funds or by the student's employer, clearly lowers this barrier to access. So it is still fair to conclude that, by and large, open universities lower the threshold for access to higher education, for obtaining a genuine university degree.

A means of keeping the operational costs of an open university low is the choosing of an appropriate pedagogy. Traditional universities<sup>4</sup> very much rely on a model in which relatively little money is spent in the design phase of a course (design time) and much on the actual deployment ('teaching') of it: the lectures, work groups and so on (run time). In the past, this model was enforced by the lack of appropriate technologies to disseminate information in anything other than large joint sessions (large-scale lectures). And traditional universities by and large still follow this mode. For open universities, however, large-scale lectures was never a genuine option. Perhaps lectures could be televised, but the issue was always that students had little opportunity to interact with their teachers, which significantly detracted from the quality of their learning experiences. So open universities developed a pedagogy which heavily depended on investing in the development of courses and spending as little money as possible on running them. That way too, increases in the numbers of students could be accommodated with little additional cost to the university. Of course, the advent of the Internet, particularly the social web, which allowed for synchronous interaction between teachers and students, removed the old limiting conditions and consequently made open universities rethink their pedagogical commitments. Open universities such as The Open University in the United Kingdom, Athabasca University, and The Open University of the Netherlands are in the midst of this transition (Sloep, 2013). But that is another story.

## MOOCs

The full history of MOOCs is too immature to be written. It is too early for anyone to distance themselves sufficiently to oversee all relevant and ignore all irrelevant MOOC-related events. Also, MOOC development is still in full swing, with many conferences, journal articles (often in special issues) and projects devoted to its delineation.<sup>5</sup> This particular section is not to be seen

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than an OUNL student. On the other hand, students at traditional universities are eligible for student loans, which OUNL students are not. Data on The Open University of the Netherlands are provided by the authors themselves, one of whom is and the other was for several years employed by the university.

4

'Traditional universities' is a term that is often used to denote universities that are not 'open.' Traditional universities, then, mostly cater to adolescents and have brick and mortar buildings where students and staff meet.

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as a contribution to the writing of the definitive MOOC history. It is a mere recount of a number of notable events, particularly those that are relevant in the context of the story we want to tell.<sup>6</sup>

For reasons that will become clear later, we let MOOC history begin with the introductory course in artificial intelligence that Stanford professors Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig organised in the autumn of 2011.<sup>7</sup> The course was mainly intended to serve their residential students, but in an entrepreneurial move, they decided to open it up for free to students anywhere in the world, with baffling results. Approximately 160,000 students from 200 different countries all over the world registered for the class (Rodríguez, 2013). Since then, many more MOOCs were set up, in Stanford, also at MIT and Harvard, and soon all over the world.

Seeded by an influx of venture capital, Thrun was quick to set up a company, *Udacity*, that provided an online platform for the various MOOCs they intended to host. At about the same time, their Stanford colleagues, Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller, followed with their own company, *Coursera*. In contrast with *Udacity*, which created its own content (mainly in science subjects), *Coursera's* content was provided by 'traditional' universities and their professors, also being helped on its way by venture capital. Universities worldwide could join their platform, where, in an attempt to establish a high quality brand, the company was quite selective about who could and who could not join in.<sup>8</sup> In 2013, Telefónica of Spain and Banco Santander jointly founded the *Miríada X* platform, which quickly garnered a huge following in Latin America. In 2014, it already had become the third largest MOOC provider, after *Coursera* and *edX*.<sup>9</sup> The Open University in the United Kingdom founded the *FutureLearn* consortium, which was launched in

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The yearly eMOOCs conference, started in 2013, is an example of a conference that is fully devoted to MOOCs. Liyanagunawardena, Adams, and Williams (2013) carried out a review of MOOC-related articles published between 2008 and 2012. Following are a few special issues: *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 12(3), 2011; *Journal of Online Learning with Technology*, 9(2), 2013; *Journal of Distance Education*, 35(2), 2014; *Comunicar*, 22(44), 2015. Following are several projects funded by the European Union and devoted to MOOCs: *European Multiple MOOC Aggregator*, *MOOCKnowledge*, *Higher education Online: MOOCs the European Way*.

6

Much of MOOC history is 'common knowledge', shared in blogs (e.g., <http://www.scoop.it/t/networked-learning-learning-networks/> or <http://www.scoop.it/t/openingupeducation>), articles in *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/16/science/16stanford.html>), *Inside Higher Ed*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Wired* ([http://www.wired.com/2012/03/ff\\_aiclass/](http://www.wired.com/2012/03/ff_aiclass/)) and so on. The MOOC lemma in the English version of Wikipedia does a good job of consolidating much of this information ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive\\_open\\_online\\_course](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course)).

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Strictly speaking, there is another type of MOOC that predated them, set up by Cormier, Downes, and Siemens. We come back to these later. See also Yuan and Powell (2013).

8

It was generally thought, and with good reason, that part of the success of the early MOOCs was the idea of being able to develop a course with an 'elite' university at no cost.

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According to Sara Custer, on August 27, 2014, in *The Pie News*, which provides news and business analysis for professionals in international education (<http://thepienews.com/news/spanish-portuguese-mooc-platform-rolled-latin-america/>).

September 2013 (Gaebel, 2014). On their heels, several other initiatives followed, some squarely in line with the setup of *Udacity* and *Coursera*, others, mainly in continental Europe, such as *iversity* (2012) and *OpenupEd* (2013), with slightly different approaches (Gaebel, 2014). On the face of it, these approaches seem to be more in line with that of *edX*, which grew out of MIT's commitment to OER and OCW.

In MOOCs, courses are free in the sense that no enrolment fee has to be paid, but somehow the universities involved and the MOOC providers need to recoup their investments. There is an ongoing and lengthy discussion about viable MOOC business models. An early volley was launched in July 2013 by *The Economist*.<sup>10</sup> Chrysanthos Dellarocas and Marshall Van Alstyne (2013) conducted a very thorough analysis of MOOC business models. Among the sources of income are fees for acquiring a certificate of attendance and fees for the opportunity to sit in on an exam and be graded.<sup>11</sup> Other sources of income are selling student data to anybody with an interest in them, such as recruitment agencies, corporations, universities, and so on.<sup>12</sup> This is very much like the business model of online social services, such as Google, Gmail, Facebook and Twitter, in which the companies that buy the data are the real customers, not the users. Free access is offset by willingly parting with one's data.

We suggest that it is in particular the latter type of income prospects that prompted the involvement of venture capital and large companies. Their authors' argument was probably one of analogy. The first element in the analogy is that companies and even entire industries who fail to judge the power of the Internet appropriately have a hard time surviving unless they innovate. We are referring here to the music, film and most recently book publishing industries. These relied on a business model in which media (CDs, DVDs, paper books) were used to diffuse content; the costs of media reproduction, financially and in terms of time needed, were high, and the quality of every next copy went down significantly as distribution and storage relied on analog technologies. The advent of the Internet, with its reliance on digital distribution means, made media other than hard disks superfluous, made the costs of producing copies negligible and, because of its reliance on digital data, made their quality identical to that of the original. This effectively ruined the viability of the original, business model (which the industries nevertheless tried to uphold). Second, MOOC venture capitalists saw how companies such as Apple (iTunes), Netflix and Amazon managed to take a sizeable share of the music, film and book markets precisely because they better understood the affordances of the Internet (Anderson,

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See <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21582001-army-new-online-courses-scaring-wits-out-traditional-universities-can-they>.

<sup>11</sup>

See, for example, <http://techcrunch.com/2013/01/08/coursera-takes-a-big-step-toward-monetization-now-lets-students-earn-verified-certificates-for-a-fee/> and <https://about.futurelearn.com/about/faq/>

<sup>12</sup>

See an article on the topic of business models for MOOCs in *Inside Higher Ed*: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/06/11/experts-speculate-possible-business-models-mooc-providers>.

2009). Their argument probably was that, if the education 'industry' is subject to the same logic of the Internet, universities as we know them are bound to disappear and a large market for Internet-based education is for the taking.

This argument assumes a high similarity between the notions of education and content distribution. And indeed, MOOC providers profess to adhere to a pedagogy of mastery learning, that is, assimilating mere content until a standardised test certifies that one indeed has acquired a sufficient level of mastery. Traditional ingredients of such a pedagogy are lectures and sessions, which organise the content for the student in sizeable chunks, arranged in their proper order, with tutors or teaching assistants who help iron out the final misunderstanding. In the MOOC realm, this has been translated into short videos, reading materials and self-tests.

### **Openness: Two Contrasting Views**

Through the free access they provide to pedagogically enriched content, MOOCs no doubt contribute to increasing access to education. However, there is a proviso. One has to pay a modest sum of money to obtain a certificate of participation and more to obtain a certificate of attainment, which requires one to pass a test. However, much more important to note is that neither of these certificates can be used to count toward the fulfilment of a university degree. So MOOCs do not increase access to *higher education* in the sense of a higher education degree. This stands in contrast with open universities, whose purpose is to do precisely that. But there is a proviso here too: Access to a higher education degree comes at a price, the cumulative costs of the individual course modules. This suggests that open universities and MOOCs each fill their own niche in the education ecosystem. If you want a degree, go and study at an open university; if you want to acquire knowledge at a higher education level without necessarily gaining a degree, a MOOC is your best choice. And indeed, research seems to show that MOOCs are increasingly used by people with academic degrees who want to broaden their knowledge or further develop themselves professionally (Falconer, McGill, Littlejohn, & Boursinou, 2013; Grainger, 2013; Garreta-Domingo, Hernández-Leo, Mor, & Sloep, 2015). However, this analysis misses an important point. To see this, we need to look at the wider sociopolitical situation in which open universities and later on MOOCs emerged and further developed.

### **Decades of Solidarity**

On December 10th, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>13</sup> was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It counts 30 articles, of which Articles 1 and 2 are best known.

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The declaration was adopted by a vote of 48 in favour, none against, and eight abstentions (Soviet Union, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Union of South Africa, Czechoslovakia, Saudi Arabia; see <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>).



Article 1 states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Article 2 states, “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration.” These 2 articles form the foundation on which the other 28 have been built, including Article 26, which is the most important in this context. It contains three clauses, the first of which reads as follows:

Article 26.1 Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Clearly, for the traditional universities, merit was an important factor of their access policies, but it was never the only one. The right prior school, the right skin colour, committed and/or affluent parents were among the factors that were perhaps more decisive than capability alone (Wubbels, 2014). It is safe to say that, although many countries adopted the Universal Declaration, they still had a lot of work ahead of them to meet Article 26.1’s requirement to make higher education accessible to all.

That work is extensively discussed in the UNESCO report entitled “Learning to Be,” written by Edgar Faure and colleagues (1972). Faure was no doubt influenced by the just-published report of the Club of Rome, “The Limits to Growth” (D. H. Meadows, D. L. Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972), which predicted the end of civilisation as we know it if not mankind would succeed in putting an end to the exponential growth of resource use and population growth. In the preamble to the report, Faure pleads for solidarity in dealing with the challenges of the time. In the final sentences of his preamble, after having established that “the various sectors of human development and social life are inseparable from each other,” he sees a solution only forthcoming if we acknowledge that “[t]his age, which has been called that of the finite world, can only be the age of total man: that is to say, man entire and all of man” (Faure et al., 1972, p. xxxix), in short, the age of solidarity.

This sentiment is also echoed in the attitude of the peoples of Europe in the postwar period of the 1950s. It was a period of hard work and sacrifices but also a period of much optimism, of belief in a better world and in mankind’s ability to build one (Judt, 2005; Mak, 2004). The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights indeed testifies to that optimism. Another example thereof constitutes the establishment of the European Union, first as the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952, to be followed by the European Economic Community in 1957, which in its turn through the signing of the treaty of Maastricht in 1992 was succeeded by the current European Union (Judt, 2005; Mak, 2004). The European Union’s contribution “to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe” cannot be overestimated, as is underscored by the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize the

European Union as a whole received.<sup>14</sup> So there definitely was a willingness to sacrifice but also a keen resolve to exercise solidarity in dealing with Europe's problems.

It is against this backdrop of solidarity that several countries inside and outside of Europe decided to establish open universities.

### A Change of Attitude

In 1996, about the time that the last open universities were established, a seminal report was published by the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Delors, 1996). This commission was headed by Jacques Delors, a well-known European politician who, among other achievements, presided over the European Commission for 10 years (from 1985 to 1995). The report has been highly influential, commensurate to the political clout its chair and members had. The commission obviously built on earlier work, for example, on the ideas put forth in the Faure report already mentioned (Faure et al., 1972) but also on the progressive and humanitarian thoughts of educators and philosophers such as John Dewey, Célestin Freinet, and Paulo Freire (Sancho Gil, 2001, p. 144). No doubt tapping into the vast experience of its members, it also carried out an insightful analysis about where the world would and should be heading over the decades to come and what would therefore be the challenges education has to face. The commission identified seven tensions, some of which are still very current, such as between the need of citizens to adopt a global perspective and their urge to stick to their local roots, between the need for competition and the concern for equality of opportunity, or between long-term, often scientifically grounded, and short-term, often politically motivated, considerations that affect policies to be adopted. Overall, according to Tawil and Macedo (2013), "it propos[ed] a *philosophical approach* [emphasis added] to the ultimate purpose of education"; it was "a document proposing paradigms for the conceptualisation of an integrated and *humanistic vision of education* [emphasis added]; it "offered a different vision for education from the dominant *utilitarian, economic tone* [emphasis added] prevalent at that time" (pp. 4–5).

The dominance of a utilitarian, economic take on education did not emerge out of nothing. Half a decade before the publication of the Delors report, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. Ostensibly, this marked the end of the Cold War, the antagonism between the "Free World" headed by the United States of America and the world behind what Sir Winston Churchill called the "Iron Curtain,"<sup>15</sup> headed by the Soviet Union. Particularly for the United States, swiftly

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See [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2012/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2012/).

<sup>15</sup>

Ignace Feuerlicht apparently coined this term in October 1955: A New Look at the Iron Curtain, *American Speech*, 30(3), 186–189.

followed by the Margaret Thatcher ruled Great Britain, the taking down of the Iron Curtain marked the victory of liberal capitalism over socialism and communism. In such a political and economic climate, it is small wonder that the view of education as a humanitarian enterprise, which had dominated in the first postwar decades, had to give in to a view of education as an economic activity, subject to the forces of capital markets. The Delors report may be seen as a final attempt to turn this tide by portraying education as a public good that has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development (Burnett, 2008).

It is safe to conclude then that, by and large, in the last half century, the view of education as a public good that serves humanitarian values has been supplanted by one that sees education as a private good that is subject to market forces.<sup>16</sup> In our view, open universities side with the humanitarian take on education, MOOCs with the utilitarian one. Besides serving different target groups as we already established—learners with an interest in a higher education degree versus learners with an interest in developing themselves professionally—open universities and MOOCs are built on different ideological foundations—humanitarian values versus utilitarian values, in particular, liberal capitalist ones.

### Conclusion

The prevailing tide of the time, then, is that of liberal capitalist utilitarianism, in which showing solidarity and valuing a sense of community have given way to satisfying one's own needs and taking an individualist perspective. In a recent essay entitled "Inequality and Limits," Bonnie Nardi (2015) convincingly traced a number of undesirable consequences of this type of transition. And as we showed, it is this transition that coincides with the advent of MOOCs as an alternative mode of implementing openness in education, one that is radically different than the kind of openness open universities were built on. Indeed, we suggest that it is the liberal capitalist form of utilitarianism that gave rise to the emergence of MOOCs as we know them. However, true as this may be, the decisive question is whether a utilitarian view of openness and the kinds of MOOCs we discussed as the operationalisation thereof should be a cause for concern?

Our answer is a nuanced but firm 'yes.' We gladly admit that there could well be a place for the kinds of MOOCs we discussed, and only time can tell whether they indeed will be able to carve out a place for themselves in the educational landscape. Much depends on their ability to find sustainable business models. However, we are also convinced that it would be a grave mistake to interpret their current and possible future successes as a sign that a few MOOC providers suffice to serve the worldwide education market, as MOOC proponent Sebastian Thrun initially

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Fear that this type of transition was lying in wait was already voiced by one of us in a late 2012 blogpost: <http://pbsloep.blogspot.nl/2012/11/moocs-what-about-them.html>.

claimed,<sup>17</sup> that one can do without humanitarian values in education, and that open universities have become relics or worse, should henceforth adopt a utilitarian *modus operandi*.<sup>18</sup>

First, and to reiterate our position, we firmly believe that education without a humanitarian outlook is a gravely impoverished form of education, a form of education that is commensurate with a world without solidarity and compassion, a world that sees monetary values as the most important values. We would not appreciate living in such a world and we believe we are in good company. Delors, in his 1996 report, vehemently tried to retain the humanitarian aspect of education. Similarly, Markus Deimann has been arguing for a while in favour of adopting the German ideal of *Bildung* for open education, *Bildung* being the mould in which the German educational system traditionally casts its humanitarian ideals (Deimann, 2013; Deimann & Farrow, 2013; Deimann & Sloep, 2013). However, being in good company hardly qualifies as a valid argument. What more causes for concern are there?

The first is that in a world in which utilitarian MOOCs are the dominant form of education, students would be confronted with the pedagogy of mastery learning only. MOOCs can't do without that pedagogy, because they need its logic of investing in content development (design time) and not in tutoring (runtime) to be economically viable. The more time is devoted to runtime and the less to design time, the profits that the Internet 'laws' of low reproduction, transaction and distribution costs guarantee, start to crumble. The larger the number of registrants, the more acute this issue becomes. However, mastery learning is a limited and outdated pedagogy. There are good reasons for why alternative pedagogies for the design of MOOC-like online learning are widely discussed (Bayne & Ross, 2014; Sloep, 2014). One of those is networked learning—social constructivist learning supported by advanced technologies (e.g., Carvalho & Goodyear, 2014; Sloep, 2015)—of which indeed the earliest MOOCs, by Cormier, Downes and Siemens, are an example.

Since MOOCs rely on this pedagogy, there is a danger that a two-tiered educational system will arise—MOOCs and mastery learning for the masses and other course types with more sophisticated and also more labour-intensive pedagogies for those who can afford it. And, indeed, in a widely cited TED talk in 2012, Daphne Koller of *Coursera* claimed that MOOCs could

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According to the *Wired* article already mentioned, "Fifty years from now, according to Thrun, there will be only 10 institutions in the whole world that deliver higher education" (see [http://www.wired.com/2012/03/ff\\_aiclass/](http://www.wired.com/2012/03/ff_aiclass/)).

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The first signs of such a move are already showing themselves. Funding for The Open University of the Netherlands, for example, is dependent on 'output' in terms of the number of students who graduate. Funding is in part dependent on 'efficiency,' the time it takes those students to graduate. Underlying considerations are 'returns on (public) investment' and 'time to market.' These are economic considerations in which there is no room for, say, the contribution that individual courses has on citizenship education, let alone personal development.

democratise education.<sup>19</sup> Now recall that for Thrun and Norvig's introductory artificial intelligence class, MOOC students registered from 250 different countries, among them several so-called developing countries. MOOCs would allow students in developing countries, with their ailing educational systems, to have access to content from elite U.S. universities. A similar argument has been made with respect to the educational system in the United States itself, where tuition costs have been on the rise for decades and quality has been going down. A Californian legislator suggested that MOOCs could be the way out of this problem.<sup>20</sup>

Obviously, from a utilitarian point of view, this kind of democratising is entirely justified.

However, from a wider moral point of view, it isn't. First, 'helping' troubled educational systems in developing countries by making them superfluous amounts to neocolonialist or cultural imperialism (cf. Sonwalker, Wilson, Ng, & Sloep, 2013).<sup>21</sup> The morally right thing to do would be to help them set up a properly functioning educational system, so that the countries could take responsibility for their own education, students could be taught in their native language and in their own cultural settings. That way, they at least would have a choice. Similarly, in the United States, the higher education system is in such poor shape because public funding has been decreasing for decades, and the increases in tuition fees do not make up for the difference.<sup>22</sup> Small wonder then that the quality has decreased. Here too, the morally right thing to do would be to increase public funding so that every student would have access to a quality education.

Moral philosopher Michael Sandel, in a book entitled *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (2012), extensively discussed these kinds of situations, also outside of education. The essence of what he claimed is that there is a moral limit to what we should put a monetary value on; that is, that there is a limit to commoditisation (as in courses), to privatisation and commercialisation (as in universities). We wholeheartedly agree with this. Although there may well be room for MOOCs, insisting on a utilitarian philosophy to underpin open education or even education *tout court* leads to seriously impoverished forms thereof, forms that make a

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For Koller's Ted talk, see  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/daphne\\_koller\\_what\\_we\\_re\\_learning\\_from\\_online\\_education](http://www.ted.com/talks/daphne_koller_what_we_re_learning_from_online_education).

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See an article by Paul Fain and Ry Rivard in *Inside Higher Ed*:  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/03/13/california-bill-encourage-mooc-credit-public-colleges>  
For a nuanced view, see the following Inside Higher Ed article by Ryan Craig:  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/08/31/massive-open-courses-arent-answer-reducing-higher-ed-inequality-essay>.

21

See also <http://pbsloep.blogspot.nl/2013/11/moocs-democratising-education-i-am-not.html>

22

See, for example, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-11-13/college-tuition-in-the-u-s-again-rises-faster-than-inflation>. Wikipedia also has an insightful lemma:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College\\_tuition\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College_tuition_in_the_United_States).

mockery of the humanitarian values that in our view any education system needs to adopt to remain morally defensible.<sup>23</sup>

Although we firmly stand behind this conclusion of our analysis, we are not impervious to a number of arguments that one may level against it. We will discuss and try to defuse what we believe are the most important ones.

First, one may argue that we have set up a straw man when discussing MOOCs as we did. The original model of the early MOOCs that we discussed earlier has been modified in various ways over the years. Indeed, although the MOOCs we discussed are the most prominent ones of the early days, they were by no means the first. As we indicated in a footnote, they were preceded by the pedagogically more sophisticated connectivist MOOCs of Cormiers, Downes and Siemens, which fit into a tradition of networked learning, their underpinning much more in line with humanitarian than utilitarian principles (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens, & Cormier, 2010; Rodriguez, 2013; Yuan & Powell, 2013). Also, the *edX* platform that MIT and Harvard set up almost simultaneously with *Udacity* and *Coursera* differs significantly from theirs. It is funded out of donations by alumni, strictly not-for-profit, should be seen as a follow up to their October 2001 decision to make their educational resources freely available and is intended to serve the community and to do research on online learning.<sup>24</sup> Finally, recent MOOC initiatives that have emerged in particular in continental Europe—*iversity*, *OpenupEd*—like the connectivist MOOCs, combine a more sophisticated pedagogy with an allegiance to humanitarian values. Also, to varying extents, they rely on public funding and therefore are not subject to the demand of making a profit like MOOCs supported by venture capital. Our analysis does not apply or applies only to a limited extent to these types of MOOCs. That said, the *Coursera*, *Udacity* and *Miriada X* MOOCs to which we have directed our objections are the largest ones and are still quite influential.

Second, and restricting ourselves to the utilitarian MOOCs, if you like, one may argue that the picture we paint is too black and white and does not allow for any nuance. For sure, Thrun does no longer believe that 50 universities suffice to serve the world, and Koller has publicly recanted her claims about the democratising effect of MOOCs. Also, research is done to mitigate the effects of the mastery learning pedagogical model (to the extent that the utilitarian model is able to absorb such pedagogies). True as this may be, it is the utilitarian value system out of which these MOOCs arose that prompted the remarks by Thrun and Koller and suggested mastery learning as a pedagogy. The fact that the sharpness may have been taken off of their stances and the way the utilitarian MOOCs are deployed has become more palatable, does not detract from the fact that they derive from a value system that is ill-suited for education, a system that in the

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For a slightly more extensive analysis of the relevance of Sandel's ideas for MOOCs, see <http://pbsloep.blogspot.nl/2013/01/moocs-what-about-them-continued.html>

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Personal communication by Katie Vale (see <http://pbsloep.blogspot.nl/2012/10/how-to-improve-teaching-with.html>).

final analysis denies open education its humanitarian values. This cannot be portrayed but in black and white terms as such is the nature of these underlying value systems. Anyone who wants to experiment with MOOCs or investigate their potential for education on their own terms should do so. Still, we would suggest remaining keenly aware of the two contrasting philosophies we described.

Third, how about the other forms of openness? Does our analysis of opposing underlying philosophies and value systems apply to them as well? Lack of space prevents us from ticking them off one by one and establish to what extent our analysis applies to them. But actually, we doubt whether such an exercise would make much sense. Thinking about openness is in a state of flux. So rather than declare to what forms our analysis does and does not apply, we would reverse the argument. If what we have said seems to make any sense, we invite others to use our analysis of contrasting underlying philosophies to scrutinise other forms of openness and clarify those forms' position with respect to humanitarian and utilitarian values. OERs, it would seem, are not necessarily aligned with humanitarian or utilitarian values. It is how one wishes to conceptualise them. The exercise of (re)conceptualising forms of openness would seem to be a much more productive one than establishing in some essentialist sense what they are.

The ultimate question is a normative one: Which way do we want that openness in education to go? That question concerns educational resources, open educational practices and what other forms the educational system may spawn. For ultimately, we as stakeholders, in the learning of our children and grandchildren, in the professional development and *Bildung* of ourselves, should get the educational systems that we want, including appropriate forms of openness therein. Every individual then should decide for herself or himself to what extent this requires education as a public good and to what extent education as a private good, that is, as a commodity subject to market forces. It should not come as a surprise that we side with the humanitarian elaboration of openness. Indeed, we feel that governments as guardians of the public space should actively get involved in promoting this kind of openness, indeed, much as Delors in 1996 advocated for education as a whole.

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