



Inside a College Owner's Soul

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Feelings, thoughts, words and deeds are said to be in harmony when these entities within the inner-self have the due synchrony. Dissonance on the contrary occurs when words filter and censor what we actually feel or think, and all the more when deeds go against volition, words and commitments.

Under certain circumstances, we may have “reasons or justifications” when our acts or omissions go against our feelings, thoughts and words. This occurs when words are hedged or modulated for the purpose of courtesy or civility to such a magnitude that would not amount to an outright lie, and when deeds are adjusted to current realities in order to avoid the risk of “*being right at the wrong time*”.

We may imagine some sort of dialogue that represents the various shades of feelings and thoughts inside a private college owner's soul. For the purpose of convenience soul refers to the *mind-emotion-spirit* nexus within us.

In Plato's dialogues, various ideas and perceptions are expressed through different characters. But we may imagine an inner dialogue inside a college owner's soul before the triumphant thought develops into verbal expressions and then deeds. We can thus create a hypothetical setting that *Entone*, after some toss and turn in his bed (one Sunday morning) harbours an intense contemplation whereby competing thoughts and feelings undertake a heated conversation on issues related to his daily endeavours.

P and *Q* within *Entone*'s soul represent, respectively, the motives and desires of *Profit* and *Quality*. And at a later stage of the dialogue a third entity may participate in the conversation. The dialogue starts while *Entone* still lies in his bed, his eyes glued on the æsthetic design of his bedroom ceiling.

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- Please don't nag me *Q*. Our college is not a welfare organization. Nor is it an NGO established with a non-profit objective. It's a simple demand-supply phenomenon. The demand for higher education is there. And here we are, with a college, which is engaged in the supply of services.

- If we are short-distance runners, what you say is correct. We will run as fast as we can, sprint at every possible juncture, make fast and easy money, and then quit gasping and breathless. But P, rest assured that this trend will backfire someday.
- Meaning?
 - Most of our graduates will be far below the professional and academic height expressed by the diplomas or degrees we affix our signatures and seal on. The current rate of unemployment coupled with compromised quality of education will inevitably have repercussions someday. I hope you can understand what I mean. Ultimately, what you say “demand” will shrink and dissipate.
- Easier said than done. Have I ever said that I don’t strive towards quality? The problem boils down to practice, practice and practice. I am sure you don’t have some magic formula towards an action plan.
 - Decision and commitment are the initial steps towards every journey.
- Don’t forget that we need money for our efforts towards Quality. I’m afraid you haven’t given enough thought to the practical aspect of the issue.

Q paused for a while and responded:

- I am not preaching altruism. Let’s reallocate most of our profit to inputs until such a time that our college stands on its feet confident with its quality performance.
- You mean our current performance is inadequate.
 - We should not compare our college to those behind us, but instead to the ones that are ahead of us and in particular against our own potential. We ought to steadily march towards excellence because there are always better ways of doing things. Ultimately, quality brings about sustained and deserved profit, not in the sense of ordinary business, but deserved return to enable us to live our private lives comfortably and pay more attention to the enhancement of the teaching and research endeavours of our college.
- You are a dreamer Q. This reminds me of a certain quotation I had read decades back. “The easiest way to get into trouble is to be right at the wrong time”. Can you think of an action plan which is pragmatic and not ahead of the actual realities on the ground?

- I don't have ready made prescriptions. All we need is the *Will* and determination. If we agree on principles, we can easily work on the details.
- Come-on. Of course, we share the same principle. Who doesn't like quality? And, who hates profit? I'll be glad if we can blend quality education and profit. Just tell me what you recommend as initial steps towards enhancing quality.

Q opted not to go into details, and replied:

- Let's check out our net profit, and then allocate X percentage of it for quality education and research inputs.

P's response was prompt:

- What does X percent stand for?
 - Any figure you might feel appropriate provided that the percentage of the profit that goes into our wallet is far below the amount that finds its way to the personal account of the average businessman.
- By the way, what do you mean by inputs? Does that include further investment in terms of extending the scope of our activities?
 - Reinvestment is another issue. By inputs I mean the reallocation of a greater portion of our profit towards the enhancement of quality education and training.
- You mean the customer is the King.
 - Yes indeed. Our current students are among tomorrow's scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, accountants, leaders ... *et cetera*.

P took a deep breath and replied:

- Be realistic Q, and don't forget the standard of our students. Assume that we allocate our entire profit to fill our libraries and employ the best instructors available at attractive salaries and benefits. The books we buy as textbooks and references should be read and comprehended. And the instructor's lectures and responses during class discussions should be understood.
 - You seem to throw the blame to another factor. I mean English language proficiency level of our students.

- I had been an instructor for quite a long time, and the language barrier is apparent. True, the Chinese and the Japanese have fared well by using their own languages as a medium of instruction. In our case, however, this seems unimaginable because we cannot stand still and wait until the infinite heritage written in the European languages is translated into one of our languages. To be honest, our languages would not at present be able to express every abstract and technical concept or idea published in the various spheres. Besides ...

P continued despite a gentle knock at the door.

- Besides, our professionals would be unable to compete and serve in the international skilled manpower market if our colleges use national languages as a medium of instruction. By the way, certain African countries are currently benefiting much from the remittances of their professionals working abroad. And the inevitable wave towards African union and globalization doesn't allow us to diverge from but to converge towards the international community.
 - You are right P. I share your view with regard to the language barrier. But it doesn't only involve students, but many instructors as well. Current college classes in Addis are “*guramaile*”, I mean, partly English and partly Amharic. Some instructors do it to go down to the comprehension level of their students, and others because they are unable to consistently lecture and hold discussions in English. They shouldn't of course bear the blame because they are yesterday's students who went through the “*guramaile*” classroom tradition. Our public schools have for decades reduced their facilities to the half-day shift system, thereby considerably reducing the amount of time and resources allotted to each student. Moreover, our practice of using national languages as a medium of instruction has been stretched up to higher grades, and the number of students per class is steadily rising.
- So Q, I'm glad that we have started to share many views. In fact, reason is now prevailing over your emotion. Our country is in the midst of the poverty trap. The mismatch between the number of students and schools from Grade One onwards has inevitably resulted in compromised quality in favor of quantity. And I think we can't do much under the circumstances other than bringing about some modest improvements.
 - We definitely share the same view with regard to English proficiency and comprehension level of our students. This factor doesn't, however, justify disregard to quality. In fact, we need to allocate classrooms, facilities and instructors to enhance the

reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of students who are below the language proficiency level required by the courses they are registered for. In addition to the compulsory English courses, sustained non-credit English courses ought to be given to those who need them. And we can encourage our students to take supplementary independent studies on their own and private tutorial English language classes.

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It was at this juncture that a third entity in *Entone's* soul intervened and started participating in the heated conversation. P and Q couldn't help attentively listening to what R (Realist) was saying in calm voice. P opted to listen while Q pursued the dialogue.

- I'm afraid your dialogue is heading towards "the chicken-egg" paradox. Inevitably, most private colleges at the initial phase incline towards repayment of investment cost and towards material return. Many colleges can gradually elevate themselves to the higher-level need of *self-actualization* through quality education, research and publications. Some, however, might remain enslaved by an insatiable material greed and lack of vision and in effect end up as "degree mills" rather than credible academic institutions.

R hesitated (for a few seconds) to speak out his mind, and then continued after some pause.

- I don't dare say it to any other person, but just between us, there is a thought that has been crossing my mind for quite some time.
 - What's it R?
- It may sound radical, but how do you see the advantages and disadvantages of adopting English as Ethiopia's second national language?
 - Come-on, you must be kidding.
- I'm serious Q; we need not be colonized to accept a foreign language. After all, English was initially foreign to the English themselves. Don't forget that it developed from a Germanic language and blossomed through borrowing, coining and many other factors. Our ego aside, what's wrong in using it as our *runner-up second* language next to our national language. If the key to development at this information age is *knowledge*, and if the information and data in every sphere of knowledge is best available in English, should we remain fenced by our language fidgeting in the vicious cycle of educational mediocrity and poverty? I think this is one of the minimum ego-concessions that we ought to make to come out of the depth we are in. Such a paradigm shift may be criticized from political angles. But, even in the arena of

politics, the more quality education takes root, the more would governments be unable to *rule* but to *govern*. None of us can feel satisfied, proud and happy until we, as a nation, regain our dignity (*thymos*) and until Mother Ethiopia ceases to be a beggar nation, way below the status she had until few decades back.

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A phone call interrupted the dialogue in *Entone's* soul. It was a call from a friend. *Entone* couldn't thereafter focus on the inner conversation he had enjoyed so much, as his thoughts travelled elsewhere.

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