

A Note on PhD Studies
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Back in 1932 Jose Ortega Y Gasset wrote in "The revolt of the Masses":

When by 1890 a third generation assumes intellectual command in Europe we meet with a type of scientist unparalleled in history. He is one who, out of all that has to be known in order to be a man of judgment, is only acquainted with one science, and even of that one only knows the small corner in which he is an active investigator. He even proclaims it as a virtue that he take no cognizance of what lies outside the narrow territory specially cultivated by himself, and gives the name "dilettantism" to any curiosity for the general scheme of knowledge. (p. 80)

And later:

He is not learned, for he is formally ignorant of all that does not enter into his specialty; but he neither is he ignorant, because he is a "scientist," and "knows" very well his tiny portion of the universe. We shall have to say that he is a learned ignoramus, which is a very serious matter, as it implies that he is a person who is ignorant, not in the fashion of the ignorant man, but with all the petulance of one who is learned in his own special line. (p. 82)

Further:

The result is that even in this case, representing maximum of qualification in man – specialisation – and therefore the thing most opposed to the mass man, the result is that he will behave in almost all spheres of life as does the unqualified, the mass-man (*ibid.*)

Needless to say, the situation has not been improving over the past 80 years. Perhaps the opposite is the case – the fields of knowledge narrow down increasingly and the learned men's on women's areas of ignorance keep growing. We are not only losing broadly educated intellectuals, but also academics who know well their disciplines. Which, of course, makes it well possible that one or two charismatic individuals or perhaps lunatics easily manipulate entire highly educated nations. Well, these highly educated specialists behave, as Ortega suggests, in the same manner as a mass of ignorami, because, as a matter of fact, they are ignorami in almost everything save a narrow field of knowledge, even if their own self-esteem suggests something different.

There is obviously a limit to which PhD training could serve as a means to reverse this development. But I would suggest that it is our responsibility to try and not give in to the pressures to reduce PhD training to credit hours and dissertations in increasingly narrow areas of specialization. As a minimum, we

should introduce solid taught components into PhD training, the content and amount of which is established by the academics and not bureaucrats in Brussels or elsewhere, or allow TUNING our programs, which we consider as a violation of the principle of academic freedom. Following the PhD course work, which may last a year, two or why not four years, the candidate takes his or her comprehensive exam and starts working on the thesis.

It is, of course, the full freedom of any unit or institution to take any shortcut may wish to, but then, I guess, others can exercise their own freedom not to recognize such studies or not to cooperate in other ways.