

Public schools are stalled and maybe are in a phase-space of becoming electronic schools. While preparing for extended on-line learning, two readings gave me pause to think: “The Great A.I. Awakening” and “The Shallowness of Google Translate.”¹ “The Great A.I. Awakening” caught my attention because APUSH students need to review for their exam and I’m always looking for relevance so I dug in to “The Great A.I. Awakening” with the thought that artificial intelligence is the new calling underneath the epidemic of cellphonomania where I teach. The statement that even computer programmers were not immune to the labor-saving grace of A.I. caused me to have a moment of concern for my son who programs video chips. What will future generations do if A.I. can do everything? He and countless others will have to do something else. Maybe that something else will be contributions that will deepen or humanize “the shallowness” of A.I. as explained in Douglas Hofstadter’s reading. Whatever the future holds, we first must overcome the Covid19 pandemic and one way to help students review for the mighty test is to remind them that the Great Awakening² was a human experience of human emotion (faith in the human heart) to counteract the rational certainty of the Enlightenment (faith in the human mind). As cellphonomania will become the link from student isolation to the outside world, perhaps the growing personal quarantine will give rise to a yearning for human emotion closer than the social distance of chats and grams and video signals.

Perhaps that time period of the Great Awakening, between the 1730s and 1770s, reflects the isolation that is growing around students because of Covid19. Colonists and their religious beliefs were isolated by both distance from immediate effects of the Enlightenment and, over time, from their own religious certainty that withered away through survival in the New World. Like Covid19, the Great Awakening spread throughout the colonies with emotional fever, but the source of the Great Awakening was from across the Atlantic Ocean, not the Pacific Ocean. Regardless of its origin, both the Great Awakening and Covid19 are the result of human interaction. The breath of one is consciously inhaled as faith in God and droplets of the other are blindly inhaled and both the breath and droplet lead to different realms: one to salvation for the soul and the other to viral destruction.

¹ Gideon Lewis-Kraus. “The Great A.I. Awakening.” The New York Times Magazine. DEC. 14, 2016.

Douglas Hofstadter. “The Shallowness of Google Translate.” The Atlantic. January 30, 2018.

² For a great review of, and as context for the Second Great Awakening, please read the Great Awakening: https://www.colonialwarsct.org/1740_s.htm
See also: <https://www.ushistory.org/Us/7b.asp> and <https://www.ushistory.org/Us/22c.asp>
This URL, ushistory.org, is an excellent resource for review for the exam as the pull-down menu under the BACK HOME NEXT navigation bar contains a complete outline of U.S. History.