

Marek REMBIERZ

THE CURRENT DISPUTE ON THE STATUS OF THE UNIVERSITY The Anthropological and Axiological Aspects of the Problem

The academic ‘not-doing-anything-in-particular’ is actually a form of activity taking place inside the university and, in the long run, ensuring its longevity. If this apparent inactivity is threatened by the requirement of producing immediate effects, the university, being denied the right to work at its own pace, to let reflection mature in its own time, will lose its internal rhythm. The game of appearances and illusions which has replaced the right to ‘do nothing’ will promote immaturity, eventually impeding the development of both research and teaching.

The contemporary university suffers from split personality disorder: while the idea of serving the whole truth is apparently still fluttering in it, it is simultaneously striving to transform into a service-providing company, and as such it cannot continue its mission.¹

Agnieszka Lekka-Kowalik

The academic community has the indispensable right and duty to be the leader in propagating, strengthening, and defending the university as a unique value.²

Kazimierz Denek

In the present paper I argue that the ongoing widespread dispute over how universities should function must be considered as an essentially axiological and anthropological controversy.

In order to clarify the problems discussed in this paper, I shall begin by citing Tadeusz Kotarbiński's (1886–1981)³ description of the freedom to teach and to learn which he enjoyed as professor of the underground Warsaw University during the German Nazi occupation:

¹ Agnieszka Lekka-Kowalik, “Uniwersytet jako firma usługowa – szansa czy klęska?,” *Ethos* 22, no. 1–2 (85–86) (2009), 66. Unless otherwise noted, quotations are translated by Marcin Garbowski.

² Kazimierz Denek, *Uniwersytet*. “Między tradycją a wyzwaniem współczesności i przyszłości,” *Edukacja Humanistyczna*, no. 1 (28), 2013: 9.

³ See M. Rembierz, “Ethos edukacji i jej filozoficzny logos: Elementy filozofii edukacji w dociekaniach Tadeusza Kotarbińskiego,” *Studia z Filozofii Polskiej*, no. 2 (2007): 342–54.

Lectures and classes ... took place in private flats..., in small ... groups, ... the participants were enthusiasts who studied, because they wanted to.... Nobody interfered with the curriculum, the professor took responsibility for the course and ... for the participants of this illegal academy, consumed with the spirit of freedom.... There was no censorship or interference of any authorities. What a paradox! I have never participated in such an absolutely liberal teaching process as... during the darkest years of the German occupation.⁴

The personal responsibility of professors for the subject matter of their lectures and the personal responsibility of students for the course of their studies provide a solid basis for academic freedom. The responsibility of professors plays a fundamental role here and it is worth recalling that the term ‘professor’ is derived from the Latin *professio*: a public statement, and *professus*, *profiteri*: to testify or confess publicly.⁵ By giving a lecture, the professor not only provides information, but also testifies publicly—before the academic community listening to him—that he has adequate reasons for considering the information he proposes for discussion by this community as reliable; thus he becomes a witness and an authority.⁶ During the German Nazi occupation, an extremely high price, even the price of life, had to be paid for performing the tasks of a university professor.

Underground teaching, based on self-organization and self-discipline, and thus free from external, institutional framework, may be taken as a model for the ethos of the university inspired by the spirit of freedom. Kotarbiński’s paradoxical experience of academic freedom reveals—from the perspective

⁴ Tadeusz K o t a r b i ń s k i, “Z dziejów podziemnego Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego”, in: Tadeusz Kotarbiński, *Prakseologia: Część II* (Wrocław, Warszawa, and Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2003), 519. In this context it is worth recalling Roger Scruton’s description of his participation in illegal academic (philosophical) seminars held in the 1970s, during Communist rule, in Prague. Showing his respect for the Czech people, Scruton refers to that experience of his, while discussing—from the point of view of a Westerner—the (unsatisfactory, in his opinion) condition of the university in our times. See Roger S c r u t o n, “The End of University,” *First Things*, April 2015. See also Wiesław T h e i s s, “Universitas, czyli wspólnota oporu w czasach PRL-u (szkic zagadnienia),” in *Innowacje w edukacji akademickiej: szkolnictwo wyższe w procesie zmiany*, ed. Jacek Piekarski and Danuta Urbaniak-Zajac (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2010), 225–34.

⁵ See Anna M u r a w s k a, “O idei uniwersytetu, kompetencjach nauczycieli akademickich oraz nadziei i prawdzie,” *Pedagogika Szkoły Wyższej*, no. 17 (2001): 71–5; Ryszard K l e s z c z, “O godności nauczyciela akademickiego,” in *Nauka—Etyka—Wiara 2011*, ed. Andrzej Zabołotny and Julian Ławrynowicz (Warszawa: Chrześcijańskie Forum Pracowników Nauki, 2011), 392–402; Jacek Juliusz J a d a c k i, “Etos akademicki,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 53, no. 2 (2005): 75–81; Janina K o s t k i e w i c z, “Nauka i wolność—wartości fundujące uniwersytet,” in *Uniwersytet i wartości*, ed. Janina Kostkiewicz (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, 2007), 13–34.

⁶ See Katarzyna O l b r y c h t, *O roli przykładu, wzoru, autorytetu i mistrza w wychowaniu osobowym* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2008); Lech W i t k o w s k i, *Wyzwania autorytetu w praktyce społecznej i kulturze symbolicznej* (Kraków: Impuls, 2009).

of anthropology and axiology—the very essence of university studies and academic teaching and should be remembered whenever an attempt to impose political or administrative regulations affecting the autonomy of the university is made.

Kotarbiński's description of academic freedom in the context of the war-time terror—contrasted with present-day practice—helps highlight the dangers inherent in technocratic anthropology and utilitarian axiology which are spreading together with the currently promoted model of the university as a provider of educational services. The dangers in question have been recognized by Bogusław Śliwerski:

Put in service of market economy, the university becomes an institution objectifying human beings, disregarding their dignity and transforming them into a means to the end which is alien to them. By creating an antagonizing educational context, the authorities seek to impose the one and only correct standpoint ... of their own ideology, regardless of whether ... the academic community accepts it or not.... By serving mechanisms of market rivalry, institutions of higher education become marketed products characteristic of our times.⁷

Above all, the objectification of human beings destroys their primary human selflessness and transforms the university into a product to be marketed, at the same time demolishing the world of academic values grounded in centuries-long experience.

The ongoing debate on the model of the university entails serious difficulties. Not only does the debate focus on a comparative approach to the past and present identities of the university and on the questions of the meaning and essence of the university amid the current challenges, but it also addresses civilizational changes, as both the present situation of the university and its future seem to be entangled in processes that are, to a large extent, nontransparent. However, the university's entanglement in the processes of civilizational change is often mythologized, interpreted as an 'all-explaining' schema, and seen through the prism of ideological clichés: it is claimed, for instance, that the entanglement in question is an effect of the historical (economic, globalization-related) determinism to which the university must yield and that this irreversible necessity is beyond dispute. Such a radically deterministic standpoint generates a (quasi-religious) belief that civilizational transformation fully determines what the university is supposed to be and what, in fact, it shall be. Needless to say, the standpoint in question severely limits the field for reflection, makes imagina-

⁷ Bogusław Śliwerski, "Problemy szkolnictwa wyższego—diagnozy i perspektywy," *Pedagog*, September 27, 2015, <http://sliwerski-pedagog.blogspot.com/2015/09/problemy-szkolnictwa-wyzszego-diagnozy.html>.

tion sterile, enslaves thought, and invalidates the meaning of free academic debate as a knowledge-generating method. No longer is university supposed to grasp the meaning of the ongoing changes and develop their models, but it is to succumb to those changes and to the political pressure exerted by supporters of the prevailing and (at a given moment) undisputed vision of the transformation. The only course of action that remains acceptable in such a context is to entrust universities to pragmatic managers who understand the requirements (especially the economic ones) of the ‘Zeitgeist’ and shall accordingly effect the necessary changes. Those who oppose them shall be either reeducated, taught the required competencies, and made to accept the dominant schema of academic practice, or labeled ‘anachronistic naïve idealists’ who—as persons ignorant of the ‘Zeitgeist’ and incapable of acquiring necessary competencies, qualifications, or attitudes—are to be excluded from the university seen as an institution determined by cultural transformations. This narrative of adaptive reeducation (or expulsion from the structures of the university) may seem a Cassandra-like prophecy, but I must confess that on a certain occasion, having delivered a lecture on the principles of academic freedom, I was myself described as a ‘naïve idealist,’ a clearly discrediting epithet. In the long run, though, my ‘idealism’ proved a ‘blessed fault’ (*felix culpa*), making me sensitive to the intellectual necessity and practical importance of continuous reflection on the timeliness of the traditional ethos of the university in the context of the ongoing changes in its identity.⁸

In my inquiries, I follow the guidelines suggested by Michał Heller:

I shall write about the university, education, and academic work. ... I promise I shall not say a word about money. Money, however, has something in common with ideas—both money and ideas can lose their value. Nonetheless, there is a difference between them: when money is devalued, a good idea can lead the way out of a financial crisis. However, should ideas lose their value, no money will help.⁹

Emphasizing the financial aspect of how universities function, one seems to forget that money does not possess an inherent, self-propelling power. The belief—perhaps a partly unconscious one—in the creative power and agency of money, as if it were the primary cause, the metaphysical motor of all activity, can make one blind to the special values of the university.

⁸ An idea, proposed by Stanisław Majdański, of interdisciplinary studies on the university from the perspective of science studies and general methodology of science, seems worth noting (and perhaps popularizing). See Stanisław Majdański, “O autorytecie i idei uniwersytetu (z refleksji naukoznawczej),” *Summarius*, no. 38 (2009): 63–80.

⁹ Michał Heller, “Śmierć uniwersytetów,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, July 2, 2012, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/smierc-uniwersytetow-16535>.

In the classically understood culture of Europe, one recognizes the specific identity of the university and its irreducibility to other, albeit similar, institutions of culture. Universities have a particular way of upholding the ethos of intellectual work and manifesting the cognitive values that serve academic research and education.

The university should distinguish itself from other forms of intellectual culture by pursuing an integrated knowledge of reality, or at least by attempting to combine knowledge of different aspects of reality into a relatively coherent whole. Such a pursuit is motivated by the belief that the unity of the reality should be reflected in a unified knowledge of it. As Tadeusz Czeżowski (1889–1981) reminds us: “Universality is the principle expressed already in the term ‘university’ The circumstance that all the arts and sciences are related to one another in a multiplicity of ways is expressed in this principle.”¹⁰ Czeżowski presents a maximalist idea of the universality of the university and extends it to include a consistent outlook on the world: “All [the arts and sciences] seek to achieve a homogenous view of the world and they mutually support one another in this pursuit.”¹¹ The university is also *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*: a community of masters and students, i.e., a community of people responsible for teaching and learning.

The instability of the foundations of the contemporary university and the denial of the very ideas in which it is grounded stand in clear contrast to the memories of his university studies (at the beginning of the 20th century), as Karl Jaspers recorded: “Important teachers I viewed with reverence, all of them, even those of whom I disapproved, with respect for their position. The buildings, the lecture-rooms, the forms of the tradition were objects of reverence for me. What it really was which lent to all this a still visible lustre I did not yet clearly discern.”¹²

Thus the community of teachers and students is perceived as a community endowed with a specific aesthetic quality.¹³ One might ponder over the noble ‘lustre’ of the university: What does it consist in? Why is it no longer visible nowadays? What undesirable practices have hidden it from view? How can the lustre of university values be regained and made visible anew? Reflecting on the aesthetic dimension of academic education, Jacek Piekarski offers a potential

¹⁰ Tadeusz C z e ż o w s k i, *O uniwersytecie i studiach uniwersyteckich* (Toruń: Księgarnia Naukowa T. Szczęśny i S-ka, 1946), 8.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Karl J a s p e r s, *Philosophical Autobiography*, in *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schlipp (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1957), 46.

¹³ See Jacek P i e k a r s k i, “Estetyzacja praktyki akademickiej—głos w dyskusji na temat perspektywy uczestniczącej,” in *Innowacje w edukacji akademickiej: Szkolnictwo wyższe w procesie zmiany*, 235–51.

answer to these questions: "Participation in creating knowledge is of genuine importance when it is related to the deepest commitment, when it is directed towards the pursuit and discovery of the possibly most significant, individual meaning. This meaning should always be expressed in most perfect possible a way."¹⁴

This aesthetically attractive and noble lustre of the university appears to originate in the perfectionist attitudes of the members of academic community, in their personal commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, and, in particular, in their striving for the greatest possible excellence in epistemic and social sense.

An emphasis on the traditional values of the university is often accompanied with an anxiety about the decline of these values, as it has been expressed, among others, by John Paul II: "The institution of the university is among the masterpieces of human culture. At the same time, one may feel concern that nowadays this masterpiece is being deformed on a global scale."¹⁵ The social functions of the university are currently considered from the vantage point of the so-called science policy, education policy, or research productivity management, and thus the emphasis has been shifted to the effectiveness of the university in terms of economic profit. Research and teaching are subject to an increasingly close monitoring which involves a jargon alien—or even hostile—to the ethos and values of the traditional university.

I shall present here, in the spirit of critical reflection, a broad sketch of the destruction of academic ethos. Bureaucratic overregulation of the academic structures and milieus encourages narrow-mindedness and reinforces it by coercing researchers and teachers into attempts at the quantification of their, essentially unquantifiable, intellectual effort. As activities required by the bureaucratic directives continue to undermine the intellectual and spiritual culture, the autonomy of the university is being destroyed and replaced by its obedience to military-like discipline.¹⁶ Misleading technocratic ideologies are forcibly imposed (by arbitrary decrees) on academe. New regulations are successively introduced at such a rate that they cannot be absorbed; faculty members are encumbered with the demand to complete countless debilitating forms and to compile meaningless tables. As a result, the atmosphere of the university is literally strewn with paper and academic freedom is lost. To make matters worse, the belief in the 'healing' power of overregulation has its partisans. Their commitment, leading to far-reaching practical consequences, seems to be a form of idolatrous worship of administrative-bureaucratic authority as

¹⁴ Ibidem, 250.

¹⁵ John Paul II, "Spotkanie z Katolickim Uniwersytetem Lubelskim," Częstochowa, June 6, 1979, in *Jan Paweł II: Nauczanie papieskie*, vol. 2, part 1 (1979), ed. Eugeniusz Weron and Antoni Jaroch (Poznań: Pallottinum, 1990), 667.

¹⁶ See Jadwiga Mizinska, *Bezduśzny uniwersytet*, Fundacja Homo Inquietus, October 4, 2010, <http://homoinquietus.wordpress.com/category/czytelnia/jadwiga-mizinska/>.

well as an open expression of distrust in individual human conscience and in its power over the area of the intellectual activity. Such a bureaucratic vision of institutionalized research and teaching proves fatal to the ethos of the university.¹⁷

It is worth recalling that, in one of his *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education* (a work from the mid-19th century), John Henry Newman states: “I have no hesitation in giving the preference to that University which did nothing, over that which exacted of its members an acquaintance with every science under the sun.”¹⁸ The academic ‘not-doing-anything-in-particular’ is actually a form of activity taking place inside the university and, in the long run, ensuring its longevity. If this apparent inactivity is threatened by the requirement of producing immediate and visible effects, the university, being denied the right to work at its own pace, to let reflection mature in its own time, will lose its internal rhythm. The game of appearances and illusions which has replaced the right to ‘do nothing’ will promote immaturity, eventually impeding the development of both research and teaching.

Being a scholar requires a specific form of asceticism and relinquishing certain types of values in order to pursue the unique values proper to the university. Karl R. Popper points to alarming changes in the situation of his contemporary universities and in university curricula, and particularly to the decline of this necessary asceticism and its replacement by the consumerist approach based on the ideology of equal opportunities:

The idea of equal opportunity and of equal access to higher education has produced ... undesirable effects in some countries. For the impecunious student of my own generation the struggle for knowledge was an adventure, demanding self-denial and sacrifice, which gave the knowledge attained a unique value. I am afraid that this attitude is on the wane. The new right to education has created a different attitude. This right is taken for granted; and what we receive as our due, without sacrifice, we value but little. By making the right to education a gift to the student, society has deprived him of a unique experience.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Maria Czerepaniak-Walcza, “Autonomia w kolorze sepia w inkrustowanej ramie KRR: O procedurach i treściach zmiany w edukacji akademickiej,” in *Fabryki dyplomów czy universitas?*, ed. Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, 2013), 29–56. “Activities are full of superficiality, they disrupt the hitherto academic traditions ... they introduce a formalized system of supervision into university education. The university gives up its autonomy and renounces it for the sake of ensuring its security. It becomes subjected to market games and ad hoc expectations of students and potential employers.” Maria Czerepaniak-Walcza, “Wprowadzenie,” in *Fabryki dyplomów czy universitas?* 17.

¹⁸ John Henry Newman, “Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning,” in John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/idea/discourse6.html>.

¹⁹ Karl R. Popper, “What Does the West Believe In?” in Karl R. Popper, *In Search of a Better World: Lectures and Essays from Thirty Years*, trans. Laura J. Bennett (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 217.

Experiencing the values of university studies and of acquiring knowledge must not be hampered by reducing the right to study to a social entitlement. Popper points to another threat to the functioning of the university in the context of the development of technological civilization (which became apparent around 1968): “More and more technicians are needed, and as a consequence, more and more PhD students are trained only as technicians. Often they are trained in measuring techniques. And they are not even told what more fundamental problems are to be solved by the measurements they are doing for their doctor’s thesis.”²⁰

Popper believes that providing training which narrows the cognitive horizons is morally execrable and describes it as a “breach of the Hippocratic Oath on the side of the academic teacher.”²¹ The task of the academic teacher is to “initiate the student into a tradition, and to explain to him the new great problems which arise through the growth of knowledge and which in their turn inspire and motivate all further growth.”²² If higher education is reduced to “training in the field of measuring techniques,” the dynamism of intellectual work will weaken and fade, and the university will cease to fulfill its fundamental function.

According to Jaspers, in turn, the obligatory curricula introduced in the first half of the 20th century pose another threat to the quality of university studies and intellectual development:

Artificial guides such as the syllabi, curricular and other technical devices which convert the university into a high school, are in conflict with the ideal of the university.... Lectures and seminars which are slightly over the student’s head and so spur him on to increased effort are better than full comprehension purchased as the price of oversimplification.... The university is turned into a high school in order to achieve a satisfactory average with statistical certainty. This leads to the destruction of the university. As you stifle the student’s freedom to learn as he sees fit, you stifle the life of the mind. The life of the mind is never more than a chance achievement amid a sea of failure and frustration.... An atmosphere of uninspired and uninspiring common sense may well produce satisfactory mastery of technical ‘know how’ and testable factual information. Such an atmosphere, however, stifles genuine understanding and the spirit of adventure in research.²³

²⁰ Karl R. Popper, *The Moral Responsibility of the Scientist*, in Karl R. Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: In Defence of Science and Rationality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 124.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Karl Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, trans. Harold A. T. Reiche and H. F. Vanderschmidt (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1959), 60–1.

Today, the mandatory, detailed curricula are a commonplace occurrence and they are considered as if they were necessary and obvious.

To junior faculty, who are required to prepare innumerable syllabi and complete countless forms, as well as to some the older professors who have become accustomed to the growing bureaucracy, the view expressed by Tadeusz Czeżowski in his dissertation of 1946, may seem surprising: “While the secondary school needs the fixed curriculum to specify the type and scope of information to be taught to students, in the case of the university such a curriculum becomes superfluous. The freedom to teach is, above all, the freedom from complying with an inflexible curriculum. Academic teachers must not be constrained by a curriculum, being able to choose freely the areas of knowledge they wish to present.”²⁴

The supporters of inflexible curricula, trained by the current regime, are unable to comprehend the essential conditions, so assertively expressed by Czeżowski, for academic freedom. Nowadays, his claim that “the freedom to teach is, above all, the freedom from complying with an inflexible curriculum” is opposed by those who regard themselves as rulers of the academic world. Moreover, contrary to what is often believed, the (missing) freedom from fixed syllabi does not present the most important problem (to some, such freedom is hardly imaginable, so deeply has the lack of inner freedom contaminated them); from the perspective of the idea of the university, the crucial issue is depriving universities of their natural freedom by forcing them into following the curricula imposed by the administration.

Making university professors responsible for the upbringing (in the sense of German *Bildung*) of their students is another cause for concern. The responsibility in question, often indicated in official documents, means that professors, supposedly on the grounds of pedagogically significant objectives, are expected to get their students involved in activities which are, in fact, oversimplistic in the case of adults, i.e., individuals capable of self-education.²⁵ While it is true that various activities employed by academic teachers in the teaching process may have a formative aspect (e.g., by manner of teaching, professors may shape and strengthen desirable stances in students), if the proper meaning of upbringing (understood as a specific personal relationship between the educator and the student) is to be preserved, what is expected of university professors must not be described by means of the general term ‘upbringing.’ Instead, it would be useful to specify the scope of the most important formative

²⁴ Tadeusz Czeżowski, *O uniwersytecie i studiach uniwersyteckich*, 11.

²⁵ For a broader understanding of the idea of self-education, see Bogusław Śliwerski, *Teoretyczne i empiryczne podstawy samowychowania* (Kraków: Impuls, 2010); Janina Świrko-Pilipczuk, *Samo-dzielność w filozoficznych poglądach i koncepcjach człowieka: Implikacje pedagogiczne* (Szczecin: Przedsiębiorstwo Produkcyjno-Handlowe ZAPOL Dmochowski, 2011).

activities professors should undertake and to define the values and objectives to be attained by way of academic teaching (considered also as formative). The term ‘upbringing’ used in this context obscures both the proper meaning of upbringing²⁶ and the specific purpose of university studies.

Hans-Georg Gadamer indicates the difficulties connected with the ‘upbringing’ of university students. He recollects how, shortly after 1945, in Frankfurt, he was to deliver, on the American initiative, a lecture on the topic of the upbringing provided by the university. The suggested title of the lecture was, “How does a German professor conceive his educational task?” Gadamer’s reply to the question was, “unambiguous: he doesn’t, because he doesn’t have one. He comes much too late for that ... A professor who sees his students for a few hours a week and at best comes into contact with them during office hours can mean something similar only for his closest students and co-workers.”²⁷ This reply by Gadamer remains relevant, but, unfortunately, it does not seem to have convinced those who, using the term ‘upbringing’ in an arbitrary fashion, extend its meaning to include a wide variety of formative activities.

The upbringing given to university students is supposed to stop their alleged immaturity. It seems, however, that such belated attempts at psychological training are doomed to be counterproductive and actually prevent young adults, perceived as overgrown children, from reaching maturity. This, however, does not mean to say that the problem of students’ immaturity does not exist. Referring to this question and reflecting on his long experience as university professor, Mieczysław Porębski (1921–2012) claims that indeed it is the freshmen’s immaturity rather than their ignorance which is most dangerous for the teaching process. Porębski looks back on his experience as a secondary school student: “My high school provided us with maturity—its graduates were adults. Obtaining the graduation certificate implied further duties in life, among them that of beginning to make their own choices.”²⁸ Commenting on the university of the late 1980s, he observes:

And now we are told to take care for the upbringing of our students, we are told that those who attend the university are very young and we are supposed not only to teach them, but also to watch, supervise, and test them. In many ways, we are dealing with an attempt to transform the university into a second-rate high school, where one has to ‘collect’ professors’ signatures to confirm one’s attendance of the

²⁶ For a discussion of various ways of understanding upbringing, see Bogusław Śliwowski, *Pedagogika ogólna: Podstawowe prawidłowości* (Kraków: Impuls, 2012).

²⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. Robert R. Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), 123.

²⁸ Mieczysław Porębski and Krystyna Czerni, *Nie tylko o sztuce: Rozmowy z profesorem Mieczysławem Porębskim* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1992), 20.

courses, and take exams by simply cramming information into one's head. Add to this that terror of deadlines....²⁹

Pathological situations which occur in the wake of such erroneous ideas seem to intertwine: combined with the terror of deadlines, the requirement to educate and supervise students is transforming universities into mediocre high schools which impose on boisterous pupils—and also on professors who guard them—the treadmill of discipline which undermines the very meaning of academic freedom. Since the time Porebski expressed his views, the transformation in question has been still intensified as a result of adopting new forms of monitoring and an increasing the terror of deadlines (which applies also to the duty, imposed on the professors, to report on their own work).

Having the new ideas on the role of the university in mind, let us refer again to Karl Jaspers, who reminds us, “University students are adults, not children. They are mature, have full responsibility for themselves.”³⁰ Making the university responsible for upbringing students deprives them of their independence. Jaspers writes: “From the freedom of teaching springs the freedom of learning. No authority, no rules and regulations, no supervision of studies such as are found in high schools must be allowed to hamper the university student. He is free to ‘go to the dogs.’”³¹ This rather strong statement emphasizes academic freedom and offers an antidote to the fashionable moralizing on the alleged tasks of the university towards mature and independent people.

In order to strengthen my argument, I shall cite Bogusław Śliwerski's unequivocal answer to the question: “Is upbringing students among the tasks of a university professor?”

No, such an idea brings to mind the communist period. We can, at most, help grown up people work on themselves, perfect themselves, but it is only them who can change their characters or attitudes. This, however, does not exempt us from the duty to show a high level of personal culture, ethicality, and professionalism. If we wish to call them ‘upbringing,’ so be it, but it is indirect or—as Ellen Key wrote—invisible upbringing.³²

Thus, from the perspective of a pedagogy based on the correct understanding of the concept of upbringing and on respect for the proper meaning of educational activities, it is unacceptable to foster the illusion that universities

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ J a s p e r s, *The Idea of the University*, 52.

³¹ Ibidem, 54.

³² Grzegorz F i l i p, *Musimy wyjść z platońskiej jaskini: Rozmowa z prof. Bogusławem Śliwerskim, pedagogiem*, <https://prenumeruj.forumakademickie.pl/fa/2012/01/musimy-wyjsc-z-platonskiej-jaskini/>.

actually give upbringing to students, since the essential obligations of academic staff are different.

Józef M. Bocheński (1902–1995) sees the roots of the current crisis of universities in the state's pressure on them to transform into "facilities which prepare people for practical tasks."³³ In this context, following Jaspers, Bocheński emphasizes the ideal of pure science, stressing that it is "one of the greatest values known to humanity."³⁴ Bocheński believes that within a model university, the faculty of pure science (i.e., pure mathematics, philosophy, theoretical biology, etc.) should be considered as central: "Around this central faculty there would be practical departments: for engineers, teachers, priests, etc. But, throughout his or her studies, every student would maintain contact with pure science by attending several hours of classes a week at the central faculty."³⁵ To function well, such a university, i.e., an institution dedicated to developing theoretical knowledge as a value, needs autonomy.³⁶

Teaching methods and results of the 'pure science' postulated by Bocheński may, at the same time, provide a form of axiological education which aims at the formation of beliefs and attitudes corresponding to the relevant values. As Józef Tischner, himself a long-term university professor, points out, the fundamental task of an academic teacher consists in "teaching a selfless approach to the subject."³⁷ The question posed by a student wondering, "What practical benefits shall I gain from my study?", should be given the following answer: "You shall gain a broader knowledge and a better understanding of the reality; this is why learning things and studying at university are worthwhile." All practical interests are derivative from the value of the pursuit of truth.

The contemporary education system is dominated by a 'bribery mentality': students acquire knowledge mainly to obtain good grades which are often seen as a kind of bribe. Such a system—based on this particular form of corruption—has a demoralizing effect on students, undermining their selfless approach to studying. Also, in such a system, the demand for responsibility for truth conceived as the basis for university education, is not respected, as Jan Śniadecki (1756–1830) pointed out: "The love of truth was and will always be the ruling passion of creative minds."³⁸ Education should enable students to

³³ Józef M. Bocheński, *Miedzy logiką a wiarą: Z Józefem M. Bocheńskim rozmawia Jan Parys* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Literackie Noir sur Blanc, 1995), 35.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ See Józef M. Bocheński, "Autonomia uniwersytetu," in Józef M. Bocheński, *Sens życia i inne eseje* (Kraków: Philed, 1993), 60–71.

³⁷ Józef Tischner, Dorota Zakoń, Jarosław Górn, *Przekonać Pana Boga* (Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 1999), 144.

³⁸ Quoted after Włodzimierz Tyburski, *Mysł etyczna w Polsce od XVI do XIX wieku* (Toruń: Top Kurier, 2000), 308.

creatively expand and deepen their knowledge. By their commitment to the pursuit of knowledge—as Śniadecki emphasizes—students can achieve intellectual humility, which is also a condition for tolerance towards opinions different from their own: “Whoever has forced his way through the thorns and obstacles of science will, not infrequently, see in front of himself obstacles even more formidable than those he has overcome, and thus cannot be humble enough.”³⁹ By absorbing knowledge, we become capable of recognizing our ignorance. Śniadecki adds, “The deeper we delve into knowledge, the better we learn to recognize how much we lack.” If one is wanting in humility, “the vanity and pomposity of one’s skills” come to the fore, being a clear “sign of a weak mind, incapable of probing into what has germinated and taken root in it.” Faulty education—Śniadecki warns us—leads to an increase in the number of “ignorant know-it-alls who take the vestibule of science for its limits and the meager supply of knowledge they possess for the entirety of what human reason has accomplished.”⁴⁰

Education divorced from a selfless pursuit of truth is bound to form ‘closed minds,’ incapable of searching for truth, while mass production of “ignorant know-it-alls” will jeopardize the quality of academic knowledge and of social life. Nowadays, when higher education has been conducted on a mass scale, it is advisable to consider the following words of Karl Jaspers: “Anyone who was studying merely in order to pass an examination or to procure for himself a better position, who, instead of gaining genuine knowledge, wants to have more examination knowledge poured into him, does not belong in a university at all.”⁴¹ Selfless acquisition of sound knowledge is thus an important prerequisite of participation in university education.

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In the struggle to implement the idea of the University (I believe the word ‘University’ should be capitalized to reflect the actual dignity of the institution), considered as a specific world of values and personal stances, one must not stop at dreaming about the ‘golden age’ of the academia, which has passed irreversibly. Members of the academic community of today need to acquire sufficient knowledge on the essence of the university, as well as theoretical and practical knowledge on the reality which they experience, share, and create. They also need to have a strong sense of themselves as moral subjects and moral agents to be able to establish and maintain the University, thus withstanding

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 309.

⁴¹ Karl J a s p e r s, *Philosophical Autobiography*, 47.

an increasingly widespread belief (expressed in official regulations) in historical and civilizational determinants with which every academic community with no exception supposedly has to comply. One must keep alive the hope that the implementation of the idea of the University is still possible and desired; one must not lose this hope, as it is inseparable from the very existence of universities.

In order not to forfeit the axiologically committed idea of the University, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth, systematic, and multidirectional theoretical and, at the same time, ethically and practically relevant reflection on the identity of the university and its transformations. Such a reflection would contribute to the implementation of the idea of the University.

Despite the frequently raised alarm, the University must not be perceived as a cultural phenomenon that, consigned to oblivion, has left the stage of history. The University remains a humanistic (i.e., genuinely human) task and a challenge to which one should respond by creating, developing, and preserving the academic community. The task and the challenge are addressed particularly—on account of academic tradition and their professional obligations—to philosophers and pedagogues who, collectively, have the necessary intellectual tools to determine the best ways of creating, in any given cultural and civilizational circumstances, the University able to radiate its values despite ideological, economic, and political pressures.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Marek REMBIERZ, The Current Dispute on the Status of the University: The Anthropological and Axiological Aspects of the Problem

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The author claims that the ongoing controversy over the functioning of the university is essentially of an axiological and anthropological nature. The paradox, described by Tadeusz Kotarbiński, of the academic freedom which characterized clandestine education organized during the Nazi occupation in Poland, provides the background against which the author presents threats posed by reductionist technocratic anthropology and utilitarian axiology inherent in the currently promoted model of the university as a provider of educational services. According to the author, the progressing objectification of research and teaching results in an atrophy of selflessness, a quality indispensable in this type of activity, while perceiving university as a product to be marketed undermines the world of academic values. Due to bureaucratic overregulation, researchers and teachers are coerced into attempts at quantification of their, essentially

unquantifiable, intellectual effort. The author expresses also his anxiety about the demand for university professors to take responsibility for the ‘upbringing’ of their students, i.e., about the expectation that students should be involved in activities which are oversimplistic in the case of individuals capable of self-education. According to the author, such ‘belated’ attempts at psychological training tend to prove counterproductive and actually encourage immaturity on the part of the students. The author also argues that the system of a military-like discipline imposed on the university contributes to the destruction of its autonomy and that the teaching methods recommended in the official guidelines would be damaging to the intellectual and spiritual culture and to the ethos of the university. In the author’s opinion, education divorced from the selfless pursuit of truth is bound to produce ‘closed minds,’ incapable of a pursuit of truth.

Keywords: university, the academic ethos, academic freedom, objectification of research and teaching, utilitarian axiology

Contact: Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences, University of Silesia, ul. Bankowa 12, 40-007 Katowice, Poland
E-mail: marek.rembierz@gmail.com
<https://scholar.google.pl/citations?user=bQyITAEAAAAJ&hl=pl>

Marek REMBIERZ, Antropologiczne i aksjologiczne aspekty sporu o status uniwersytetu

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Autor ukazuje współczesne spory dotyczące funkcjonowania uniwersytetu jako spory o charakterze aksjologicznym i antropologicznym. Opisany przez Tadeusza Kotarbińskiego paradoks wolności akademickiej w warunkach tajnego nauczania, organizowanego w Polsce podczas okupacji nazistowskiej, pozwala uwydatnić niebezpieczeństwa związane z redukcjonistyczną antropologią technokratyczną i aksjologią utylitarną, które obecne są wśród założeń promowanego obecnie „usługowego” modelu uniwersytetu. Zdaniem autora, postępująca instrumentalizacja nauki i nauczania prowadzi do zaniku niezbędnej w tego typu działaniach bezinteresowności, a traktowanie uniwersytetu jako produktu będącego przedmiotem zabiegów marketingowych niweczy świat wartości akademickich. Biurokratyczna nadregulacja systemowa wymusza zaś podejmowanie prób ilościowego ujęcia nieprzeliczalnej wartości aktywności intelektualnej. Niepokój autora budzi też narzucanie profesorom obowiązku wychowywania studentów, czyli podejmowania wobec osób dorosłych, zdolnych do samowychowania, nieodpowiednich w tym kontekście działań pedagogicznych. Spóźnionemu wychowywaniu studentów przypisuje się funkcję kompensacyjną, ma ono zaradzić niedojrzałości osób podejmujących studia. Próby takiego „wychowania” nieuchronnie będą jednak, jak wskazuje autor, prowadzić do skutków przeciwnych niż oczekiwane. Autor argumentuje, iż

narzucając uniwersytetowi system koszarowej dyscypliny, niszczy się jego autonomię, a nakazywane w biurokratycznych dyrektywach działania okazują się destrukcyjne dla kultury intelektualnej i duchowej, jak również zabójcze dla ethosu uniwersytetu. Jeśli działania edukacyjne rozmiągają się z bezinteresownym dążeniem do prawdy, to kształtowane przez nie umysły pozostają „zamknięte”, niezdolne do jej poszukiwania.

Słowa kluczowe: uniwersytet, ethos uniwersytecki, wolność akademicka, instrumentalizacja nauki i nauczania, aksjologia utylitarna

Kontakt: Wydział Sztuki i Nauk o Edukacji, Uniwersytet Śląski, ul. Bankowa 12, 40-007 Katowice

E-mail: marek.rembierz@gmail.com

<https://scholar.google.pl/citations?user=bQylTAEAAAAJ&hl=pl>