

INTELLECTUAL TRADITION OF UNIVERSITY IN THE FACE OF CURRENT CHALLENGES

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Abstract

With this essay I want to pay attention to the condition of the contemporary university and to define its function in the future. According to the rich tradition of university I pointed at the meaning of humanistic research as the research that describes the character of high education. I focused on the mission of postmodern university, as a part of postmodern culture which destroys humanistic values. I do not agree with postmodern egalitarianism and utilitarianism of higher education and I recommend coming back to the 20 th century vision of university, created by Wilhelm von Humboldt. I believe that only intellectual traditionalism and conservatism are the cure for contemporary problems of higher education.

Key words: *university, ehtos, value, tradition, humanism, intellect, culture*

Touching upon the issue of this kind, we are aware of both the reasons as well as consequences of a breakthrough, which, together with changes in the field of politics and world-views at the beginning of the 90s, also reached the Polish scientific environment bringing it closer to the cultural heritage of the western civilization. Experiencing values related to the above heritage, not literally but more like spiritually, we observed the emergence of a new scientific institution under the name of a higher education institution. Still, we must bear in mind that the answer to the question about its shape, condition concerning the substance as well as forecasts is not possible without relating to the idea of *universitas* born in the Middle Age and verified by the Arabic idea, known as universal community of knowledge constituting *universalitas*, i.e. that, which laid the foundations of the

enlightened condition of reason responsible for consistent building of cultural and spiritual eminence of Europe for centuries. It is not without the reason that the importance of the above eminence, backed by spiritual unity of our continent, which by joining philosophical enlightenment with university responsibilities extends the interest of individual reason to the whole social sphere. It is also worth remembering that university set in the above sphere does not constitute an institutional tradition embedded in the structural frames of scientific life but rather intellectual format connecting proponents of truth in their superior task of looking for goodness and wisdom. It is also a spokesman of matters, about which we know well that it does not reduce ancient ideals to particular manifestation of live but instead treats it as general form of wisdom. It is a basic condition of that that in order to open university for modern pragmatism of life going beyond mandatory nature of natural sciences it shall take into consideration ethical context of their effect. Only then it is possible to reach a level on which theoretical sense of science allows the understanding of humanistic message.

The point is, however, that in order that the classical sense of truth, goodness and wisdom, so consequently left unsaid in various spheres of social life, might become obligation, each society shall be made to manifest it under threat of ethnical-cultural pauperization. That is why realization of the aforesaid values, their skillful presentation and use and then systematic and persistent multiplication seem to be the fundamental goal. In order for the goal to be fulfilled in a solid and useful way, fulfilling it practically in many ways, experiencing objective truth is supposed to be a fundamental obligation and aspiring after it becomes the highest priority. Hence, in order to capture the broadest picture possible creating institutional conditions for its realization at the same time, we must face rich cultural tradition shaping truth historically. The difficulty of analysis by the use of a short draft makes me solely concentrate on depicting relations of truth with freedom of looking for goodness, which constitutes a task ascribed to universities for centuries.

Spotting the problem, I am aware that - putting it in a platonic way - truth, independence and goodness are to be placed on objective axiological plane. Their inseparability, proved by Pythagoras authority and His school, reinforces theoretical thought in practical space of moral acting. It also confirms the dignity of university as a place synthesizing scientific inquiries with the necessity of pointing out the rules of practical conduct. In addition to the above, it also testifies the unique ethos of university in which freedom of scientific research is a guarantee of truth, life, science, philosophy and art at the same time. All other solutions, among other things, as a result of their ideologization, turned out to be, as history of the last decades shows, completely unfruitful and impermanent. It is then appropriate, negating opportunistic (ideological) character of the truth to concentrate on the solutions which, on account of their philosophical character, testifies for its rationality.

It is to constitute a given form of intellectual monologue giving the mind as well as needs resulting from it the unquestionable primacy. Whereas the postulate of the truth arising from it, confirmed by the enlightened primacy of mind, seems to be the complement to the idea of university. One, however, has to bear in mind that truth will testify the dignity of university on condition that it is free from non-factual pressures, solely on its own way of faithfulness to itself it will fulfill its mission. It

confirms that only after being released from external conditions limiting the functioning of university, can this institution confirm its spiritual autonomy claiming the full right to freedom of research at the same time. On this account, among other things, university should integrate itself around the fields of science, which confirm its spiritual independence. It would be a mistake to expect from non-factual reasons to testify the dignity of university. That is why, even if it may happen that human sciences are unable to defend their political neutrality, let it serve as a warning in order that the dignity of university does not become uncertain and ephemeral values but to become the thing that theoretically and practically results from the depth of its nature. In this way, the concept of freedom about which we said to be an inseparable dimension of truth, cannot get out of the obligatory scopes of rational conduct. It is then difficult to expect from science, being its realization after all, not to lay solid foundations for understanding the future. Doing this, it refers to the past, making from it the basic project of the upcoming times. If university is able to anticipate the desirable tasks only then can this relation integrate university with socio-cultural life.

As the result, the system of values university gains among other things by didactic realization, backed up by the ancient triad of truth, goodness and freedom, seems to be an integrated system. Each, even the smallest intervention in one of its three inner elements, results in its disintegration. If one decides to weaken truth, then goodness is in danger. If goodness suffers, it will impoverish freedom as a result. Finally, if the truth of science, even if only partially, is disrupted by para-scientific experimental search, then goodness is weakened. Then it leads to a situation in which the whole axiological structure is belittled. What shall be done then not to allow such situation to occur? For sure one needs to refer to the dignity of university. It happens because this is a place where given values are buried, the values whose universals, by joining life and science, give priority to philosophical reasoning. The above institution is also a carrier of mission whose history dates back to sources of ancient synthesis of truth-goodness-freedom. The above synthesis, by fulfilling itself in both theory and practice, constitutes modern ethos of university. One of the key questions to be asked is to what extent and scope we should face up to it. For sure to the extent to which political and economic organization of each society should be liable to ethical rights. Without the above, and especially without consolidating social tissue of imperatives of practical philosophy, sensible thinking about the future seems to be impossible. Hence, the requirement for *logos* of life to become its *ethos*, truth to become goodness and goodness to become freedom. It is also worth stressing that the contemplation of the above values should be backed up by a conviction that we need theoretically valuable and practically needed thought about university (being a dispatcher of truth) as an institution, thanks to which the reasoning of truth will become the sign of the highest wisdom possible. By giving truth the features of necessity, we hope to meet the above expectations, which are going to build up the rational judgment of the occurrences of our world. In this sense the power of revealing values will result from the feeling of participation in the intellectual power of university. It seems then that its authority emerging from the spirit of ancient Greek academy, on the pattern of Platonic *paidei*, creates the climate of timeless humanism. In a historical cross-section of the ages it means that social life based on it must create transhistoric

axiology. The given axiology, neither as a whole nor as a part, can otherwise be replaced by a noble vision of postmodern claims to freedom.

The idea of objective value itself functions in order to be able to, contrary to its opponents and after Plato, consolidate the faith in values of the highest rank. They are the only values delivering rudimental truth about human being, who, making their way towards common goodness, is characterized by rational freedom. In this sense the archetype of Platonic *paidei*, perfected through the institution of university throughout the years, has become the universal archetype. The above means that being resistant to the influence of cultural regionalisms, university should shape a fundamental vision of truth as universal value. Only then, out of the truth, will emerge that what, on one hand confirms it historically and, on the other hand, gives durability to principle values. Out of them results, almost forgotten nowadays, the ideal of philosophy (as searching for truth) in compliance with life. This basis, shaped by Socrates in the distant past, demanded that the existential thread to be determined by high principles of intellectual virtues. Out of the *ethos* results the premise that truth and its teaching constitute a midwife like endeavour, which, by testifying obligation of university, creates its authority.

Another obligation is related to the above. The one, which due to the fact of science seen as the truth *per se*, with the proviso that it shall be propagated, constitutes the basic *clou* of the life of university. The above thought nowadays does not seem to get proper understanding and is obscured by common thought that university is related to industry, job market or broadly understood economic indicators. It is then strengthened by the thesis of a productive role of university, which leads directly to a belief that including university to the above trend blurring the boundary between business and truth can become the embers of authentic civilization progress. In a word, it is a bit of an exaggeration to claim the functioning of an academic institution constitutes a prosperous enterprise (let's not be deceived by the definition of department of science as principal organizational unit of each university) definitely losing the thing that does not have its proper equivalent in Polish but what is traditionally called *Wissenschaft*. It is the concept that reflects the fact that testimony to the truths as a superior value above temporary political and economic circumstances shall be manifested and revealed. Along with it a consent to free searching should be given, which only turns out to be effective if possibility of free action is provided. Only this gives enough certainty that relations of science with material basis of its functioning will not turn into submissive relations, in which the dignity of truth will be dependable on opportunistic aims.

It is then worth bearing in mind that logical argumentation of truth should become common obligation of intellect in its basic function of looking for goodness and truth. Serving this purpose, truth becomes submitted to values for which the goodness of entity and the whole of society in the broadest dimension determines the sense of theoretical and ethical actions. Hence, it is difficult to accept the situation in which inductive heritage of empiricism, based on the Anglo-Saxon premise of *Science*, narrows university to the level of a vocational institution, in which economic profitability becomes the only criterion for profiling scientific research at individual departments of university. That is why multiplicity of university faculties seems to be of vital importance taking into consideration the fact that we are currently facing the emergence of very narrow specializations of

teaching as well as accompanying autonomy of knowledge. By letting to preserve a real value and sense of science and rejecting giving up dreams of mercenary education, it negates as completely unjustified a belief that one area of science is more valuable than the other. Domination by any kind of science leads to the upset of the existing balance between them. In consequence, it triggers a condition in which philosophical foundation of truth becomes superfluous. It is quite easy to visualize the results of such conduct.

One of the consequences is undoubtedly the destruction of harmony joining together individual segments of science in basic task of searching for the truth. In case of its destruction it would be impossible to develop science in individual areas of spiritual life of human being. With visible result it would put an end to a possibility of using the results of type of science in others. Meanwhile, as we already know, such situation, only hypothetical, cannot have practical application. The achievements of psychoanalysis, structuralism or the theses of hermeneutics clearly prove that. In some sense it is also reflected by reference of humanistic sciences to environmental sciences. Presenting their correlations, it is worth mentioning that as early as in the 19th century the structure of humanistic sciences dressed in apparel of hermeneutics thinking had little in common with explanatory scientific procedures of environmental sciences. However, with the passing time it turned out that their division, consolidated between the authority of Wilhelm Dilthey and Wilhelm Windelband creates closer relations between them demanding undertaking a sound dialogue. The necessity of the above, after many years of misunderstandings, requires, on the one hand and on the other hand different treating. So, only a just communication creates a chance to overcome consolidated schemata as well as effective reflection of misunderstandings embedded in them. Of course, it also must lead to the change of the existing habits. The resulting context of understanding characteristic of humanistic sciences and the context of explanation appropriate for environmental sciences, each in its distinctiveness, lose the right to exist. We become then the witnesses of supplementing tasks of metaphysics by the philosophy of world outlook, which, a result, creates the *primary philosophy*. Despite the fact that the perspective of its development may seem vague to some, for others they constitute a unique chance for successful development of the environmental hermeneutics. Thereby, spirituality created by the above philosophy, as a matter of fact testifying the dignity of science, does not let the dignity of university based on mutual harmony of environmental sciences and human sciences be disrupted. By complementing environmental sciences with humanistic interpretation of culture we put ourselves in a position in which the values of science will become permanent and common values embedded in the truth of life. Remaining in truth and next to truth will turn out to be effective only when opportunism fails to stay in "the dens" of university. However, it still does not mean that university has to close its door in on life itself. It is true that it does not have direct influence on the course of events, but the issue of their judgment comes under specific system of values. Where, if not on the premises of a respectable university, can it arise and then settle down? Is it not the place where the dignity of truth is permanently retained and maintained? For sure it is, but a dispute over the practicality of scientific research does not lose its meaning. It is enough to say that lack of influence on current events is not going to be onerous, if

we come to realization that it is the science itself that sets a goal to which social needs shall aim at. For sure, we do not need extra justifications in order to point out that only under the banner of truth can the above goal be reached.

After all, only this brings us closer to complete liberation from orders not resulting from rational obligation. There is no doubt that the guarantee of its existence was and still is language as well as world view community, which combines European “republic of scientists” into one, living, cohesive and universal trend of “communicative intellectual community”. Therefore, it is truth itself, marked by *universitas* origin, that created scientific climate of Europe. In order to be able to seriously reform pre-modern universalism, we needed modern modernization processes together with accompanying philosophical understanding. It came to happen among other things due to the reformation and the resulting nationalist tendencies including the emergence of a national state responsible for consolidation of societies into clearly defined national groups building their own cultural identity on the basis of their national languages. Thanks to their dynamics, leading to fast development of literature, art and science, the authorities of the state made rising demand for a highly qualified administration personnel and as a result we could observe inclusion of universities, which constituted central units, in the structures of the state. At that time, as a result of gradual but consistent secularization of public and social life, we can observe the process of connecting their fates with the whole machinery of the political state.

It is especially visible in the situation when universities become a breeding ground for managerial elite, which have to be reproduced for the needs of public life.

The given obligation reflects general direction, which all research centers followed including the Wilhelm von Humboldt University, perceived as the most representative academic institution in the 19th and 20th century Europe. It was the institution that embraced a wide *spectrum* of science, personnel and education policy of a modern state. The hegemony of the Humboldt model, which practically lasts till today with minor changes, has brought to life the institution of “the state university”. Suffice it to say that its structure, which is currently in effect across universities, namely seminar classes, seminars, monographic lectures, dates back to 1799, the year when one of the biggest philosophers, Johann G. Fichte took up the position of the Rector of the university of Jena and issued an edict implementing the above structure, which the Wilhelm von Humboldt University faithfully continued. It is also worth noticing that the gradation of university organizational levels remains unchanged. The aforementioned gradation in its traditional form was implemented by the German Minister of Education in 19th century. Its presence strictly regulated research centers and academies (in contrast to university life) by administrative imperatives issued by countless commissions. How does that compare with the challenges of the postmodern present time in Poland? The question is indeed legitimate, we shall try to give answer to the above question, even if partially.

Along with slow but visible vanishing of politicization and nationalization of university, we can also observe the vanishing of radical universalism of enlightened rationalism. It seems that in times of current globalization national identity ceases to be primary intellectual material, and ideals, which laid the foundations for the project of a national university and matters less and less. It seems that

universalism of another sort takes the place of the above, namely universalism directed inwards, making the idea of university being associated with the processes of a technologically developed society, which narrows knowledge and science to the needs of global market economy. As a result, we can observe a gradual disappearance of that what for Humboldt was the basics of a culturally educated human being namely reference to traditions of neohumanism based on models of ancient culture. One question recurs consequently; if it is possible for the fascination of the Greek culture to find its continuity in esthetic and ethic spirituality of our times. The question is quite important in its nature, as penetrating general educational cycle ranging from the youngest school years to university, it influences the plot and quality of education of modern human being. And this in turn is invariably conditioned by the unity of science and teaching what Humboldt grew into a symbol of the principal idea of university education. In principle, the general concept of university functioning as enclave was supposed to result from the above unity. At the same time it was to be the place where truth was equivalent for ancient tradition, on which it was growing, after all. So, unlike in case of past, comprehensive general knowledge, based on the best ideas of ancient Greek *episteme*, where solid education for the sake of education itself as something superior to with regard to detailed sciences, nowadays university provides relatively narrow competences, on a scale never seen before. Intellectual uniqueness, which usually accompanies this trend, may pose danger of emergence and functioning of society, which from now on, can be called an information-communication society, in which research and education institutions absolutely report to the pressures of economic nature. Hence, the alliance of economy and politics, in fact giving rise to specific structures of “civic society”, becomes at the same time a specific form of “education capital, generating various forms of “academic capitalism”. No wonder that developed countries of Europe (Poland seems to be a disgraceful case as a result of reducing quotas for the development of science), spare no expenses in universities treating them as a great investment of capital, prognosticating hope for lucrative investment for the future. It triggers of a situation, in which nationalization is replaced by liberalization, and Humboldt politicization of knowledge and science by – supranational economy. In fact, the breakthrough in this situation depends on the fact that “paradigmatic revolution of thinking” emerging from it, another after Copernicus and Kant, kind of demythologizes – making use of already worn out terminology Max Weber – the whole modern reality, giving it simultaneously the characteristics of modern thinking and acting, losing at the same time the great tradition of culturally educated society, being the pride of modern Europe, formed, as it is said, by the Humboldt model of university. Its gradual but more and more visible disappearance causes us to the situation in which, instead of reading “the great book of the world” in the privacy of our own office, turned on ancient reminiscences, we discuss its content loudly, publicly and sometimes in a controversial manner. That is why the visible emergence of university, especially in recent times, from the spirit of postmodern globalization are not solely characterized by theoretical nature. Since any interference in the structure of the world inevitably carries in itself an element of survival. It does not yet mean that the general problem of knowledge is narrowed down to natural sciences with possibility of their technical and technological use. Nevertheless,

there exists something that testifies to considerable role of humanistic cognition. The above allows to assume that since the establishment of The Institute of Psychology in Vienna in the second half of the 19th century, initiating arduously but categorically the dynamic development of specialized sciences through the establishment and development of Freud's psychoanalysis, liberating the science of human being from the dominance of pure natural history, critical thought about the world of human life, robed in hermeneutic thinking, much more preferred by German historical school, and less by nomothetic Marburg neo kantism explaining, was at the gates of cultural science perceived just as idiographic science. Resulting in the new vision of the world with historical thinking being the basis for it, they transfer judgment of the world from *a priori* forms of logical-nomological description to cultural plane of historical judgment of phenomenon. Along with it, the need of *historical consciousness* triggers off the need for joining in the current of changes, which are dependent on the strength and needs of substantialist mind but procedural mind. Its eventfulness preceded by extra theological understanding of history, moreover marked by fallibility of events, disrupts rationality of metaphysical certainty, becoming not a system of well-ordered values but more an open project, in which axiological centrism changes into historical interpretation. One does not need a great degree of perception to realize that at least since Dilthey antinaturalistic revolution, hermeneutic reading of Freud, deeply changing the understanding of human being that is a special kind of knowledge, on one hand giving the sense to individual human life, but on the other hand, trying to assign the shape of ethical obligation to modern forms of human communication and cooperation.

Disseminating the above forms, which are straightjacketed by practical knowledge, becomes the primary task of academic didactics. Nowadays universities, like in the past, have an enormous potential of rational enlightenment. But the newly established universalism of "western rationality", which is being put in practice in front of our eyes, constitutes a universalism consolidated in humanistic *ethos* of human and citizen rights in their endeavour to become the citizen of the world. By verbalizing the above endeavour, they become a real confidant of intellectual leadership. Of course, they do lose a lot from their traditional independence at the same time becoming addicted to economical tendencies, but as a result they gain a chance of having influence on the whole economic and political life in the upcoming future. It causes that conditions, which blasted out the monoculture of Christian Europe, nowadays are heading to create new universalism. Still enlightened education is on guard of the above universalism as it is universities with their educational and research structures of area of public discourse that create an institution, which is able to overcome irrational absurdities of social life, causing that *universitas* one more time shall bring back and then maintain *universalitas*. Today's education quite loosely resembles ideals of the old university. Both the notion of mind and truth, goodness and beauty acting on its behalf, has undergone a far-reaching transformation. As a result, on the one hand we experience transversal mind, in which universal categories of truth, goodness and freedom have blurred under specific forms of historical rationalities, and on the other hand, narrativism of hermeneutics together with difficult to reconcile metaphysical

understanding of values. Both in the former and the latter case, it creates an image, in which stable forms of structural mind have been shaped by enlightened Europecentrism through ages, are now giving way to diversification, among which rationality of truth, goodness and beauty is assigned to specific projects of knowledge. Apart from the fact that it creates a need to verify rational standards of science established in ancient times and continued by the tradition of Cartesius and Kant, it also creates a need to verify institutionalized forms of social life in the aspects of science, education and economy. From their point of view, modern concepts of Foucault, Luhmann and Welsch are presented as historically changeable forms of particularity, over which no superior institution has control. Certainly, it means that metaphysics must be replaced by pragmatism, among which the principle of usefulness, as the one, seems to reflect postmodern standards of science and cultural life. And if the role of mind is not definitely questioned on its basis, weakening only its universality, then it means that objectiveness of Platonic values is transferred to different area than before. Resigning from universality and giving way to transversality, in the context of openness to current events of social life, it verifies theory and practice of *wily mind*, in the meaning in which it treats contextuality and perspective as regulative ideas of new metaphysics. As a result weakened objective mind tolerates individual points of view on the basis which is completely devoid of hallmarks of necessity and absolutism. Hence, we can observe lack of axiological synthesis of individual aspects of social life as a part of homogenous understanding of truth, goodness and freedom results in losing traditional function of university. Along with it, university becomes dependent on not only economical tendencies, by creating personnel for economy depending on economic situation, which is, among other things, shaped by enrolment quota at academic faculties, but also on current demographic tendencies creating a new structure of the whole educational system. This - as well as non-existent, both in Humboldt and Heidelberg (based on Humboldt's) tradition of university - technical and empirical shaping of the world, though common nowadays, stands in open contradiction to the goals, which were assigned to a classical idea of university. It is more and more difficult to think that they would be able to, in extent similar to the past, make use of intellectual liberation. More often, being dependent on economical tendencies through economic and political connections, universities are looking for other ways of exploring truth in greater depth. Usually it takes on a form of struggling with progressive irrationality of public life, which is dangerous to university itself as well as institutions being on guard of it. That is why it is very important that looking for new enlightenment in the era of modern globalization is to be accompanied by rational truth.

One has still to remember that the above processes must be accompanied not only by its new understanding but also a new type of activities propagating it, however, by deepening the process of abandoning university dogma, in which searching for knowledge itself was not conditioned by the possibility of instant use, we are condemned to opportunistic accumulation of truth. Today, not mentioning universalism of knowledge as cultural core of educating society, we concentrate on narrow specialties in technical manner, that is in categories of practice interpreting reality. So, it seems that the times, in which cognitive passion (creating the nature of knowledge) of a lonely scientist looking for the sense of the world is sinking into

oblivion. The above is being replaced by “production” of knowledge by specialists of a relatively narrow specialization and often results in the loss of spirit of what is only seemingly perceived as useless and unnecessary. It leads to a situation in which the attitude to science makes knowledge the primary criterion of its social and practical use. “Ordered” by specific institutions appropriating the right to marketing “production of knowledge” only in humanistic sciences it is able to prove its timeless dignity.

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