

Editor's Preface: On the Idea of the University

Universities have always been complex institutions. Especially from the early nineteenth century onward, the university as an idea and as a structure has faced a number of challenges within conflicting social and political contexts. Most of our contemporary populace assumes that universities are the foundations for higher education, that they promote teaching and the production of knowledge through primary research, and that they operate by their own principles, based on a model that is *sui generis*. In western European histories universities and institutions of higher learning date to the Medieval period, and throughout the past seven hundred years have evolved in different ways. But institutions of higher learning can hardly be viewed exclusively as a Western innovation, since many historical epochs and nations had centers and citadels for the production and transmission of higher learning.

In Medieval Europe, institutions of higher learning were primarily an expression of the teachings of Scholasticism, where the central unity of all knowledge was to be found in logic, more precisely in the foundations of mathematics as a science. Mathematics was the barometer that established and measured knowledge; thus all knowledge had to subscribe to mathematical principles. Music, which we now consider as a separate body of knowledge, was always subsumed under mathematics. Knowledge that could not be understood by mathematical principles, therefore, was simply discarded, or else categorized as metaphysics and thereby excluded from the realm of what was considered knowledge.

Thus, how the university is constituted and what it expresses must always be comprehended within the total intellectual foundations of a period of time, within what might be labeled as the thought of an age, an episteme or epistemes. However, through time, epistemes change, or are altered, or come to be rejected altogether, processes through which different sets of knowledge come into being and, in turn, have an impact on how the university structures itself and what it considers as knowledge. In this sense, the university hardly exists in a vacuum. From the perspectives of those who inhabit the university of today, what is critical is to understand what knowledge meant in the past and how it reflected dominant epistemes of earlier eras.

Since the 1840s and 1850s, if not earlier, the university as an institution has had a series of challenges that have ranged from philosophical issues and their implications on how knowledge is understood and conveyed, to what is meant by a liberal education and by a general education, to the perennial issue of knowledge and its utility, to the connection between knowledge and reason, to debates over what constitutes a "cultured" individual, and of course to the structure of and conflict within the curriculum. Some of these concerns are internal to how the university constitutes itself, but others are constraints imposed by society, by private and state funding, and by the general political context in which the university and higher education are imbedded.

In examining this range of issues I think about three scholars and writers who had a critical bearing on the idea of the university. The three come from different historical contexts, and so they dealt with problems that are different. At the same time, however, the problems are in many ways overlapping, dealing with the issues with which higher education must always contend: the extent to which the university is devoted to establishing new vistas of knowledge and thought, the extent to which it seeks to convey the past into the present, and the extent to which it is responsible to society and the state.

John Henry Cardinal Newman's (1801-1890) *The Idea of the University* (1852) sets forth a vast range of issues that were and are critical to higher education. Coming from a life spent in the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, Newman understood the major problems that universities must confront. He maintained that a liberal education must include not religion but theology, and that any form of general education must be committed to exploring the relationship between the subjects of study and the teachings of morality. In this sense liberal education must be grounded in theological principles, and thus Newman continuously

argues that morality is sustained only through the intellectual foundations of theology.

Yet, Newman's message ranges much beyond theology. One of his major concerns is that education and the curriculum must have a form, a structure that conveys the intellectual and theological foundations of knowledge. The contrast between form/structure and experience/freedom is central to Newman's vision of the curriculum. In the long run, the freedom to study merely what one chooses, a decision often based on utilitarianism, produces neither a liberal nor a moral education. Such an education only ends up as a pantechicon of experiences. Furthermore, knowledge is simply not a matter of reason per se. In fact Newman fears that reason combined with utilitarian philosophies will undermine knowledge, since knowledge is worth studying for its own sake and the question of utility must always be secondary. Thus, the university is not a vocational institution.

Just as knowledge is threatened by questions of utility, theology must be circumscribed from philosophy. For Newman, the foundations of truth remain unattainable in the physical and moral sciences, and thus we must turn to theology, the only basis for seeking Truth. Catholicism cannot be compromised with principles of religion, philosophy and humanism; consequently Catholicism is not solely a faith but an intellectual foundation that cannot be dissolved into pragmatics.

Newman's vision of the university is the closest we have to an ivory tower. But even during his time, forces of culture, class conflict, and liberalism were at work while reason and the intellectual philistines were seeking the high road. In some ways the issues Newman addresses in his writings are more critical today than they were at the time of their inception.

A second notable figure in the evolution of the university, Max Weber (1864-1920) was by training an economic historian and sociologist who spent the whole of his career teaching and writing at the University of Heidelberg in Germany. His letters and essays on the German university system are critical in assessing not only how control was maintained in Germany, but also how the political process and bureaucracy led to a highly centralized structure that controlled all forms of higher education. The German university prior to 1914 has a direct bearing on the American university, since in many ways, apart from its domination by the State, it was the model of the research university in this country.

Weber's critique of the German system of higher education is expressed through a variety of voices. Since the system of higher education fell within the orbit of the German political structure (the Prussian state with Berlin as its capital), the universities, faculty, students, research programming, and curriculum were all at the mercy of bureaucratic administrative heads that controlled personnel and policy with an iron hand. Academic freedom only existed insofar as the ideas, opinions, and realms of knowledge were perceived as non-threatening, and thus the freedom of the sciences existed only within the narrow limits of what the German political and ecclesiastical bureaucracies deemed acceptable.

If the subject matter of various disciplines had to gain acceptance from Berlin, the issue of how the faculty was hired and retained was always problematic. Centralization of personnel and policy meant that political or cultural voices that differed from those of the Prussian State were silenced, creating a situation in which, according to Weber, "[E]ducation [was] the State." On this point the contrast between Weber's Germany and the United States is critical. In the United States, universities and colleges compete with one another for faculty, funding, and students. But in Germany during Weber's time, the power of the university, although ostensibly resting with the provincial states, in reality was held by the State, as even the local governmental bureaucracies were hierarchical, unitary, and directed from Berlin.

The research organism of the modern American university stems from the German experience, which contrasts markedly with Newman's vision of the academic cloister. The emphasis on research, especially in the sciences, took hold after World War II, ushering in yet another phase in the evolution of the university. Clark Kerr (1911-2003), a third figure notable for advancing our understanding of the university, was the Chancellor of the Berkeley campus of the University of California from 1952-1957, and then assumed the

role of President of the University of California system from 1958 to 1967. For our present purposes, Kerr's illuminating writings on higher education go back to 1963, when he developed the idea of the multiversity.

Universities have traditionally been founded, especially in Germany, on nationalism and science. The American addition to the idea of the university is that education must contribute to humankind, an ideal best expressed in the land grant mission, which was and is central to the American university. For Kerr, the university is a complex institution in which power is hardly centralized—virtually the opposite of Weber's German university. Students, faculty, public authority (such as that exercised by regents), the administration, trade unions, internal and external influences, taxpayers, parents, public and private foundations, and the state all impinge on any institution of higher education. While the university has always been viewed as a community, today it is difficult to assess just where the community starts and ends.

Kerr's views and the concept of the multiversity are prescient for our times. They are all the more critical and powerful within the present context, when the modern university must face challenges both internal and external. It goes without saying that research and teaching are interconnected, but the changes that Kerr envisioned remain critical to the research mission of the university. And the university must therefore, *mutatis mutandis*, continually recreate itself in light of both the cultural forces at work and its own values and sense of mission.

Explorations is part of that re-envisioning, that transformation. Four or five decades ago, even less, undergraduates were hardly ever involved in research. Learning took place in something of a passive context, with knowledge flowing from the teacher to the student. After four years of lectures and classrooms, students might have justifiably asked what was truly theirs.

The context of the university today, however, involves teachers and students in a dynamic exchange, an active dialogue that takes place not only in the classroom but in the Coffee House, the office, and the lab as well. The research in this, the seventh volume of *Explorations*, attests to the power of what can emerge from that exchange.

Angela Hawk's essay examines the cultural attitudes that made Disneyland such a popular attraction in the Cold War era. Talia Moto explores the promise of therapies utilizing the Human Artificial Chromosome. Regan Clark studies the relationship among religion, spiritual belief, and IQ. Carl Gould describes a program analysis technique used to verify the correctness of dynamically generated query strings in database applications. Sebastien Betermier analyzes the relationship between the economic conditions in today's overseas territories and their political status of dependence or independence. Finally, Kathleen Feehan examines the changes among freshmen in their political orientation. These writings show how the individual voice—articulating the joy of discovery in one's findings, probings, inquisitiveness, and original research—joins in the dialogue of scholars and thinkers past and present, helping us move toward what Emerson inscribed as the belletristic state of the mind.

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