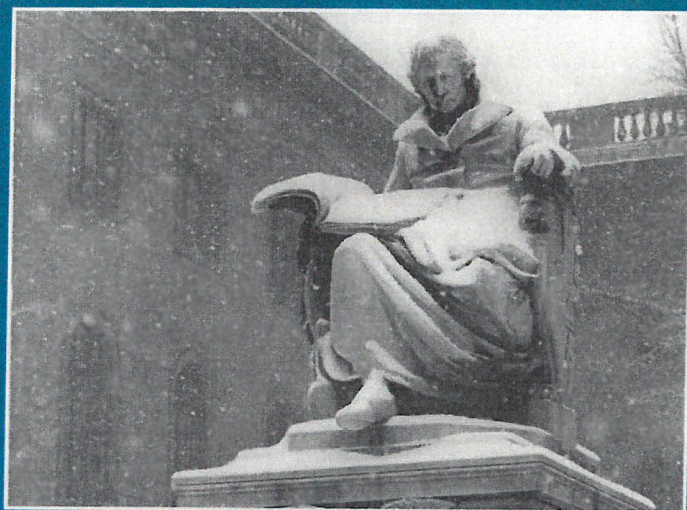


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Peter Josephson, Thomas Karlsohn, Johan Östling (Eds.)
The Humboldtian Tradition



The Humboldtian Tradition

Origins and Legacies

Edited by Peter Josephson,
Thomas Karlsohn & Johan Östling

SCIENTIFIC AND LEARNED CULTURES AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS

Series Editor

MORDECHAI FEINGOLD

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The Very Idea of Higher Education

Vocation of Man or Vocational Training?

Sharon Rider

In general, indeed, the wise in all ages have always said the same thing, and the fools, who at all times form the immense majority, have in their way too acted alike, and done just the opposite; and so it will continue. For, as Voltaire says, *we shall leave this world as foolish and as wicked as we found it on our arrival.*¹

Introduction

A common objection today to references to Humboldt is that they are merely nostalgic: the mass university has de facto been integrated into a political economic system from which it cannot be separated without serious damage, if not outright destruction, to both.² Yet a critique of the present need not be a call for a return to some mythical, glorious past. The following reflections are not concerned with Humboldt's writings as such, nor to the uses or abuses of Humboldt's name in struggle for the identity of the university; but I do try to recall the spirit, if not the letter, of Humboldt's thought, and most especially of the ethos that guided it. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, Humboldt saw a way to reform the university, not only administratively, but in its very conception. His reforms were to make the university something of use to mankind by entrusting its functions to the scientific spirit of its faculty and the diligence of the students. Vocational schools, it was thought, arrested students'

- 1 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer: Volume 7: The Wisdom of Life*, trans. T. Bailey Saunders, Penn State Electronic Classics Series (2005), 29. (first pub. 1850).
- 2 An earlier version of this paper was published in Swedish as 'Högskolan bolognese: Otidsenliga betraktelser över den högre utbildningens mål och mening' in Torbjörn Friberg & Daniel Ankarloo (eds.), *Den högre utbildningen—ett fält av marknad och politik* (Hedemora: Gidlunds, 2012). I provide a more detailed discussion of the themes of the Enlightenment idea of autonomy and the Bologna Process in 'Higher Heteronomy: Thinking through Modern University Education', in Sharon Rider, Ylva Hasselberg & Alexandra Waluszewski (eds.), *Transformations in Research, Education and the Academic Market: The Breakdown of Scientific Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012).

intellectual and moral development. This is an important point, because the pressure toward the 'vocalization' of the university is seemingly ever-present and nearly irresistible, and has been so for more than a hundred years, as attested by Nietzsche:

But the present age is, as aforesaid, supposed to be an age, not of whole mature and harmonious personalities, but of labour of the greatest possible common utility. That means, however, that men have to be adjusted to the purposes of the age so as to be ready for employment as soon as possible: they must labour in the factories of the general good before they are mature—indeed so that they shall not become mature—for this would be a luxury which would deprive the 'labour market' of a great deal of the workforce...the words 'factory', 'labour market', 'supply', 'making profitable' and whatever auxiliary verbs egoism now employs, come unbidden to the lips when one wishes to describe the most recent generation of men of learning. Sterling mediocrity grows even more mediocre, science ever more profitable in the economic sense.³

Nietzsche describes an ethos that we recognize as belonging very much to our day. In the last section, I will attempt to show how this ethos is institutionalized as official policy in the Bologna Process.

An Education Suited to an Idea of Man

I don't know what I want, but I know how to get it.⁴

One of the difficulties attending any attempt to delimit and define the aims of higher education is that any concrete notion about its purpose and function is intimately tied to what a given community at a certain point in time takes for granted about many other important questions. And such aims are of necessity also formulated in the idiom of that community, expressing its ways of thinking and speaking, including what it values and what it despises. Ideas about higher education are necessarily related to hopes and fears about the world that the coming generation is going to inherit, ideas about what they will need to know when they take the steering wheel. In short, the question has to

3 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', *Untimely Meditations*, ed. D. Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 99 (first pub. 1874).

4 Sex Pistols, 'Anarchy in the UK' (EMI, 1976).

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do with how a nation, a tribe, a people, a state, or a group view life; what they value, what they fear, what they believe in, what they worry about, what they reject, what they hope for: the burning issue of the point and purpose of higher education constitutes a crossroads where a number of the most fundamental human concerns meet. The state of a system of higher education, and what is taken for granted when considering various possibilities and alternatives, is a concretization of the most basic beliefs, values, hopes, and desires of a community, insofar as what the community chooses to do in order to educate their youth shows what they take to be of ultimate importance. In contemporary academic terms, one would say that the idea is historically and culturally situated.

Depending upon which values are supposed or cited, what material or social conditions apply, and which context the discussion arises in, the concept of 'higher education' can refer to different phenomena in the same society. When we talk about 'higher education' in Europe today, for example, we may mean a variety of things: different kinds of publicly financed professional and vocational training; the higher-education system as a whole, including its institutions, such as colleges and universities; the set of relevant laws, rules, regulations, ordinances, and directives regarding the higher-education system as such; and so on. Or the concept can refer to the multifarious components and substance of that education.

In debates concerning the aims of higher education and how these are best to be achieved, these different senses of the term are frequently conflated, or at least not held apart. In what follows, I will attend to this last use of the term, the *content* of higher education, which, I argue, ought to be the touchstone when considering even the other issues. But in point of fact, there has been a marked tendency in recent years to do the opposite—that is, to modify the content of higher education to suit or even be subsumed under other considerations, without any idea of what that content is, on the basis of a layman's concerns without insight into or knowledge of the subject. To take just one example, it has become common to adjust course offerings and programmes to meet what are thought to be the demands of the labour market, say, 'what kinds of engineers are presently in demand?', rather than to consider what kind of education would make someone a good engineer even under unknown circumstances, whatever the future may bring. This shift in focus from content, construed as something of intrinsic value to which all other considerations must be adjusted, to external demands as primary and determinative of content is my first and in many respects most important point. It is often claimed that there is no inherent conflict between the idea of *Bildung* and the strictures placed on higher education by the Bologna Process (most significantly, the

requirement of 'employability'), yet as a matter of fact, there is. The conflict has to do with the motivating ideals articulated in the respective models. I want to show in what follows that the fundamental precepts of the Bologna Process are inimical to the very concept of science and scholarship understood as the means of fulfilling, in Fichte's words, 'the vocation of man as such'.⁵

Secondly, as a consequence of the first point, I wish to show that there is a political, or rather a moral, dimension to all the definitions of the aims and descriptions of the purposes of higher education. Every statement regarding what higher education can or should achieve says something about what we value, how we view the relationship between the individual and the collective, and what sort of society we are prepared to build and inhabit, and thus also what we want to change. In other words, the question of what higher education is or should be is ultimately the question of which values and ideals we as a matter of fact embrace, even if we do not explicitly refer to these ideals *as* ideals. Any particular conception of the notion of 'education' is actually a specification of an idea, the use of which is essentially normative and evaluative; every application of it is therefore entirely conditioned by those implicit norms and values. What constitutes a 'good education' is a matter of values, just as in the question of what constitutes 'good art' or 'a just society'.

One way to illuminate buried norms and ideals is to reflect on other ways of thinking and acting, such that the very contrast creates a kind of *Verfremdungseffekt*. Thus I will begin with a review of earlier conceptions of the purpose of higher education. The aim is not to show that the ancient Greeks, for instance, represent a better, wiser, or deeper notion than ours. On the contrary; if anything, the conclusion to be drawn would rather be that any such comparison is invariably misguided and misleading. My point is rather that to understand the Athenian conception of what it meant to educate their young is to understand how the Athenians conceived of life in general: it is to understand *who they were*. We cannot simply embrace the Greek idea of education, and even less revive it, without at the same time radically altering our way of thinking, and even our way of life. What we can learn from considering how they conceived of the task of education is not how to implement their ideas in our society, but rather how much their ideas about education were a part of their way of thinking about man and his place in the world, just

5 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 'Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation', in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, trans. & ed. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988). First published 1794. According to Fichte, the vocation of the scholar is 'the supreme supervision of the actual progress of the human race in general and the unceasing promotion of this progress'.

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Without a deeper discussion about the intimate connection between education and the values and form of life of which it is an integral part, all planning and evaluation is meaningless. It is perhaps a sign of the times that we devote so much energy to the painstaking development of instruments for the planning, execution, and evaluation of educational institutions, as if the quality of these instruments was of great moment, yet at the same time, we tend to forget the fundamental question of what it is that we are planning for—namely, the future. But the question of what kind of future we hope and plan for is not itself a technical question, nor is it merely a question of economics or administration. Nor is it primarily a political question. It is ultimately a philosophical and ethical question. My observations here should therefore not be read as an attempt at writing a history of educational theory, or a conceptual history of education as a philosophical notion, but as an attempt to place our contemporary ideas about higher education in one historical perspective.

An Idea Suited to a Community: *Paideia* and *Polis*

In classical Athens, the term *paideia* referred to the training considered appropriate for the moral, aesthetic, and intellectual development of the children of the aristocracy; that is, what they needed in order to take on the roles and responsibilities and live up to the ideals that their position in the city-state would place on them. Their education consisted of rhetoric, grammar, mathematics, music, philosophy, geography, natural history, and gymnastics. The goal was the achievement of *arete*, commonly translated as 'virtue' or 'excellence', but perhaps best understood as 'superiority' or 'virtuosity', even in ethical or political matters.⁶ The idea seemed to be that education is something that forms, even transforms, the individual by making him more capable of fully realizing the promise of what he was born to be, if only potentially.

Among the important capacities to be formed was that of good judgement, be it in aesthetic, ethical, or political questions.⁷ Our interest here is in the idea

6 This notion in itself points to the enormous gulf that exists between the Greek idea of the human being and the modern idea. We can hardly imagine what it would mean to call someone a 'moral virtuoso'.

7 Again, striking evidence of the cultural contrast between the Greeks and us. For the former, the distinction between the moral and the aesthetic was not nearly as self-evident and clear-cut as it is for the modern European.

of a cultivated ability. The teacher's task, given this idea, is not to instill in the pupil a pre-determined set of established opinions, but to induce in him the desire to develop and improve his capacity for sound judgement. The goal of education as such was to enhance the process of intellectual and moral maturity, to teach the young adult to think as one who is sovereign, as one who can exercise discretion and self-control, characteristics which were the *sine qua non* for the patrician way of life as master of the house and citizen (or legislator). Another way of putting the same point is to say that the Greeks thought that a free man was one who has not only the right, but also the duty, to exercise sound judgement in matters concerning what we would call 'values'. Nobility, genuine freedom, and the ability to take responsibility for one's actions and opinions were not innate qualities for the Greeks, but traits that had to be inculcated and cultivated. How this was to be done was thus a question of the greatest concern, for it was a specification of the question 'What sort of human being would express the fullest realization of who we are or strive to be, and how does he become who he is?' Aristotle writes:

And the same principle applies in regard to modes of life and choices of conduct: a man should be capable of engaging in business and war, but still more capable of living in peace and leisure; and he should do what is necessary and useful, but still more should he do what is noble [*tà dè kalà deî mállo*n]. These then are the aims that ought to be kept in view in the education of the citizens both while still children and at the later ages that require education.⁸

Closely related to the idea of *paideia*, and the purpose which it served, the cultivation of *arete*, was the view that the latter was its own reward: the Greek term *eudaimonia*, commonly translated as 'happiness', implied a kind of growth and thriving, a coming into the full bloom of *arete*, conceived as the realization of man's greatest potential—that is, the achievement of the greatest Good. Thus the ultimate point and purpose of *paideia* was just that: the flourishing of the Athenian citizen as the embodiment of the norms and ideals of the *polis*. Both Plato and Aristotle explicitly contrasted this aim with the kind of training that was thought desirable or necessary for those who were not born to exercise freedom, the worker or tradesman (*banau*soi). The *banau*soi were thought to be deformed in body and soul through repetitive and unsound movements, physical and spiritual depletion of their energies, and, perhaps most of all, the child's exposure to and preoccupation with base

8 Aristotle, *Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), vii: 14, 1333b.

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things. Among the most ignoble of such concerns, thought to be the most injurious and spiritually debasing, were activities directed at making money, in contrast to pursuits in the service of higher things: truth, virtue, and the *polis*.⁹ Socrates makes the following observation concerning the value of knowing how to perform mathematical calculations:

Moreover it occurs to me, since the study of calculation has been mentioned, what a subtle study it is and in how many ways it is useful to our purpose, if one studies it for the sake of knowledge and not to buy and sell [*kapeleúein*].¹⁰

Thus Socrates readily admits that mathematics has a practical value, but insists that this value depends ultimately on its being taught and learned for its own sake, as something that is good to know in and for itself. The Greek *gymnasia* and *palaestrae* were designed to maintain and improve a sound mind in a sound body for a life in the service of the realization of the greatest human good, both for the individual and for the community.

The medieval university had a different task. Its primary purpose was to provide professional training in law, medicine, and, most importantly, theology. *Artes liberales* were considered the basic education, the ground upon which higher studies could be built, the idea being that there are certain things that the student simply had to know about the world and man's place in it before he could embark on a programme of study in the professions, with all the responsibility that the offices in question implied. This basic course of study comprised the *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, and music), which were thought to constitute a coherent system of a kind (as opposed to, say, the study of French or Italian, which were considered worth learning, but not essential elements in the system as such). But the professional training that the student of law, medicine, and theology was to receive was of an entirely different order than the kind of training required to become a skilled craftsman or artisan, due to the nature of the judgements that a priest or lawyer would have to exercise. While a master mason would have shown himself to have total mastery his craft, no

9 Plato's critique went further. He thought the influence of commerce on a community to be almost always corrupting, leading inevitably to conflict, discord, and strife.

10 Plato, *Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974), vii: 525d. The Greek infinitive, *gnorizein*, translated above as 'knowledge', should be understood here actively in terms of discovery and recognition of something that one *does*, as opposed to 'knowledge' understood statically, as something that one *has*—say, of a set of facts, theories or doctrines.

longer needing direction or instruction by a teacher, the field over which the priest, doctor, or lawyer needed to be able to survey in order to make sound judgements was the entire natural order, including its Creator and its crowning achievement, man. A professional in this sense was not merely someone who had mastered the tools of his trade, but someone who could be relied upon to exercise his office in a judicious manner within the complex cosmic order which man inhabits. The very idea that someone could take on the responsibilities associated with the Church, the law, or the temple of the soul without familiarity with that order would have seemed absurd.¹¹

Further, by entering the university, the student joined a new collective. His identity as someone with this or that native language and this or that home country was augmented by a new identity, as part of a community thought to be higher and more constant than whatever temporary economic or political alliances he might enter into. For the knowledge that he was to attain was thought to be of universal value and applicability. *Universitas*, the community of masters and students, formed a new kind of corporation, with roots most immediately in the institutions of the Church, but dating back to the city statutes of the Roman Empire. The medieval university had the task of producing a certain kind of person, one fitted to fill vital functions in the society of which he was part.

With the Enlightenment, we see a renewed emphasis on the skills and abilities thought necessary or desirable for the practice of self-rule—that is, citizenry. Here we see clear parallels with the line of thought running back to Plato and Aristotle, with the decisive difference that in the eighteenth century, this category included a vastly greater proportion of the population. In a sense, the idea of Enlightenment combined the ancients' aristocratic ideals of autonomy and self-actualization with the medieval conception of universal norms and values applying to all members of a community of thought. For Enlightenment thinkers, what was to be cultivated was the innate capacity for self-legislation (at least in the male half of the population), and the existing social and economic order, regarded as neither enduring nor predictable

11 This interpretation of the meaning of the medieval university is strongly influenced by my reading of J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Mission of the University* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1946), 43. For a more detailed historical account, see William Clarke, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). My contrast between different ideals of education as expressing the form of life of an epoch is in part inspired by Ortega's ideas about the evolution of scientific thinking from Galileo to the present. J. Ortega y Gasset, *History as a System and Other Essays in the History of Philosophy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961).

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in an age of intellectual as well as political agitation, revolt, and upheaval, could not serve as the source. Thus it was thought that the capacity for self-determination and self-reliance, a potential that was the birthright of all men, should be cultivated as the realization of man's genuine nature and his proper destiny. Rousseau writes:

Fit man's education to what man really is. Do you not see that if you try to fit him exclusively for one way of life, you make him useless for every other?...You put your trust in the existing social order, and do not take into account the fact that order is subject to inevitable revolutions, and that you can neither foresee nor prevent the revolution that may affect your children.¹²

Inspired by Rousseau, Kant argued in a similar vein in his lectures on education. He saw education (which, for Kant, included the cultivation of both moral and intellectual qualities) as first and foremost directed towards the actualization of the human potential for freedom and self-legislation (autonomy) in the individual, and ultimately in the species. Kant distinguishes between physical and what he calls practical or moral training.

Practical or moral [versus physical] education is education toward personality, the education of a freely acting being who can support itself and be a member of society, but who can have an inner value for itself.¹³

The aim of education is not to drill the student in a set of skills like training a horse for dressage, nor to impart specific doctrines, but to *enlighten* him: the point is not to teach him what to think, but how to think.¹⁴ Toward the end of *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (*The Metaphysics of Morals*), in a section on method in teaching ethics, Kant claims that the core of moral education is to make the student aware that 'he himself can think'.¹⁵ Notice that what Kant is saying here is that thinking for oneself does not arise by itself, but is something

12 Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Oeuvres complètes*, iv: *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, (ed.) Charles Wirz (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969), iii. 468. (first pub. 1762).

13 Immanuel Kant, 'Über Pädagogik', Wilhelm Weischedel (ed.) *Werkausgabe XII* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 712 (first pub. 1803).

14 Ibid. 707.

15 Immanuel Kant, 'Die Metaphysik der Sitten II: Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Tugendlehre', Wilhelm Weischedel (ed.), *Werkausgabe VIII* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997) § 50, A 165 (first pub. 1797).

that the human being can learn, something he is capable of being taught to do, through education (*Erziehung*); it is through education, and only through education, Kant claimed, that the human being can achieve his humanity, that is, his autonomy. Further, with a carefully considered and well-devised programme of education, humanity can look forward to a 'future happier human species'.¹⁶

A University Suited to Its Mission

What I have tried to show in this brief sketch of different formulations of the idea of higher education is the family resemblance between ideas emerging out of fundamentally different historical and cultural contexts. The resemblance that I want to point out has two characteristic features: first, in each case, there seems to be a premium placed on the capacity to see the contingencies of the moment and the circumstances in which one finds oneself, including one's own present interests as well as the influence of others, as something upon which one can exert a greater or lesser degree of autonomous thought or action. Second, in each case, such a capacity for greater autonomous thought and action is not seen as arising spontaneously, but rather as something to be achieved, through the deliberate care of the community. The differences between the ideals described seem to have more to do with what kind of talents, skills, and personal traits are deemed estimable and salient incarnations of the capacity for freedom. Thus, for instance, the difference between Plato's view and Rousseau's resides primarily in the types of character traits they consider necessary or valuable in the world as they know it. Despite these differences, it is clear that in both cases *the aim is to form a certain kind of human being*. If the one who is to be educated is to devote his life to something more than slavery or manual labour—that is, to citizenship and a profession—then he must receive an education proper to the attendant duties and responsibilities. In particular, he must develop his capacity for responsible action, autonomous judgement, and conscientious decision-making, in matters both public and private, practical and theoretical. In short, one might say that the kind of human being to be cultivated through higher education is one capable of sound and independent *judgement*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kant 1977, 700.

¹⁷ One might be inclined to think that the current emphasis on 'critical thought' would constitute an example of this ideal; yet, as I will argue, the automatized systems that have been introduced to train critical thought as a general skill display in their conception and

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The educational ideal outlined above bears the stamp of another age, of course. To our ears, it can sound starchy, pompous, impractical and unprofitable. Norms and ideals of the type enumerated here cannot survive in a vacuum; they are born of prevailing attitudes, concerns, controversies, and problems that someone is trying to come to grips with. And it seems to me that the problem that Plato and Rousseau, Aristotle and Kant are grappling with is not whether a people, a society, a state, a community, or a regent has a legitimate interest in the form and content of higher education. From the point of view of the philosophers, the question has never been whether or not the state has the right to involve itself in the business of education, but rather *under which conditions and upon what grounds this legitimate right can be exercised*. In the end, the answer must rest on the nature of that interest. Humboldt, for instance, writes:

The university always stands in a close relationship to practical life and to the needs of the state, since it is always concerned with the practical affair of training the younger generation. Academies concern themselves only with science and scholarship. University teachers are generally integrated with each other simply through the internal culture and the organisational framework of their disciplines. But regarding their proper business of science and scholarship, they communicate with each other only insofar as they are inclined to do so. The academy is in contrast a society constituted for the purpose of subjecting the work of each member to the assessment of all others.¹⁸

For just this reason, Humboldt argues for the importance of state control of certain university affairs:

The right of appointment of university teachers must be reserved exclusively to the state; it is certainly not a good arrangement to grant more influence to the faculties than a prudent and fair-minded body of trustees (Curatorium) would allow. Although disagreements and disputes within a university are wholesome and necessary, conflicts which might arise between teachers because of their specialised intellectual interests might unwittingly affect their viewpoints. The conditions of the

construction an instrumentalist interpretation of that goal which is remote from the ideal described here, and even at odds with it.

18 Wilhelm von Humboldt, 'On the Spirit and Organisational Framework of Intellectual Institutions in Berlin', *Minerva* vol. 8 (1970), 248.

university are too closely bound up with the direct interest of the state to permit any other arrangement.¹⁹

I understand Humboldt's point here to be that academic questions—issues involving the actual form and content of research, scholarship, and teaching as such—ought to be assessed on academic or scientific grounds. There is, however, an ever-present danger that the necessity for specialization blinds the academic community to the need for pluralism, and thus can lead to homogenization, standardization and the weakening of science. But furthermore, the university is much more than science and scholarship. Its very existence is based on the societal functions that it is to fulfil. And when it comes to these extra-mural functions, academic considerations are not always primary. This distinction, between the legitimate interests of state and community on the one hand and the interests of science as a pursuit on the other, is reminiscent of Kant's famous argument for freedom of speech.²⁰ Kant maintained that it is perfectly legitimate for the regent to limit the enlightened citizen's right to public expression insofar as the citizen expresses himself in his capacity as civil servant. As a scholar (or enlightened citizen), he is an equal among equals in the republic of ideas; but as a civil servant, say a clergyman or a tax collector, his rights are limited by his civil function, and he must answer to the state and his fellow citizens, and not only to other scholars. The theoretical distinction between strictly academic (scholarly or scientific) considerations and institutional needs also played out in the nineteenth-century battles over *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lehrnfreiheit*. The issue of how, when, and why these freedoms could and should be curbed or not was debated on and off well into the twentieth century. I take this to mean that this was considered an important question.

Since the expansion and democratization of higher education during the second half of the nineteenth century, the practical function of the university (society's legitimate interest in it) has increasingly taken centre stage in discussions concerning higher education. To begin with, the entry and integration of new student groups (the working classes, immigrants, and, somewhat later, even women) posed new problems and raised new concerns. The university was to provide society with a technically skilled labour force, while at the same time providing these new groups with training in the rights and duties of citizenship in a liberal democracy. They were to be freed from the shackles of

¹⁹ Ibid. 249.

²⁰ Immanuel Kant, 'Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', in James Schmidt (ed.) *What is Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996) (first pub. 1784).

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ignorance and superstition as well as the ethnic, cultural, and kinship loyalties that bound them and deprived them of the opportunity to participate in the democratic process and debate enjoyed by their more privileged school-mates.²¹ What we have here, it would seem, are two distinct aims, which, at least when formulated in this way, seem difficult to weld into a single goal. When this transformation first began, it was not self-evident that someone who had studied at a business school or a technical college was by definition 'educated'. On the contrary, there was a good deal of discussion about the extent to which practical instruction could or should be integrated into the university. John Stuart Mill, for instance, in his inaugural speech as vice-chancellor of St Andrews in 1867, thought the issue needed to be addressed:

The proper function of a University in national education is tolerably well understood. At least there is a tolerably general agreement about what a University is not. Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. The object is not to make skillful lawyers, or physicians or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings. It is very right that there should be facilities for the study of the professions. It is well that there should be Schools of Law, and of Medicine, and it would well be if there were schools of engineering and the industrial arts. The countries which have such institutions are greatly the better for them; and there is something to be said for having them in the same localities, and under the same general superintendence as the establishments devoted to education properly called. But these things are no part of what every generation owes to the next, as that on which its civilization and worth will principally depend...Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians. What professionals should carry away with them from a University is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge, and bring the light of general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit.²²

21 This was an explicit concern, for example, in John Dewey's classic *Democracy and Education*.

22 John Stuart Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews 1867', in J.M. Robson (ed.) *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, xxi: *Essays on Equality, Law, and Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), available at <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/255/21681>>, accessed 11 April 2011. For Mill, astronomy, biology, physics, and

The situation today is somewhat different. In a word, it is not the case that 'the proper function of a University in national education is tolerably well understood'. At the very least, one can say that it is not universally agreed that its proper function is first and foremost to cultivate the capacity for autonomous, sound judgement. Nor is it true any longer that there is 'a tolerably general agreement about what a University is not', if we take that agreement to refer to the general acceptance of the claim that 'universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood'. Quite to the contrary, the systems that have been devised by national governments for auditing and assessing the value and effectiveness of higher education are based on the criteria of standardization, mass production, and, above all, employability. Universities themselves also follow rankings in branch journals in which the value of an education is tied to the average income of its graduates ten years after graduation, and adjust their programmes to emulate those at the top of the list. In other words, what Mill took to be the definitive characteristic of a university is not a relevant factor in considering the value of a course of study in today's policy debates and discussions. To be sure, most policy documents, including those relating to the Bologna Process, stress the role of the university in promoting tolerance, equality, and critical thought. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to demonstrate convincingly the value and efficacy of studying classical subjects such as philosophy, astronomy, and Latin in promoting these goals. At the same time, it goes without saying that such subjects are unlikely to achieve the same success in attracting students or guaranteeing their future employment as more practical programmes. The only argument for their continued existence would have to be Socrates': however useful they may turn out to be, they will only be valuable if they are taught and learned as worth knowing in themselves. But in a society in which value is strictly measured in terms of foreseeable practical utility and economic growth, it is perfectly natural that 'employability' serves as the umbrella term for the technical competence and vocational skills required by industry, the market, and the public sector. Thus a good education is by definition an education that produces highly skilled workers who are in great demand. An excellent education is one in which the students achieve such a high degree of technical accomplishment that they can not only follow technological developments and their attendant economic benefits, but actively contribute to them. An excellent university is hence one that produces innovations and innovators.

mathematics were as important and even indispensable elements of a general or liberal education as law, political science, and, for reasons that can be understood in terms of 'multicultural awareness', classical Greek.

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This ideal differs more radically from previous ideas than any preceding change in terms of its fundamental shift in focus from ensuring that the coming generation consists of 'capable and sensible men' to a concentration on commerce and competition. That this transfiguration is substantial becomes clear if one considers that Plato and his contemporaries saw the latter as sources of community dissolution, albeit one which could be held in check by seeing to it that the free citizens of the community were given a proper education.²³ Where Plato saw the role of education as indispensable for the creation and sustenance of a sense of commonality precisely by training the capacity for autonomy in those who had the task of fulfilling the ideals of the *polis*, current trends in higher education would seem to see education as an efficient way of dissipating the sense of community (national belonging, disciplinary integrity, and so forth) by enforcing a heteronomous framework in which the student is perceived as a token of an amorphous mass of mobile, potential employees, distinguishable primarily by the set of skills he can demonstrate through a standardized certification process.²⁴

An Education Suited to the International Market

Up until this point, I have assumed the reader's acquaintance with what I have called 'current trends', and which I have exemplified simply by allusions to the Bologna Process *tout court*. I think it important, however, to specify with a few examples more precisely what I mean, even though it will mean moving from philosophical reflection on the nature and purpose of the cultivation of human thought by some of the greatest minds in Western history to pamphlets and proclamations produced by committees with the explicit aim of structuring, standardizing, and formalizing the European system of higher education. The

23 I have intentionally avoided referring to any of the established theoretical positions regarding the philosophy of education. In my view, the majority of the overtly normative positions ('perennialism', 'essentialism', 'progressivism', and the like) in the main share the view that higher education ought to contribute something more both to the individual and to society than professional or vocational skills, if we are to justify the existence of institutions such as universities. Where there is disagreement, it has to do with what one takes these higher or broader aims to be, and how these are best attained. I have not taken a clearly defined stance here, although I do suggest that the capacity for judgement (a philosophically difficult concept) is central.

24 On the role of education in the creation of the modern European nation-state and the deterioration of both, see Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

documents are every bit as officious and arid as one might expect, but I take it as one of my tasks to sift through the layers of technical terminology in order to illuminate the conceptual implications embedded in them.

I have selected as my illustration a report written by the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks.²⁵ The expressed aim of the report is to make recommendations and 'offer advice on good practice' in the elaboration of national frameworks for higher-education qualifications. Now, this is merely one in a slew of regional, national, and European reports, commissions, communiqués, statements, schemes, and manifestos to have emanated from the Bologna Process since its inception, but it is representative of the style and content of the majority of them. There is nothing in this particular report that conflicts with the basic ideas behind 'Bolognization'; on the contrary, I have chosen it because it is genre-typical.

Due to a lack of established consensus on terminology, the authors offer a glossary of terms used in the report. Among these is the crucial notion of 'learning outcomes', the axis on which all educational activities are supposed to turn. 'Learning outcomes' are defined here as 'statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning'. Consequently, a 'credit' is to be understood as 'a quantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes and their associated workloads'. Learning outcomes are pivotal because they 'represent one of the essential building blocks for transparency' with regard to qualifications. With 'outcome-based approaches', they have 'implications for qualifications, curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment, as well as quality assurance' and 'are thus likely to form an important part of 21st century approaches to higher education (and, indeed, to education and training generally) and the reconsideration of such vital questions as to what, whom, how, where and when we teach and assess'. Because of this profound influence, learning outcomes are 'important tools in clarifying the results of learning for the student, citizen, employer and educator'.²⁶

One might wonder how it is that a formal statement of what the student is expected to know at the end of a course of study can have such a fundamental effect on higher education—on the 'what, whom, how, where and when' of university teaching. The answer is that the perfunctory definition with which the report begins actually 'represents a change in emphasis from "teaching" to

²⁵ Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (Copenhagen: Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation, 2005).

²⁶ Ibid. 38.

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"learning" typified by what is known as the adoption of a student-centred approach', which 'produces a focus on the teaching—learning—assessment relationships and the fundamental links between the design, delivery, assessment and measurement of learning'. And this, in turn, is important because it 'implies that the manner of the achievement of a qualification is not as important as the achievement of the qualification itself'. Finally, this is shown to be desirable because, among other things, it facilitates employment, since prior work experience can now be fully accredited without the process of formal academic training.

But what does it actually mean to implement 'learning outcomes' in practice? On the face of it, not much. Instead of syllabi, which are formulated in terms of the aims and purposes embedded in the 'course content'—what the lecturer as a practitioner of her discipline considers central—the course plan is now determined on the basis of what the student is expected minimally 'to know, understand or do' in completing the course successfully. The difference is merely that now the student (as well as future potential employers) will be in possession of a specific formulation of the minimal requirements, and the lecturer must base her teaching, along with her examinations and assessments, on those specifications.

In this respect, course plans in the Bologna Process resemble little so much as contracts, whereas syllabi are generally neutral descriptions of a subject matter and a plan of action for how it is to be assimilated. This shift in focus from subject matter to expected outcomes means that both teachers and students are to conceive of education in a new way: the old way of thinking 'first—subject matter, then—teaching, then—examination' is replaced with 'first—criteria for assessment and accreditation, then—techniques, methods, and systems for fulfilling the requirements stipulated at stage one, then—expected and achieved outcomes'. The latter is called 'constructive alignment', the implementation of which is thought to ensure a more transparent system of qualifications and progression between levels of education. The basic idea is that having achieved a certain level of qualification, the student and educational institutions can 'check off' the relevant step on the protocol and thus predict whether the student is qualified for the next level.

Let us consider the implications of this almost imperceptible administrative shift in the organization of teaching practice. There is one assumption in particular built into the acceptance of the scheme that merits consideration: the idea that it is both possible and desirable to lay down in advance the expected results of any course of study, regardless of its content, whether or not it is theoretical or practical. Let us consider the former case, in other words what it means to specify what a given student should be able 'to know,

understand or do' having studied, say, philosophy for three months. Most students who study philosophy for a term walk away thinking that Plato said that we are all living in a cave, that Kant believed that it was better to reveal the location of the Jewish family hiding in your attic than to lie to the ss, and that Nietzsche argued that everything is about power. Some students develop their capacity for critical thought and sound judgement after a course of study in philosophy, but many do not. That they can learn to apply certain techniques to meet with specified requirements stated at the outset does not mean that they have started thinking critically or philosophically.

Now it may be objected here that it is up to the lecturer to see to it that the criteria are so precise, and the application of them so fastidious, that only a student who has genuinely learned to think critically, at least at a rudimentary level, will be deemed to have fulfilled the course requirements. But no philosopher has ever succeeded, despite innumerable attempts, to state the nature of critical thought once and for all. It seems unlikely that a garden-variety professor at a run-of-the-mill European university should succeed where Kant failed. Thus if the application of such instruments is to have any meaning, university teachers and administrators should concern themselves with formalizing and automating professional judgement. Indeed, the more formalized and mechanized the instruments, the less there is need for judgement at all. And this is explicitly the point, since two of the main goals of the Bologna Process, mobility and transparency, are two sides of the same goal: interchangeability. The idea is that a course of training in, say, internal medicine in Lille should be equivalent in form and content to the 'same' course in Umeå; something that facilitates the exchange of students and staff within the EHEA, and, ultimately, the entire European workforce. The transparency provided by the Bologna Process provides employees with a universally recognized certification, and the employers with a standardized means of comparison and valuation.

Thus the value of 'learning outcomes' lies in the transparency and measurability they create. The aim is to inform the student and her prospective employer what it is that she has attained in her course of study in terms of specific competences and levels of attainment. Her attainments are to be assessed according to a (within the EHEA) universally recognized standard, including those for general competences such as 'written and oral communication', 'information search and retrieval', and so forth. What is assured by these measures is not the quality of the education itself, but of the system of certification.

Philosophically speaking, the basic assumption at work here is that subjectivity is merely the opposite of objectivity as construed in the everyday sense as tantamount to arbitrary biographical or biological determinations or

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idiosyncrasies. The value of the cultivation of the capacity for and exercise of judgement as a *sine qua non* of science and education is, given this assumption, almost incomprehensible. Judgement is assumed rather to belong to the domain of the aesthetic and perhaps the ethical, but has no place in scientific thinking per se.

Now compare this call for mechanical objectivity with the emphasis on the cultivation of judgement found in past conceptions of the purpose of higher education. In antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Enlightenment, judgement was inescapable as long as there was evaluation. Judgement is something necessarily exercised by the subject, however one conceptualizes the grounds on which it is exercised. Mechanized quantification does not do away with judgement; it merely weakens, impairs, and hides it. In this respect, formalized systems of verification and assessment are undemocratic, since the norms on which they are based are not transparent. You cannot reason or debate with a thing, and what formalized procedures and protocols do is to reify the norms involved in the activity of assessment and evaluation so that considerations alien to the system are locked out at the outset, thus crippling judgement and disabling reasoned discourse.

I have argued that higher education has always been linked to the exercise of autonomous judgement. This is most especially and most explicitly the case during the Enlightenment, the period when the modern research university came into being. Kant indeed argues for the need for at least one faculty, the 'lower' philosophical faculty, to serve as the foundation for the other, more worldly faculties (theology, medicine, and law) and their 'business', by virtue of its freedom to submit their assumptions to critique.²⁷ The philosophical faculty, in contrast to the others, should be fully independent of external authority with regard to science and scholarship (which naturally included university teaching), and this as a safeguard for the continuation of science as such, including the applied sciences of law, medicine, and theology, the work of which was conditioned by external authority. The members of the committee on qualification frameworks for the Bologna Process do not share Kant's view:

'Externality' is increasingly recognised as an essential part of quality assurance, and so it should be within the development and application of new national qualifications frameworks. For such frameworks to be of benefit to stakeholders, including intending and current students, and

27 Immanuel Kant, *The Contest of the Faculties*, trans. Mary MacGregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979) (first pub. 1798).

their employers, the frameworks need to be expressed in terms that are understandable and relevant.²⁸

Aside from 'intending and current students and their employers', who are these 'stakeholders' who are to guide the development and application of qualifications frameworks (and thus, via the formulation of 'learning outcomes', 'vital questions as to what, whom, how, where and when we teach and assess')?

The stakeholders may include: learners/students; providers of education and training; government and appropriate government agencies; awarding bodies; higher-education professors/teachers; employers and the business sector; trade unions; community and voluntary organisations; professional bodies; etc.²⁹

Regardless of whether the external authority is a prince, a politburo or, as one concludes from the quotation above, just about everyone, it is still an external authority. The more 'externality is recognized as an essential component of quality assurance', the further away we have moved from the idea of autonomy and the development of the capacity to exercise judgement. Indeed, a synonym for 'externality' would be, in Kantian terminology, heteronomy, i.e. the subordination of an activity to principles alien to that activity laid down by an external authority, as opposed to autonomy, self-legislation in accordance to internal principles stemming out of the aim and meaning of the activity in question.

Conclusion

I make no claims to have the answer to what higher education is or should be in essence; indeed, I have been at pains here to point out that there is no universal concept, but only different forms of life expressing and perpetuating themselves. Yet one can see what a culture or a society is really about by looking at what it does to prepare its youth for the future, and how it articulates the motives and rationale behind this preparation. There are any number of relatively recent books, many of them quite good, describing today's higher-education policy with a variety of fitting titles: *Academic Capitalism*, *University Inc.*, *Universities in the Marketplace*, *The Triumph of Emptiness*, *Killing Thinking*,

²⁸ Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks 2005, 53.

²⁹ Ibid.

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University in Ruins, and so on. And there is much to be said about the instruments of this transformation and its effects; in particular, the loss of a sense of mission. In a society in which human judgement is considered unreliable, and by necessity subjective and even partisan, it is only natural that it will be replaced by formal protocols. In such a society, the development of character is not a possible goal, since character, again, is something judged, not arithmetically measured. The notion of self-government is barely conceivable in a form of life in which there is no government, but only governance; no accountability, but only accountancy. Yet it seems to me that to bemoan the loss of the sense of mission in higher education is simply to lament the fact that we have the form of life we have—that we are who we are.