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When one considers a topic such as *The University and Society*, the first thought that comes to mind is 'What do we mean by University?' What is a university today? What was it in the past? One may say that a university is an institution of higher learning; but, if we look at what universities were in the past and what they have become today, we see that the word 'university' is really a commonplace. I use 'commonplace' in the traditional sense of Greek and Latin rhetoric. What is a commonplace? A commonplace stands for a value that you cherish and upon which a community of minds may agree because the word is so vague and can have so many different meanings. If, for example, people agree to favour the idea of justice, or of happiness, it is because they can give to that idea so many different meanings that there is little opportunity for disagreement.

To understand the contemporary situation of the university, we should compare it with that of the past. The first universities grew out of the convents, and their purpose was to educate faithful servants for the church. Later they became institutions for education in the liberal professions, especially law and medicine. Later still, they were looked upon as places for the education of public servants.

For centuries, the chief role of the university was to preserve and transmit a traditional culture. But more recently the role has been not only that of transmitting culture, but also that of evaluating and criticizing it. By the nineteenth century, the aim of the universities was to produce free and creative minds, engaged in the process of learning as scholars and scientists. Later, in England, the purpose was to form

critical minds steeped in a humanistic culture, thereby selecting and educating members of the ruling class.

Since World War II, the role of the universities seems to have become that of educating the bulk of citizens beyond the level of high school and, with the same stroke, preventing unemployment. As you know, when the GIs came back to the U.S.A. from the war, the problem was whether or not to put seven or eight million people on the labour market with no possibility of finding jobs for them. The answer was to grant scholarships; and the result was the multiplication of students in American universities. In some sense it was a raising of the level of education of the average citizen—a process of educating the whole people—rather than a way of selecting an élite.

So, as you can see, the university can mean different things, at different times, to different people. Numbers play a very important part in this change. When I was in Japan in 1961 I was told, to my great amazement, that at that time there were seven hundred colleges and universities in Japan as compared to seven before and during the war. That means that in the fifteen years between 1946 and 1961 the number of Japanese universities multiplied by a hundred. In Belgium, to take another example, there were only four universities between 1834 and 1959, no change occurring in 125 years. Today there are eight. But when the numbers increase so rapidly, is it still possible to say that the same word applies to the same reality?

What has happened as a result of this increase in numbers is a shift, a shift from the German conception of a university to an American one. The German university was meant for the élite, the American university is designed for the community. From this we might easily draw the conclusion that German universities began as private institutions while American universities were public. But just the opposite is true. All the German universities were created, if not by the state, at least by the ruling princes of the time. In the United States the only state-created colleges established between 1860 and 1880 were agricultural or teachers' colleges. So

creation by the state has nothing to do, really, with the ideal of higher education. As you know, only some private universities in the United States have maintained the idea germane to the German university.

Today we have to look at things as they are—it is difficult to change them. We live in a world where the word 'university' has various meanings. Even in the same university, it stands for different things at different levels of education. If we compare European and American universities, we could say that in America colleges are a continuation of high school. They do not have the spirit of European universities. European universities can usually be compared to American graduate schools. I do not mean that beginners at European universities have the same education as people who have bachelors' degrees here. I mean only that the spirit is different. After two years of study in Europe, you may get a degree that is comparable to the bachelor's degree, but you do not think that you are educated. If you stop going to university after two years, it means that you have failed. You have stopped in the middle of your course of education. This intermediate degree means nothing in the European universities; the only thing that matters is full education. The first years are really the beginning of a complete education that leads to the degrees of master and doctor. There is not such a clearcut separation as in American universities between the undergraduate and graduate levels because the two form a unity. But in North America undergraduate studies are a unit in themselves. Students may graduate with a bachelor's degree, and perhaps 85 percent of them do not continue beyond the undergraduate level. This rarely happens in European universities.

So we live in a world in which the university stands for many, many different things. But if there is a spirit in a university which stands for something—such as autonomy and academic freedom—that spirit is connected not with what the university is, but with what it should be, what it stands for in the minds of people devoted to an ideal.

As you know, when we speak of academic freedom, of the

freedom given to the university or to individual members of the university, we mean four different things. There is the freedom to select teachers, who should be chosen by the university community not imposed upon it from outside. That is a very important freedom. I can give you an excellent example of the importance we attach to it. In 1941 the University of Brussels closed its doors because the Germans wanted to nominate or impose upon the university three teachers. This was cause enough for us to close the university, because we knew that once a university is not free, entirely free, to select its teachers, its spirit is already perverted. That is the first freedom. The second concerns the selection of the curriculum, the subject matter to be taught. If, as in many countries, such as Belgium and France, a doctor's degree gives you certain legal rights, then some framework has to be devised by the state. But this framework is usually so broad that, in reality, the universities are free to choose their own curricula. The third freedom concerns methods of teaching. The fourth concerns the selection and promotion of students. The university should be able to select—to choose whom it accepts as students, whom it promotes, and to whom it gives degrees. If some of these freedoms are taken away from the university, it ceases to be autonomous and becomes a tool of the managing system. To say who should be admitted, what should be learned, how long it should be learned, how many people should obtain degrees—if all this is controlled from outside, the university has lost its autonomy, its traditional meaning. When these freedoms are granted, even if the state has to pay the cost, the university remains a part of the community, but it stands in the community as an autonomous body. This means that the values for which it stands are respected by the community. Otherwise, the university is just a tool; it gives a service to the community, but it does not have an aim that is respected for itself.

I must admit that this idea of academic freedom is an old one. There were people fighting for it as far back as the Middle Ages. It was the great slogan of what was called the

Faculty of Arts as opposed to the three other faculties, Theology, Medicine, and Law. The Faculty of Arts always fought for freedom. A great name connected with this fight is that of Thomas Aquinas. He was perhaps the first man of stature to fight for freedom of the universities in the Faculty of Arts. But the idea was taken up and developed by a very different mind, opposed in many respects to that of Aquinas, the mind of Spinoza. Spinoza looked upon science and learning as the true religion. And this is what it became for many scholars after the beginning of the nineteenth century. At this junction, the curious relationship between science and technology cropped up, the relationship between pure and applied science. Today you can hardly see the difference in most cases. Anyhow, the problem is one of ends and means.

The man who looked upon science as a tool and upon knowledge as a means to power was not Spinoza but Francis Bacon. Bacon worked out a plan for what he called the House of Solomon, where the best minds in the country would be put together in great secrecy to elaborate the new technology that would give power to the state and wellbeing to its citizens. That means that Bacon despised learning as such. For him it was to be only a tool. The best proof of this is that the condition for this state-subsidized specific research was to be absolute secrecy. In his scheme scientists would not be allowed to say what they were doing or to communicate in any way with foreigners. There would be no international community of scholars. Scholars would be merely servants of the state, tools for its power. This was Bacon's view. He was Chancellor of England but not in the least devoted to learning for its own sake.

Compare this view with Spinoza's conception: for Spinoza, knowledge was actually a way of glorifying God. Science was the true religion, which had to be elaborated through rational knowledge and free communication. It was through reason that you became a free person and a free mind, and through reason that you created a humane and rational community where one man, as Spinoza said, had to be a god for another. Unlike Hobbes, who said 'homo

homini lupus', Spinoza said that rational man was 'homo homini deus'. This was Spinoza's ideal: to create a world community of rational human beings.

Now these ideas were developed, as you know, especially in Germany, by philosophers like Kant, Fichte, von Humboldt, and Hegel; and they were united in the idea of building the university as a place of fulfilment through the education of reason. In this conception, research had to be separated from any practical application, which explains why degrees in Germany do not give any rights, except perhaps the right to teach. The purpose of the university is the creation of a community of scholars, of teachers and students who are devoted to the same ideal of scholarship, learning, and science.

As you know, the idea of 'Bildung' designates not only the idea of research, scientific research, but also the idea of knowledge of history. The ideal of Socrates, that of self-knowledge, has been linked with the ideas of Spinoza and also the idea of the importance of history for knowledge of humanity, not knowledge of the individual but knowledge of the human community. This idea was developed in other forms by Cardinal Newman, John Stuart Mill, and, in the United States, by Whitehead. The idea was to nurture, by education, critical minds capable of connecting the past with the future, of transmitting, evaluating, adapting, and innovating a humanistic tradition.

This idea connects the old, the teachers, the grownups, the experienced, with the young. It is the connection of tradition and imagination. Both of them should be connected, because then tradition becomes creative and imagination responsible.

The critical mind needs imagination, but it has to be responsible imagination. All this Whitehead included in the idea of reason: reason as criticism and reason as creation. Because he did not separate the faculties of mind, he put more into the idea of reason than just contemplation. For him, the idea of reason was linked with that of creation. And reason as responsible creation is the ideal of the university. In the words of Professor Levy, president of the Uni-

versity of Chicago, 'The university has to be looked upon as the custodian of reason,' but of reason in the sense that connects the past with the future.

It is in connection with the past that methods of critical reasoning are developed, hence the importance of tradition in the university.

And from this perspective I must point out that money is not all-important. Money is not essential, leisure is. I remember that for many years few universities gave much money for research in the humanities. When they did give money, it paid for time. To learn and study, you should be free. The important thing was the library, because that was the link with the past. The idea that the humanities need money to be creative is just aping what happens in the sciences and technology. Today there is no science, except perhaps mathematics, that does not need tools to experiment and to improve, to test ideas, and so on. On the other hand, the humanities need money for time, for libraries, perhaps also for publication. But this is not the real need of the university—the university needs an ideal, an ideal that will make it a responsible institution. Responsible not to the state, I mean, nor to the students, but responsible to its own ideals.

When we speak of usefulness or of relevance, we should always ask 'Useful and relevant for what?' It is only when you consider yourself the servant of an ideal that you can resist the pressures of society. Otherwise, you are just a tool in the hands of the state. The state may change your staff or your curriculum; it may force you to accept a lowering of standards in the name of all kinds of philanthropic aims or ideals of solidarity. Anything may be forced upon you and you will have to accept it unless you have an ideal that will enable you to resist and say 'What I am doing should be useful and relevant for *my* purpose, which is to build up a community of rational minds that links scholars from different generations and different countries.' And in this sense it has to be an autonomous community which sets up its own standards without taking into account the wishes of the

majority in the country or the fads and slogans that are popular with students or politicians. There is only one condition—and this has to be stressed—that will make it possible for the university to be an autonomous institution in a given society. It is that the idea of reason should be considered an absolute value, similar to the idea of religion, or of God, or of some absolute service. If you are faithful to this ideal, you can resist anything. If not, the idea of the university is lost. Universities then become at best knowledge factories or at worst butchers of the mind, as I have read somewhere, tools in the ideological struggle and perhaps also servants of the ruling class.

If the university loses its autonomy, you can no longer ask your students to become members of the community of scholars. Such a community has to be based upon mutual confidence, upon a common love of certain ideals. If these ideals are not common, the university has lost its stature, it has lost its fame. It can no longer fulfil the part it was supposed to play in the conception of such minds as that of Spinoza, as a kind of substitute for religion. If you do not look upon learning, teaching, and spreading the critical rational spirit in your community as essential, if you do not accept that this is what you stand for, nothing else matters. For then the traditional spirit of the university will be lost; the university will be considered a kind of tool, a service; the subjects studied will count only insofar as they are immediately useful or relevant. Relevant to whom? The university's role is to teach what it means should be relevant. You receive students who have come to learn. There must be some kind of integration in the community of scholars. Only when this exists can the meaning of relevance become common to all the people involved. We know what relevance means if we are members of one community of people devoted to the culture of the mind, to the knowledge of the human spirit. Otherwise, what does the word mean? What is relevant for one man will not be relevant for another. The teaching of rationality, the fact that the university is the custodian of reason, also means teaching what is relevant

and what is not relevant for the spirit of the university. And this is so difficult because it means linking the past with the future, tradition with innovation, old and young people striving to sustain the same ideals.

It is in this light that we may speak of the international community of scholars, because this ideal transcends all the purely communal values. What cannot be rationally transmitted should not be considered a part of the university in this sense of the word. But the university has to do with everything that can, in this sense, be the subject matter of a community of rational minds. That is why experience is needed, why older universities normally have some kind of superiority over younger ones. Tradition matters as the basis for innovation. To have been able to keep up these ideals for a hundred and fifty years is the greatness of McGill University.

