I. STUDIA I ROZPRAWY

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THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN FOSTERING SOCIAL TRUST

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The article presents an intellectual examination of the contemporary university's condition, with special emphasis on trust as a core aspect underpinning university culture. By highlighting key elements of the university's culture during critical phases of its evolution, the author articulates the tensions between societal expectations of the university and its inherent tasks and values, as well as the cultivation of social trust within the institution in today's world. Additionally, the article offers insights into the foremost issues related to the expectations placed on researchers and the scientific community by society and individuals. It advocates a re-evaluation of the university's role, urging that it be perceived not merely as a corporate entity or administrative framework, but rather as a community grounded in shared values.

Key words: contemporary university, ideas of the university, public trust in university institutions, Comparative Education, philosophy of education

The issue of trust, discussed by its precursors such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith, Ferdinand Tönnies, Talcott Parsons and David Riesman, has not lost its relevance and is still present in the analysis of modern societies. This is due to the lack of transparency in the social world that brings increasing uncertainty and risk in all spheres of social life, both in interpersonal relationships and institutional areas. Social trust is defined as the willingness to engage in action based on the expectation that individuals and institutions will behave in a manner that is advantageous to oneself and to the broader community. This form of trust is crucial for the effective functioning of both individuals and groups; consequently, it plays a significant role in the

organization of social interactions and the levels of social and economic development. Trust or its reverse – distrust – in social life creates phenomena that translate into a generalised attitude to reality, the effect of which is visible in the form of collective behaviour. It can be said generally that trust established in social life leads to the consolidation of the subjectivity of social collectivities, whereas distrust leads to their alienation. This is due to the functions that trust plays in social relations. A trust may refer to the whole spectrum of objects that are either trusted or distrusted, creating a trust balance sheet.

According to Piotr Sztompka, in contemporary societies, we can distinguish between various objects of trust and distrust: personal trust/distrust directed towards specific individuals; position trust/distrust directed towards specific social roles, professions, positions, offices; commercial trust/distrust directed towards specific products; technological trust/ distrust directed towards technological systems – communication, energy, IT, etc.; institutional trust/ distrust directed towards institutions – banks, organisations, schools, etc.; systemic trust/ distrust directed towards the system – system, economy, civilisation (Sztompka, 2007, p. 221). Such an arrangement may characterise an individual, but it may also become a feature of the whole collectivity and create a specific culture of trust or culture of distrust.

The social consequences of consolidating one or another model in interpersonal relations are far-reaching, although social trust should not be simplistically assigned only a positive meaning (as it may imply naivety or infantilism in the assessment of social facts) or only a negative meaning (it may be caused by a rational judgement of reality). The consequences of trust/distrust are related to the rational (justified or unjustified) assessment of a given social fact.

Epistemologically grounded social trust or distrust, in a direct way, can manifest itself in all aspects of social life and translate into both the economic activity of entities and the creation of civil society that, as it is believed, can only be built on a foundation of social trust. People who do not trust others generally feel it is not a good idea to participate in social action, to come together to deal with common issues or to support the less fortunate. Lack of trust also causes people to become conservative, overly cautious, and uncreative, so a lack of trust can also cause people to become disorderly, stagnant, immobile, inert, idle, and apathetic. Trust is always a gamble – we take risks of actions when we are uncertain of the consequences.

The most complex social structures are broken down and expressed in the manifestations of everyday life, and structures reflect what people do in their everyday lives. This is why the citizens of a democratic state are more willing to trust each other because democracy offers them safeguards against the potential abuse of trust. People who live in an atmosphere of

trust become more trusting, and this atmosphere stems from the trust of individual people in each other. In an atmosphere of envy, a spectacular form of distrust, social life fizzles out, and all expressions of civic (responsible) behaviour fizzle out as well. Aristotle defined envy as feeling upset at the undeserved prosperity of others (Aristotle, 2007), Marcus Tullius Cicero as worrying that someone else has achieved something that was our desire (Cicero, 2007), François la Rochefoucauld believed envy to be more relentless than hatred (la Rochefoucauld 2010). As Tadeusz Gadacz writes: 'We are envious because of the successes, fortunes and talents, personal advantages, marital harmony, wealth and happiness of others' (Gadacz, 2013, p. 60). Claude Adrien Helvetius wrote: 'At the service of envy stands hatred, slander, treachery and falsehood, and wherever it appears it drags with it insatiable hunger, inflammation and the venom of confusion' (Helvetius, 1976, p. 94). Envy, however, is ambivalent – it is a destructive passion and yet at the same time a harbinger of an essential value – the pursuit of success that we hate in others. Envy is the shadow of success. It often hides itself in the form of ill-natured criticism. People of science, artists and the clergy are particularly vulnerable to it. Bernard Mandeville wrote: 'People of letters who fall ill with this disease show quite different symptoms. When they envy someone's talents and knowledge, their main concern is to conceal their infirmity, which usually manifests itself in denying or reducing the value of the qualities which are the subject of their envy. They carefully read works and find faults in every beautiful passage they come across; they look only for errors and desire nothing more than to find a major mistake that becomes a veritable feast for them. As critics, they are as capricious as they are harsh; they make a mountain out of a molehill, do not forgive the smallest hint of a mistake, and exaggerate the most trivial oversight to the extent of a fundamental error' (Mandeville, 1957, p. 132). Resentment envy (spiritual poisoning), as Max Scheler claimed, can be a feature of entire societies (Scheler, 2007). It then becomes an obstacle to the development of civil society and, consequently, also to responsible state structures. Resentment envy is one of the traits characteristic of many Poles. This is because we cannot rejoice in the successes of our fellow Poles; we often treat such successes as an insult to ourselves. We magnify some successes at the cost of marginalising the successes of others. And yet, trust is a mechanism based on the assumption that other members of a given community are characterised by honest and cooperative behaviour based on professed norms. Trust is not only a personal attitude, it applies to modern society as a whole and has become a part of its culture.

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Modern universities are an integral part not only of the educational system but, more broadly, of the functioning of society. Discussions in academic circles and public debates reveal the wide range of tasks of the university. Changes concerning the university are always closely linked to changes in other spheres of social life. The university is embroiled in many disputes, especially between those advocating the preservation of the glorious traditions of academic freedom, high dignity and proven models of university functioning and those who not only question the university's former status as an ivory tower, but also insist on opening it up to new challenges and opportunities. Intense reflection on the preservation or abolition of the university's tasks to date is not exclusive to the times in which we live. Past centuries have seen many disputes about education and the university as an integral part of it, often in the form of violent revolutions resulting in radical reforms not only of the criticised institutions, but sometimes also of overall forms of social life. I refer, for example, to the Reformation movement in Europe initiated by Martin Luther (1517) and the discussions in many European countries on the renewal of church life, or the fundamental changes in the models of social, economic, religious and scientific life in the Victorian era in England (1837-1901), which made England a liberal democracy that guaranteed many civil rights.

References to the two great traditions of the institution, initiated in the nineteenth century by Wilhelm von Humboldt in Germany and John Henry Newman in England, also occupy an essential place in the debate on the tasks of the modern university. These debates, born in very different socio-economic and scientific conditions, initiated model solutions that, despite the emergence of new fields of exploration and critique, remain significant for the order prevailing in contemporary universities. However, emerging aspirations to adapt the university to the demands of the modern world, especially neoliberal ideas, mean that the university – the place of truth discovery – is beginning to be subject to market arguments. As a consequence, the importance of a broad knowledge base and creativity, for example, disappears from view in favour of aligning the educational process with a professional qualification framework, and critical thinking and richness of language give way to the ability to present formulaic messages. In the quest to adapt the university to the neoliberal order, those characteristics of the university that have shaped its overwhelming influence on the world over the centuries may be lost. The

university – in its medieval and modern versions – has always been part of society and thus subject to the same processes that have determined society's functioning. At the same time, it shaped the evolution of society by providing it with new ideas that challenged previous ways of perceiving reality and human action. It is on the influx of such ideas that both technological and social development, and consequently also the development of the university as an institution focused on expanding the boundaries of human cognition, have depended and continue to depend. In all of the statements quoted above, the conviction that the neohumanist university has clearly left its mark on the understanding of its tasks not only on its contemporaries, but also influences the current ways of perceiving the role of science as a creator of rational solutions *sine ira et studio* – without anger or passion, i.e. impartially, objectively and neutrally. Scientific role models, as the biographies of the great 'fathers' of the neo-humanist university reveal: Georg-Wilhelm Leibniz, Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, Hans-Georg Fichte, Friedrich Schleiermacher, to name but a few, result not only from scientific achievements, but also from the way of life, the created path of scientific and personal development. Academic positions always remain an important part of biography, and biography reveals the path that a scholar has to travel in order to distinguish and internalise the stance taken. Even the most convincing model of the university remains only a template, into which only human biographies insert authenticity, truth, rationalism, and assertive judgements that have always remained the mainstay of scientism and a kind of antidote to dogmatism, fanaticism, unjustified mysticism, pride and contempt for those with different views, in a word, an antidote to contemporary intellectual barbarism.

Wilhelm von Humboldt claimed that science obeys its rules and that the scientific institution 'lives and constantly reproduces itself, without any coercion or stated purpose'. But he added that the university should devote its material, science, to the 'spiritual and moral education of the nation'. In line with its recommendations, the neo-humanist idea and organisation of the university served as a model in the creation or reform of higher education in the 19th and 20th centuries in many European countries. Today, we are seeing its increased criticism.

Many contemporary scholars have undertaken and continue to analyse higher education functions, including the University. Even a brief review of research on the history, transformation and contemporary reception of ideas and models about the university makes a convincing case for the multifaceted, and multifaceted approaches, conceptualisations, and analyses. Particularly interesting are the critical voices concerning how higher education institutions function and their role in building relationships between people and communities.

Is it possible, and if so how, in a world full of turmoil, chaos and permanent change, to save the values fundamental to the university and the attitudes emanating from them? respect for the freedom of thought (*Freiheit; liberty*), understood not as the freedom to choose any solution, but as respect for the freedom to seek/investigate the truth, respect for doubt (*Zweifel; scepticism*) about the truthfulness of statements, which is the basis of scientific progress and, finally, the fostering of rationality (*Vernunft; rationality*) of judgements about the world, which is the counterweight to all kinds of delusion, pretence and mystification in a world that accepts the legitimacy of every judgement. Can the modern university, and if so to what extent, be responsible for building social trust?

Entering the walls of a university and thus the university (academic) culture presents young adults with numerous social challenges as well as the necessity to modify personal convictions concerning communality, responsibility, readiness to cooperate, but also to comply with the rules of academic life. I understand culture, following Piotr Sztompka, as 'a set of ideas (beliefs, views, opinions) shared in a given community and accepted by its members and, which is particularly important, rules of conduct (values indicating worthy goals, norms dictating worthy ways of achieving goals, and personal role models showing a person who is worth emulating). Academic culture is the ideological and normative framework that marks the field of activity of the university community. In this sense, it is a narrower concept than academic culture, as it refers to only one type of institution functioning in science. Most out of them all are to an institution that is very specific and rooted in a long history (Sztompka, 2014, p. 7).

Research on coping with these challenges often draws on the perspective of Bourdieu's or Coleman's social capital theory. It links successful access to higher education to the capital and habitus that students bring as they adapt to unfamiliar institutional demands. Although some research considers trust (and perceptions of trustworthiness) to be very important in establishing the 'fit' between individual and institutional characteristics, the notion of trust and practices that build social trust as part of cultural capital is rarely considered.

During the formation of the medieval university, the rules of coexistence of its members – scholars and students – were understood ethically. In the late Middle Ages, the search for scientific truth was also considered in moral terms. Still, the prevailing conviction was that the world's order was given to humans by God and that human beings, since they were imperfect, could overcome their imperfections through ethical values such as humility, respect for others and the pursuit of truth. The search for truth, therefore, constituted one of the supreme values of science in the late Middle Ages, with this quest

requiring the scholar, above all, to be humble and to avoid the temptation known as *ambitio dignitatis*. The medieval pursuit of truth had its own rules determined by the scholastic conviction that it was the scholar's duty to recognise knowledge already acquired and proven. The notion of freedom of scientific inquiry did not emerge until the Humboldtian 19th-century university reform (Nowakowska-Siuta, 2019).

The desire to discover scientific truths, rationalism, and the pursuit of fame are all phenomena that stand, in a way, in contrast to medieval restraint, although many features of the university from the medieval tradition were preserved in subsequent centuries. Francis Bacon wrote: *Multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia* (science grows with the generations). In the traditional view of university values, the heritage of the past is a value to be multiplied and enriched. Respect for this heritage ensures the rationality of any innovation.

In the 19th century, the rules of independence, doubt and reason (rationality) were elevated to the status of supreme values by Wilhelm von Humboldt when he founded the University of Berlin. In the 19th century and the following one, reforms became a permanent component of academic life. The notion of academic freedom was built on the old foundations, although it sometimes had (and has) sentimental overtones, especially in the complex relationship between the state and the university. The autonomy of science and the freedom to teach meant that individual scholars were free to decide on the direction of their research and their choice of research methods. They could speak freely on social and political issues, and independence was guaranteed by the rule of permanent employment and non-removal from their positions. The permanent association of scholars with their scientific discipline allowed them to broaden their scientific competence and build authority. Control on the part of the academic community had an ad hoc character, meaning that it existed at key moments in the academic career and when essential events in the university's academic life occurred. It, therefore, is concerned with selection for the profession, promotion to senior positions, granting of permanent employment, election to collegiate authorities, election to prestigious scientific societies, award of scientific prizes and membership of the Academy of Sciences, selection of papers submitted for publication, selection of papers for conferences. The review system, the roots of which can be traced back to the Middle Ages, was fully developed in the early modern period and has remained essentially unchanged to this day. It has also been the basis for setting academic standards, but this has always been a bottom-up, intra-university initiative.

The rule of creating, multiplying and transmitting knowledge has been firmly established in the tradition of the neo-humanist university. Therefore, an academic employee's primary duty was to conduct research and teaching.

In reality, the responsibilities of academic staff were much broader. It was determined both by the formal position of the scholar and by the informal position derived from prestige. The academic community permitted a different structure of working time (especially teaching time) to those scholars who conducted intensive research, recognising that researchers needed more time not only for formulating the problem but also for substantive preparation, conceptualisation of scientific ideas, preparation of tools, literature studies, etc. It was also up to the professors to prepare their successors – the young academics.

Academics, like other professional circles, are guided by a certain general set of behavioural norms. Among the norms characteristic of the liberal tradition, we can distinguish, following Robert Merton, five basic ones: the norm of universalism, communality, disinterestedness, scepticism and originality. It follows from the norm of universalism that there are no privileged sources of knowledge. The acceptance or rejection of a scientific claim cannot depend on the personal qualities of its author. An expression of this norm is the desire to keep scientific careers open to talented people. Restricting opportunities for scientific work for any other reason than lack of sufficient competence contradicts the norm of universality and is not conducive to progress. The norm of commonality means that scientific discoveries are the property of the whole community and constitute a common heritage. Discoveries should be disclosed immediately through publication, and authors should not charge fees for citing them. The requirement of disinterestedness applies to the public nature of science.

Scientists undertake research driven only by a desire to discover the new. Scepticism is imperative in methodology, assuming knowledge should be constantly scrutinised. In the traditional approach, scepticism reveals itself in discussions, scientific seminars or informal meetings. The requirement for originality is the norm and the scholar's duty. Science is about discovering new things, so originality should accompany research, teaching, or scientific publications. One of the most important issues concerning science in the 19th century, mentioned by Leibniz and continued by Wilhelm von Humboldt, was the link between learning and teaching. It meant professionalisation and personalisation at the same time. Professionalisation – because learning is a workshop in action, and teaching is the implementation of this workshop in action. Personalisation – because the relationship between learning and teaching is realised through the personal bond between the teacher and the student, the scholar and the student. The only viable way of realising this relationship seemed to be through the individualisation of teaching and the individualisation of scientific paths, as revealed in the Humboldtian idea, which raises as many positive comments and considerations as it does criticisms.

Nowadays, it is difficult to speak of the dominance of a single idea that could steer the functioning of the modern university. Its organisation is a result of many factors that are not always realised. Sometimes, in the same area, almost side by side, within the borders of the same country, universities based on entirely different ideas coexist, with the United States serving as an example. There is a simultaneous overlap today between different (current and expected) developments in different national systems and (current and expected) developments at the European level. The academic undertaking in Europe is therefore becoming increasingly complex. For the last two centuries, the market has not had a major impact on higher education: most modern universities in Europe were founded by the state and subsidised by it. Today, market forces in higher education are becoming increasingly visible in institutional solutions around the world. Although the forms and pace of these transformations vary in different places around the world, they are global in nature and can be expected to have an even greater impact on higher education systems in Europe in the future. Today's increasing complexity of approaches to the role and function of university institutions is also due to the fact that higher education systems are under permanent pressure to reform. Today's waves of reforms introduced in all European education and higher education systems are increasing and resulting in further waves of reforms. Reforms lead to more reforms. Perhaps the end of a specific idea of the university is the end of a certain philosophical idea of it. But can there be another? Can there be a university without a modern philosophy behind it and giving it its raison d'être? What is left of it, for whom and for how long? What are the costs of this painful surgery on culture? Is it inevitable? Are we approaching a time when the university is going to require specific defensive speeches or apologia in the traditional sense? Who should speak 'on behalf' of the university? Who should defend it in the face of the threats posed by globalisation? It seems that the most predestined to do so are the participants in the university discourse, who see beyond the diverse fragments to the bigger picture; the originators of the university institution who gave it the modern idea and breathed new life into it for two hundred years, namely the academics. So why are most university reforms devised by politicians?

Perhaps we are now dealing with another, as Allan Bloom called it in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*, 'change in the arrangement between the philosopher and the civil society' (Bloom, 1996, p. 305). While the Enlightenment change brought about the previously unknown axiom that the progress of knowledge and political progress determine each other, today's exhaustion of the project of modernity may result in a break in the permanent links between knowledge and power introduced in the Enlightenment.

Thanks to the promises of the philosophers of the Enlightenment, writes Bloom, 'reason was not only acceptable to civil society, but earned a paramount place in it. A society based on reason needs those who reason best' (Bloom, 1996, p. 305). And further: 'The Enlightenment was a bold undertaking. It set the objective of remodelling political and mental life in such a way that it came entirely under the supervision of philosophy and science' (Bloom, 1996, p. 305). Bloom goes even further, stating that universities – are 'the backbone of liberal democracy, its foundation, the reservoir of the rules that animate it, and the never-drying source of education and knowledge that drives the machinery of the system' (Bloom, 1996, p. 305). A free university, therefore, exists **only** in a free system. Let us follow this idea further: social trust can only manifest itself when individuals trust each other and envy becomes a marginal phenomenon.

If one assumes the veracity of the view that the university is perhaps the only institution of the medieval world that has been taken over by the modern age, one must at the same time assume that this takeover was only possible on the condition that the institution was fully adapted to the different social and cultural realities of modernity. So once again, education and enlightenment have become the most important and valuable things today. For universities and academic communities, this means new challenges, which is true in Eastern and Western Europe. The collapse of communism has unleashed the dangerous powers of social opacity and irrationality that make themselves felt in both parts of the continent. Perhaps the most dangerous alternative phenomenon to European modernisation and integration – increasingly violent outbursts of tribal nationalism, populist demagogy, ethnic and religious intolerance, aggression, and hatred – has already reared its ugly head. The institutions of higher education, above all universities, should form this instance to resist the irrationalisation/mystification/distorting mirrors of social life. Today's universities once again need to focus all their forces to preserve a pan-European *universalitas*. This does not involve creating utopian visions of a republic of scholars, but rather making an effort to provide intellectual and pragmatic solutions to the difficult problems of social life, to value **the elitism** of the scientific development path (Nowakowska-Siuta, 2019, p. 125).

I argue that the source of the hostile atmosphere, anxiety and uncertainty in the university environment is the progressive erosion of the traditional idea of the university, the academic community culture and the increasing intrusion into university life of a corporate culture utterly alien to this tradition. This is, in my view, the source of phenomena such as the collapse of the academic ethos, both in relations between scholars and between lecturers and students, egoistic individualism and fierce competitiveness in the community,

blurring of achievement standards, bureaucratisation, 'financialisation', educational mediocrity and expansion of the margin of real scourges: plagiarism, falsification of results, writing diploma thesis for money, 'friendly' reviews, nepotism, corruption. Can it be a coincidence that as recently as the middle of the previous century, prominent sociologists of science stated that the extent of deviance in science was incomparably smaller than in other areas of life and other communities and that today, scientific scandals are more likely to find their way into the headlines of tabloids?

It can be said that at the root of the development of academic culture, we find an interplay of four actors: 1) the nation-state in need of enlightened citizens and civil servants to ensure the rational operation of the administration; 2) a growing industry in need of educated management staff; 3) ambitious young people from the growing middle class, for whom higher education was becoming a route to social advancement; and 4) academic staff, for whom work at university was not only a means of pursuing their own cognitive interests, but also a source of social prestige. And it is in the processes that have completely reorganised this initial system of interrelationships that one should, according to Piotr Sztompka, look for the causes of what we today refer to as the 'crisis of the university' (Sztompka, 2014, p. 7).

First of all, in contemporary society, the position of scientific rationalism as a specific attitude defining the attitude towards reality has been significantly reduced. On the one hand, it is becoming only one of many equal ways of knowing, sharing this position with emotionality, the accumulation of private experiences, inner conviction, and the desire to show one's experiences to others, often without insight into one's emotions. On the other hand, it has been almost entirely displaced by the rule of economic rationality from its function as a cultural criterion for deciding the sensibility of actions taken, whether individual or social. Second, the university's expectations have changed in line with the transformative processes of social life. Regarding the functioning of the state, the most significant change is the shift from governance based on political representation to public management based on a system of general regulations, and implemented by external institutions. As a result, the modern state no longer needs engaged citizens but competent users of institutions. This fundamentally changes the expectations of the university, which should equip students not so much with general knowledge but with specific skills to facilitate their functioning in institutions. Employers expect universities to develop what are known as 'soft skills' in future employees, namely good self-presentation, language skills, and the ability to formulate one's thoughts in writing, communication skills and commitment to teamwork. Entrepreneurship, 'flexibility' and knowledge derived from accumulated work experience are valued, rather than academic knowledge, often regarded as unneces-

sary burden. In the case of ambitious young people, it can be seen that already at the outset they are confronted with the fundamental obstacle of a growing discrepancy between academic thinking shaped by academic tradition and colloquial thinking shaped mainly by the media.

The massification of culture has led to ludic behaviour, a tabloidisation of the press, catering to the lowest tastes, behaviour that is not in line with the dignity of functions and offices. The massification of education has led to axiological chaos and the disappearance of positive role models. I do not wish to deny the rights of those who rightly claim that education is an inalienable right of every human being and that any education, even a fragmentary one, is of value, but culture needs an elite. There are areas of knowledge in which this is not controversial – you cannot be a musician without a musical ear or a painter without both manual and creative skills. So why do we consider that scientific artistry does not require a unique talent? The university's social responsibility (and response) is to speak out (anew) about building social elites, but also, by adhering to values and rules, to create a foundation of trust in elites, in science and scientific rationality, to build in individuals and thus in society a rational striving for one's success and not only envy for the success of others. Let us ask ourselves what kind of University culture we want to fight for today. What are the motivations for participating in this culture? In the case of the University, Autotelic motivations dominate the community culture, such as scientific passion, cognitive curiosity, inquisitiveness, creativity, sharing of ideas and achievements, and working for the common good. Instrumental motivations, such as earning money, are secondary in the university community – the doctoral oath says so. In a corporate culture, the monetisation of achievement and climbing the career ladder as quickly as possible constitute the individual's prestige. What might constitute a healthy 'brake' on corporate attitudes displacing historically grounded community attitudes? In community university culture, the opinion of the academic community is decisive. It is negatively expressed in community condemnation or isolation. Enforcement of rules is usually internal and based on psychological mechanisms of pride and shame. Perhaps we should allow the university community to continue and self-regulate instead of constantly subjecting it to multiple political turbulences, undermining trust in it by constantly creating new checking, evaluation, and parameterisation procedures.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work.

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