

# Knowledge and Power: University, Transition and Democracy

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In the context of social processes at the end of the eighties and in the nineties – most often referred to as »democratization« and »transition« – I perceived in a totally new perspective a certain theoretical question which had been puzzling me for some length of time. I could not overlook a certain paradox: along with the developing process of democratization in the broader society there often came the return of academic institutions to their outmoded forms. University and power? In what relations to university is it possible to recognise power? The past bipolar conception of *university of knowledge* in conflict with the *predominance of power* experienced newer and newer dimensions in the tangible processes of social and university reforms during the nineties. Regardless of my ambition to take into account all possible relations of the university to power I am going to try to analyze the issue on three levels: starting with the epistemological analysis of university as power of knowledge, proceeding with discussing university in relation to external power, and finally considering the university as regards its internal power relations, which is of essential importance for my fundamental question.

## **Epistemological Meritocracy**

If the university is the basic institution of science and knowledge itself, it can be comprehended as the power of knowledge in the first place: *scientia est potentia*. To gain this power means complying with the nature of objectivity, the laws of the world, which implies one's acquaintance with them, knowledge about laws, *rationality*; finally, rationality as *potentia*, the possibility of practice. Within such a discourse there is no place for power as a pure derivative of will, *political power*. Neither power nor passion is experienced at such a university. Power there is based on rational grounds. The concept of knowledge, as *non-interest*, deprived of all other interests except of the interest for accumulation of knowledge, is plausible and provides profound traditions at the same time.

Contemporary analyses merely agree with this fact of long historical attachments, but only in as much as they are actually contemporary do they raise new questions in this age-old subject. In connection with the famous beginning of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* [»All men by nature desire to know«] (Aristotle, 1952, 980a) Derrida warns that as regards those issues as early as in the ancient mode of thinking some »theoretical-political hierarchy« was established [»une hiérarchie théorético-politique«] (Derrida, 1990, p. 26). On top of the pyramid there is *theōría*, theoretical knowledge: the purpose of research is not the *benefit* that can be obtained through knowledge, but *knowledge about the beginnings and principles*. The theoretician is the *arkhitektôn* of the society; similarly as Plato's ruler-philosopher is above the handworkers who »act without knowing what they do, as fire burns« (Aristotle, 1952, 981b). This »chief-theoretician«, an authority on causes, is by no means distinguished by »practical« [»pratique«] capacities, but »the capacity of teaching« [»la capacité d'enseigner«] (*to dunasthai didaskein*) of others. The »theoretician-teacher« [»chef théoricien«], says Derrida, is on top of the hierarchy because he finds himself on the side of the *arkhè*, the beginning, commencement and commandment [*du commencement et du commandement*]. Even prior to the written word and prior to everybody else he answers to the *principle of reason*, [*le principe de raison*], which is the first principle. For this reason he does not accept proofs, but establishes laws. This higher science, coming into existence where there is free time, is given power through its very *uselessness*. It should be added that the very *uselessness* justifies the rational power of knowledge and demands its separation from politics and passion as referred to above.

When afterwards Derrida contemplates the »Idea of University« with German philosophers, beginning with Kant, he exposes a pure continuity of these standpoints despite historical distance: philosophic or lower faculty, the place of pure rationality is the place where the truth must express itself without control and without concern about »usefulness«, a place where the very meaning and autonomy of the university are united above and outside professional education: the architectonic scheme of pure reason finds itself above and outside the technical scheme [»lieu du savoir rationnel pur, lieu où la vérité doit se dire sans contrôle et sans souci d'«utilité», lieu où se rassemblent le sens même et l'autonomie de l'Université, au-dessus et en dehors de la formation professionnelle: le schème architectonique de la raison pure est au-dessus et en dehors du schème technique.«] (Derrida, 1990, p. 26).

But in epistemological relation to power also inherently political (but also social and ethical) philosophy is yet implanted, being already expressed by »theoretical-political anarchy« [»une hiérarchie théorético-politique«] deeply in antiquity, and only slightly detectable from Kant's enlightening polarization of »upper« and »lower« faculties, of the »right« and »left wing of the parliament of learning« (Kant, 1974b). This statement is not to

be comprehended as though political philosophy would in some way be ensnared by epistemology without any closer connection. On the contrary: political philosophy (similar could be the validity for social and ethical philosophy) is a *consequence of epistemology*.

The point is not in the fact that *power* would simply be the product of the dynamics of political relations, complex relations of a certain community, ejected as temporary hierarchy, the temporary *relation of powers*. Power of knowledge is not only a category, resisting such a dynamics, resisting optional (re)forming of coalitions, it is neither a matter of a tyrant's self-will nor a matter of social agreement or democracy, respectively. *The issue is not about the relation at all*. It has been a common belief of generations of scientists and academicians that the power of knowledge is in *arguments*. There is a certain logic in building up fundamental knowledge, conducting research and introduction in this art of (higher school) teaching, no matter how they are connected and interwoven with their social and political environment. Therefore political arrangement, being a consequence of the power of knowledge, is neither tyranny nor democracy, but *meritocracy*. (As for example, in a completely contemporary text, such as *Common Declaration on Human Rights*, Article 26, where one could read that »higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit«.) Unfortunately, the relation of Professor X to student Y in real life can sometimes truly be tyrannical, yet the sole demand of the student Y, that he be granted a positive mark in the subject taught by this Professor for this very reason, is entirely unjustified from the perspective of *power of knowledge*, the authority of argument. He must *deserve* it, which is the only academic recognition for his *merit*. The same also applies to the humanistic belief that the assessment of knowledge could be a matter of democratic decision making. The power of decision-making in this subject is the sole propriety of the »theoretician-teacher« [*»chef théoricien«*]. Consequences of the power of self-will, however, do not result from this; this is more a consequence of epistemology. As the student cannot demand *academic* merits because of the tyrannical behaviour of the Professor, so are the Professor's *academic* merits not established by his individual behaviour.

Good. Let us neglect the contribution of empirical development of the context to the discussion about this question, in which knowledge and university appear; i.e., legal, moral, social and other conceptions or demands of their environment. Let us stick to the entirely principled question which a well-intentioned commentator of former contemplations could ask himself: *But how to prevent acts of insanity?! How to prevent fundamentally an obviously possible scenario, according to which the supposed »theoretician-teacher« is equipped with »power«, which he utilizes in concrete situations at the university in sharp contrast to its definition? How to prevent the existence of »power of self-will« behind »power of knowledge«?* It is not difficult to comprehend that a tyrannical relationship towards the

student can be conditional on the Professor's entirely particular interests. On the other hand, there is the Professor's »people friendly« relationship, which would in this case transfer the power of decision-making to »democracy«, would be conditional on a complex network of particular interests surely determining the given democracy. If for the time being, I repeat, the empirical context is left out of consideration, in which university and knowledge appear, and we remain on a purely epistemological level, we must not and cannot allow ourselves to get excited. The answer is simple and comforting: the *power of knowledge is assumed in arguments*. For this reason the place where new knowledge is created and – together with the capacity to carry out research – transferred to new generations, is not a place of privacy and particularity, but a *public* place: a place of *freedom* in the sense of Kant's »to make public use of one's reason in all matters«. »But by the public use of one's own reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it as a man of learning addressing the entire reading public.«(Kant, 1974a). The institutionalized public, in which the power of knowledge is exercised, is the *University*. Except for unavoidable polemics, free public debate, enduring authorization, it is here (according to Kant: at the lower faculty) where every possible question and (counter)argument can be addressed. There is no other security from the possibility of insanity on the epistemological level. Any other security that would interfere with epistemology from the outside, would endanger the »principle of reason« as the »first principle«, the further power of knowledge, the rationality of power. This is the primary function of autonomy for the university.

Debates, polemics, argumentation, assured and due to be assured by »the reading public«, the community of the studying, are certainly predominantly not intended to eliminate the danger of insanity. Such danger is merely an unusual hypothesis within this context. The debates are triggered by the epistemological inevitability of (double) *reflexion*. Knowledge is not only directed outwards, it is not only knowledge about the external world; taking into consideration Socrates' very ancient warning, it should firstly be *knowledge about knowledge*, thus (also) directed inwards, reflected. Its object is not only »the object«; following its own logic, it must fundamentally be the object to itself. Just as film-makers' scenarios telling the story by telling the story of film-making are quite common, so in academic spheres the discourses on the academic have been conducted for centuries. The inquiries about the university, its purpose, goals and all other possible problems is a part of the inevitability of reflexion. Therefore academic debate about the university is not merely professional deformation or maybe syndicalist reflex, rather also is conditional on fundamental theoretical debates. Their - to a wide audience sometimes very hermetic - findings over and over again literally provoke questions, such as for example »why the university?« »where to, university?«, and the like.

Also a modern philosophical debate about the nature of objectivity can be considered as belonging to these fundamental debates, providing some important elements to illuminate) our question. According to some traditional presuppositions, the notion of the university is based on the philosophical »*Idea of Truth*«: the truth as exact representation of the internal nature of reality. In a certain period this idea, so to speak, constituted philosophical and scientific disciplines, and led to other important and far-reaching consequences. It also constituted university and the hierarchy of its disciplines. The modern era shook many of those traditional presuppositions. First, doubts were raised followed by disbelief in the traditional concept of objectivity, reality, which would be independent on judgment or »conviction«, in the theory of correspondence (according to D. Davidson »idea devoid of content «) etc., reminiscent of heresies. Does this »heresy« not ruin the epistemological grounds?! Does this not deny the » power of knowledge“?!

With Rorty we come across the article (Rorty, 1996), in which he connects this popular theme of his with our very debate, the reflexion of the university, in an interesting way. The debate about presuppositions, which are comprehended by Rorty as fundamental convictions and not as »fundament« on its own, »arkhé«, »beginning«. In this article he frankly proves that *philosophical debates about the nature of truth become irrelevant to academic practices*. For analogy he adds that to legal practices debates about the existence and forms of postmortal punishment are equally irrelevant; moreover, as the legal system is incomparably more trusted in than God's providence, so are our universities incomparably more trusted in than individual philosophical viewpoints about the nature of truth, objectivity or rationality. »My view of the nonpresuppositional relation of any given set of philosophical convictions to academic freedom is of a piece with President Eisenhower's famous dictum that America is firmly founded in religious belief, and that it doesn't matter which religion it is.” (Rorty, 1996, p. 24).

When considering this we cannot ignore Rorty's viewpoint, that this is by no means the direct negation of traditional categories, such as disinterest, objectivity, universality, rationality, and the like. The respect for the tradition of academic freedom is not based on philosophic – or theological and the like – »presuppositions«, but on »convictions«; they can be expressed also as trust in secular values connecting us as citizens. With secularization of the society the conviction is strengthened that personal religious views and maybe even the complete absence of such views are irrelevant to the majority of social practices. In as much as our views are a matter of our choice, still »social practices do *not* have philosophical presuppositions«. (Rorty, 1996, p. 22). One of Rorty's analogies states that those theologians who deny the existence of hellfire, do not endanger either Christianity or morality; he and other similar pragmatic philosophers do not endanger either university or society in this

respect. They think differently about all these: »if we stop trying to give epistemological justifications for academic freedom, and instead give sociopolitical justifications, we shall be both more honest and more clear-headed. We think that disinterested, objective inquiry would not only survive the adoption of our philosophical views but might survive in a desirably purified form. One result of the adoption of our views might be, for example, that physics-envy will become less prevalent, and that distinction between disciplines will no longer be drawn in phallogocentric terms, such as 'hard' and 'soft'« (Rorty, 1996, p. 27). Biologists and historians, he sets forth, could stop looking down on their department colleagues, who do not base their conclusions on empirical or archival facts; sociologists and psychologists, on the other hand, could stop inquiring whether they abide by severe scientific procedures and start contemplating whether they can provide their fellow citizens with something that provokes changes in their lives.

Drawing on Habermas, Rorty then sides with replacing the concept of objectivity-as-accurate-representation (harmony between reality and thinking) with the concept of objectivity-as-intersubjectivity. Rorty may be a philosopher who does not believe in reality as independent of thinking, yet he does not deny objectivity either. Objectivity as harmony with other subjects presupposes striving for such a description of reality that would satisfy certain human needs. »Moral seriousness is in treating other people seriously and in that nothing else is treated as seriously.« Thus, we do treat each other seriously, but without »realistic« seriousness, i.e. without treating seriously the » internal nature« of reality. In a word: »The point, we say, is not whether Christ is Really Present in the bread but whether we should treat a consecrated Host as we would a snack.« (Rorty, 1996, p. 28)

What consequences for the understanding of the university result from such epistemological heresy? Is it not maybe based on the very altered »social practices«? Does it not possibly interfere with some other level?

## **Disintegration of the 'Idea of the University'**

The power of knowledge is the »internal« power of the university as a rationally grounded institution, as an institution at the source of science and knowledge. We may also speak about the relation of external power to the university, science, and knowledge. On the one hand the relation of university to political institutions is mentioned especially often, as are relations to the institutions of civil society, and increasingly to the sphere of economy. At this point as a rule all the debates about the *autonomy of the university* and about the need to limit external powers in relation to the power of knowledge are initiated. The autonomy of the university is its power in relation to its external powers. But the comprehension of its own

power is also conditional on the status of its external powers, which is least, but not last, proved by the changes brought about in the transition period.

Surely contemplation in relation to the everyday world of objects is not another planet, let alone another sovereign state. *Knowing about fundamental principles* may be epistemologically-hierarchically high above *knowledge about the the everyday useful*, but in neither variant as high as to interrupt their relationship. There is no point in exposing problems about the unuseful, non-interesting nature of theoretical knowing and its security from whatever demands practical capabilities. In some special way, through history the university has been an unuseful and privileged place in need of constant protection and assurance.

Derrida states that »neither in its medieval nor in its modern form university disposed of absolute autonomy and rigorous conditions of its unity. »ni dans sa forme médiévale, ni dans sa forme moderne, l'Université n'a disposé de son autonomie absolue et des conditions rigoureuses de son unité«. In his opinion for eight centuries »University« stood for a name which human society intended for »some sort of a supplementary body, which it at the same time wanted to project outside itself and jealously guard in itself, to emancipate and to control [»à une sorte de corps supplémentaire qu'elle a voulu à la fois projeter hors d'elle-même et garder jalousement en elle-même, émanciper et contrôler«. University was considered to represent those two roles of the society. Which it was actually doing. In its relative autonomy »university artefact« [»cet artefact universitaire«] was considering the society by obtaining the possibility of reflexion, consequently also *dissociation*. There the period of reflexion means not only, that the internal rhythm of a university mechanism is relatively independent on social time and that the urgency of command is loosened for it, enabling it great and precious freedom of play. Vacant place for the possibility. Turning the inner pocket. Time of reflexion is also the possibility to return to the conditions of reflexion in every meaning of this word« [»la chance de la réflexion, c'est-à-dire aussi la *dissociation*. Le temps de la réflexion, ici, cela ne signifie pas seulement que le rythme interne de dispositif universitaire est relativement indépendant du temps social et détend l'urgence de la commande, lui assure une grande et précieuse liberté de jeu. Une place vide pour la chance. L'invagination d'une poche intérieure. Le temps de la réflexion, c'est aussi la chance d'un retour sur les conditions mêmes de la réflexion, a tous les sens de ce mot«, is »telescoping the view « [»téléscoper' la vue] itself (Derrida, 1990, p. 26-27).

The thematics of the autonomy of the university conducted almost millennially ought to be treated with more respect because of our conviction that this conception ought to be used on the cutting edge of actuality. Debates about the autonomy of the university, witnessed in contemporaneity (in especially exciting forms after the fall of the Berlin wall had resulted in a

tremendous accumulation of more or less undiscussed experiences and viewpoints), despite heterogeneous historical contexts, from which individual participants come and also regardless of the heterogeneous viewpoints they defend, as a rule draw on some common point in the historical development of the university as an institution. We are referring to the period denoted by debates about »the Idea of the University«, inspired deep in the atmosphere of German classical philosophy, mostly distinguished by the name of Wilhelm Humboldt. This concept has a long history and it can be dealt with within different contexts. The expression »the autonomy of the university« is at least in »transitional societies« nowadays pursued mainly in relation to the (political) state.

The common ground of the debates about »the Idea of the University« was the conviction that the quest for truth and the creation of knowledge (*Wissenschaft*) was incompatible with politics and at the same time completely different from other cultural activities. Time at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century into the 19<sup>th</sup> century assigned the university a new double role. The more the era of enlightenment expanded in history, the more clear it was that *modern science and knowledge* finally freed themselves from the tutorship of the church. Some »external power«, significant for centuries, dissociated, and this change was crucial for the restructuring of the conception of autonomy, for the redefinition of the relation between the power of knowledge and external powers. In the circumstances of that time science and knowledge were institutionalized anew, assuming that their autonomy should neither be endangered by (a modern) state which otherwise assures external circumstances for their operation, nor by a (heterogeneous and still undeveloped) civil society, in need of their results. This assumption demanded arguments that had to prove that it is in the interest of the state as well as of the civil society, that the university retains its internal freedom in full.

Which are the key moments of this argumentation? Firstly: the university is an apolitical institution, withdrawn from the public and political sphere, yet at the same time the relation of the knowledge built up there to the state and society is affirmative. The university is consequently state-constitutory, but also national-defensive.<sup>1</sup> It is well aware that as an institution it is obliged to protect its own profession and the historically gained status from potentially inappropriate or dangerous external influences; this is particularly valid for the demand for interaction between research work and teaching. The next important moment, as was already indicated, was when the central role was attributed to the philosophical faculty (a little earlier, in Kant's time this was the »lower« faculty, involved in a complex dispute with the three »upper« ones) as being a decisive factor in the formation of cultures; moreover, it

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<sup>1</sup> That is especially true in middle Europe, where the conception »national university« is remembered: science and the study of humanities in a nation's own language were a state-constituent element in the process of the emergence of national states in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

was the point at which the »principle of reason« revealed itself, having been assisted by the context of German classic philosophy, to establish itself as *spirit, totality*. Considering categorical history this argument defends the quite pure rationalistic viewpoint.

Also with Habermas we come across an article (Habermas, 1987), directly pointing at the reflexion of the university; and which philosophical authority would be more suitable to assist in analysing the debate on (German) »Idea of University«[»the Idea of the University«]? Scientific process, originating in German classical philosophy as a concept, is described as »narcissistically self-enclosed process of research and teaching« (Habermas, 1987, p. 10) by Habermas. The very thing that unites the university as a whole and serves as its foundation, yet at the same time justifies its relation towards the external world, is *philosophy as encyclopaedic science*. Philosophy secures the sole *unity of science* and all members of the university, regardless of the faculty they belong to, ought to proceed from the starting-point in philosophy, as Schleiermacher claimed. Encompassing its time in thoughts as can be borrowed from Hegel, philosophy took over the integrative social functions that once belonged to religion. Therefore in the era of romanticism the university is not only a source of knowledge, but also enlightenment, general education, culture, nationalism, and an emancipated future society. It is not only the power of knowledge--in its programme it declares much more: the power of knowledge spreading its influence consciously into the external world on behalf of its mission. Habermas talks about »the totalizing power of the scientific process« (Habermas, 1987, p. 15).

Integrative social functions, which in this philosophical programme are taken over by science and knowledge, led the Prussian reformers of the university to *the request for four unities*: firstly the unity of research work and teaching, implying the unity of science and general education and the broader unity of science and enlightenment as the third unity and finally the unity of scientific disciplines. [»These institutional preconditions for an implementation of the fundamental idea of the German university were either non-existent from the start, or they became ever less capable of fulfillment during the course of the 19th century.«] (Habermas, 1987, p. 12).

Here Habermas analyzes four moments, brought forward in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, the more and more *differentiated vocational system* demanded scientific and professional education for a greater and greater variety of academic professions: technical faculties, business schools and teaching and art academies could not remain outside the university forever. *The development of empirical sciences* which had emerged from the womb of the philosophical faculty« contradicted – even in the sociological and humanistic field – the

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concept of an all-embracing philosophical encyclopaedia and »in the midst of a pluralism of privatized religious beliefs, philosophy also lost its monopoly on interpreting culture as a whole.« (Habermas, 1987, p. 12). On the other hand in nascent industrial society science developed fast and reached the status of an important production power; natural science abandoned shaping the world view and declared in favor of the *production of technically applicable knowledge*. Finally, *the social stratus of highly educated citizenry*, close to the image of a higher state clerk, with which neither the universalism of »the Idea of the University« nor the programme promise of the general social emancipation were kept.

The twentieth century actually did not contribute anything much new to the process of dissociation of »the Idea of the University«; i.e., to the difficulties in its inner coherence and to the problems with the argument of the principle of autonomy in relation to external power. Problems, which »the totalizing power of the scientific process« has to face inwards due to greater and greater diversification of disciplines and the pluralization of scientific discourses, tend increasingly to turn convex, as well. Academic education, so closely attached to the power of knowledge, to the beginning, the principle of reason, unusefulness, etc., is more and more interwoven with imperatives and the dynamics of vocational systems (Donald, 1990, pp. 145-150), and academic research is becoming more closely connected to the dynamics and imperatives of the industrial complex, together with its armament component (Mayor, 1995, pp. 138-146). In the systems of higher education obviously turbulent processes are employed, which by the end of the twentieth century are even more intensified, for example in the so called *Bologna Process*; evaluations that this is an expression of a complete failure of the traditional »continental« concept and the oncoming of the new »globalistic« concept of the university are not unknown.

To understand all these processes as »conspiracy« against the power of knowledge, as breaking into the academic sphere and as the decline of the principle of autonomy, would be paranoid. As Rorty proposed before (i.e., instead of dubious presuppositions let us derive from the conviction that it is reasonable to trust the principle), so also after the analysis of these historical processes, it is not possible to draw conclusions in a defeatist manner, that the principle of the autonomy of the university ought to be abandoned and the grand and precious freedom of play consequently rejected »une grande et précieuse liberté de jeu« as Derrida wrote. With the logic that should not be unfamiliar to scientific considerations, such processes only draw attention to the fact that argumentation, inherited from the beginning of the nineteenth century and sometimes still applied as being self-evident, is at least questionable, if not disputable.

Habermas also analyzes the postwar development of the German university in an interesting way; even though this analysis may be of great interest, we are not going to pay

any more attention to it, as according to the perceived trend it would not lead to any important new moment. However, it does end with an important question: »But if the inner integrity of the university cannot be saved even under these revised premises, mustn't we admit that this institution can get along perfectly well without that fond notion it once had of itself? Does anything remain upon which an integrating self-understanding of universities could be founded?« (Habermas, 1987, p. 18).

In response to himself Habermas cites Parsons (*The American University*, 1973), in whose opinion modern higher school systems simultaneously perform four functions: research work and the training of new scientists, academic preparation for professional careers and the creation of technically applicable knowledge, general education, and, finally, contributing to cultural selfunderstanding and intellectual enlightenment. The first three functions are exercised by the whole cascade of higher school institutions, from the university to its departments and chairs; the last should be connected with the (non-institutional) role of professors as intellectuals. At this point Habermas reminds us of the resemblance to the four »unities« of the former Prussian reformers of the university, whereby he warns that a certain radical change has been brought about: the contemporary open and differentiated abundance of scientific disciplines is far from »the totalizing power of the scientific process«, which used to combine all these functions into a unity. »It is rather the very form of organizing scientific learning processes in the medium of academic discourse which still roots the highly differentiated and specialized disciplines in the life world via the simultaneous fulfillment of those various functions.« (Habermas, 1987, p. 20). Differentiation of specific areas surely presupposes differentiation within a broader university. Different groups with different interests attribute different degrees of importance to the different functions of a university: in one place they distinctively emphasize research, in other professional formation; only a part of an academic community will always be uncompromisingly prepared to bet on cultural selfunderstanding, etc. In this way, in Habermas' opinion, the former predominant »corporative consciousness« is softened into »intersubjectively shared consciousness«: despite every one of us doing something else, all of us together perform not only one, but a whole complex of functions. The fact, that functions remain connected, is not to be ascribed to the normative ideal of a »perfect« university any longer. The very thing uniting the processes of learning together now in their different functions, is communicative or discursive forms of scientific argumentation (see Habermas, 1987, p. 21). The idea about the study »in solitude and freedom« (p. 10) is a pure illusion; the process of learning is inevitably a constituent part of public communication, which is confirmed by professional societies (associations), conferences, newspapers, the world web and study programmes. The community of researchers, the community of learning is a *public sphere, in which free and*

*equal participants communicate without any domination.* In as much as the university is defined as the community of students and professors remaining topical, so does it retain its autonomy.

Such a standpoint produces some more consequences for the analysis of the question of the internal relations of power at the university.

## **Meritocracy and Democracy: Relations of Knowledge and Social Relations**

Contemplations about the relation between knowledge and power on these grounds are now once more transferred inwards. Taking into account the presented arguments and the indicated historical context we ourselves pose some not unknown questions. What is the relation between the internal university structure of power and »internal« democracy? Do processes in the external world influence these relations at all? Is it possible to democratize the university? If so, with what arguments?

Before we – very briefly – summarized the story, which continental Europe (or at least its greater part) experienced after the era of enlightenment, at the turn into the 19<sup>th</sup> century: modern science finally freed itself from the tutorship of the Church; the vanishing of this traditional institutional »external power« was co-conditional on the restructuring of the conception of autonomy of that time. So this vanishing in the totality of historical processes influenced the redefinition of the relation between the power of knowledge and »external powers« - the redefinition of autonomy. One could say that the logic of this story in middle and eastern Europe in 1990 and after that is repeated in some special way. These parts also experienced the vanishing of institutional external power, which not only caused redefinition, but in some societies actually caused the constitution of the autonomy of the university. Following the theory of a pendulum, which quite proverbially explains social processes of »the countries in transition«, among the arguments old and outmoded forms returned rather than being strengthened by the results of contemporary theoretical reflexions. The worse the position of the university in relation to former institutions of "external power" was, the more categorically was the demand for autonomy announced. Also arguments for autonomy seemed to be self-evident, including those misinterpreting *autonomy* as *autarky*. The world cracked at that time and we could witness the general reestablishment of new balances of power. Why would any specific part of this world be an exception? If, for example »our« institute for nuclear research was no longer founded on a central state plan, so to say with »external power«, why would not its further activities be founded in autonomy, with »internal

power«, if there is still some possibility for the further acquisition of reliable budgetary funds to a certain extent?! Whereas in one part of the world »corporative consciousness« softened into »intersubjectively shared consciousness«, in the other part of the world right in the very processes corporativism experienced a new prosperity period.<sup>2</sup> With this I do not deny the importance of the issue of the autonomy of the university in this »overturn«. The state from which I come was in this perspective certainly far away from extremes, yet it added at least the interpretation to those contradictory discourses in its own way, which changed – not the most skillfully written – the constitutional norm »*State universities and other institutions of higher education shall be autonomous*«<sup>3</sup> into a specific constitutional-legal paradox: if they are state institutions, how can they be autonomous?

This »liberation« of the east of Europe was many times hard also for the west of Europe, but the encounter with it may have helped. The west experienced profound changes, in essay writing of that time they may be found under the conceptions »post-modernism« and »globalism«, but the changes in the east are actually expressed only as the »regional« realization of the world historical concepts, divided between these two notions. In the complexity of realistic processes we must look for them *inter alia* directly into the so called educational revolution, which is exhaustively described in literature today. In the sixties and seventies out of small systems of elites, which did not trigger issues about the quality and standards in public, in a very short time span gigantic educational drives were formed. Although it is true that political totalitarianism as a rule limits the extension of access to schools of higher education, from the sixties or seventies on in this perspective everywhere similar processes were set in motion.<sup>4</sup> In the west academic staff and university *ethos* was at first still assured by respectable age-old universities and some newer, »civil« ones, which were an acquisition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the comparability of diplomas being assured by oral

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<sup>2</sup> Just as an example; representation of students or junior faculty in academic bodies, which was also attained in these countries in past decades and was often attained through conflicts with »external power«, vanished from structures of »internal power« in many places (temporarily) after 1990.

<sup>3</sup> *Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia* (1990), Article 58 (author's italics). – There were heated discussions on the autonomy of the university and its relation to the State in the nineties which were ended at the Constitutional Court only in 1998. It stated: "A fully autonomous social subsystem is an intrinsically contradictory notion: if it is fully autonomous, then it is no longer social nor a subsystem". See Zgaga, P. (1997), Zgaga, P. (2003).

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Habermas, 1987, p. 5: »In the German Reich between 1933 and 1939, the number of students had been cut in half, dropping from 121,000 to 56,000. In 1945, in the area later to become the Federal Republic, only 15 universities were left to existence. [...] In the early 1960s, the course was set for a deliberate expansion of the post-secondary educational sector, and since that time the number of students has quadrupled.« - See also Campbell and Dahrendorf, 1994, p. 8: »Before the revolution of 1989, higher education and research in the communist world were pampered and privileged, but not free. I think it is quite important to remember this fact.«

tradition only. So as late as 1961 in Great Britain, for instance, only 6.5% of eighteen-year-olds were studying, whereas today systems of higher schools in the countries of the European Union scale to half of the generation and more. All these things demand setting entirely new priorities in public means, so the conceptions of quality and accountability (see Alderman, 1997, p. 130-131) make their entries onto national agendas. All these questions were not unknown prior to 1990 in the middle of Europe and in eastern Europe (at which we should be aware of tremendous differences among those countries); moreover, their solution from its part undoubtedly contributed to global historical changes.

Yet all these questions do not raise only the problematic of relations of university towards »external powers« and current contents of endless debate about academic autonomy, respectively. These issues together with those already outlined in the previous part of this article raise important questions about the internal distribution of power in the university. In the first part of the article the epistemological level was presented, in which »chief-theoretician«, »theoretician-teacher« is established. Knowledge is based on *arguments*. The teacher is *deserving*, according to the definition (presupposition) that he possesses arguments; he introduces us into their (appropriate) utilization and checks whether we use them properly. Therefore it is possible only to argue about knowledge. At the same time knowledge presupposes some hierarchy (»theoretical-political hierarchy«); moreover, a mere rationalistic standpoint inherently already comprises political (social, ethical) philosophy. It is not decent and it would not be in accordance with fundamental principles, yet it is practically quite possible, that a professor when moving from theoretical contemplation to the real relationships with the students, proves to be a tyrant. It is also neither decent nor in accordance with fundamental principles, yet very much possible that the tyrannical relationship be established in academic hierarchy, for instance between younger and older teachers or in the relationship between the Chancellor and his »subordinates«. But with scientific merits justified behaviour can be treated with ridicule immediately when he leaves the laboratory in which he deserved the merits. But we already pointed out that the very same logic can be projected in »people friendly« relationships and that neither democratic nor tyrannical relationships can be justified from the perspective of the power of knowledge. What does justify them then? Not the *power of knowledge*, but some other *relations of power*?

Let us recall the dispute between the rationalists (»representationalists«) and their opponents, the contemporary pragmatists: the dispute between the standpoint that the western rationalistic tradition also possesses moral and social character in itself and the viewpoint that such a connection is totally irrelevant. »Whose side are you on?« Such questioning seems an inappropriate loss of time and a sap of emotional energies to Rorty: »It would be better to distinguish the ethics of the academy – the customs and practices that help to determine the

attitude of students to books, faculty to students, administrators to faculty and donors, and so on – from the private theological or philosophical convictions of any of the persons involved.«] (Rorty, 1996, p. 32).

Rorty consequently proposes that in such cases we proceed from (subjective) »convictions« and not from (supposedly objective) »presuppositions«. It is undoubtedly true that these convictions are not the internal product of the university, as this could be true for (theoretical) presuppositions, yet they are a product of »the external«, the society and culture, widely shared conceptions and value consensuses or at least a value pluralism: to which the university in all its functions willingly or unwillingly permanently contributes. According to some testimony one of the causal factors of *May 68* was in some places an entirely banal limitation of night visits between female and male students (at that time maybe a reaction to the old-fashioned »what is too much, really *is* too much«). Had anyone at that time done his best to justify this prohibition *epistemologically*, for example using the power of knowledge, this theoretical »presupposition« in relation to empirical convictions of female and male students would not have been any more convincing than would have been the argument that public corporal punishment of students belonged to the context of the principle of the autonomy of the university, that it drew on traditions and that it had nothing to do either with the *Common Declaration on Human Rights* or with the national legislations of today.

Democracy at the university cannot be justified by the power of knowledge. This may also be true for the principles of the autonomy of the university and academic freedom; (the execution of this thesis should be left open for some other debate). Its foundation can only be a *communicative society*, a community of researchers, a community of the learning, in which the participants are free and equal according to the principle of communication without domination. In this sense I recommend the differentiation between the *power of knowledge* (as power which is an argument and not an intersubjective relation; but it can really be conditional on it one way or another, for instance when the authority of the argument is transferred to the authority of the teacher) and *power as structuring real social or political relations*.

Before we mentioned the fictitious and (from the viewpoint of argumentation) impossible demand of a student to be granted a positive mark because of his tyrannical examiner. The demand can become justified when we comprehend that it does not concern *the content of knowledge*, argumentation, and the like, but *its form*: when concerning *the process and procedure*, in which knowledge is created. This is not independent of processes going on outside the walls of the university. Yet its definition and the replacement of private caprices of teachers with transparent rules does not endanger in any way neither the university, nor its autonomy. It is only the answer to the question how to prevent possible

insanities and arises from some other non-epistemological level. And this level should be regarded as seriously as the first.