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## **A Critique of Universities**

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I am very grateful for this opportunity to share with you some thoughts concerning the nature of universities and their role in shaping our future.

Since I became rector some years ago I have used much of my spare time to read and study about universities, and have even prepared a little course for philosophy students on the subject. In the University of Iceland, as in most European universities, the rector is elected from among the professors to head the university. Many academics expect the rector to administer, not as a professional manager, but on the basis of his or her former experience as a member of the academic community. Thus, from the very beginning, I had to make clear to myself and others how I wanted to view the university and how I planned to fulfill the function of the chief administrator of our academy.

My approach was to look at the university from three different perspectives and to organize my work accordingly. The rector, I thought, should think of the university *first*, as an institution with a particular purpose: dedicated to the advancement of understanding, *second*, as a community with various academic values and social interests, and *third*, as an organization which had to be operated from day to day in an effective and efficient manner. You might notice that this three-part perspective reflects Aristotle's division of human reason into theoretical (advancement of understanding), moral (community of values and interests) and technical (a good management), although I did not consciously rely upon any special theory in taking it up. In my talk today, I take a step in the direction of providing a theoretical basis for my perspective.

## *1. Experiencing the University – A Short Personal History*

One's conception of the university – or of any particular university – is inevitably built in some way upon one's experience of the institution. Let me here recount for you a short piece of personal history and the reflections that later derived from it.

When, in 1964, I had decided I wanted to study philosophy in a French-speaking university, I noticed that most Icelandic students who went to Paris did not complete their studies because of the other attractions of that great city. I therefore looked for universities outside of France, and ended up at the Catholic University of Louvain. I came there without notice, a complete stranger, and said that I wanted to work and study. I was immediately welcomed and, to make a long story short, I lived there as a student for six years in a lively community of teachers, scholars and students from all over the world. The only thing that was required of me was my will to study and to participate, according to my own interests, in the academic and social life of that community.

I sometimes say that I was “brought up” by that academic community; and I believe that the most important aspect of this upbringing lay in the many conversations I had with the people I met in Louvain. In fact, these conversations are still going on in my mind. From this I derived an idea about what a university is: A university is a place of *conversation* among people who are trying to understand the world and their own existence.

A great scholar, Michael Oakeshott, has explained this idea better than I can:

The pursuit of learning is not a race in which competitors jockey for the best place, it is not even an argument or a symposium; it is a conversation. And the peculiar virtue of a university (as a place of many studies) is to exhibit it in this character, each study appearing as a voice whose tone is neither tyrannous nor plangent, but humble and conversable. A conversation does not need a chairman,

it has no predetermined course, we do not ask what it is 'for', and we do not judge its excellence by its conclusion; it has no conclusion, but is always put by for another day. Its integration is not superimposed but springs from the quality of the voices which speak, and its value lies in the relics it leaves behind in the mind of those who participate.<sup>1</sup>

This is, of course, a very traditional conception of the university. It is one to which lip service is easily paid, both within the academy and beyond it, in the wider society. Nevertheless, many people, including academics, now seem to suspect—or even to be convinced—that this traditional view is obsolete, a relic of the past, and does not apply to what the university has become in the contemporary context. Or perhaps they think that the university cleaves anachronistically to this traditional conception and must, given the realities of contemporary life, change in certain fundamental ways, or disappear. And even if Oakeshott's way of putting this traditional idea appeals to me, one may ask whether it forwards a view which is far too romantic, a vision well removed from present reality, at least from today's reality.

So perhaps my vision of the university as a place of conversation was only a dream that I should have abandoned as soon as I became rector of the University of Iceland and had to face the reality of directing my institution: an institution which appeared to be rather fragile and powerless in a society driven by forces which could not care less about “academic conversations”.

## *2. Experiencing the University in the Context of Public Criticism*

In recent years, and most especially since becoming Rector of the University of Iceland, I have had a kind of experience much different than I had as a young student in Louvain, and which leads to somewhat different thoughts. If one experiences the university, not as a participant in the quest for knowledge, but by listening to various voices that are raised in the public forum, the phenomena are quite different. A certain sort of familiar criticism of the traditional university – like the University of Iceland

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Oakeshott: “The Idea of a University”, in *The Voice of Liberal Learning*, Yale University Press 1989, p. 98.

with its hundred-year history – has forced itself upon my attention. This criticism is frequently heard among politicians, ministry officials, media figures, and corporate officers, not least in finance and in the new industries which have been making a place for themselves in the world of business. This criticism appears to me to be four-fold. In the first place, the university is said to be a clumsy and hidebound institution. In the second place, it is said to be badly governed and to lack any clear direction. In the third place, university teachers are said to be irresponsible and wont to make ungrounded criticisms of various aspects of national affairs. In the fourth place, the teaching faculties and institutes of the university are said not to be in sufficient touch with the larger society.

This is of course not a complete account of the criticisms that one hears. But these are, I think, the most commonly heard points. I was well aware of these criticisms before I became University Rector. When I made myself available for the rectorship, it was with the thought that I might work at eradicating these criticisms – by demonstrating to the public that the university was by no means a hidebound institution, by insuring that the university was well governed and had a clear mission, by urging the members of the university community – students and teachers – to act as responsible participants in public discussions, and by encouraging the faculties and institutes of the university to be in lively and active touch with their surroundings.<sup>2</sup> I believe that I, together with a potent group of students and scholars, have made some real progress in re-shaping the University of Iceland. At present, there is a remarkable sense of unity within the university concerning our objectives and the means by which they are to be achieved over the course of the next few years. But I must admit that I have not succeeded in silencing the criticisms that one has heard over and over again. Indeed, I find that, as the university has become more dynamic, more focused, and more obviously in touch with society at large, the frequency with which these criticisms are heard has increased proportionally; and university scholars have been increasingly

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<sup>2</sup> As hinted at by my wording, my position on the validity of the criticisms is not the same for each of them. That the university is static and hidebound, I think is, as has been, false. That it is badly governed and lacks direction has some truth to it. But this is not a necessary fact about universities, and at the University of Iceland, changes have been made so that this criticism no longer applies. That university teachers make irresponsible criticisms will always be true to some extent and in some cases, as it will of any group of people. I think that it has not been especially true of university teachers, but I also think that, in view of their position, they should be urged to show responsibility in the public forum. And last: the university has, I think, been continually in touch with the larger society and sensitive to its needs; but this has been emphasized even more in recent years.

accused by politicians and businessmen of letting their publicly expressed views be influenced by inappropriate considerations.

This fact gives me pause. It indicates that the university is in some way at odds with powerful forces in the political and economic life of the nation, and it raises many questions. Is there some sort of developmental flaw in society – some kind of dissonance – which causes people to look at things in one or another peculiar way, according to their position in society? Have traditional universities perhaps fallen behind politics and business and failed to rise to the call of the times and the needs of society? New types of schools have been founded by industrial or trade associations, or run by business firms, which are of a much different kind than traditional universities; and this may be a sign that traditional universities are behind the times. Or might it be the case that traditional universities have moved so far ahead that society at large can no longer grasp what they are up to? That science and scholarship have become foreign to people outside of the academy? In short – how are we to understand this criticism, and how could we react to it effectively?

### *3. The Napoleonic and Humboldtian Models of the University*

I have spoken here of "the traditional university". But there are, at least in Europe, two different models, both dating back to the renaissance of the university that took place in the early 19th century, that have been used to a greater or lesser extent in structuring the institutions that we see today. The existence of these models is something of which I have known for a long time and which is indeed familiar to many. But my active awareness of them, and feeling for them, has grown considerably during my term as University Rector, for I have more and more been visiting other institutions, meeting other university rectors and attending forums in which European universities have been discussed in global terms. Let me remind you briefly of these two models.

In the first place, there is the *Napoleonic model*, which has been influential in the development of French universities.

- Within this model, universities are regulated centrally by the state. National authorities direct the hiring of teachers, the granting of degrees, the building and maintenance of the physical plant, and many other matters.
- The emphasis is upon the university as a *teaching* institution. Research is for the most part carried out in other institutions.
- Universities are, in this model, non-*élitist* institutions, open to everyone who has graduated from the secondary school, and charging low fees. In France, they are contrasted with the *grandes écoles*, which have very restricted, competitive admission. The *grandes écoles* define, presumably on the ground of ability, an *élite* class destined to lead society. The universities have, as their primary mission, the production of school teachers.

Secondly, there is the *Humboldt model*, around which the German universities have been built.

- In the Humboldt model, universities are publicly funded but remain highly independent in the running of their internal affairs.
- In this model, universities are conceived of as *centers for pure research*. Research is importantly combined with teaching, for university teaching is understood to be grounded in scientific and scholarly research.
- The Humboldt model emphasizes academic freedom in research and teaching. In this model, curricula are designed within the university. There is no thought of a curriculum imposed by the state or other outside interests.
- Enrollment is generally open to all who have graduated from the secondary school, but the university may set numerical limits in certain subjects.

That there are these two models which have been influential in structuring today's universities create somewhat dissonant phenomena. That is, the way in which people experience university education, university work, and the public comportment of

universities is profoundly affected by the models that have been applied in shaping the institution. One may say that the atmosphere is not quite the same in a Napoleonic university as in a Humboldtian one.<sup>3</sup>

Which model applies to the University of Iceland? When the University of Iceland is examined in terms of the models just discussed, it is clear that the Humboldtian model is the most influential. The University of Iceland emphasizes academic independence, and views itself as an institution of teaching and research, with research comprising the foundation of university instruction. A closer look reveals that the University of Iceland also reflects other models, to some extent. For instance, from the late 19th century and well into the 20th, the University's principal mission was to educate officials (priests and lawyers), which in France, with its Napoleonic plan, is the mission of the *grandes écoles*. And, for reasons which are hard to explain, the University of Iceland took up, early on, certain American features, such as its degree system and its organization of teaching (which has, in recent years, become still more Americanized).

Be that as it may, when we consider the University of Iceland against the European models, it is necessary to keep in mind its role in the Icelandic Independence Movement, which led indeed to its founding. The University of Iceland was established as a *national* university and retains this mission today, even in a much changed environment in which national independence has long ago been achieved and a variety of other institutions of higher education have emerged upon the scene. The University of Iceland was founded by statute, which the king of Iceland (who also happened to be the king of Denmark) graciously ratified. It was founded as an autonomous institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, education and research – to be governed by its own members, the collectivity of professors and students who composed it. It arose directly out of the desire of the people of Iceland to create a place where it would be possible for young men and women to study whatever subjects they wanted without going abroad. In fact, those who fought the most for the creation of the University of Iceland were women, mothers of the young men who had

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<sup>3</sup> And it is still different in a British or an American university, which have been built up according to some quite different ideas; but I will not discuss those matters here.

been attracted to the dubious lifestyle of Copenhagen where Icelanders had sought university education.

The mission of the University of Iceland as a national university is to develop and deepen national understanding through the study and teaching of the Icelandic language, of Icelandic history and Icelandic culture. The University is still very much the guardian of the integrity and independence of the Icelandic nation. This aspect is not built into the Humboltian model or into the other models.

#### *4. The University in the Contemporary Context*

How different is the present! The experience which people are now having of the university – and by people I include the public, our politicians and media figures, and the members of the university community themselves, students, teachers and administrators — is deeply affected by the rapid changes that have been taking place in recent decades, particularly the revolution in communications and the cultural, political and economic changes which are collectively referred to as “globalization”. These changes affect all of our traditional institutions like the university, and even that primary political organ of modernity: the nation-state. Underlying these changes is the powerful development of market forces, with all of the technical innovations that they bring in their train.

I would like to mention two developments, different in nature, which have particular relevance to universities. In the first place, new techniques have appeared which allow for the creation of “virtual” educational institutions, institutions which can reach people who are unable or unwilling to undertake university studies in the traditional manner. Secondly, we are witnessing the ever-increasing demands of the global economy for a work force capable of mastering and creating new knowledge. Not only are these developments affecting universities in many ways. They are creating new types of institutions which may, some people claim, replace universities or make them obsolete. I do not think that will happen, but, even so, these changes conduce to a new way of thinking about education and universities and create an atmosphere within which people can be easily led to misunderstand what universities are all about.



We are also witnessing a powerful trend in which just about everything is put on the market, as a product for sale – even university diplomas – and there is tendency to look upon universities as business firms of a special kind which have to be managed and operated like companies, and which have to show a “profit”, if their shareholders are not to abandon them. This requires the universities to put a great emphasis on public relations and marketing in order to maintain their position and to get the funding and attention from the public and the state that they need in order to go on existing. From this perspective, the main function of a university president is to play the role of a managing director who knows how to fight for his or her institution in the “education and research market”.

I am not worried about the ability of universities or their presidents to play this game of marketing their institutions. I am worried about what people may deduce from this about *what a university is and why it exists*. For a university – I am convinced – is not a business corporation, and it does not exist in order to offer something for sale in the market. It is a collectivity of an entirely different kind than a business, and it does not have anything to sell—not even its “good name”—although it may occasionally, or by historical accident, run various businesses, say, a lottery, a cinema or a pharmacy (as the University of Iceland has done at one time or another).

##### *5. Toward a Kantian critique*

What I have so far discussed – my personal experience, as a young student, of the University of Louvain; the voices of criticism that one hears in the public forum, and the different institutional structures that one encounters in European universities – I think of as *phenomena*: a backlog of experience, so to speak, against which I have formed various ideas. But I wanted to engage, in this lecture, in a *critique*, in the spirit of Kant, of the concept of the university as an institution, a critique linked especially to the example which I know best, the University of Iceland. In case anyone is unsure what I mean by a Kantian critique, I will here give a brief explanation: The basis for our understanding of the university is experience, principally, for each of us, his or her own experience, but also the experience of others, which each of us also receives by way of experience. Now, at least as far as a phenomenon like the university goes, the

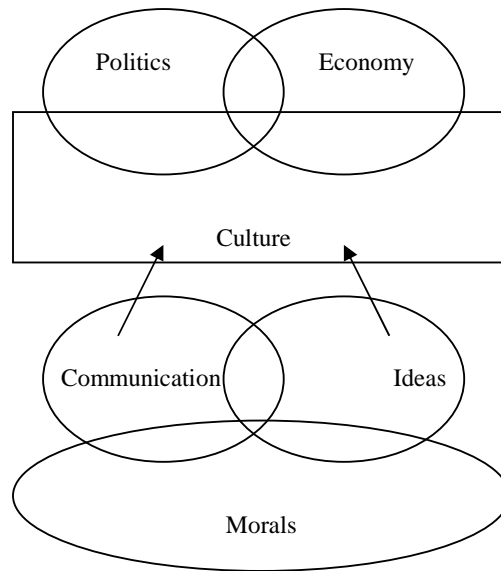
experience which founds our understanding is not only extremely complex, but diverse. Strictly speaking, it does not make sense; rather, sense has to be made of it. We make sense of experience of this kind by taking up a certain framework of concepts, a perspective that can organize and filter our experience and render it intelligible. There are often many perspectives, not necessarily compatible, which can impose sense and order upon a body of experience. In trying to form one's own understanding of the phenomena, it often helps to consider the perspectives suggested by others. Having now described at least some of the experience that I rely upon in trying to understand the university, I now mean to consider some of the frameworks or perspectives which have been suggested as keys to understanding the university and to inquire into their assumptions and limitations. Finally, I will further describe my own perspective (about which I have already given a number of indications) and the understanding of the university that emerges from applying it.

*6. Frameworks of Understanding: Seeing Universities in Their Political, Economic and Cultural Context*

It is obvious that, if we want to understand universities, we cannot simply focus upon the institutions themselves and their particular presuppositions and limits. Rather, we have to examine all of society and consider what is happening in its various sectors. Here the question arises to what extent the criticism which has been directed at universities might apply to other social institutions and businesses that are operated by the state, the towns, or by private parties.

These matters pertain to the development and structure of society as a whole, with people differing in their views at almost every point. And it is of course far too big and complex a subject than I am able to deal with, whether here or anywhere else. I have not made a sociological study of universities or of other social institutions; and I am, indeed, no sociologist. On the basis of my own experience as an individual, and my philosophical education, I have developed, as we all do, a certain vision of society, which includes a view concerning the place of the university; and I defer constantly to this vision when I think, whether theoretically or practically, about university affairs and the relationship of universities to other parts of society.

For many years, I have been disposed to schematize society in terms of the following picture:



Here we see three overlapping domains: the political, the economic and the cultural. Each of them has its own characteristic form of regulation. Within the political domain, affairs are controlled by "government"; and this, in the end, reduces to laying down the law, and enforcing it if necessary. Within the economic domain, we speak of "the market"; affairs within this domain are controlled by buying and selling. Within the cultural domain, direction is taken on the basis of critical discourse (and we will later look at the role played by abstract values in this process). Given this framework, I have always thought of the university as belonging properly to the cultural domain and supporting, in important ways, the political and economic domains; but it may not be so understood by everyone; we will investigate this further in the sequel.

Just recently I was fortunate enough to receive a paper by Peter Wagner, called "Higher Education in an Era of Globalization: What is at Stake?"; and I was pleased to find there a very similar conception. Wagner speaks of three forms of regulation: *hierarchical* regulation, *market* regulation and *community* regulation; and higher education, he says, can be thought of as being regulated in any one of these three ways. Like myself, he believes that the proper form of regulation for the university is community regulation; but he discusses various pros and cons of all three types of regulation.

I believe that the framework suggested here can help us to understand some the phenomena which we have been considering, not least some of the things that are happening in the present rush toward economic globalization.

Within the political domain – the home of our politicians, lawmakers and bureaucrats – regulation is understood to be hierarchical. It is perhaps difficult for a person who has been raised in, and who works in, that domain to conceive of a kind of regulation that might work differently. The Napoleonic model for universities is a model that was imposed by a politician. It is a fundamentally hierarchical model: a model of regulation through rules imposed from above. And, in addition to its structural features, it is a model in which the university exists first and foremost to serve the political sphere, but reflecting Napoleon's meritocratic orientation, rather than aristocratic or populist ideals. Since the university is conceived within that model as a civil-service institution, its internal regulatory structures are also hierarchical.

Within the cultural domain – the home of scientists and scholars, but also of writers and artists – "regulation", if it may be called that, is understood in an entirely different way. It is understood that creative work, and the search for understanding, cannot be controlled from without, or even perhaps from within. Individual scholars and scientists, artist and writers, want above all to be left alone to get on with their work. However, they need a community to appreciate and to evaluate that work, and moreover to provide the training needed in order to learn to do work of that kind. And this community, like all communities, needs structures and procedures. It also needs the wherewithal to work and survive: and so it needs money and materials, and equipment, and workspace, and so on – now more than ever before. Traditionally, cultural communities, such as universities, have developed various forms of self-regulation, that is, of the regulation of equals by equals within the context of a common forum. This is an extremely non-hierarchical idea. The decisions that must be taken in common, including the rules that must inevitably be set, are supposed to be guided by critical discourse within the community forum. The Humboldtian university model reflects the university culture which grew up in the Medieval universities as has persisted to the present time; it is a model rooted in the universities themselves, understood as cultural institutions, not a model imposed from without.

Within the economic domain – the domain of trade and commerce – there is increasing commitment to what is called "regulation by the market". Market regulation is, of course, natural to this sphere; but during much of the 20th century, trade and commerce were heavily regulated by governments, hierarchically. Now, with the weakening of the nation-state and the growth of huge and powerful business interests with no particular commitment to nations or national boundaries, hierarchical regulation is giving way, even in ordinary political affairs, to market regulation. This is the core feature of so-called "economic globalization". Like the politicians, the champions of market regulation have trouble grasping the kind of regulation that has traditionally characterized the academy. Indeed, they have trouble grasping the culture sphere, as I have described it. Culture is, for them, a commodity. And commodities are to be regulated by the market – all else is an anachronism.

Those who are captured by the economic point of view – who belong body and soul to the economic sphere – have, however, no difficulty in understanding the hierarchical regulatory model. For this is the model which is often best thought to fit the internal regulation of the business firm. Hierarchical control of this type permits rapid decision-making within the external context of the ever-changing market-place. And politicians and bureaucrats have little difficulty in understanding the idea of regulation by the market, even if different politicians have different ideas as to whether market regulation should apply to a lesser or greater domain of human life.

In the context of present developments, the economic sphere is pressing to become universal – to entirely encompass the other two spheres, and to fit them to its regulatory mechanisms. Against the university, and indeed as against the cultural sphere as a whole, the economic sphere has engaged the cooperation of the political sphere, whose regulatory model it in fact accepts as regards the internal affairs of individual firms and institutions.

Can it be shown that the nature of the university as a cultural institution, and the specific internal make-up that it needs to function as such, imply not only that it is an institution worth preserving, but that it cannot simply be absorbed into the economic sphere, or be re-made according to the regulatory models which apply outside of the cultural sphere?

## 7. *The University as a Unified Community With a Plurality of Values*

Every organised collectivity of people exists because of certain values or interests which are at stake and which are to be protected and promoted by people coming together. The issue concerning the plurality of values involved in academic studies thus has a direct bearing on our thinking about what sort of communities, associations, institutions or corporations universities are.

Let us return for a moment to Oakeshott:

A university is a number of people engaged in a certain sort of activity: the Middle Ages called it *Studium*; we may call it “the pursuit of learning”. This activity is one of the properties, indeed one of the virtues, of a civilised way of living; the scholar has his place beside the poet, the priest, the soldier, the politician and the man of business in any civilised society. The universities do not, however, have a monopoly of this activity. The hermit scholar in his study, an academy famous for a particular branch of learning, a school for young children, are each participants in this activity and each of them is admirable, but they are not universities. What distinguishes a university is a special manner of engaging in the pursuit of learning. It is a corporate body of scholars, each devoted to a particular branch of learning: what is characteristic is the pursuit of learning as a co-operative enterprise. The members of this corporation are not spread about the world, meeting occasionally or not at all; they live in permanent proximity to one another. And consequently we should neglect part of the character of a university if we omitted to think of it as a place. A university, moreover, is a home of learning, a place where a tradition of learning is preserved and extended, and where the necessary apparatus for the pursuit of learning is gathered together.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Oakeshott: “The Idea of a University”, in *The Voice of Liberal Learning*, Yale University Press 1989, bls. 96-97.

Here, Oakeshott describes not only the conversational activity to which the university is dedicated—the pursuit of learning—but also, and more particularly, the particular kind of community which distinguishes the university from other institutions of learning.

It would be useful at this point to turn to the history of this collectivity from the Middle Ages to the present, but I have no room to do that here. Let me just say this: From its very beginning, this collectivity has been a kind of association of students and masters *united* in their preoccupation with learning and sharing their knowledge. The term itself—university—refers to this *unity* of preoccupation of masters and students with *studium*.

Notwithstanding the unifying preoccupation with *studium*, however, the university community is at the same time pervaded by a certain plurality: a plurality of disciplines, a plurality of theories, methods, schools of thought, and world views. This plurality of values and ideas is inherent in the cooperative pursuit of learning itself.

So it was in the Middle Ages and so it still is. A university is a unity in diversity. The diversity that needs to be recognized is obvious if we consider what happens within a university. A university is a forum where people are united in discussion and disagreement about what is right and true in various fields of inquiry. As you all know, academic discussion feels around for weaknesses or faults in our theories and arguments; moreover, in an academic discussion there is usually no need to reach a common conclusion or agreement. From this one can see that a university is not like a religious order or a political party; it is not based upon hammering out agreement about substantive issues—not even about fundamental concepts like ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’, or ‘science’ and ‘truth’, or ‘theory’ and ‘evidence’, although a shared commitment to such things is basic to all academic discussion. A part of such a discussion consists in trying to *clarify* the meaning of these concepts and the *criteria* by which we can say that we know something, that something is true, that an argument is valid, that a theory has been disproved, and so on.

This also means that we never have in the university or in the academic forum the final answer to the question of how to fulfill or realise our mission. The search for knowledge requires a constant investigation into the pursuit of knowledge itself. The values and the standards by which scholars and scientists exercise their judgements in the on-going activity of learning are themselves subject to critical scrutiny and discussion. It is this “reflexivity” which makes the search for understanding and truth not only an open-ended enterprise but also a self-critical one, which may move in quite unexpected directions.

#### 8. *Types of Institution*

The question still remains how a university is to be organized institutionally. Perhaps the best way to approach this matter is to distinguish between institutions of several different kinds and to consider the grounds upon which such a distinction rests.

There are, of course, many different types of institutions. But, as I see it, there are three types which may be viewed as the main actors in society as we know it. I believe that the happy and effective functioning of society in the 21st century will depend on how well we succeed in getting these institutions to work together in harmony, without any one of them overwhelming the others. The difference between these different types of institutions rests in the difference between the fundamental goals or values to which each is ordered; and these fundamental goals and values determine the sort of ordering or organization that is appropriate for the institution and its proper mode of operation or work.

The first type of institution which I will discuss here is the *nation-state*. What are its fundamental values? The authors of the Constitution of the United States gave what is perhaps the most succinct account of the values to which their newly-founded nation-state was dedicated—its fundamental goals. They mention justice, domestic tranquility, the common defense, the general welfare, and liberty. Perhaps not all of these would have to be considered the fundamental goals of every nation-state, but it is hard to imagine a more convincing list for any state that expects to hold up its head within the family of nations in the modern world.



So, accepting this list, the nation-state must be ordered or organized in a way appropriate to the achievement—or at least the attempted achievement—of these fundamental goals. This will mean, for example, that many important decisions must be taken democratically; for this is, among other things, the best way we know to secure liberty. Slavery, although it could be a profitable way of generating wealth, must be disallowed by the nation-state, because it conflicts with liberty and justice—and perhaps even with domestic tranquility. Certain bodies, themselves institutions, will need to be set up to constitute the nation-state: bodies such as legislatures and courts for example. And other bodies will need to be maintained in order to make the operation of the state possible, even if they are not constitutive of it: examples might be police departments and tax offices. These latter types of institutions may have different immediate goals than the nation-state itself and may be organized in different ways internally: for instance, a police department might not (and probably will not) be organized democratically. The organs of the nation-state, however, whether or not constitutive, must respect, and in no way undermine, the fundamental goals of the nation-state itself, for these organs exist to support the project for which the nation-state is established. Thus, it might help the police in carrying out their duties to be able to invade the privacy of a citizen at will, but this would be a breach of liberty and perhaps of justice. The nation-state itself may pursue various goals in addition to its fundamental ones—for instance, it might seek economic profit by engaging in commerce—but such an effort would have to be in rigorous accord with the state's dedication to its fundamental goals. Otherwise, the nation-state becomes distorted into something else which cannot claim legitimacy on the grounds upon which most modern states do claim legitimacy.

The second type of institution is the *business corporation*. Such an institution has, as its fundamental goal, economic profit, which it pursues by producing goods or providing services and selling them on the market, and it will be ordered to this end. Thus, there will be workers and managers, and in all likelihood a hierarchical chain of command. Democracy will play only a minor role, if any, in decision-making. Part of the organization will be dedicated to the management of cost-efficiency and will look for ways of eliminating inefficiencies and of producing the corporation's products or services more cheaply. Part of the organization will be dedicated to marketing, part of it to the development of new products, and so on.

This type of institution has no inherent commitment to any of the fundamental values of the nation-state. Indeed, at bottom, its own fundamental values make it a natural antagonist of liberty, justice, the general welfare, and, potentially, any of the values or ends to which the nation-state is fundamentally dedicated. Thus, one of the chief tasks of the nation-state must be to keep business corporations within limits, so that their operations do not undermine those values fundamental to the nation-state in the inherently-unlimited search for profit to which corporations are dedicated. There are, of course, other factors which keep the behavior of the business corporation within certain bounds. There is the need to retain the confidence of the public, for instance, and perhaps there are the moral scruples of individual businessmen. But these have proven very weak controls in situations where the state itself is incapable of drawing and enforcing some fairly stringent boundaries. It should be quite evident from this why the state should not be run on the model of a business—which is not to deny that the nation-state and its organs might need to rely upon certain “sound business practices” in their own operations, like meticulous book-keeping and the avoidance of waste.

The third category is the *educational institution*, and what we have said so far indicates pretty clearly what the fundamental aim or value of such an institution must be: it is *studium* or the pursuit of learning, and the order or organization of an educational institution must fit that end. Organizational principles ordered to *studium* may differ among different sorts of educational institutions. For instance, the organization appropriate to an elementary school will differ, in important respects, from that appropriate to a language-school for adults, or from that of a university. The differences are, most of them, obvious enough, and I will not belabor them here. But clearly, any educational institution must differ institutionally from a business corporation. An educational institution must take *studium* as fundamental. Schools of various sorts can, it is true, be run for profit. But no institution in which considerations of profit can override or undermine the pursuit of learning is a true educational institution. And, in fact, the objectives of *studium* and profit are naturally antagonistic. For institutional learning can always be improved by making it more costly: an educational institution can always benefit from more teachers per student, better teacher training, more books in the library, and on and on. Of course, making

education more costly does not necessarily make it better; but there are always ways of making it better which make it more costly.

Cost limits must be set for educational institutions, profit-making or not; and they are set by what taxpayers and fee-payers will tolerate or find it appropriate to pay for *studium*, which—although the fundamental goal of an educational institution—is not the fundamental goal of the nation-state or of society at large. But if an educational institution is organized as a business corporation, then, in addition to these natural and proper limitations, its internal ordering will be in conflict with its fundamental goals.

### *9. The University as an Institution*

Let us now have a closer look at the university. The university obviously falls within the category of “educational institution”. But, as we saw earlier, the university is an educational institution of a particular kind: Oakeshott described it, as we saw, as a “corporate body of scholars” in various branches of learning, engaged in the pursuit of learning “as a cooperative enterprise”. What does this view, which I share, imply about the organization of the university?

I think that it implies, first, that a university must be, and must see itself, as a unity: as one body capable of acting as one person, for the sake of maintaining the cooperative framework which is the basis of all individual academic endeavor. And for this it needs, I think, a president or a rector who symbolizes, and works for, the *unity* of the institution, for its *independence* and *autonomy*, given both the limits that are set for it within the wider society and the diversity of individual aims and opinions within. This point is rather obvious. All institutions—be they public services or private companies—need people who represent them, whatever they may be called (say, “administrators”, “managers” or “directors”). This person must never lose sight of the fundamental aim of his institution; especially, he must work as hard as possible to keep this aim from being undermined by other considerations. [In this connection, I like Kerr’s image of the university president as a “gladiator” fighting for “freedom and quality”.]

Second, the university must function as a corporation of scholars, teachers, and students, who share the same basic values of a free inquiry into whatever subject they

want to understand. It must be, and must see itself as, a collectivity responsible not only for the specific tasks that each of its members may accomplish within the institution but responsible also for the larger academic community and the promotion of its basic values. The university community proper consists of those sharing a dedication to the pursuit of learning, in whatever field of study, and committed to the cooperation necessary to support this pursuit in an academic collectivity. I therefore think that, in addition to the rector or president, a university needs an academic body (or, in some organizational plans, more than one) which participates in the governance of the university: an academic senate, or some such institution. This kind of body needs to exist as a venue for making clear the needs, desiderata, and critical views of scholars in all the different fields which are material to their effective participation in the cooperative pursuit of learning which is the business of the university. In other words, the corporate body of scholars must, to a large extent, govern itself *collegially*. This is a traditional mode of governance within universities which is ill-understood by many people outside the academy. Neil MacCormick<sup>5</sup> has explained collegiality as follows:

The principle of collegiality says that the participants in an activity should conduct themselves co-operatively and on the basis of mutual respect and shared responsibility for decision-making about that activity. Levels of mutual trust tend to be, and in fact have to be, quite high. Strongly or permanently hierarchical relations of authority and subordination are suspect and a substantially egalitarian attitude prevails among members of a relevant 'college'—though this is often markedly absent in dealings with outsiders to the college, in a way that is usually regrettable.

Collegiality is not principle which would find much place in a business corporation. But it is fairly obvious why it is appropriate within a corporate body of scholars which organises itself into faculties and departments, for instance. I have in mind here the units which bear special responsibility for organizing and making possible the

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<sup>5</sup> In a paper given at the University of Iceland, Neil MacCormick, formerly Professor of Law at the University of Edinburgh and currently a member of the European parliament, spoke about two principles of great importance within the university: These he called the principle of collegiality and the principle of subsidiarity (the latter being familiar from discussions within the European Union).

cooperative pursuit of learning within a given field of scholarship or a set of related disciplines. This is still academic governance, focused first and foremost upon the pursuit of learning.

Third, it needs to be recognized, and is indeed easily evident, that the university is also an organization within the economic, social and political community which fosters it. I once asked a university president what his main concern was for the future of his university, and he replied: “To get more parking space”! A university is thus, to no little extent, an organization which has to manage its affairs like a city, a town, or an enterprise, with attention to its economic and material conditions. For this purpose, it will need other sorts of administrative bodies: accounting departments, technical services departments, buildings and grounds departments, a student registry, and so on. Such units are necessary to the institutional functioning of the university. However, their internal organization is normally quite different from that of bodies dedicated to academic administration, and properly so, but it would be unwise to try to remake the latter in the image of the former, or to imagine that this might improve things in the university.

How are these various elements of governance to interact within the university? This is too complex a matter to discuss here, particularly as various, but equally successful, plans are possible and are, indeed, exemplified in practice. In general, however, I agree with MacCormick that the principle of subsidiarity should be a main rule of university governance. This principle says:

. . . that, in any hierarchy of authority, decision-making on any given subject matter should be reserved to the lowest level of hierarchy that is capable of effective and efficient decision making in relation to that subject matter. Subsidiarity so understood is favorable . . . to local knowledge and sensitive to local condition and expertise.

Here, I have again quoted from MacCormick.

What I have just been saying reflects what I suggested at the beginning of this talk: We need to think of the university *first*, as an institution dedicated and ordered to the advancement of learning, *second*, as a corporate community of scholars engaged cooperatively in critical conversation, but with various academic values and interests, and *third*, as an organization which has to be managed and operated in an effective and efficient manner, but in a way that is consistent with its institutional order.

If the traditional university is to continue to exist – as I firmly believe it should – it must demonstrate to the wider society, and indeed, to the world at large, that its special form of internal governance is necessary to its functioning as a wellspring of creative, critical thinking, and of the ideas and visions which mankind needs in order to develop and to face what the future brings. These things that the traditional university provides – and which it must retain its special character in order to provide – are needed precisely by those spheres which are currently working (whether intentionally or not) to break down the traditional university, namely the spheres of politics and economy. If the traditional university should be made to disappear, these spheres will find that they have become rootless.