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On the identity of the university: between dignity and commercialisation

Abstract: The article examines the nature and evolving role of the modern university in contemporary society. It highlights the tensions between traditional academic ideals and the pressures of political, economic, and cultural transformation. By analyzing the responsibilities of universities and the challenges they face, the text proposes a reconsideration of their mission and identity in order to respond effectively to present-day expectations.

Keywords: academic mission; higher education; institutional change; political context; social responsibility; university

Introduction

What I would like to propose here is a reflection on the nature and status of the university, and the changes to which it is subject. Much has already been said and written on this subject. However, given our responsibility[1] for this precious yet fragile asset, which is under threat today, it is worth revisiting the topic.

In the face of the challenges encountered by the adepts of science in their daily strife, doubts may arise as to whether the nearly reverential attitude towards 'service to the truth' pursued in the academic 'temple of knowledge' is irretrievably a thing of the past. This is a beautiful, albeit somewhat romantic and unrealistic, vision. In an age of the mandatory measurability of intellectual reflection, incessant scoring and the commercialisation of everything, the 'dignity of the university' as described by the founder of the Lviv–Warsaw school, Kazimierz

[1] On the responsibility of the academic community for the condition of the university [e.g. Filek 2018: 53-73].

Twardowski, almost a century ago[2], is gradually fading away. All that remains are a few external accoutrements, such as professors' robes, the rector's ermine and the solemn hymn '*Gaudeamus igitur*', sung at university celebrations.

To dispel these doubts, let us first outline what we associate with the 'dignity' of the university. Given this institution's identity crisis, many distinguished scholars have called for such reflection. For example, in the landmark year of 1989, Władysław Stróżewski [1992: 7] encouraged us to realise 'what the university is and what it should remain in its essence'. Let us therefore briefly recall this ideal. In doing so, I will primarily refer to the views of scholars from the Lviv–Warsaw school on this issue, who are known for their strong academic ethos[3].

1. The university as an august 'temple of knowledge'[4]

A cultural asset

Undoubtedly, the university that emerged in the Middle Ages is an institution of which Europe can be proud. It has become an integral part of Europe's cultural landscape and has contributed to the dynamic development of civilisation. It is a place where a community of teachers and learners engage in unrestrained freedom of thought and reflection on humanity and the world. In this way, research and teaching are brought together.

In the Middle Ages, as *studium generale*, universities became institutions of higher learning, welcoming students and scholars from the entire *universum* of that time. The degrees they conferred were recognised worldwide. Over time, the terms *universitas*, originally denoting a corporation of teachers and students, came to signify the university itself and all the disciplines taught within it. While it is difficult to describe the historical evolution of the institution within this text, it is worth mentioning the modern university, particularly the 19th-century concept of Wilhelm von Humboldt, as it still serves as a point of reference today. This concept presupposes the unity of academic disciplines, the interrelation of freely conducted research and teaching, and the spiritual freedom of the academic community. At the same time, state subsidies guarantee the institution's financial independence. It

[2] He addressed this topic during a ceremony in 1932 when he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Poznań [Twardowski 1933].

[3] In this regard, I refer to my earlier findings [Dylus 1987].

[4] I realise that this expression is metaphorical – the university has never literally been a 'temple'. However, the fact that some academics are now objecting to the term indicates a significant change in attitudes towards the institution.

is under these circumstances that academic debates between people with different views have reinforced the conviction that the 'argument of force' is secondary to the 'force of argument'[5].

From the very beginning, the basic guidelines for scientists' actions, which we would today call the constituent parts of a university's mission, have been 'freedom and truth'. In fact, the two concepts are closely linked. According to Izydora Dąmbska, 'man's fundamental freedom (...) is freedom from falsehood in the sense of error'. Freedom is a prerequisite for the pursuit of truth and a means of 'attaining the supreme value, which is truth' [Dąmbska 1981: 7].

Freedom of research and teaching

In tracing the meaning of university freedom, Dąmbska also draws attention to the interconnected nature of the concepts of **'freedom from'** and **'freedom to'**, which are sometimes juxtaposed. She writes, 'Freedom from ideological and administrative pressures is the freedom to fulfil one's proper function of seeking and transmitting the truth. Freedom of speech is the freedom to publicly proclaim one's own views and beliefs' [ibidem: 857].

In defining this value, it is important to distinguish between the **internal and external freedoms** of science. The former must be found by the scientist within. It is the strength to resist all that could compromise the exclusive pursuit of truth in favour of success, fame, or other benefits [Czeżowski 1969: 209]. Internal freedom requires civil courage. After all, 'professor' means 'one who professes'. Therefore, he or she must be characterised by independence of thought and a refusal to bow to authority, even if this requires sacrifice, entails loss of privilege or even threatens persecution. The external freedom of the 'temple of knowledge' that is the university is the independence of spirit, requiring separation from anything that hinders the pursuit of objective truth, such as political pressure from successive governments [Twardowski 1933]. Self-governance is a certain guarantee of such freedom for the university [Czeżowski 1946: 9-10].

Internal and external academic freedom consists of **scientists being free to choose issues** and methods, and **to think and express themselves freely** [Ajdukiewicz 1957]. Therefore, a scientist should not be prohibited or prevented from addressing any issue. Nor should they be forced or coerced into undertaking specific research.

[5] Radosław Zenderowski [2018: 29-30] among others, characterised the university in this way.

However, achieving this requires financial independence from public or private patrons, which is almost impossible today. Patrons, in turn, tend to succumb to short-sighted practicality. They prioritise applied research over fundamental (pure) research [Czeżowski 1933: 7-8].

Setting aside the few limitations dictated by ethical considerations such as risky experiments on human beings – it is difficult to find rationales that limit the **freedom to choose a** research **method**. The monopolisation of certain methods – historical materialism in Marxist humanities, for example – is particularly damaging [Ajdukiewicz 1957: 14-15].

In turn, **freedom of thought** implies a preference for rational arguments [ibid.: 10] and an exclusion of unjustified assertions. Any submission to dogmatic pressure from an external authority, or 'obedience in thinking', stifles scientific creativity. Stanisław Ossowski was a great proponent of 'disobedience in thinking'. He famously said that the social duty of a scientist is to 'obey neither a synod, a committee, a minister, an emperor, nor the Lord God' [Ossowski 1957b: 92-93].

In science, freedom of thought is accompanied by **freedom of expression** because science is a collaborative endeavour. Preventing someone from voicing something important diminishes the creative potential of science [Ajdukiewicz 1957: 6]. Although 'the struggle for the ability to proclaim what one believes to be true is inextricably linked to the social role of the scientist' [Ossowski n.d.], one must nevertheless accept certain limitations on freedom of expression relating to military, state or patent secrecy, for example [Ajdukiewicz 1957: 6-10].

As the research and teaching functions of science in universities are intertwined, the freedom of science must also extend to **teaching and learning**. This means, freedom from a rigid curriculum, for example. However, the Lviv–Warsaw School already recognised that this 'divergence from the curriculum' must sometimes yield to practical and professional considerations. This applies to faculties such as law and medicine [Czeżowski 1956: 11-12]. Of course, the current 'professionalisation' of university studies further restricts this freedom.

The various threats to academic freedom at universities will be discussed further. For a variety of reasons, these threats have intensified considerably in recent years. However, even in the inter-war period there were signs of the harmful effects

of financial dependence on the state or the 'partisanship' of science. In [1980: p. 20], John Paul II strongly opposed 'all that would turn science into a tool for achieving goals that have nothing to do with it (…) without allowing scientists to make judgements and decisions, in full independence of spirit, on the human and ethical integrity of such goals'[6].

In the service of objective truth

Alongside academic freedom, the second noble ideal is service to objective truth. It is precisely the university's responsibility to discover that truth. This is accompanied by the conviction that objective truth is humanity's ultimate good. Justifying the 'dignity' of the university, Twardowski [1933] pointed out: 'After all, the university brings mankind the light of pure knowledge, enriches and deepens science, and acquires ever-new truths and possibilities – creating, in a word, the highest intellectual values that humanity can possess'. The same time, his understanding of truth was marked by absolutism. He defended its imperative nature and objectivity against relativism and subjectivism [Twardowski 1965b]. Insofar as science is only concerned with arriving at the truth, it is justified in itself ('science for science's sake') [Twardowski 1973] and not in any utility or benefit. Interestingly, John Paul II [1980: p. 20] held a similar view. He believed that the essential characteristic of scientific work is the 'pursuit of disinterested knowledge of the truth, which the scientist serves with the utmost devotion'. He also expressed concern regarding anything 'that contradicts the principles of impartiality and objectivity.

'Service to the truth', first requires **objectivity**. This means not succumbing to preconceived prejudices and allegiances; choosing assumptions in accordance with scientific principles; and taking all scientifically valid arguments for and against into account when justifying assertions. In other words, it means adhering exclusively to the principles of scientific criticism. A researcher is objective when they take into account not only their own beliefs, but also all differing beliefs, and

[6] Jean-Paul II, *Discours du Pape Jean-Paul II à l'Organisation de Nations Unies pour l'Éducation, la Science et la Culture (UNESCO),* Paris (France, lundi le 2 juin 1980, 20 [*Autant nous édifie dans le travail scientifique – nous édifie et aussi nous réjouit profondément – cette marché de la connaissance désintéressée de la vérité que le savant sert avec le plus grand dévouement et parfois au risque de sa santé et même de sa vie, autant doit nous préoccuper tout ce qui est en contradiction avec les principes de désintéressement et d'objectivité,* ***tout ce qui ferait de la science un instrument pour atteindre des buts qui n'ont rien à voir avec elle****. Oui, nous devons nous préoccuper de tout ce qui propose et présuppose ces seuls buts scientifiques en exigeant des hommes de science qu'ils se mettent à leur service* ***sans leur permettre de juger et de décider, en toute indépendance d'esprit, de l'honnêteté humaine et éthique de tels buts****, ou en les menaçant d'en porter les conséquences quand ils refusent d'y contribuer.*]

are capable of evaluating them properly from the standpoint of scientific accuracy [Czeżowski 1969c: 209-211].

Impartiality is linked to objectivity. This is understood as the impartiality of the arbiter; that is, the obligation to take the side of the dispute that is scientifically justified [ibid.]. When doing so, one must be able to 'resist the temptation to play a role that is not about truth, but rather about power, influence, prestige, honours, titles, or money' [Twardowski 1933]. Service to the truth also requires modesty and intellectual culture. A disciple of truth should be creative and active, paving new paths rather than just following the beaten track. They must be open-minded and ready to revise their views, particularly if the facts have changed [Ossowska 1983b: 358]. They must not become a 'scientific technician', i.e. a specialist in a narrow field of research who is afflicted by routine [Czeżowski 1946: 58].

'Serving the truth' obviously excludes all forms of lying, or 'knowingly presenting claims as true in science the claims that are not true' [Czezowski 1969c]: 209]. Lying is facilitated by the proliferation of a pragmatic notion of truth in science and by the manipulation of language. In turn, any compromises that scientists make with the truth for the purposes of propaganda or persuasion are depraved. As Ossowski [1957b: 96-97] noted, techniques involving half-truths and expressions open to interpretation thus evolve.

Of course, the service to truth also applies to scientists in their teaching and education work. University teachers are expected to encourage young people to understand the value of scientific truth, inspiring them to participate in its pursuit. However, this is a long-term process and is far from indoctrination [Twardowski 1933]. Furthermore, credibility is required of those who proclaim the truth [Czeżowski 1967: 115].

Integrity of research

For the principle of serving the truth to be realised, scientific research must be conducted with integrity. This involves adhering to certain methodological principles, being clear and **precise in thought** and expression, and providing appropriate justification for assertions made [Ajdukiewicz 1959: 31]. First and foremost, integrity requires independent thinking, which is linked to **scientific criticism** [Czeżowski 1946: 52]. According to Czeżowski, the primary purpose of university courses should be to develop this very aptitude. He wrote: 'Students should learn to criticise, but reasonably so! Even the student's own professors

should be subject to criticism. The more critical the student is, the better their results will be. However, students should also be critical of their own criticism and not assume that, just because they are criticising, they are always right' [ibid.: 32].

Hand in hand with clarity of thought comes **clarity and precision in speech and writing**. The complexity of the issues being discussed does not justify an obscure communication style. According to Twardowski [1965a: 346-347], even the most challenging philosophical issues can be articulated with complete clarity. Those who think clearly will also find simple and understandable words with which to express their thoughts. Tadeusz Kotarbiński's [1937: 5] advice is valuable to us all: 'Carry on pondering a thing until you succeed in expressing it clearly'. This postulate requires academic language to be clear and precise in its terminology, accessible and simple in its style, free from unnecessary foreign inclusions. It should also be grammatically and stylistically correct in the Polish language [Rzeuska 1969: 314]. Obscurity, imprecision, long-windedness, gibberish and verbosity should be avoided [Czeżowski 1969a: 188-189]. To 'keep the language in check' and control the flow of deliberations, the composition and disposition of the whole must be appropriate and clear [Czeżowski 1946: 38].

In addition to clarity of thought and language, another element of the principle of integrity is the requirement to **justify assertions properly**. None of these postulates are an end in themselves. Rather, they stem from the principle of service to the truth, which is supreme in science. They also stem from respect for the audience, whether readers of scientific works or listeners to lectures. These postulates can be narrowed down to the scientist's responsibility for their words. This involves, *inter alia*, the honest disclosure of any doubts and transparency regarding the research methodology [Ossowski 1967a: 291].

The realisation of the principle of scientific integrity presupposes that a scientist possesses certain **moral attributes**, the most important of which is uncompromising intellectual honesty. According to Maria Ossowska [1983b: 360], it requires one to fear no thought, even if it is rebellious, revolutionary and merciless to privileges, established positions and comfortable habits. Rather, one must think things through to their logical conclusion, regardless of the consequences, and not give in to various authorities, nor to self-deception or hypocrisy. In his catalogue of scholarly virtues, Twardowski included reliability, defined as honouring agreements and deadlines, as well as punctuality [Twardowski 1912: 148]. The other moral virtues he postulated can be summarised as the requirements for doing

a good job. He believed that those who love their work will be diligent and devoted to it [Czeżowski 1969d: 9]. The cardinal virtues of scientific work are assiduity and inner discipline, which enable sustained long-distance effort [Kotarbiński 1958a: 358]. An interesting scientific idea 'has to be earned (...) with long hours of tormented concentration' [ibid.: 292]. Therefore, a scientist needs perseverance, systematicity and the ability to plan activities and finalise work, as well as correctness, order and tidiness to avoid descending into chaos. This catalogue of virtues is supplemented by thoroughness and conscientiousness, as well as the requirement for competence, in order to guard against dilettantism [Czeżowski 1946: 28; 52].

As research work at university is accompanied by teaching, a description of this 'temple of knowledge' should reveal the intricacies of the master-student relationship, showing how the authority of the master and the subjectivity of the student are formed. Within the scientific community, solidarity and tolerance towards different standpoints are required in relation to other scholars, whether they are colleagues or representatives of competing academic institutions. Much could also be said about the obligations of scientists in their various societal roles: as scientific critics, reviewers, organisers of science and popularisers of knowledge, and as citizens.

Setting aside this vast array of issues, it is worth noting that the 'dignity of the university' is a challenging concept. Satisfying this requires considerable 'human capital' – the right mindset of its constituents – but above all, it requires favourable external conditions to guarantee the tranquillity of this 'temple of knowledge'. Unfortunately, factors that distort the ideal of the university have been increasing for a long time. One of these factors is, first and foremost, the commercialisation of the institution itself. Alongside a description of this process and the threats it poses to the university, we will also attempt to identify factors that could help to preserve its identity.

2. Processes of commercialisation and defending the identity of the university

General remarks

The commercialisation of science in recent decades has been closely linked to the globalisation of the economy[7]. Indeed, scientific and technological progress, particularly in communication technology, has been one of the factors in the formation of the global market. The digital revolution has triggered a radical trans-

[7] I refer here to my earlier reflection on this subject: [Dylus 2005: 101-126].

formation of economic structures, resulting in explosive demand for information and applied knowledge. If great profits can be made from scientific products and companies risk being pushed out of the market without access to innovation, it is difficult for individual scientists and the entire scientific system to resist commercial pressure. That is all the more true as state subsidies are shrinking dramatically. State officials are reducing budgets for academic institutions and expecting them to 'fend for themselves'.

The commercialisation of science is linked to its privatisation. This can take the form of the dynamic, bottom-up emergence of private academic entities – including universities – or the gradual transformation of public academic institutions into semi-private entities that are expected to generate their own income or even make a profit.

For the time being, it seems that continental Europe, nourished by invigorating legacy of the glorious medieval university tradition, is more resistant to the complete commercialisation of academic institutions than neoliberal America. As far as universities are concerned, there is still a consensus that they should remain public institutions funded mainly by the state, and that academic work should retain the nature of a free profession. This does not mean prohibiting the pursuit of additional sources of finance. In fact, their mobilisation may even save underfunded universities. However, in the process, commercialisation has spread to both research and university education.

The commercialisation of research

Perhaps the most striking consequence of the commercialisation of science is the radical shift in its operating paradigm. As previously mentioned, the scientific paradigm is the disinterested pursuit of truth – a passion in itself for scientists – whereas the goal of economic activity, or at least the main criterion for its assessment, is measurable financial success. It has long been recognised (at least since the time of Francis Bacon) that knowledge is power, which has undermined the noble ideal of serving the truth[8]. Nevertheless, replacing this ideal entirely with a 'logic

[8] The famous phrase '*Scientia enim est ipsa potentia*' ['(for knowledge itself is power) whereby he knows'] from *Meditationes Sacrae* refers to God, not man [Bacon 1859: 253]. Therefore, heresies are born not of humility of spirit, but of human ignorance. The more man comes to know God's will and mysteries, the more he is strengthened in the love of God. This transfer of the expression, but not the original thought, into the context of secular science, is found in the *Novum Organum*, where we read: *Scientia et potentia humana in idem coincidunt, quia ignoratio causae destituit effectum. Natura enim non nisi parendo vincitur* (Aphorismus III) [Bacon 1620].

of profitability' is concerning, and market compromises cause moral discomfort for scientists.

In the hope of rescuing the ideal of disinterestedness, we must discover that, in the long term, transferring the market paradigm of profitability to science simply does not pay off. This is particularly true of basic research. Indeed, scientists themselves have pointed this out. For example, as early as [1937b: 218-235]], Władysław Tatarkiewicz noted that a focus on the mere cognition of truth in science, regardless of its practical applications, is a characteristic of European culture – a kind of 'biological superfluity'. However, it is precisely this theoretical stance that has brought Europe enormous and incalculable benefits. According to Innocenty Bocheński [1989: 6], 'knowledge, and in particular pure and seemingly impractical theory, turns out paradoxically to be the most practical thing of all'. Unfortunately, sponsors, both private and state-related, usually fail to understand that these practical benefits are merely a 'by-product' of science. By demanding immediate, measurable results and prioritising applied and implementation research over basic research, they stifle scientific invention and creativity in the long term. Such narrow-minded practicality hits the seemingly 'non-pragmatic' humanities particularly hard.

The inefficient management of science, whereby limited resources are channelled into collective, interdisciplinary research programmes according to the criteria of political correctness, further stifles the originality, spontaneity and creative joy of outstanding scholars. In turn, external procurement, whether public or market-based, threatens academic freedom. Above all, it violates the freedom to choose the subject of research. A researcher may accept a commission that is not the most important from the theoretical point of view, but the most lucrative, and publish their work wherever they are paid the most or receive the most credit. Of course, research projects 'commissioned' by commercial entities can be scientifically significant. Nevertheless, accepting commissions from the market often confronts scientists with the choice between truth for truth's sake and pragmatism[9].

[9] It should be noted that the phrase 'a knowledge-based economy' is not based on an appreciation of science, but on a focus on economic efficiency. There is nothing wrong with the fact that the natural sciences contribute to economic development and raise citizens' standard of living. However, even in these fields, it is important to seek not only useful knowledge, but also theory and a deeper understanding of the subject of research and the ethical issues surrounding its conduct and future applications.

It should also be noted that the objectives of long-term basic research cannot be precisely defined. Thanks to non-conformist thinking, its development usually occurs by leaps and bounds, and great discoveries are made somewhat unexpectedly. Therefore, the administrative requirement to clearly state a specific research objective in the submitted project (upon which funding is contingent) is doomed to failure here and sometimes even forces the pretence of achievements.

The commercialisation of science can sometimes present genuine dilemmas. For example, when a university professor accepts an offer from a private sponsor, they essentially place their intellectual potential at the sponsor's disposal, even though they are primarily financed by university funds. Furthermore, projects commissioned by private companies are often carried out in university laboratories. It would seem that moral sensitivity to such situations is directly proportional to the level of professorial remuneration. However, even those who are paid very little should be advised to exercise restraint when accepting commissions. The otherwise understandable desire to 'make some extra money' does not justify neglecting existing commitments. Furthermore, a scientist's links with the business world should not affect their scientific objectivity.

Other types of dilemma relate to the application procedures for research grants. These resemble commercial marketing. A researcher entering a competition is obviously interested in the success of this labour-intensive process and will therefore prepare a project that is 'tailored to fit the sponsor'. However, sometimes scientific objectivity when formulating an important research question can give way to non-scientific considerations. In other words, the project needs to be formulated and presented in such a way that it can 'break through' and gain the jury's appreciation. If such pursuit of success does not clearly bear the hallmarks of 'unfair competition', does not involve offering scientific banality, and is not carried out by being blatantly untrue, then a bit of marketing embellishment is probably acceptable when selling the 'products' of scientific thought. For example, I suppose that a philosopher, sociologist or political scientist does not betray their mission to 'serve the truth' if they resort to utilitarian arguments and emphasise the social usefulness of a project in order to convince a sponsor.

The potential economic applications of scientific findings highlight another aspect of the incompatibility between scientific and market logic. The painstakingly discovered scientific truth must be made available to everyone. It belongs to no one. The deliberate concealment of research findings undermines the universality

of scientific knowledge. It also contradicts the freedom of scientific expression. Meanwhile, exclusivity and patent or trade secrets are elements of market logic. Therefore, the author of a scientific discovery that can be implemented in market practice is faced with a dilemma: should they prioritise universalism or exclusivity? The fact that this is not a hypothetical dilemma is evidenced by the hesitation of those involved in deciding what to prioritise. Maria Skłodowska-Curie, for example, found the idea of patenting her discoveries fundamentally unacceptable. On the other hand, for Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz [1957: 6-10], the 'debatable issue' was whether a researcher had the moral right to sell their patented discovery to certain individuals while preventing the general public from benefiting from it. The guidelines contained in the code of ethics 'Dobre obyczaje w nauce' [1994: p. 2.7] (*Good Conduct in Science*) rightly permit the patenting of inventions, but not of scientific discoveries. However, the authors acknowledge the potential issues involved, as they state that a 'scientific worker may apply for patents', but then immediately add in the next sentence that 'such activity should be aimed at asserting the author's rights in the sphere of practice, but not at restricting the free flow of scientific information'.

The commercialisation of science is not only a concern for its research function. It also extends to academic teaching activities, which can place academics in similarly challenging moral situations.

The commercialisation of university education

The increasing specialisation of academic disciplines and the 'professionalisation' of higher education over the years have threatened to undermine the 'dignity' of the university. The different allocation of emphasis between general and professional education in curricula has long been debated. Under the influence of immediate market demand, the 'pure' knowledge of university graduates is being sacrificed in favour of specialised, narrowly focused knowledge. Universities are gradually being transformed into vocational colleges. However, it seems that the need to adapt education to the labour market must be accepted. This does not, of course, address the concerns of academics, who are right to view in the 'professionalisation' of higher education as a rejection of the concept of the university itself [Łagowski 1998: 63].

Today, the market itself is proving to be an unexpected ally of traditional humanists. Global companies are increasingly seeking to hire graduates with a broad-based education. They claim that this enables them to recruit the most creative

employees, who are also open to further education. In contrast, overly specialised programmes of study are rapidly becoming obsolete. Furthermore, modern employees must be committed to continuous self-education, professional training, mobility and openness. However, when defining the profile of a university graduate, it must be remembered that this mobility and flexibility must be based on a solid foundation of core values. It is hoped that wisdom and the associated virtues will always be in demand. Moreover, they are also regarded in economic circles as an essential element of human capital.

It transpires that a return to the original concept of a 'wisdom-oriented' university education is significant for economic interests. Alongside the pragmatic focus on education and qualifications, it should offer a certain 'added value'. This includes personal development and preparation for participation in the life of society. Education undoubtedly has an irreplaceable integrative function in society. The idea that education is a public good for citizens usually leads to the conclusion that the state must support existing educational institutions and develop new ones.

Unfortunately, even though a university education, knowledge and spiritual freedom undoubtedly constitute public goods, the state has not fulfilled its obligation to finance higher education particularly well. Moreover, today's mass university, which sometimes serves as a repository for unemployable young people, has moved far away from its original concept. It is no longer a 'forge' for a first-class intellectual elite. At best, its graduates receive a good, albeit rather one-sided, professional education. As a massive, bureaucratic and therefore static institution, it is unable to respond to the demands of a rapidly changing economy. The commercialisation of the institution is seen as an opportunity to overcome the challenges.

Indeed, private, elite universities are often established on the initiative of economic circles. They offer students the kind of interdisciplinary knowledge, proximity to practical experience, foreign language skills, international contacts and psychosocial competencies that public institutions most often lack. Consequently, there is fierce competition in the global education market. And there is plenty to fight over, as education is a lucrative business. The ambition of university managers is to obtain a 'quality seal' for the services offered, confirmed by a high ranking. In this model, the university becomes a 'service point' for intensive professional and life training.

At the same time, public educational institutions require profound reform of their fossilised structures, including their financing systems. For the time being, the university must make intensive efforts to raise additional, extra-budgetary funds for its day-to-day operations. These funds can come from wealthy individual sponsors, companies, and tuition fees. The transformation of university teaching into a market-based service is taking place throughout the world, albeit at different rates. In post-1989 Poland, numerous private universities were also established in response to the explosive demand for education. Existing public higher education institutions introduced various paid forms of education, selling academic and teaching services in a quasi-market manner. The concept of 'public service' has been replaced by 'selling educational services', where the key to long-term success is being 'customer-oriented'. However, this market terminology and commercial orientation is incongruous within the university's 'temple of knowledge'.

There are further dilemmas associated with mass university education, whether it is paid or unpaid. I will only mention one of these here. Until recently, the unquestioned paradigm of science was the close relationship between research and teaching. This implied that science develops through dialogue and that master-disciple relationships stimulate scientific creativity. This paradigm is being challenged by the massification of education, the standardisation of teaching methods and content, and the ability to find dialogue partners beyond the university community, for example on the internet. It is difficult to predict whether the signs of the disappearance of the interdependence of research and teaching functions, which are evident today, are permanent. One thing is certain, however: minimising direct contact between professors and students severely restricts the transmission of cultural patterns.

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The presentation of ethical dilemmas related to the various manifestations of the commercialisation of science was not intended to resolve controversial issues. Rather, it aimed to stimulate moral sensitivity and invite collective reflection by signalling ambivalence about the changes taking place and raising certain questions. Years ago, John Paul II [1980: p. 22] invited us to such a 'mobilisation of consciences' and urged us to 'employ all our efforts to establish and respect the primacy of ethics in all the fields of science'. He asserted that scientists who respect this primacy, 'even though they do not all profess one particular religion (…) [t]hrough their intellectual honesty, their quest for what is true, their self-discipline as scholars, and through their objectivity and respect before the mysteries of the universe, these people make up a great spiritual family' [Jean Paul II 1981: p. 7, pt. 12].

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