

What is a university for?

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by T. R. C. Boyde

The two articles 'What is a university for?' published in this issue are the last two in this series - Editor.

We are to consider what a university is for, and earlier articles in this series have mentioned all the activities which we do in fact observe taking place, namely:

Teaching;
Training, of the intellect and for the professions;
Education - drawing out of the individual the qualities which were latent in him, fitting him for all the duties of life at a high level;
Imparting breadth of knowledge and view;
Sharpening of the intellect by the meeting of minds;
Imparting civilized values;
Conserving knowledge;
Advancing knowledge or scholarship;
Research.

As thus listed, these are not mutually exclusive categories of activity. Nevertheless it is plain that the university undertakes a remarkable variety of tasks - to the extent that it has always been difficult to understand or to explain why they are all done by the one institution. Three explanations for the paradox suggest themselves - that various of these functions were added on to a primeval function, that all these functions have and rest upon a single common theme, and that various of these functions were begun independently and later fused under the umbrella of one governing and protective body. A historical view may perhaps show that all three explanations have truth in them.

The first universities

Institutionalized advanced teaching existed in classical times in the Hellenic and Roman worlds and in China. But for diverse reasons these arrangements broke down or stultified in antiquated forms, failing to adapt to changing times. The university as we know it grew out of the thirst for knowledge and the increasing stability and prosperity of twelfth-century Europe. We cannot set precise dates to the formation of the very first universities, because they were not deliberately founded but grew spontaneously, so that the earliest charters were granted to bodies founded much later, in imitation of the leaders. We can say for certain that recognizable university organizations existed in Bologna (Italy), Paris and Oxford before A.D. 1200, and that even earlier, before A.D. 1100, there was a medical school of wide repute at Salerno (Italy).

The institution at Bologna was devoted to the teaching of law and this shows us straightaway that at the very beginning there were professional schools of university character and that

there were specialist institutions devoted to one such profession. Breadth of knowledge and view has always been a characteristic of the educated person, but breadth of teaching is not a necessary feature of the university. One does not, after all, have to be taught in order to learn!

One may go further into this by examining the original meaning of the word 'Universitas' which, as has been mentioned earlier in this series, was simply a commonly used word for association or corporation and had nothing to do with universality of subjects. Further, the Bologna legal school was not recognized as being one universitas but was composed of a number of much smaller bodies, variously counted at various times as two (composed respectively of students from the Italian side of the Alps or from the other side) or as seventeen universitates going to make up the 'cismontane' universitas just mentioned and eighteen such smaller bodies going to make up the 'ultramontane.' These universitates were actually student societies which before long came to hire and discipline their teachers.

Elsewhere, the student societies did not rule the university, and perhaps we should mention at once that the upshot of their control of Bologna was stultification and decay! Paris was regarded as a society of masters and scholars. That university and most others to some extent reproduced the Bologna system of societies divided according to the place of origin of the students, but the masters ruled and this is of course the common, natural and only safe structure for an institution which is to endure.

The reason for the failure of the student-governed body can be examined at the same time as we look at what these earlier universities were actually doing. We have seen that the word universitas had then a different meaning. In fact the common word for the entire institution was 'studium,' or school, and this reflects a misunderstanding common then and now and particularly common among students. The first such institutions formed, as we have said, spontaneously, and it seems unlikely that any school in our modern sense would grow up in this way. There was formal teaching to be sure, lectures and the dictation of texts, since printed books were not available.

But men came to universities because the knowledge they sought could not be had anywhere else.

They were seekers and this expressed itself in the other kind of group activity which was so characteristic of these early bodies - the disputation. Thus the students and masters alike were engaged in the active pursuit of knowledge or truth, using the only tools they supposed to be appropriate, namely wide acquaintance with books, and logical argument. To be sure this is a long way from our present-day activities, but the spirit and drive of the place were also very different from the all-too-common student attitude of wanting to learn off material so that one may get a pass mark at this or that test. It was probably because later generations of students lost this initial purpose, adopting instead that of merely acquiring professional competence, that Bologna fell from grace.

The university today

Universities have been through bad times as well as good. Much of their original initiative was lost for centuries, but even so they have been in the forefront of all the truly intellectual revolutions that have occurred in the past 800 years. Through evolution or creation or re-formation, good modern universities are much closer to the original ideal than was the case 200 years ago. That ideal, or primeval function, or common theme is the pursuit of knowledge or truth, and that is a very different thing from mere teaching and the purveying of diplomas.

Yes, new functions have been added on over the years. In particular, new subjects have been added to the curriculum and it is proper that they should be studied at the university if they are genuine fields of original enquiry. Yes, various of the modern functions of the university were originally carried out in independent bodies - such as at the School of Law at Bologna and the School of Medicine at Salerno - but commonly now these have come under the wing of universities and the reason for that is that they share the same common theme that we have just discussed.

For many students the university is the passport to a career or to a particular kind of job. That is perfectly proper and should be encouraged for everybody's sake. But the fact that the university can so successfully educate people is by way of a by-product of its essential principle, which should determine the manner and style of all its activities, the Pursuit of Truth.

(The writer is Professor of Biochemistry and Head of that Department.)

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本期刊登兩篇有關‘大學的使命’的文章是這個專題討論的最後兩篇

—編者

《交流》陸續刊登了幾篇有關大學教育使命的文章。這些文章差不多概括了所有大學裏各種活動：

- (一) 教學。
- (二) 培養知識份子，訓練專業人才。
- (三) 教育一啓發學生的潛能，使他們能負起重任。
- (四) 傳授知識，增廣視野。
- (五) 通過意見交流，使學生的思考力更爲敏銳。
- (六) 灌輸文明價值觀念。
- (七) 保存知識。
- (八) 增進知識和學問。
- (九) 研究。

上述九個方面並不相互排斥，同時亦充份說明大學負有多重任務，因此往往使人難以理解一個學術機構如何能擔當這許多任務。這種特殊的現象的解釋有三。解釋之一：這些不同的任務，是大學根本任務之外後來才加上去的。解釋之二：所有這些任務都是圍繞着一個共同主題。解釋之三：這許多不同的任務起初原本是獨立自發的，後來才由一個組織來加以庇護和管理。從歷史觀點來看，這三種解釋都說得通。

早期的大學

古時的希臘、羅馬和中國已有學院制的高等教育。但是，由於各種原因，這些制度不是崩潰了，就是過於墨守成規，以致無法適應時代的變遷。我們所熟悉的大學，是由於人類對知識的渴求，和十二世紀歐洲的安定和繁榮而成。我們無法知道早期大學形成的準確日期，因為那時候的大學不是人們故意創立的，而是由於自然的成長。最早獲頒特許狀的大學其實都是後來才成立的。不過，我們可以肯定，意大利的波倫亞

、巴黎以及牛津在十二世紀前便已有略具大學規模的學術組織。甚至早在十一世紀以前，意大利的塞勒諾亦已設立一所頗負盛名的醫學院。

波倫亞的學院專授法律，由此證明，遠在那時候便已有大學性質的專業學術機構，受過教育的人多爲博學多才，但內容廣泛的教學却並不一定是大學的特色。人不一定要通过教授的方式始能學習。正如《交流》刊登有關這類文章所提及，大學一詞原義只是協會或社團的慣用語，與大學所設立的科目絲毫無關。況且人們並不把波倫亞的法律學院看作是一所大學。它由許多小型個體組成。

這些所謂「大學」，實際只是一些學生會社，後來才聘請教師。其他地方的「大學」，學生會社並沒有掌管大學。在此我要順便提一筆，學生控制波倫亞的結果正導致法律學院的失敗和衰微。人們一向認爲巴黎是教師和學者的集中地。此處的大學和許多其他的大學都在某种程度上沿用波倫亞的會社制度，按學生的籍貫分別組成會社。不過，掌統治權的是教師和學者。這正是任何學府賴以延續的共同、自然、唯一安全的結構。

我們可以借助早期大學的經驗來審察學生統治學校失敗的原因，上文已略述「大學」這個名詞的各種不同的涵義。事實上，通常稱爲「學校」。這恰好反映出一個長久而普遍的誤解，學生誤解尤深。正如上文所說，第一所學府是自發而成的，但現代學校並非如此組成。學校裏肯定有教學，授課和默寫課文（因爲那時還沒有印刷）。進大學是由於別無他法。他們是知識的追尋者。無論學生和教師

都同樣積極追求知識和真理，採用他們所認爲最適合的方法，即熟習書本的知識並加以邏輯辯論。這些活動與我們今天所有的肯定有很大的差距。同樣地，那裏人們的精神和幹勁，與我們常見的爲爭取測驗合格而勤奮學習的學生態度亦大相逕庭。這很可能就是因爲後繼的學生失掉了這個最初的目標，而代以獲取專業技能爲鵠的，這些因素導至波倫亞的末落。

今天的大學

大學享受過順境，亦經歷過逆境，大學原有的首創精神已失落了數世紀之久。即使如此，在過去八百年裏，所經歷的歷次思想革命，大學始終是先驅者。經過演進。創造和重整，現在出色的大學比起二百年前的大學，更接近原有的理想。這個理想，或稱之爲根本任務、共同主題，是對知識和真理的追求。這和單純的教學和頒授文憑毫不相同。當然，隨着時代的演進，大學將有更多任務，尤其是新課程。有獨創性的研究科目是應該歸納入大學的。不錯，大學許多現代任務原來都是由獨立的組織來擔負的，如波倫亞的法律學院和塞勒諾的醫學院，但現在這些獨立學院都納入大學。合併的理由是他們都具有上文所論及的共同主題。

對許多學生來說，大學是踏上事業和職業征途的敲門磚。這完全是應有的態度，應該加以鼓勵。可是，大學之能夠成功地教育人們，實是大學基本原則的副產品。這個基本原則，便是對真理的追求，而這個原則亦決定了大學的型態和風格。

（本文作者爲生物化學系講座教授）