

АКАДЕМІЧНА КУЛЬТУРА

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Jörg BABEROWSKI¹, DSc (History), Prof.
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7147-3791

e-mail: baberowski@geschichte.hu-berlin.de
Humboldt University of Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Olena PAVLOVA, DSc (Philosophy), Prof.
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0593-1336

e-mail: invinover19@gmail.com
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

THE IDEAS OF THE HUMBOLDT MODEL AND THE MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE CURRENT WORLD

This issue of our journal is thematic. It is devoted to understanding the mission of the university in the current world and the Ukrainian university under the conditions of war. We ask you to cover this topic from such perspectives.

• **O.P.:** Max Weber delivered his renowned speech *Wissenschaft als Beruf* before university students in 1917, commencing with the identification of pressing issues: "What are the conditions of science as a vocation in the material sense of the term? Today this question means, practically and essentially: What are the prospects of a graduate student who is resolved to dedicate himself professionally to science in university life?" (Weber, 1946). Can these concerns still be identified today? How do you perceive the answers to these questions within the current situation?

• **J.B.:** This is a very interesting and difficult topic. This was the situation at the end of 1917 when the majority of German students had returned from the front. They served as soldiers and, therefore, Max Weber addressed the young people who were a part of the war that had lasted for three years. There was no enthusiasm about the war any longer, and that should be kept in mind. A second point is that very early in the war Weber declared that the democratic countries, especially the United States, Great Britain, and France had been more successful, because the ministers and the generals were responsible to parliament. Therefore, he advised Germany to make democratic reforms. It was the political issues of Weber that made clear that democracy was not a sign of weakness. All problems of the German Empire were rooted in its autocratic character, and that was also true for Russia.

• **O.P.:** Today, the 9th of November, when we are recording this interview, is the annual celebration of the Weimar Republic Proclamation, the day when the German Empire fell.

• **J.B.:** This is a great holiday for Germany.

• **O.P.:** William Clark, in his book *Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*, conducted microanalyses of academic practices and underscored that the origins of the research university were rooted in an Enlightenment-driven transformation of academic norms influenced by governmental policies and market forces. The dichotomy between academic charisma (in the sense Weber conveys vocation) and the rationalization of education stemmed from this transformation. He identified the seminar as a practice that originated at Humboldt University and served as a fundamental tool in shaping the university's research model (Clark, 2006, p. 141). You have been overseeing the Colloquium "Osteuropa" at Humboldt University for many years. How is it structured? What are your thoughts on the prospects of this mode of academic engagement? What guidance would you offer for effectively organizing such academic initiatives?

• **J.B.:** This is also a difficult subject. The majority of the people think that the ideal Humboldt model university still exists in Germany, but it does not. This specific model was created in Germany in the 19th century and then expanded into other European countries, especially Russia. This model is still represented in the United States at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. The main idea of this model is that academics, such as philosophers, sociologists, and historians, are conducting research because they choose to do so. We are not following this model now, because we have to do something useful – useful in the sense that we create something like money or economic profit. But science, especially humanities, is not something that is related to usefulness. It is about the whole issues, about thinking. The famous philosopher, John Rawls, at Harvard University was famous for doing nothing for 20 years. For 20 years he did nothing except holding seminars with his students. After 20 years of not publishing, he wrote a great book called *A Theory of Justice*. It was totally acceptable at Harvard University that someone use his time and his words only for thinking. All students could participate in his way of philosophical thinking. Currently, from our perspective, this would be totally useless. Our presidents would have said, "No, this is not possible. Where is the money you've generated? How many students do you have? How many projects?" This is the opposite of what Humboldt had in mind when he created a university as a space where people could discuss problems without being useful. That cost a lot of lost revenue for the state. It was a great idea, but this does not exist in Europe.

• **O.P.:** Kant asserted "It is absolutely essential that the learned community at the university also contain a faculty that is independent of the government's command with regard to its teachings; one that, having no commands to give, is free to evaluate everything, and concerns itself with the interests of the sciences, that is, with truth: one in which reason is

¹ Jörg Barberowski is a Professor of Eastern European History at the Humboldt University of Berlin. He studies the history of the Soviet Union and Stalinist violence. Member of the editorial board of journals and book series: "Contributions to the history of Eastern Europe" (Böhlau Verlag); "Own and foreign worlds. Representations of Social Order in Comparison" (Campus Verlag); "Research on Eastern European History" (Harrassowitz Verlag); "Yearbook for Historical Research on Communism"; "Yearbooks for the History of Eastern Europe"; "Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History"; "Systems of Order. Studies in the History of Ideas in the Modern Era" (Oldenbourg Verlag); "Research in Contemporary History"; "Journal of Modern European History"; "Research on the Consequences of War", "Ukrainian Cultural Studies".

authorized to speak out publicly" (Kant, 1979, p. 2), the significance of academic freedom in research and learning. In your view, what role does academic freedom play in the contemporary world?

• **J.B.:** First of all, it is a very difficult situation for scientists who work under the conditions of war or under dictatorship at the present time. In such prospects the university is not a place where people can conduct research for the "public use of reason." There is no prospect for free thinking, especially in the humanities. However, on the other hand, democratic countries. It is not the same under a dictatorship. A democratic state has certain interests to produce a certain number of students for the economy, and they want us to produce certain types of students who will be useful to the society. It is very dangerous for states and bureaucracies to intervene in the university.

• **O.P.:** *How does the bureaucracy in Germany control the knowledge produced?*

• **J.B.:** Of course, there is no direct interference from the state. It's not like in Russia. Nobody would say, "You have to do research on German nationalism or whatever." We can do whatever we want. I can research whatever I want. They ask us to raise money and to produce graduate students, but you can't receive this money without asking questions which are important for this view of the state. For example, if you want to raise money for a research project, it should be something for which they would give money, and therefore, it cannot be for simply anything. It is supposed to be in a certain field. In comparison with dictatorships and autocratic regimes, we are in an advantageous position, but the Humboldt university model is only a regulatory idea.

• **O.P.:** *Randall Collins delineates two models of universities – traditional and modern [Collins, 2002: 618], with a particular emphasis on the pivotal role played by German universities in shaping the latter. He noted the trend of specialization in fields and disciplines, which continues to play a crucial role in the functioning of universities. Does this trend carry the same weight in shaping the "modern research university" as it did during the "German university revolution", where professors were not only expected to impart existing knowledge but also contribute to the creation of new knowledge?*

• **J.B.:** As professors and researchers, we are free to develop our ideas from the past or from the current societies. On the other hand, the university has grown to fulfill tasks. For example, Harvard has under 7,000 bachelor students¹. We have 35,000 students at Humboldt. We are big machines. We produce teachers, people who work in economics, and doctors. Philosophers are not useful.

• **O.P.:** *Heroic faculty: As Kant said – it is heroic not to be useful.*

• **J.B.:** For two thousand years we have only been sitting and thinking. That is not useful, but it can be helpful to produce free space, without which democratic society cannot exist.

• **O.P.:** *Kant's idea was that the university is a form of soft power. The university produces experts in basic spheres of labor division (clerks, or nowadays media specialists, lawyers and doctors) in connection with human well-being (spiritual, social, and physical levels). The university gives experts, through the help of the philosophical faculty, a free space for thinking. In the process of using experts to guide people for the sake of academic freedom, the society continues to run democratically. The government, with help from the thinking style produced, not specific knowledge content, produces new knowledge, forming democratic advantages. People can be forced to do physical work, but a scientific discovery cannot be the result of violence. There was a joke in the Soviet Union that in the next quarter we would discover three elementary particles. It is impossible to predict, let alone force.*

• **J.B.:** Of course, the university produces a free society. Schools generate useful people. In America law schools produce lawyers. There people learn techniques, but research in law or in medicine is something different. The university needs space, possibly 20 years, for only thinking and conducting experiments. Science cannot exist with only immediate results. And that costs a lot. There are many needs to just sit at a desk and think and write. It has to be an academic community. That was a joke about the Soviet Union. However, in Western universities we have the same ridiculous planning of research. We have procedures of evolutions of our philosophical faculty in Humboldt university of Berlin. This evaluation will take place next year. And the most important task is determining what the program will be for the next five years. Three years ago, there were totally different humanities topics for Eastern Europe. The war changed everything. Now we are interested in building a nation state in war. To conduct predictable research is dangerous. It leads to a kind of research that is no longer open. That cannot exist without discussions with scholars. Humanities is not the same model as natural science.

• **O.P.:** *The modern university model evolved during a period of information and knowledge scarcity. How has the institutionalization of knowledge and its consumption been affected by the mass production and dissemination of information through new media, along with the diminishing influence of classical regulatory structures within education and science? Why and how is this over-production and control of knowledge connected to "geopolitics of emotion" rather than "public use of reason"?*

• **J.B.:** Nowadays scholars are aware that emotion is very important for what we are doing. Martin Heidegger wrote in Sein und Zeit that we are people with reason, but this does not rule the world. People are emotionally situated before they think. We think not only reasonably but in a depressive way or in an enjoyable way, because we create an experience. Ukrainians are experiencing a devastating war. I am not, and that is different. Our perception of the war is different. People use arguments but take them from their cultural and emotional frames of experience, from their environment and the way in which they live. The increase of violence changes everything. People in Western countries do not understand that. Using reason is an important issue of the future: How can we all live in peace?

• **O.P.:** *We experienced war before full scale invasion in another way.*

• **J.B.:** Exactly. People in such terrible conflicts can feel aggressive, want revenge. But the most difficult question is what will be after the war. Even after the war ends, negative emotions will not go away. How in such a situation can you find a way to forget the negative; it cannot be done. How can you find a better life and cope with a new situation? For my

¹ https://oira.harvard.edu/factbook/fact-book-enrollment/?fbclid=IwAR2iIydpV6y0QQWA8Wd92nibY34DyHmwldTR2nReh7wqDS6ldwqw_X1O25. Date of access 27.11.2023

country, it has taken more than forty years. I remember my family. Every family had something awful happen to them. Our school had a teacher who survived Auschwitz and those who served as Waffen-SS. Afterwards, I wondered how it was possible for these people to sit in one room. What kind of emotions did they have? Your experience is different. How can we build a democratic society with these kinds of feelings?

• **O.P.:** *Given such a perspective, I suppose Weber recommended people from the trenches to study in the university so that they could distance themselves from what happened. That's why I want to get back to colloquium organizing. How do you choose reporters, topics, and make the time for them? How are you coping with this sea of possibilities?*

• **J.B.:** The colloquium is the main place to celebrate Humboldt's idea because in this way, we don't come to take exams or produce something useful for society. This is totally opposite from bachelor's or master's seminars. Students must go to lecture halls to take an examination and receive a grade. But the colloquium is open to everybody. This is a place to discuss what people want, receiving nothing in return. What is gained is intelligent conversation and questions. We simply sit and talk about topics, which are interesting for us. And the best part is receiving nothing for that. That's why I love the colloquium most. This is the place where I like to go every week. People who attend want to tell us what they are doing. Nobody forces anyone to come. That is wonderful.

• **O.P.:** *We will finish with this optimistic idea.*

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Йорг БАБЕРОВСЬКІ, д-р іст. наук, проф.

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7147-3791

e-mail: baberowski@geschichte.hu-berlin.de

Берлінський університет імені Гумбольдта, Берлін, Німеччина

Олена ПАВЛОВА, д-р філос. наук, проф.

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0593-1336

e-mail: invinover19@gmail.com

Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, Київ, Україна

ІДЕЇ ГУМБОЛЬДТІВСЬКОЇ МОДЕЛІ ТА МІСІЯ УНІВЕРСИТЕТУ В СУЧASNOMУ СВІТІ