

# The University in History: 1088 and All That

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Let me begin by adding to my title the subheading "1088 And All That." Some of the more mature among you will remember the gloomy Dean of St. Paul's, a cleric renowned for his pessimistic views on just about everything and treasured especially by historians for his observation that "Events in the past may be roughly divided into those which probably never happened and those which do not matter. That is what makes the trade of historian so attractive."

It is in this spirit that the history of universities used often to be written, and its products have sometimes vindicated the view expressed in Samuel Butler's remark to the effect that God cannot alter the past and that is why He connives at the existence of historians. So I will remind you that it was in fact a poet, not even a professed historian, who presided over a committee charged with determining the date at which the University of Bologna should celebrate its 800th anniversary. He set the year of 1888 in an act of false precision that has taken on a historical life of its own. In doing so he repudiated the charter that had been forged in the mid-thirteenth century to authenticate the founding of Bologna by the Emperor Theodosius in the year 423 A.D. Since it was after all an established fact that Bologna had been the very first, so people reasoned at the time, it was perfectly legitimate to secure that ancient right by invented proof.

Actually, in earlier days, the University of Bologna was not always acknowledged as the world's oldest. The Puritans who founded Harvard College believed on the evidence of Scripture that the prophet Samuel had established and led the first university, and there were still savants in the early seventeenth century who assigned this honor to Noah; his was presumably the first floating campus. Oxford was claimed by some to have owed its birth to the philosophers who had accompanied Brutus, the legendary creator of the British monarchy and grandson of Aeneas, on his flight to Albion from Troy, while others, looking for a more native origin, credited this accomplishment to Alfred the Great (perhaps explaining the burning of the cakes by this absent-minded academic). In any case, the myths attending the origins of universities have been legion. What must more soberly be said is that, in their most ancient incarnations, universities just sort of grew rather than emerging as outcomes of a conscious act or out of some explicit and purposeful idea of a university.

The idea of an idea of a university has a history of its own, one considerably shorter than that of the institution itself. Of course one can generalize to some idea of a university from the structures and practices and courses of study of the medieval universities and their successors, and of course the specific charters of

universities in succeeding eras normally contained some rhetoric as to the reasons for their foundation. But it is also true that those who later on ascribed an "idea" to the medieval university were commonly using that institution as an exemplary precedent for a complex of ideas born later and were asserting a continuity that could help lend the weight of apparently unbroken tradition to programmatic aims unknown and unthought of in earlier centuries.

There are of course many different ways by which to discuss the university in history. One might study primarily the corporate institution, its institutional arrangements, its relation to the church and/or state, its constitutional structures and guiding conditions, the development of such fundamental concepts as that of academic freedom and their institutional impact. Or one might read and reflect on the histories of individual universities, works not in general to be warmly recommended aside from such really excellent accounts as S. E. Morison's history of the founding of Harvard College, set in a broad and scholarly context. The impulse to their composition has tended all too frequently to the celebratory and parochial. But these works can still offer wonderful funds of information and anecdote and can interestingly illuminate the institutions' ethos, traditions and aspirations. Thomas Goodspeed's *History of the University of Chicago*, running from 1891 to 1916, is such a book, part memoir, part history, unaffected in its direct response to the people and events that made up the early history of the University of Chicago, generous and enthusiastic in its sense of a great work brought into being.

One can also study the university in history from a comparative perspective, as much recent scholarship has fruitfully done. One may explore, as contemporary historians have increasingly sought to do, universities in the context of social history, examining how they are positioned and what functions they serve in their larger societies, what the interplay is between those roles and the social and political needs, pressures, and expectations of the worlds in which they are imbedded.

One might study universities from the large and complicated vantage point of the history of knowledge itself, examining changing views of intellectual truth and value, changing priorities in the hierarchies of knowledge, changing modes of organizing and communicating knowledge, revolutions in the methods, criteria and conclusions of knowledge, debates over the uses of knowledge, controversies over the evaluation and legitimization of knowledge and over the philosophy of knowledge, and ask how universities served, or failed to serve, as the crucial vehicles for these histories and how they were in turn affected by them. Or one might investigate the history of the curriculum and of the expressed aims of higher education over time and ask how and why these matters were argued over and adapted in the universities, whether from their period of foundation onward or at critical junctures of time.

Such different ways of seeing the university in history are not, of course, so simply compartmentalized, and they will intersect at many points in any serious analysis of the university and its cultural role. But our

theme here is the "idea" of the university, and so I will confine myself to some preliminary thoughts on the history of the idea of an idea of a university.

□□□□□That takes me back to 1088 and all that. There are, as you well know, many debates and questions associated with the development of universities in the Middle Ages, including the problem of identifying what might properly be called a university in some visible and familiar form. The term *universitas* itself was a generic one for a corporation that covered corporate entities with various kinds of objectives. It then came to be applied over time to this special kind of corporation in particular. But that was not the only name by which the institutions were identified.

□□□□□The first universities were corporations of faculty or of students or of faculty and students both, and that is how Bologna, later in the twelfth century, and Paris, very shortly after, and Oxford, not so long after that, came to be recognized as such corporations or guilds which had certain features roughly in common. Such institutions were often in the next period referred to by the terms *studium generale* or "academy." And to make matters more confusing, one finds that the professors' guilds at Bologna were called colleges, and those of the students, universities. Bologna and Paris represented the major models for other universities to emulate as, in the high and late Middle Ages, new universities were founded under the aegis of lay and secular authorities. The important thing to note in relation to our subject today is that, whatever model might be taken, the stated motive for the foundation and the institutional structures legislated had little to do with some articulated vision of higher education or appeal to some idea of a university. The charters issued by ecclesiastical or lay authorities dealt above all with the grants and guarantees of the legal privileges and immunities which these corporations were to enjoy. They were often promulgated at moments of crisis and conflict when stronger clarification was required to protect the rights of faculty and student guilds against local jurisdictions. The statutes of the universities dealt, often in minute detail, with syllabi, degree requirements, teaching obligations and methods, the organization of the faculties, discipline, and academic conduct in general.

□□□□□Perhaps the closest approximation of the "idea" of a university to be found in the early documents is contained in the bull issued in 1231 by Pope Gregory IX for the University of Paris. If you can make coherent sense out of it, be my guest:

Paris, the mother of sciences, ... a city of letters, stands forth illustrious, great indeed, but concerning herself she causes greater things to be desired, full of favor for the teachers and students. There, as in a special factory of wisdom, she has silver as the beginnings of her veins, and of gold is the spot in which according to law they flow together; from which the prudent mysteries of eloquence fabricate golden necklaces inlaid with silver, and making collars ornamented with precious stones of inestimable value, adorn and decorate the spouse of Christ. There the iron is raised from the earth, because, when the earthly fragility is solidified

by strength, the breastplate of faith, the sword of the spirit, and the other weapons of the Christian soldier, powerful against the brazen powers, are formed from it. And the stone melted by heat, is turned into brass, because the hearts of stone, enkindled by the fervor of the Holy Ghost, at times glow, burn and become sonorous, and by preaching herald the praises of Christ. ( *University Records and Life in the Middle Ages* , tr. L. Thorndike, N.Y. 1975, p. 36)

What is clear in this passage is that the University of Paris is regarded as a sword of the Christian soldier, its learning as serving the ends of the Church and of faith, and that the university in question is specifically Paris, now made a special ward of the Papacy.

If the first universities, grounded in the assumptions of Christian doctrine and looking to the education of a learned clergy, did not grow out of a clear idea or plan, they nonetheless came historically to represent an idea, or an idea of a university constantly re-conceived and reformulated, appropriated and reappropriated, to the needs, structures, and aspirations of different times and settings. It was a partially imagined idea that stirred people to envision a sense of the timeless dignity, the enduring worth, the permanence amidst the flux and chaos that reigned elsewhere in the world, of the higher learning and its institutions. Bologna, Paris, Oxford: these came in a long tradition to stand for the grand accomplishments of scholastic philosophy and theology and jurisprudence, for an ideal of the universality and the unity of knowledge, its essential parts ordered in a hierarchy of truth. They stood for the international character of learning, for a community of scholars that transcended all boundaries to constitute a larger republic of learning. They represented the fundamental autonomies and freedoms requisite for the academic world. Their degrees gave life and authority to the profession of teaching and scholarship and to the other learned professions.

Such is the highly generalized image of the ancient and timeless university with its dreaming spires that has emerged and re-emerged in the western tradition and its literature. At the same time, the ideas associated with that image have taken on quite different meanings, and shades of meaning, and quite different embodiments at different times. The history of the idea of the idea of a university is one of continuing reinterpretation and re-adaptation in which the strongly felt need to assert a continuity with the past confronts the project of giving new life and form and purpose to the higher learning under circumstances quite remote from that past. The past was continually evoked and cited to legitimize later ideas, and it was continually altered and given a modern face-lift by doing so.

It is true also that Bologna, Paris, and Oxford, however great their roles, existed increasingly amidst a diversity of universities, as more and more of them came into being, as they became differentiated among themselves, and as they were caught up in the sweep of major historical change which created shifting relations to church and state, to the social order by which universities were molded, to the requirements and

functions they were made to serve, and by the currents of intellectual development and its directions which moved their universe of study and learning.

By the late Middle Ages, the international character of the universities had not disappeared, but there now existed many regional and provincial foundations, not all of which were to survive. Although more laymen were in attendance, the idea of a university was still tightly bound to religious authority and clerical purpose. The faculties of theology, law, and medicine retained their dominance. A degree signified the acquisition of an official license to teach. The fourth faculty, that of the arts, existed to prepare and certify students for such higher study by ensuring their mastery of Latin and acquaintance with a set of common texts in the basic liberal arts narrowly defined.

Renaissance humanism, from its beginnings in the Italian fourteenth century, introduced a new conception of learning and its purposes that was ultimately to influence profoundly both the idea and the institution of the university in the following centuries. Humanism did not in fact originate in the universities themselves. It began as a movement that advocated a program of education suitable for the schools and that tried to extend this program into the university faculties of the arts with growing success.

The humanists criticized and rejected what they saw as the educational assumptions and academic culture of their time. For them, the pedantic specialization and abstruse speculation, which they derided as a stereotype of scholasticism, reflected a larger condition of decay in the contemporary world. Reform was needed, and it might be achieved through the instrument of an education located in the ancient corpus of the liberal arts, grounded in a direct return to and immersion in the ancient texts themselves, and looking to the creation of capable, ethically sound and well-rounded individuals who would apply such learning to the civic and secular world. They argued that the professional education and forms of scholarship pursued in the universities had no relevance to the needs of their society or to the understanding of those matters that had to do with human life and its conduct. They wanted a form of secular learning, revitalized through the recovery of ancient culture and its norms, directly related to the development of human wisdom and character and inspiring active minds and moral energies that would have effect in the world of affairs and its institutions. They maintained that liberal education and humanistic scholarship should equip people to lead a good life.

Humanistic scholarship was concerned, above all, with the restoration and study of antiquity. Its focus was on classical literature, on rhetoric and history and moral philosophy. It came to develop, as ancillary disciplines, such fields as archaeology, numismatics, philology and textual criticism. As the humanists' program came to penetrate the university faculties of the arts, so, the demand for lay higher education grew, carrying with it the desire to create courtiers and civil servants and gentlemen of refinement and some cultivation fit for society. So the collegiate idea began to grow within the universities, but without, so to

speaking, creating a new idea of a university *per se*, for the universities retained their essentially medieval organization of the higher faculties and its priorities. The consequences of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation were to reinforce the roles of theology and religious authority. But it also happened that the major Protestant churches and, especially after the Council of Trent, the Roman Church, took over, if with somewhat different aims, a humanist program of the liberal arts. They wanted a learned clergy trained in languages and expert in textual exegesis and a laity educated in the requirements of their faith. They were engaged in battles where victory depended in part on intensive, if partisan, scholarship that could use the humanistic disciplines to help prove the rightness of their cause. Increasingly, too, as the universities became the homes of endless theological controversy and a pervasive orthodoxy, there arose a kind of new scholasticism that permeated the humanistic as well as the theological domain. The goals of humanistic scholarship became, so to speak, more academic; its spirit more closed and defensive of tradition as such. It is not surprising that the great intellectual revolutions of the seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries did not, on the whole, emerge out of the universities. Indeed, the Scientific Revolution largely bypassed the universities. And, allowing for perhaps some exaggeration on his part, one should not be startled by Gibbon's devastating portrait, in his *Autobiography*, of the languid and even anti-intellectual Oxford of his experience or by his narrative of a scholarly life carried on outside the universities of his day.

□□□□□ To the extent that one might search for the idea of the university as one centering around the liberal arts, it is only partially to be found in the universities of early modern Europe, despite the huge influence humanism exercised on learning in the faculties of the arts and on their ideal of scholarship in that era and despite the almost sovereign role of the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge. It was to be some time before the liberal arts idea, which was of course never to disappear, became a conception that would secure a vital hold on the idea of a university.

□□□□□ The terminology of an "idea of a university" is of course most commonly associated with Cardinal Newman, author of the book that ultimately took that title. It is a book more widely admired and cited than read. Perhaps Sam Goldwyn's saying, that he had read part of a book all the way through, best describes the usual fate of Newman's work. A still more terrible doom was once visited on him and it by the *Chicago Maroon*, which referred to "Carmen Newman and the Ides of the University." This Carmen is no doubt cousin to the operatic figure who became Doris Gudonov in a famous typo perpetrated by the *Manchester Guardian*. However that may be, Newman, a man who could be said to have "a high tolerance for restatement," laid out an idea of a university that excluded research, locating the discovery and advancement of knowledge in separate academies and confining the university to the function of teaching. What has continued to appeal about his view and is recurrently being recalled, pulled and stretched almost out of recognition to fit a very different kind of academic environment, is his insistence on a broad or

general education in the liberal arts in an institution dedicated to the civilizing mission of shaping the cultivated gentleman and looking rather like the ideal model of an Oxford college. What tends to be overlooked is that Newman was also preoccupied with the theme, now restated in a nineteenth-century version, of the relation between faith and reason, religious commitment and worldly learning. That of course had been the central concern of medieval thought in its speculations and controversies over the justification, scope, and uses of secular studies in a universe of revealed higher truth. Newman's new university was, after all, to be a Catholic foundation, and his goal was to find the means by which the best of liberal learning and the training of the mind could be given life and power in a way that would be congruent also with the prescriptions of faith and obedience.

So Newman's "idea" of a university has significant associations with the past while simultaneously assimilating and expanding a collegiate ideal of his own time. That collegiate ideal, as Don Levine pointed out in his November lecture, stands in contrast to the Humboldtian conception of a university given shape in the founding of the University of Berlin some forty years before Newman wrote. The guiding idea of Humboldt's university might be said to begin from the idea of knowledge itself as a *universitas*. It was rooted in a liberal humanistic philosophy that looked to a breadth of basic scholarship whose different parts illuminated a coherent universality of thought and learning to be expanded and pursued for their own sake. Humboldt's idea of a university celebrated an ideal of *Wissenschaft*, with research carried out at the highest level and students initiated into the grand tradition of learning through advanced study. The institutional form of this university required academic freedom for professor and student alike, so that the ideal of intellectual creativity, the following of rigorous investigation and thought wherever these might lead, could be fully realized and encouraged. Such freedom now became an essential dimension of the idea of the university. The ideal of intellectual freedom became primary, replacing that of a corporate freedom as expressed in the liberties provided by the privileges and legal immunities granted to the medieval university; institutional autonomy now became an essential means for securing and sustaining the primary end of intellectual freedom at the university's center.

This idea of a university where universal truth and the disciplines of learning might be searched out and advanced unfettered by utilitarian considerations or by the orthodoxies of other traditions or by the pressure of state authority or by the demands of social contribution or by the responsibility for elementary collegiate instruction came to have a powerful hold on the imaginations of those who saw the nineteenth-century college or university as stifling institutions badly in need of reform. Nowhere was this influence more compelling than in the case of those American academics who spent time, especially in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, at German universities.

By that day, the course of American higher education had been set toward pluralism and

decentralization, with a mix also of private and public. There had been those who, in the wake of the Revolution, had hoped for a federal university that would train the nation's future leaders and help provide its common culture, but that was not to be (outside the military academy.) The state of American higher education reflected its origins in religious tradition, a sectarian spirit, and a collegiate outlook and emphasis. It was affected, too, by the deep strains of populism and anti-intellectualism, of concern with the visibly and effectively practical, that have often resonated through American culture. It is a tendency that has looked to educational purpose as having to do with professional life and the advancement of the social good and that has looked skeptically on the pursuit of fundamental knowledge or immersion in intellectual activity as a good in itself.

■■■■■The university movement of the nineteenth century, as it gained momentum, conceived an idea of a university quite removed from the existing collegiate model, with its constricted required curriculum designed to educate clergy and citizens and its self-conception as the home of inherited learning and its transmission. The university movement advocated instead an institution that emphasized also scholarly investigation and discovery, a wide embrace of all the different and newly created fields of knowledge and study, and, above all, the introduction of science and scientific research. That would entail the transformation of already existing colleges into such universities and the establishment of entirely new institutions. Thus an idea of a university as comprehending an entire universe of learning at every level of higher education became the distinctive type, albeit with variations, for the American university.

■■■■■In 1851, Henry Tappan, who was to become president of the University of Michigan the following year, wrote:

How simple the idea of a university. An association of eminent scholars in every department of human investigation; together with the books embodying the results of human investigation and thinking, and all the means of advancing and illustrating knowledge. ... How simple the law which is to govern this association! -- That each member as a thinker, investigator, and teacher shall be a law unto himself, in his own department.

■■■■■Tappan cited as his general models the University of Paris, the universities of England "before they were submerged in the Colleges," and the universities of Germany. They represented, as he put it "Cyclopaedias of education." His idea of a university placed comprehensiveness of knowledge, all types including those that might have a practical bearing, at the center of an ideal in which the university becomes the beacon of civilization for the entire society and an instrument for elevating the nation's culture. It is the generator of knowledge in a hugely widening range. Its institutions are marked by freedom and individual initiative; its structure by self-government, its world by the possession of every good, from libraries and laboratories to art museums and botanical gardens, that may conduce to the preservation and advancement of the sciences,



letters, and arts. The new university is seen as a kind of great experiment and one in which there need be no conflict between the scientific and the humanistic, knowledge pursued for its own sake and applied knowledge, the world of the intellect and the world at large. The intellectual has priority over the utilitarian, but they are seen in harmony. Throughout this vision of a university, Tappan expresses an enormous faith in the power of scholarship and intelligence to sway and persuade the larger world of its value and to work progressively toward ever higher levels of achievement to the benefit of all. And finally, he links this new university to those of the old world, both medieval and modern; his idea of the university is irenic in embracing the old as well as the new and suggests that the medieval university itself embodied such an idea. But his eclectic university was not Paris or Oxford or modern Berlin. Tappan took the three major purposes assigned to universities over their history--the pursuit of pure learning for its own sake, the service of social and civic ends, the development of individual capacity and virtue--and gathered them in together as part and parcel of a single space in which the idea of the university as a community is blended also with that of a robust and diverse individualism.

Some colleges, Yale and Princeton among them, moved somewhat gradually toward university status and were cautious in assimilating the new interest in graduate education and in science. Charles William Eliot of Harvard, on the other hand, took office in 1869 with a clear idea in mind as to what his university should seek to become. His vision was grounded in the elective system. For Eliot the elective system, replacing the confining requirements of the traditional common curriculum, would help make possible research and scholarship and advanced training in a university environment that existed to provide the greatest freedom for its individual members to pursue and create knowledge and that stressed a close relationship between teaching and research. "The largest effect of the elective system," he wrote, "is that it makes scholarship possible, not only among undergraduates, but among graduate students and college teachers." And again: "As long as our teachers regard their work as simply giving so many courses for undergraduates, we shall never have first-class teaching. ... If they have to teach graduate students as well as undergraduates, they will regard their subjects as infinite, and keep up that constant investigation which is necessary for first-class learning." Eliot's university at the end of his term, as Oscar Handlin has written, had merged the inherited ideal of liberal education with that of scholarship, "ever evolving as knowledge accumulated. Tradition yielded to science as the source of authority ..."

It is, I think, in that transition from tradition to science as the source of intellectual authority that the modern idea of the university, and the reactions to that idea, came to be born. The shift from an emphasis on inherited learning and its preservation and transmission to one on the freedom that had necessarily to accompany the conviction that knowledge was an open and infinite area of new discovery, with multiple paths of entry, was to prove decisive. The methods and instruments of the sciences, too, gained an

ascendancy and an influence on all the disciplines that was to change the organization of the university forever. The rapid professionalization and specialization in the fields of learning and inquiry that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the new emphasis on graduate education and certification through the Ph.D. degree as a growing requirement for membership in the professoriate created an academic profession and a new set of expectations in the world of higher education. This in turn opened the way to a proliferating series of ideas of the university, often born out of intense debate over the aims and outcomes seen in the universities of the time. Each of the new universities--Johns Hopkins, Chicago, and Stanford among them--had for all their common inspiration, a distinctive idea at their foundation that helped to direct quite distinctive histories.

From the outset, in the emerging universities of the late nineteenth century and ever after, there occurred fierce debate over the relative positions of science and the humanities, of academic inquiry and liberal learning, in their work of education and research, together with intense arguments over the comparative weight that should be assigned, indeed, to education and research. The driving norms for the standards of research, whatever the field, were, after all, meant to be "scientific," empirical, investigatory, critical, professional and disciplinary. To some extent these norms had already transformed humanistic study, if not in the collegiate curriculum, then in the work of scholarship. In the new universities, the organization of departments and graduate study and their growing specialization swept up the humanities as well.

In opposition, there were some who lamented these developments as threatening to kill the spirit and the purposes of a genuine university culture that had to find meaning and worth in humanistic roots and goals. They grieved over what they saw as the disintegration of a once unified curriculum and deplored the attention and deference accorded the natural sciences and newer social sciences at the expense of a centrally humanistic base. They expressed fear over the professionalization and specialization which they saw coming to dominate the disciplines of learning and the requirements of research and scholarship, and worried about the effect all this had in turn in setting the criteria for teachers and their work and about the growing status of research in relation to teaching. They believed that a general or liberal education was in peril of subordination to the practical and scientific, and that the prospects for civilization, and for universities as the beacons of a civilizing mission, were in decline.

In yet other reactions to growth and its institutionalization, William James spoke out against the "Ph.D. octopus" as a specious advertising gimmick dreamed up by universities to raise their status and image in competition with their peers. And Thorstein Veblen saw the new universities as falling prey to corporate and commercial as opposed to intellectual values. Arguing against the corporate university, he defined the true idea of a university as follows: "A university is a body of mature scholars and scientists, the 'faculty,'--

with whatever plant and other equipment may incidentally serve as appliances for their work."

■■■■■Veblen's strictures on the university in *The Higher Learning in America* arose out of his belief that the university of his day had veered off course by falling into the hands of business men and become subjected to the application of business principles and practices that corrupted and distorted the true ends and spirit of an institution that should be dedicated to higher learning *per se*. Veblen had spent a number of not very happy years at the University of Chicago, arriving at the unveiling of Harper's university. Harper's own idea of the university was in some ways very appealing to Veblen, but the university itself had come in his view to be something sadly different.

■■■■■And what was Harper's idea of the university? It was an idea that required a detailed organizational blueprint, an idea that proclaimed itself wholly new in character and that sought simultaneously to associate itself with centuries of tradition, affirming this relationship through the design of its neo-Gothic campus. "I have," said Harper, "a plan for the organization of the University which will revolutionize College and University work in this country. It is 'bran splinter new,' and yet as solid as the ancient hills." He wanted the University on its first day to begin, he wrote, "as if it were the continuation of a work which had been conducted for a thousand years," even though no such institution had yet existed. For him what he called the "University idea" would be paramount and would create something quite distinct from a college. It is expected by all who are interested that the *university* idea is to be emphasized. It is proposed to establish, not a college, but a university.... It is only the man who has made investigations who can teach others to investigate.... Freedom from care, time for work, and liberty of thought are prime requisites in all such work.... In other words, it is proposed in this institution to make the work of investigation primary, the work of giving instruction secondary. (Harper, "First Annual Report," quoted in Goodspeed, pp. 145-46)

■■■■■Harper's idea of the university was that of a builder for whom the idea was of no moment until it stood as an articulated structure. It was an idea that required the institution's continuing increase and development. There were those who saw this idea as a prescription not only for graduate and professional study and research, but for incessant growth and diversification, and who spoke disparagingly of "Harper's Bazaar."

■■■■■Robert Maynard Hutchins, too, published a book (1937) entitled *The Higher Learning in America*, and it, too, offered a passionate indictment of American universities and what they had become. In his view, the decay of the idea and reality of the university had occurred some time between the age of Harper and his own. The higher learning had descended from those commitments that framed the true idea of a university--namely, the single-minded pursuit of truth, the cultivation of the intellectual virtues, and the disinterested search for genuine learning-- to a state of philistine vocationalism, primitive utilitarianism, and cynical relativism. All that seemed to matter, he thought, were certification, trivial research, and "social

accommodation." The university had become, in effect, anti-intellectual and so mimicked and pandered to the worst features of the larger society. A university should possess a set of ordered principles grounded in the unity of knowledge. Instead, thought Hutchins, the modern university represented the disorder, even anarchy, that had been spawned by Eliot's free elective system and its consequences, seen in the fragmentation of learning. Hutchins expressed a keen nostalgia for the medieval university, for the clarity of its identity linked to the unifying principle of theology. He asked whether metaphysics might not play that role in the renewed university. "If we can revitalize metaphysics and restore it to its place in the higher learning," he wrote, "we may be able to establish rational order in the modern world as well as in the universities" (p. 105). Seven years later, in the heightened emotion of wartime, his voice became yet more urgent:

The centrifugal forces released through the dissolution of ultimate beliefs have split the universities into a thousand fragments. When men begin to doubt whether there is such a thing as truth or whether it can ever be discovered, the search for truth must lose that precision which it had in the minds of those who founded the American universities.... The universities, instead of leading us through the chaos of the modern world, mirror its confusion. ( *Education for Freedom* , p. 100)

■■■■■And in 1944, at a faculty-trustee dinner at which Hutchins' words struck terror into the hearts of the faculty for what appeared their ideological thrust, he gave the following description of his idea of a university:

... an academic community is not an end in itself. Neither is academic democracy. They are both in their turn preliminary steps; they are means to the accomplishment of the purposes of the University. And the purpose of the university is nothing less than to procure a moral, intellectual, and spiritual revolution throughout the world. The whole scale of values by which our society lives must be reversed if any society is to endure. (p. 8)

■■■■■For Hutchins, the idea of the university had to do with unity rather than universality; or, at least, with a universality measured by the principle of unity, by ultimate intellectual value and understanding more than by investigation and discovery, by collegiate rather than graduate instruction, by the preservation and cultivation of an enduring tradition that provided the key to rational reflection on the basic foundations and questions of human life, and by a conviction that truth was discoverable, that all things were not relative. If the university was a place of the intellect in this sense, it was not, however, a good simply in itself but a missionary to the world as well. To some degree, Hutchins' idea secularizes and modernizes a conception of the higher learning that has deep roots in the medieval university he romanticized. It was at once other-worldly and world-changing, independent of the larger society but charged with the mandate of acting as its critic and saving transformer.

■■■■■In the decades following World War II, the history of the idea of a university became that of the *research* university, its character and the perceptions of its character, and the range of controversies and dilemmas related to its growth and institutions. Our universities were again remade, now by the partnership (born originally out of wartime exigencies) between government and the universities based in scientific research and support and by the institutional and public policy issues to which this led, by the G.I. Bill of Rights and the opening of higher education to a new form of meritocracy, by the increasing internationalization of universities, and by an intensified faith, and support for that faith, in the promise of higher education and expanded access for all who might receive its benefits as the priority and means for strengthening individual opportunity and an enlarged democracy. In some sense, it came to be viewed by many that the university *ought* indeed to mirror the society it served.

■■■■■The post-War period saw dynamic growth in the university system and its institutional varieties. It witnessed also a huge expansion in the multitude of ambitions pursued by and of demands made on universities to cover all possible fields and to serve all kinds of socially beneficial purposes. There emerged the idea of the university as the "multiversity," in Clark Kerr's phrase. This came to overwhelm the idea of the university as comprising a unity and emphasized instead universality as the comprehensive embrace of plural purposes in a world of many different kinds of knowledge and outlook. In that context, too, the idea of the university as an autonomous community in which individual freedom and institutional independence frame the activity of learning and the advancement of knowledge seemed once again vulnerable, and in new ways. The very different critiques and calls for reform that have arisen in the past decades have seemed to question the validity of the higher learning pursued in the first instance for its own sake or for the ends of preservation or of general cultivation or of liberal education. In the era of radical dissent, the university came under assault for its so-called "irrelevance" and was asked to constitute itself an exemplary community that would give itself to solving the pressing social and political ills of our society. In subsequent critiques, the university was declared remote, self-absorbed, and irrelevant to the important issues of economic development or of public need or of the trained practical expertise essential in a complex world of rapid movement and global change. And elsewhere, in the universities of England and the Continent, the problems of politicization and political direction and control have seriously eroded the universities' capacity for self-determination and freedom in choosing their intellectual priorities.

■■■■■Universities have become increasingly complicated and inclusive institutions representing an immense array of fields of study, research, and training. They have undertaken a widening range of service in a great variety of areas. They have been ever more asked to justify their existence and social contribution to those who pay their way and to their so-called constituencies. They have struggled to reconcile the need for resources and the strings that attach themselves to such resources in an intellectual universe marked by an

unparalleled explosion of knowledge and its technologies. As all this has occurred, it has become more difficult to understand whether there is such a thing as a clearly held idea of a university, or whether there are simply a number of ideas, not always explicit and consistent, that co-exist and sometimes clash. It is difficult, too, to know whether the various representations of that idea in the past can have an effective presence today. There are discontinuities in that history, times when universities flourished, times when they saw stasis and decline. There is an immense discontinuity between the idea of an intellectual authority emanating from the cultivation and preservation of tradition and that of one arising out of the search for new knowledge and the model of scientific discovery. The divergence between more traditional humanistic conceptions and the dynamic scientific vision of the university is significant at least in emphasis, however the two may coexist in the modern university. Yet another discontinuity was created by the contrast of faith in the unity of knowledge, or the possibility of affirming such a conviction, and the assumption, now broadly characteristic of university culture, of an open-ended universe where it would be thought constraining, perhaps impossible, to live by such a belief.

□□□□□ To say that there have been different representations of the idea of the university, both institutionally and in thought, is not, however, to deny the power of such an idea over time or to deny the existence of any common thread still vital in the present. It is rather to say that the idea of a university needs constant re-thinking and re-commitment in the light of the best possibilities that preservation, transmission, and discovery can command and that its several competing meanings, and shades of meaning, and the debates to which those lead, may create a potentially productive tension that stimulates such thinking.

□□□□□ The University of Chicago has been a place in which that debate has gone forward from the beginning. We might even argue that our own tradition and character arise out of this phenomenon, that the continuing impulse to define the university's purpose and character has kept us engaged in articulating and insisting on the integrity of an idea of the university that is very clear about what the university is not and should not be, even while its reach has become more inclusive. That idea includes an emphasis on the necessary freedoms of the academic community *vis a vis* the community at large and also on the fullest intellectual freedom, within a commonly affirmed purpose, of that internal community, a community dedicated to the pursuit of basic knowledge and understanding. It is the idea described by Edward Levi at a time when those values were gravely threatened:

...[U]niversities exist for the long run. They are the custodians not only of the many cultures of man, but of the rational process itself.... [T]he greatest contribution of universities will be in the liberation of the mind.... First, the university conceives of itself as dedicated to the power of the intellect. Its commitment is to the way of reason. It stands, as Robert Hutchins said, in perpetual agreement with Cardinal Newman, that the object of a university is intellectual, not moral. This is not to say that adherence to reason, the self-criticism

and discipline which this imposes, does not itself partake, indeed it requires, the highest morality.

(Inaugural Address, in *The Idea of the University of Chicago* , pp. 63-64.)

■■■■■This university, over the 110 (or 109) years of its history (for we, too, have our own need for a committee decision on this matter) has self-consciously thought of itself as remaining faithful to a distinct idea, one present at its foundation. It has challenged the orthodoxies that have overtaken much thinking about the university in its time while stimulating fierce arguments over how to assimilate change within the general principles it has sought to exemplify. And that has led, in the history of the idea of this university, to a broadening and deepening appreciation of the complexity, and of the worth, attached to realizing the idea of a university in a community of learning that finds its central purpose in an ideal of intellectual freedom within the pursuit of fundamental learning.

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