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## The myth of university freedom

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# THE MYTH OF UNIVERSITY FREEDOM

This chapter will aim to highlight the issues surrounding the origin of universities. University culture refers back to a very old medieval concept, which is a fact that has to be taken very seriously as the institution of the university as we know it today with its faculties, courses, lectures and titles, comes to us from the medieval world. We can safely say that cathedral schools and certain informal groups acquired their form during the 12th century. But how would we characterize a university? Some authors see their characteristic features in the canon of required texts from which teachers lectured and added their own views, forming academic programmes which conferred titles, in some cases independently of other institutions and offices. In the thirteenth century, we see for the first time a certain freedom of “universality” – the rightful holder of a title could teach anywhere in the world (*ius ubique docendi*). It was a type of legal “university stamp”. As in other spheres of medieval society, the fundamental matter was the granting of privileges (mainly by religious dignitaries at universities). The Czech scholar Pavel Spunar sees the main characteristics of medieval universities as being their administrative and spiritual autonomy, which was strictly guarded from the outset (the outward expression of authority was an academic community directed by a rector, who was elected from among them and who exercised jurisdiction over the members of the university), in a community which was created by the participation of people from all social groups (social background did not play a decisive role for the students or teachers!), and by a new border between clerics and laymen (the term *clerikus* was not unambiguously understood and there appeared attempts to transfer it from the religious to the secular sphere). According to Spunar, an “intellectual class” began to form in Italy in the 13th century, where student lawyers were no longer considered as laymen, but as clerics, even though they had not been religiously ordained.<sup>23</sup>

Freedom in the modern sense of the word did not exist in the Middle Ages. Privileges were understood as “the presentation of freedom” in a world divided by the estates. There was no concept at the time of a universality of rights.<sup>24</sup> The freedom of universities was at first linked to the freedom of the clerics, which was also granted by secular rulers. It is clear from the start that they fought for these privileges, and that the character of the university as an intellectual corporation matured with these struggles. Documents exist which tell us about the right to suspend lectures, about professors’ salaries, even about the right to strike (*Parens scientiarum* Gregory IX).<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, the early universities differed from later ones in many respects: for example, universities did not have libraries, sometimes not even their own buildings, the most common and most popular subject was law, which was seen as preparation for other vocations. The main subjects taught were the ‘seven free arts’, as well as civil and canonical law, cosmology, medicine and theology. From the outset, universities received a tremendous boost for their development from the intellectual renaissance which was occurring in the emerging Western world. The core of teaching and education lay in the ‘disputation’, which was designed to stimulate the ability to argue logically (the scholastic argumentation is best described in *Summa Theologica* by St Thomas Aquinas, the learned Dominican).<sup>26</sup> A future master had to demonstrate his knowledge of a specific canon of books, after which he could apply for a licence to teach, and this process was accompanied by an act of loyalty. Sometimes the licentiate would also receive a master’s title. Again, the concept of “freedom” here is part of a precisely defined framework. In terms of the medieval concept of independence, we have to add that the university began at that time to represent a certain “power” in society, and its self-confidence grew in this regard. It is possible to recall a chapter from Czech history which relates to the time of Charles IV and the Hussite period, and is illustrative of the role which the university (Central European by this stage) played in scholarly disputes and how it assumed powers. In religious disputes, universities had the tendency to place themselves as the arbiter of the true interpretation of Biblical texts, Christian traditions, as well as history. One example of this was the history of the medieval and early modern age councils.<sup>27</sup>

The Modern Age continued to be linked to these university origins. This is best shown in the relationship towards the main figures in medieval scholastics,

23 Spunar, Pavel et al.: *Kultura středověku*. Prague 1995, p. 87.

24 Cf. Hanuš, Jiří (ed.): *Lidská práva. Národ na obecnou platnost a kulturní diferenciaci*. Brno 2001.

25 Woods, Thomas E.: *Jak katolická církev budovala západní civilizaci*. Prague 2008, p. 45.

26 Cf. Floss, Pavel: *Architekti křesťanského středověkého myšlení I*. Prague 2004. A scholastic interpretation from its origins to the later period.

27 Cf. Schatz, Klaus: *Všeobecné koncily. Ohniska církevních dějin*. Brno 2014.

the study of intellectual life in the Late Middle Ages, and a rational understanding of issues in general. Naturally, there was a significant distance in this period from the medieval basis of science, and not only in the sense of time, but also an intellectual distance. Jacques Le Goff saw one of these transitional phases as the end of the 14th and the start of the 15th century, when universities “opened up to humanism”, in particular in Italy (Bologna, Padua). This signalled a development in Greek studies and interest in ancient writings in general, the rejection of scholastics as a “rigid system”, an emphasis on the duo of philology and rhetoric (as opposed to the duo of dialectics – scholastics), interest in the “beautiful language” – but also a certain aristocratic behaviour as the humanist “writes for the enlightened” (the home of humanism was more the ruler’s court than a student hostelry!). “*From the start its world was designed as a protective hand for the powerful, for the maintenance of offices and material wealth.*”<sup>28</sup> It is also important that humanism pushed intellectuals from the towns to the countryside, specifically to rural residences, as was described by Erasmus in *The Profane Feast*.<sup>29</sup> Humanism also brought a rift between science and teaching, which was connected to the expansion of book publishing and libraries. During this period, independence was an even greater chimera than it had been previously – scholars gladly worked in the service of rulers and courts: here too we cannot apply a contemporary postmodern perspective.

We have presented these two historical situations (outlined in almost unacceptable brevity) for an important reason. When describing the main interpretive stereotypes as part of the history of universities, we might come across dual-type problems. The independence of the medieval and humanist type of scholarship and its institutions cannot hide a certain continuity through all of the changes which universities went through, even from the 18th to the 21st centuries. On the contrary, this modern period often returned to its medieval and humanist origins and mythologised them, even if this was not done within the holistic European cultural mainstream, but instead some parts of it. Therefore, for example, the Catholic universities which were founded in the 19th and 20th centuries sometimes openly declared their respect for these medieval traditions, even if the forms of teaching and their relationship towards other institutions, in particular towards the state, were more fitting for that period. On the other hand, we can see the exact opposite in the Modern Age – the attempt to escape from this tradition, the attempt to radically break from earlier periods. It is unsurprising that such attempts are also often types of “mythologies” (for example, communist attempts led to a kind of mythology about the contemporary rejection of old university forms, as we will see later). The independence of universities in the

28 Goff Le, Jacques: *Intelektuální ve středověku*. Prague 2009, p. 130.

29 Cf. Svatoš, Michal – Svatoš, Martin: *Živá tvář Erasma Rotterdamského*. Prague 1985.

past was also mythicised or even directly parodied, and during the Modern Age, the Middle Ages were generally (and entirely non-historically) considered to be an era lacking in freedom, of intellectual repression, whilst knowledge was better during the humanist period, in particular because the first reflections on science appear, which Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers thought signified the origins of real education. The Modern Age, therefore, mythologised both its present and the past, as it had to come to terms with the fact that universities were very old institutions, institutions whose origins harked back to the “darkness” of religious medieval Europe. On a more general level, we can talk about the idea of “progress”, which to a certain degree logically saw the Middle Ages and its organisations as “outdated”, or in the worst case, “reactionary”. This second view, which creates the impression that later must mean “more progressive” and, therefore, “better”, would appear to be the most controversial modernist idea.<sup>30</sup> It was research into the Middle Ages from the second half of the 20th century which showed the richness, variety and also logic of the school and university councils of the time.

## Society and knowledge

The British historian Peter Burke has helped us to uncover on a general level the myths relating to education and “knowledge”, and their relationship towards the autonomy of universities in the period after the European Enlightenment. He examines the relationship between society and knowledge and its fundamental aspects in his important book *A Social History of Knowledge*, particularly in the second volume.<sup>31</sup>

At first he determines the position of “knowledge and society” on the basis of how knowledge is used. It is a type of framework which also describes the position of universities and other educational institutions in the Modern Age, particularly in Europe and America. The most important idea which evidently determines the overall character of the epoch is the *idea of practical knowledge*, i.e. turning away from “pure” science, from “knowledge for knowledge’s sake”. What we have said in the previous paragraphs applies here – we have to avoid mistaken ideas about previous historical periods. To a certain degree, knowledge and education had always been practical, despite the fact that the requirements and applications of this “practicality” differed. However, it can be said that in the 18th century there was a significant expansion in practical knowledge and applied knowledge in rela-

30 In a Czech context, one of the first historians to criticize the “idea of progress” was Bohdan Chudoba in: Chudoba, Bohdan: *O dějinách a pokroku*. Brno 1939.

31 Burke, Peter: *Společnost a vědění II. Od encyklopedie k Wikipedii*. Prague 2013.

tion to the practical orientation of the natural sciences and to economic growth (it is possible to name emerging institutions in Germany, Great Britain and the USA). In the USA in the second half of the 19th century the slogan “revealing the truth for the benefit of the people” began to spread, which was a call to scientists and inventors, but also to millionaires and philanthropists (Andrew Carnegie and others). The idea of utility became established thanks to the growth in trade and industry, and it appeared at the turn of the 20th century that universities were losing out to competition from other more practically orientated institutions. Commerce brought with it further difficulties and problems, for example, the question of the ownership of knowledge and the issue of acquiring information, which became increasingly important.

This understanding of utility, however, did not survive for long. Further expansion in practical research in the modern era was the result of military conflicts. These introduced the scientization of warfare, modernization, the development of military intelligence services and technology in general. From there it is only a small step to those who lead the war – rulers and governments. Even here there was movement away from the collection of practical information, as ordered by Enlightened rulers, to the acquisition of information using technological means, as we see today, for example, with the intelligence services. Undoubtedly, the needs of empires also played a role in this development, in particular those at the turn of the 20th century which on the one hand educated and trained colonial officials, and on the other, collected material from their colonial possessions. This was the case for both the older colonial powers (Great Britain, France), as well as those which joined them in the 19th century (Germany).

This transformation in the social paradigms had to influence university knowledge and the specific form of the university, including its understanding of “autonomy” and “independence”. Universities also provided an education for bureaucrats, altering their programmes to become more practical and useful, and offering professional training in new areas such as engineering, accounting, journalism and physical education. One special area was the more practically oriented business studies (e.g. the Wharton School in Pennsylvania and the Graduate School of Business in Chicago), which also partly served as “model institutions” for Western Europe.

The collaboration between universities and the state apparatus spread widely. Governments and government agencies began to draw more upon academic research, particularly from the social sciences: *“This collaboration between the state apparatus and the university developed markedly at the Russian Research Center at Harvard. The university itself did not come up with the idea for the center, rather it was the director of the US Army Information and Education Section, who turned to the Carnegie Corporation with the project. The FBI “interfered in the center’s affairs”, subjecting researchers to preliminary screenings and assuming it would have any appropriate findings*

*at its disposal prior to publication. Under pressure from the FBI, the center's director, the historian Stuart Hughes, was dismissed for displaying leftist sympathies.*"<sup>32</sup>

This resulted in significant changes in the standing of universities and educational centres in the modern era – approximately from the 18th century. Universities had to adapt to

- 1) the growing power of the state, its needs and demands;
- 2) the industrial revolution, industrialization and modernization, which brought with them the need for greater practicality and utility
- 3) the competing requirements between society and the state, and even military conflicts;
- 4) competition with other schools, institutions and organizations.

This was the framework in which the freedom of the university developed – or was restricted.

## A dependency network

It is on a macro-level that we can see the necessity and, at the same time, the relative speed with which universities began to change. We might also be aware of a “dependency network” which the universities were part of.<sup>33</sup> They became part of an enormous educational system, which on the one hand meant a demand for education due to the modernization of society, while on the other, it represented a large number of competitors. However, it became increasingly dependent on the state and its needs, usually accompanied by the declining role of religion and church in society. A plural society no longer required an “arbiter of the truth” as in the Middle Ages, but it still valued the diplomas which were awarded to graduates.

Specific historical situations, meanwhile, demonstrate that the idea that on one side is the “church” or the “state” or a “rich firm”, attempting to restrict the “freedom” of the university, which is on the other side, striving to maintain its independence, is false, or at least inaccurate. Naturally, such situations may occur, but the more complicated cases are more frequent.

One example is the situation in France after 1870, which was culturally influential for the subsequent period (equally influential was the period of the Napoleonic Wars and the Prussian model that followed). The French republicans came to believe that “he who controls the schools, controls the world”. In particular they

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>33</sup> Contemporary historiography uses the idea of “information networks” not only for the recent past, but also as the key to understanding the entire modern era, basically since the era of the Reformation. Cf. Ferguson, Niall: *The Square and the Tower: Networks, Hierarchies and the Struggle for Global Power*. London 2017.

had in mind the primary schools with their moral and civic education, which was to replace the old-fashioned religious education that was anathema to republican ideals. Historians do not hesitate to add that in the case of spreading republican values, this was a kind of ideological substitute: “*During the Third Republic, French village teachers became missionaries for republican layman values and competed with the village priests over who would win the hearts and minds of the local population.*”<sup>34</sup> At the same time, it led to a sharp rise in literacy not only in France, but also in western and central Europe, and to a certain extent in Russia as well. It is worth remembering that France witnessed the introduction of new school laws by Jules Ferry, which brought in compulsory free education (1881 and 1882). The expansion of literacy not only affected the development of the markets and all areas of society, but also interest in acquiring higher school qualifications, including university ones. High schools, which were originally designed for the elites, gradually opened up to everyone (Gymnasien, lycées, ginnasi). Social mobility developed – in the 1860s the Parisian lycées had been dominated almost exclusively by the elites, while half of the graduates from provincial secondary schools came from the families of farmers, shopkeepers, clerks, workers and soldiers. At this time, some countries (Italy) were already traditional the classic secondary schools and universities for educating an excessively intellectual proletariat, a “class of parasites”, people who were incapable of finding work. For comparative purposes, at the start of the century this represented an annual growth of 1,700 – 1,800 people.<sup>35</sup> The education of women also underwent serious discussion and changes too began to occur, albeit slowly. In the school year of 1911/1912, women constituted only 4.8% of all registered students at German universities, in 1914 women made up one-tenth of students at Parisian universities, and the gates to the famous École Normale Supérieure were opened to them in 1910. Women in Austria-Hungary had been allowed to register at the Faculty of Arts since 1897 and at the Faculty of Medicine since 1900.

But regarding the most fundamental matters: in several European countries, schools and education in general were considered to be a national undertaking, with universities often responsibly and “joyfully” taking part in this task. The slogans of the period emanating from France proved to be infectious. Liberalism, social cohesion through education, dreams about a rapid end to illiteracy, competition between countries through the widely expanding school networks and emerging universities – these were the ideals which spread across Europe before and after the First World War. It is clear that in such a context, universities could only preserve their “independence” to a certain degree: this was due to an awareness of the “national undertaking” and the ideology from a growing secularism.

34 Rapport, Michael: *Evropa devatenáctého století*. Prague 2011, p. 263.

35 Ibid, pp. 267–268.



The French university scene was fittingly characterized by Christophe Charle, an expert on university and intellectual history. He showed that despite all of the ideological attempts at cultural diffusion, French higher education was still very fragile at the turn of the 20th century, due to its diversification, its mimicking of the German model, and the new understanding of science and the position of the teachers: *"If in France a university in the German or English sense of the word was impossible, this was mainly because of the permanent crisis surrounding the social definition of teachers. Apart from some short and exceptional moments, they never managed to have some kind of collective consciousness, the most basic social project or the ideal of a united professional group. The Napoleonic reorganization aligned them with all the other clerks. The model of the supreme authority was represented by the highest officials of state office ('grand corps') and was based on the culmination of functions and mobility within the state apparatus, and not on intellectual excellence as judged by your peers, as was the case in German-speaking countries and then the rest of Europe. This ideal of the professor-scientist was a late import from the German model, and the group of university teachers continued to be periodically doubted."*<sup>36</sup> From this it emerges that university teachers were divided according to mutually incompatible models of behaviour and opposing social and intellectual strategies, and were, therefore, unable to build any common professional basis which would be capable of a dialogue with the outside world (with political authorities, local and social demands, economic powers, students, etc.). Ultimately, the conflicts within universities were mostly a reflection of external tensions. Therefore, this was a particularly complex system where the specific French conditions of post-revolution developments, international competition and a change in social mentalities, played their role. Charle argues that after the period of stagnation and the radical changes at the turn of the 19th century, social changes led to the French university system losing all of its autonomy, which it then began trying to "discover" with difficulty in the last thirty years of the 19th century. In other countries there were conflicts between the old autonomous area of the universities and social, political and intellectual forces which tried to limit this autonomy in the name of "external imperatives", whether these were economic developments, social requirements, international intellectual competition or a new political situation.

From the above we can see the fragility and fragmentation of the modern university environment, and the almost permanent struggle for independence and autonomy, a struggle which had varying degrees of success. It is clear that this struggle was carried out within the specific conditions of the different multinational empires (Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, Russia), and the different national states, which gave a modern tone to education (France, Germany).

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36 Charle, Christophe: *Le République des universitaires*. Paris 1994, introduction.

## The great ideologies of the 19th and 20th centuries

However, there can be no doubt that the greatest attack on the freedom and continuity of university development, and on the foundations of university education, was led by the great ideologies of the 20th century and the state parties and political organizations which adhered to these ideologies and attempted to spread them within their own societies as well as outside. These were mainly the ideologies of National Socialism and communism as developed in Germany and the Soviet Union, or in those countries which were dependent on these powers during certain historical periods.<sup>37</sup> The National Socialist and communist systems affected both the university systems in the given countries as well as education in general, as they sought the unconditional subjugation and control of all its citizens, in particular the youth. It is possible to view these political ideologies as “political religions” as they wanted to convince people of the undisputed truth of their “sacred texts”, their faith in a charismatic leader and in human redemption through obedience, self-sacrifice, unconditional commitment and unwavering effort. According to an American professor from the University of California, James A. Gregor, the two totalitarian ideologies had a long pre-history which contained scientific or pseudo-scientific systems, and which, therefore, were of interest to academics and intellectuals from these countries. In the case of National Socialism this was a tradition of racism (Gobineau, Chamberlain), German culture (Wagner), and its own ideology (Rosenberg). In the case of communism, this was post-Hegelian German materialist philosophy (Marx, Engels) and a whole spectrum of European thinkers, as well as Russian socialists and anarchists. For both National Socialism and communism, this range of ideas, projects, utopian visions and plans to solve the problems of modernity led to an intellectual assemblage which was often attractive to intellectuals both within and outside of universities.

As regards the research into universities which were affected by the great ideologies of the 20th century, it is possible to mention the work of Michael Grüttner and his team which resulted from a conference held to mark the anniversary of the University of Jena in 2008. This looked at both the history of German universities and the history of science in the broadest sense of the word. The fundamental methodological issues which were described by Ralph Jessen and Jürgen John in

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<sup>37</sup> There is no room here to develop the complex and much-discussed issue of “totalitarianism” or “totalitarianisms” of the 20th century. From the enormous library devoted to this issue we might mention the Czech researcher Bedřich Loewenstein, who examined this problem in relation to the works of Hans-Joachim Maaz, Norbert Elias, Max Weber and other writers. Cf. Loewenstein, Bedřich: *Totalitarismus a moderna*, in: *My a ti druzí. Dějiny, psychologie, antropologie*. Brno 1998, pp. 306–313. Some original Czech thinkers who looked at the phenomenon of totalitarianism included the German Studies scholar and philosopher Rüdiger Preussner (1925–2007) and his trilogy *Kritika totalitarismu*.

the journal *Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte* in 2005<sup>38</sup>, can be summarized as follows. The authors focused on some very interesting areas: how scientists' self-understanding changes, how scientific institutions operate within different political systems and how academics have reacted to the ideological changes in modern history, how science has developed within and outside of universities in both democratic and totalitarian systems, how the continuity of science has worked and why discontinuity in development occurred, and how all of this operated in German universities in an entirely unique way. These contributions are invaluable to those who are interested in the institutional and personal failings during the 1930s and 1940s and in the decline of science. On the other hand, it is surprising in its evaluation of postwar developments as it also critically evaluates the period of de-Nazification implemented to only a small degree by German democrats. This is not surprising not only in relation to the attacks in the 1950s by East Germany on West German lawyers, but also regarding the open discussion on de-Nazification at the end of the 1960s and the subsequent well-known dispute between historians (when the careers of the generation linked to Nazism came to an end, large research projects began to examine professions and organizations, such as the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) and MPG (Max Planck Gesellschaft). Meanwhile, research into the history of science in East Germany is still in its infancy. This is why revealing the subservience and instrumentalization of science remains an important undertaking, which the authors of this book are aware of and encourage.

University institutions "between autonomy and adaptation" was examined from an international perspective by the authors of a volume compiled by John Connelly and Michael Grüttner published in 2003. Alongside Soviet and German universities with their Central European satellites, they also include examples from Italy (universities under Mussolini's dictatorship), Spain (universities during the dictatorship of Franco) and even China (the Sovietization of Chinese universities 1949–1952). The history of Czech universities was presented in Jan Havránek's clear and cogent paper,<sup>39</sup> which places communist higher education and the history of science within the context of developments during the First Republic. There is a comparison of the situations in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia, and he characterizes the transformation from a democratic to communist education system from 1945 to 1948, mentioning the important elements of the communist

38 Jessen, Rapph and John, Jürgen: *Wissenschaft und Universitäten im geteilten Deutschland der 1960er Jahre*, in: *Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte*, Band 8, Franz Steiner Verlag 2005.

39 Havránek, Jan: *Die tschechischen Universitäten unter der kommunistischen Diktatur*. In: Connelly, John – Grüttner, Michael: *Zwischen Autonomie und Anpassung: Universitäten in den Diktaturen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Paderborn 2003. The comparisons in this volume are only partial because some authors (Connelly, Stiffler) only look at a certain time period during the communist dictatorship, pp. 157–171.

dictatorship which developed in universities: action committees in universities, the exclusion of “non-progressive” teachers, changes to curriculum procedures, the Sovietization of the syllabus, the ideological “transformation” of teachers, classes in Marxism-Leninism, etc. He also persuasively describes the waves of Stalinization and de-Stalinization of the university system and the situation after the Prague Spring of 1968 – the period of Normalization. He sees in certain modern traditions, such as the tragic story of the students Jan Opletal (1915–1939) and Jan Palach (1948–1969), a crucial element in awakening the independence of university students. Other contributions look at specific features of different countries (the resistance of teachers to the regime in the 1950s in Hungary and Poland, the standing of the church and its educational institutions in Poland, the “national” aspects in Hungarian intellectual thought, the differences between authoritarian Spain, Italy and Nazi Germany, etc.), as well as certain similarities, in particular within the postwar communist bloc. Typical here was the “cultural revolution” which was partly related to the pre-war left-wing avant-garde. Jan Křen gave a quite precise characterization of the Stalinist-style “cultural revolution”, where he convincingly described the situation in the 1950s in artistic, cultural and scientific spheres within the framework of Central European history: *“Artistic and intellectual work was strictly limited and all of those who were thought unsuitable in the cultural community were mercilessly expelled; the spectrum of these restrictions was wide and ranged from ending careers and banning publications to police intervention. Among the victims of communist repression, the creative intelligentsia from the arts and humanities were represented in exceptionally large numbers. One of the paradoxes of the age was the way in which artists and movements from entirely opposing directions met in the artistic and social expulsion – the leaders of the pre-war left-wing avant-garde, artists from the democratic centre, and representatives from conservative agrarian ruralism and Catholic Modernists. Those who were unwilling to cooperate faced tragic fates, suicides, death sentences, long years in prison or emigration; the Nazi era aside, no other period brought such losses to the cultural community in these countries.”*<sup>40</sup> All that can be added is that this was also certainly the case for intellectuals from universities. Havránek and Hroch’s main thesis was later expanded upon by the historian Josef Petrání (1930–2017) in his extensive work on the history of Charles University’s Faculty of Arts,<sup>41</sup> where he also provided a Central European background, both in relation to the Faculty of Arts and Charles University, as well as the origins and development of the Czech Academy of Sciences, which according to its founders was to “create a lever for universities” and “at the same time, establish a way to systematically abolish older scientific institutions which did not submit to the central control

40 Křen, Jan: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Prague 2005, p. 629.

41 Petrání, Josef: *Filozofové dělají revoluci. Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy během komunistického experimentu (1948–1968–1989)*. In cooperation with Lydia Petrániová. Prague 2015.

and supervision of the communist regime.”<sup>42</sup> Petrůň’s work can also be considered as an example for other institutional histories – it contains both a history of structural changes as well as the personal stories of teachers, scientists and students. It also convincingly demonstrated that despite all of the efforts of the Stalinist functionaries and all of the restructuring and difficulties faced by the teaching body, Charles University’s Faculty of Arts and other institutes had an intellectual basis which the communist regime failed to completely destroy. Naturally, it was impossible to talk about “independence” and “autonomy” during the period 1948–1989, apart from certain moments of liberalization, which were followed by consolidation in terms of ideology and personnel. Even here there only existed “dreams of independence”.

## The failure of intellectuals

Petrůň’s work, in particular certain passages (including those dedicated to the Czech linguists Jan Mukařovský and František Trávníček), lead us to an issue which usually falls under the remit of the history of ideas – the so-called failure of or betrayal by intellectuals when faced by strong ideological pressure (existential or often life threatening). This is a complex matter which also relates to university culture for at least three reasons:

Firstly, it is not entirely clear what is meant by the word “intellectual”. It is a term which holds different meanings in different historical periods and in different countries (France, Russia, England). In Central Europe, the French interpretation has a relatively strong tradition (intellectuals as the “conscience of the nation”), which is not only due to the goals of the national movements within the multi-ethnic Austrian state, but also the cultural transfer of the French meaning with its roots in the famous case connected to the Manifesto of the Intellectuals, published in relation to the Dreyfuss affair in Paris in 1898.<sup>43</sup> In more recent times, resistance to the communist regime has also played its role – for example, the Czech Charter 77 had a very strong “moral dimension”, referring to the “voice of conscience”.

Secondly, the theme of betrayal by intellectuals is only partially applicable to university culture because intellectuals are not just scientists or people who went through university. On the contrary, sometimes they are people who stand apart from universities, which they view as socially sterile and obstacles to true social

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 223.

<sup>43</sup> The standing of intellectuals has been examined over the long term by Czech thinkers such as Mikuláš Lobkowicz, an emigre working in Germany (Munich, Eichstätt). Cf. Lobkowicz, Mikuláš: *Duše Evropy*. Prague 2001. In particular the chapter „Intelektuál: prorok, nebo metafyzický revolucionář?“, pp. 60–69.

engagement. Intellectuals like to comment on the present (it is almost one of the “defining marks” of intellectuals), unlike “strict” academics who only observe their science and the allegedly objective reality hidden underneath the “daily froth”.

When we look at the European university and interpretations of it, we cannot overlook the relative importance which universities and colleges attach to moral or immoral behaviour, especially in relation to revolutions and the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. Universities in Central Europe were not able to completely rid themselves of the influence of intellectuals and their ideals – the universities in Prague and Brno are good examples.

The theme of betrayal by intellectuals is endless. There are more and more discussions in universities and elsewhere about the number and role of intellectuals who stood on the side of fascism, Nazism and communism. Interpretations are often based on emotional standpoints, and often popularize different individuals and their motivations without much critical evaluation. This is the case for universities across Europe where there are high-quality works on the “failings” of this type and of individuals from the West such as Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger, Knut Hamsun, Giovanni Gentili, Jean Paul Sartre and Herbert Marcuse. Central and Eastern Europe, though, have followed with more superficial or moralistic interpretations.<sup>44</sup> It was certainly the case that intellectuals from universities and colleges, as well as people for whom the word intellectual was used more as a pejorative term, had a problem in the 20th century defending their independence against ideologies and attacks by ideological regimes, leading to considerable ethical problems.

The complexity of the whole matter is also due to the fact that although certain prominent authors succumbed to the allure of great utopian projects and ideologies, their works were also some of the best to be published in their field. In German culture this could be applied to the political philosopher Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), who alongside his Nazi ravings wrote important books on legal and political thought. From a Czech perspective, one example was the theologian from Charles University, Josef L. Hromádka (1889–1969), who in addition to his important work in the fields of dogmatic and ecumenical theology and inspirational pastoral work, also worked on behalf of the communist regime after 1948, and even created a complicated theological construct to substantiate and justify these activities.<sup>45</sup>

The difficulty in interpretation is down to the fact that intellectuals and academics bombarded the public with publications which were often interesting and influential, where they explained their positions and defended any of their fail-

44 This does not mean that important, high-quality works do not exist. Some have been translated into Czech, such as Kervégan, Jean-François: *Co s Karlem Schmittem?* Prague 2015.

45 Morée, Peter – Piškula, Jiří: „Nejpokrokovější církevní pracovník“. *Protestantské církve a Josef Lukl Hromádka v letech 1945 – 1969*. Benešov 2015.

ings, which naturally their opponents did not forget to use in their critical publications. Central Europe is also a relatively rich area for similar discussions, albeit that these are more expressions of journalistic and media gratitude than critical, academic analyses. This is probably because in the Czech historical community the genre of intellectual history and the history of ideas has not been particularly well developed, while there also remains a certain academic reticence towards sensitive ethical themes.

A good example of a national discussion was one which was carried out over several decades and partly involved the world of academia – the debate surrounding the memoirs of the literary historian Václav Černý (1905–1987), which were first published in exile and then again after 1989.<sup>46</sup> Černý approached the “failure of intellectuals” in a very sharp and caustic manner, without attempting to hide his subjective viewpoint. Regarding Charles University, he not only cogently described its fall after 1948 and the tragedy of the university act of October 1950 (which he compared to the White Mountain catastrophe), but he also evaluated structural and personnel issues: *“The act suspended free intellectual thought at the university and in this sense put an end to its reason for existing; university humanism replaced by the trough of prescribed ideology and party propaganda. Intellectually independent people now had no business being there – neither professors nor students. There were several waves of expulsions of nonconformist teachers, regardless of the outcome for the school, science and the students. Then a vetting pogrom of students was organised based on their social background and beliefs, ignoring their talents, the future of national culture, or any justice or human sensitivity for young people. Informing, denunciation and spying on teachers and students was carried out at an official level.”*<sup>47</sup> Černý was also criticized by the democratic intelligentsia (he was “damned” by orthodox communists and strongly criticized by reformists) for his sweeping generalizations as well as passing his private experiences for general trends. However, this writer demonstrated the irreplaceable role of the intellectual-academic in the public environment at a time when it was necessary to publish personal accounts. His work and the writings of others show that during the totalitarianism of the 20th century, it was a matter of preserving the absolute basics in education and morality on which creative human freedom rests.

Fortunately, the theme of “the failure of intellectuals” also contains the aspects of their “non-failure”, i.e. the ability to resist all forms of totalitarianism and ideology. If we were to produce one example from many, practically a role model, then we could name the Czech theoretician, art historian and archaeologist

46 Černý, Václav: *Paměti I–III*. Brno 1992–1994.

47 Černý, Václav, c. d., III. vol, p. 271.



Růžena Vacková (1901–1982).<sup>48</sup> Naturally, she paid a high price for her protest: in February 1948 she was the only teacher from Charles University to take part in a student march to address President Edvard Beneš at the Castle, and at the same time spoke up for those teachers deemed unsuitable by the new regime. Her strong moral position did not go unpunished: she was sacked from her post in 1952 and sentenced to 22 years in prison as part of the “Mádr et al” show trial. From 1952–1967 (sic!) she spent time in prison in Znojmo, Nový Jičín, Pardubice, Ruzyně and Pankrác, Opava, Ilava and Ostrava nad Ohří. She became a credit to Czech higher education as even in the difficult conditions in jail she was able to communicate her thoughts and she often lectured for her fellow inmates.<sup>49</sup> Vacková thus became an example of freedom within complete “non-independence”, which is something quite exceptional.

## University freedom as an arduous undertaking

It might appear that the collapse of the USSR in 1989 and the liberation of Central Europe from dictatorship – which in the 1970s and 1980s meant censorship and the rejection of a plurality of ideas and personal legal recourse within universities and academia – also meant an end to those ideologies which had stifled science and academics throughout the entire 20th century. It might have looked this way at the start of the 1990s across a whole swathe of countries which had once more acquired their independence. State independence should also have meant independence for all of its institutions. However, initial enthusiasm soon cooled as it became apparent that it was impossible to introduce democratic structures overnight, and that the destruction had not only hit institutions, but also people’s thinking and mentality. In any case, much was accomplished. Large and small universities in Central Europe gradually regained their lost self-assurance and re-established their former eminence as well as their international contacts, which had previously been directed entirely towards countries from the “Eastern Bloc”. Added to this trend was also a kind of optimism, as in the 1990s there was the general conviction that it was possible in the new era to establish a multitude of new institutions, as there seemed to be a hunger for education which could not be satiated in just the large intellectual centres, but also in the regions.

Soon, however, problems began to appear. At first some intellectuals began to point to the fact that the end of communist utopia and concepts of “a class-free happy tomorrow” did not spell the end of all utopias, that we were still exposed

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48 Cf. Gjuríčová, Adéla: 20. stoletím s čistým štítem i utkvělými představami: Růžena Vacková. In: Marek, Pavel – Hanuš, Jiří (eds.): *Osobnost v církvi a politice*. Brno 2006, pp. 546–556.

49 Vacková, Růžena: *Vězeňské přednášky*. Prague 1999.



to several destructive influences (which was also the case for universities!), which forced us to adapt our ideas about independence and forced us – as the older ideologies did – into a type of behaviour which took away our freedom. Here we can look at three warnings from various facets of university life in Central Europe. According to the Krakow philosopher Ryszard Legutko (1949), one major contemporary problem that causes us great confusion is mass culture, which penetrates into and upsets the entire education system. In his view, therefore, we have been naïve to expect that a democratization of culture would lead to progress in the grand march of intellectual and aesthetic development, introducing life and dynamism to the existing hierarchy. Mass culture becomes a danger which democratic institutes are incapable of confronting and instead succumb to it: *“Education increasingly turns towards mass ideas and, therefore, the intellectual horizon typical for the majority. One interesting example is to observe the changes in school textbooks and manuals where references to mass culture, the mass aesthetic and an imagination formed by television or mass entertainment predominate. There is a widespread belief that education which ignores these relationships is ineffective. Children are perceived as a democratic electorate who have to be approached using various forms of persuasion and whom it is necessary to cajole, enliven, encourage, but how they will finally make decisions will depend entirely on them.”*<sup>50</sup> Legutko’s warning is not only applicable to primary and secondary schools, but also to universities, as it is there where they have to contend with the results of such educated youth. It is clear that “mass culture” is a phenomenon which goes hand in hand with democratic societies and its ideas of equality, and thus it is very difficult to avoid its influence.

The famous Austrian thinker Konrad Liessmann (1953) has a similarly critical, albeit less pessimistic outlook, and his works on university education and the character of our age have been widely translated and discussed in Central European intellectual circles. In his most famous book, Liessmann criticized the semi-education or even non-education spreading across universities and colleges, which are characterized by their emphasis on the different world rankings (PISA), attempts at reforms which bring a worse situation than before (the Bologna Process), and instead he called for the old (basically Humboldtian) model where universities did not chase after performance points. His observations concerning university autonomy deserve attention: *“This so-called university autonomy, which has taken root in many areas over recent years, gives the impression that it responds exactly to the demands for freedom in study and research. Universities have a guaranteed budget to cover at least the basic equipment and essential needs for teaching, and can to a large extent make decisions concerning employees and the listed fields of study. It is naturally curious that at those universities where the transfer to autonomy had been completed that the space for free decision-making had not expanded, but had in fact been restricted on*

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50 Legutko, Ryszard: *Oškřivenost demokracie a jiné eseje*. Brno 2009, pp. 24–25.

*all levels. University autonomy in institutional and economic terms does not mean a free university. Autonomy can often be a euphemism for insufficient administration, which the state leaves to the universities themselves in order to save money. And through budgets, academic surveys and European directives, universities remain just as dependent on politicians as before. The joint financing by external sources, the existence of accreditation and evaluation agencies, and the interference by university boards to a greater extent in university affairs leave obvious marks.*<sup>51</sup>

It is not necessary to agree with all of the Austrian philosopher's conclusions. On the other hand, it is interesting that similar criticisms have also appeared independently in different places. For example, the aspect of universities being subject to "practical interests" and the implementation of market principles within universities has been criticized by a group of British humanist and science scholars, and they also pointed to the paradox mentioned by Liessmann – what was initially had been emphasized as the quality of a university eventually became a burden which bureaucratized universities, and when combined with government intervention tended to damage the overall system.<sup>52</sup> The fact that critics have been heard from different areas saying similar things would suggest it is not just the work of some bitter cultural pessimists who do not want important reforms (even though such people can be found in universities!).

In recent years, however, criticisms concerning the bureaucratization of universities and the restriction of freedom have been connected to the European Union, its projects and overall strategy for higher education development. Many people have warned that the aim of a united policy pushed forward by the current liberal ideology (multiculturalism, gender and environmental themes, political correctness, the rejection of traditional values, the illusion of technology's ability to solve all problems), and the complex project mechanisms, confuse and place a burden on the existing national higher education systems. The application of the Union's "calendar plans" destroy academic creativity (as did the communists' Five-Year Plans). Gottfried Schatz (1936), a professor of biochemistry from Basel has warned, for example, that: *"Knowledge is precious, but we should not overestimate it. Our schools, our universities and our politicians responsible for research focus too much on knowledge and thus often suppress independent and critical thinking, i.e. science. The public and also, unfortunately, many research experts believe that research is a strictly logical process, which requires the researcher to patiently place stone upon stone until the meticulously planned building is finished. Innovative research, however, works exactly the other way round: it is intuitive, rarely predictable, full of surprises and sometimes even chaotic, all of which also applies to innovative art. Both innovative art*

51 Liessmann, Konrad Paul: *Teorie nevzdělanosti. Omyly společnosti vědění*. Prague 2010, p. 84.

52 Cf. Ohrožení britských univerzit (Rada na obranu britských univerzit a Manifest reformy), Kontexty V., 1 (2013), pp. 45–49.

*and science cannot be compared to strolls along clean streets, but rather to expeditions into unknown territories, where artists and scientists often get lost.*"<sup>53</sup> There are also some Czech university professors who are not afraid to criticize the Union's existing education policy as "social engineering" of a sort. For example, the biologist and philosopher Stanislav Komárek has repeatedly brought attention to the growth in the number of diplomas, the expansion of the term "university" ("The University of Local Studies and Tourist Management in Smallville"), the disintegration of the term "cultural heritage" and the erosion of the meaning of education.<sup>54</sup> He states: *"When I see the gigantic and uncommonly generous programmes of the European Union under the pressure of integrating European education and research in often bizarre bureaucratic projects, where they have calculated precisely the number of institutions from different regions of the continent which have to work together, along with the percentage of women and young people involved, then I can't help but feel anxious."*<sup>55</sup> Although many university researchers do not express themselves so succinctly, they are also often thinking the same thing.

## Conclusion

The myth of freedom and autonomy, and the exaggerated expectations concerning both values, can be seen in issues which face us today. These should be described and analysed by academics and intellectuals who are part of the university environment and know its weaknesses. In addition, it is necessary to give a precise definition of the borders of the "independence" of science as well as university institutions. The 20th century showed how important this independence is, while the present teaches us how delicate a fabric independence creates, how complex the issue of free research is within institutions and how problematic and counter-productive attempts at reforms (even necessary ones) can be. University freedom is a fragile flower which not only needs care, but the right type of care. Otherwise it will die.

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53 Schatz, Gottfried: *Skutečné vzdělání namísto pouhého zprostředkování znalostí*. Kontexty VII., 3/2015, p. 33.

54 Cf. Komárek, Stanislav: *Evropa na rozcestí*. Prague 2015, pp. 259–261.

55 Ibid, p. 260.