

University PR and Efforts to Prevent Research Misconduct

University PR and Efforts to Prevent Research Misconduct:

Gold, Glory and Integrity

By

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PROLOGUE

ACADEMIC DIVISIONS

Gold, glory and integrity belong in different categories. They are not immediately compatible; perhaps they are not compatible at all. Integrity, in particular, seems an incongruent and fragile companion to glory and, even more so, to gold. Nevertheless, both gold, glory and integrity are significant to today's universities and, therefore, the subtle quality of integrity—academic integrity, research integrity¹—must somehow be protected from the not very subtle cravings for gold and glory that have become so pronounced in the world of learning and knowledge.

Against that background, this book, composed of three interconnected and slightly overlapping essays, concerns three interconnected themes. The first theme is the rise of gold and glory as markers of academic success, accompanied by a transformation of universities into business corporations. Then, there is the rise of institutional communication and Public Relations (PR) activities as, at the same time, expressions and drivers of that transformation, and the third theme is the dealings of those who, struggling to maintain research integrity, are concerned with issues connected to the transformation. Together, the three essays constitute a pamphlet in the sense of “a brief work dealing with some question of current interest (about which the author wishes to appeal to the public)”². The question of current interest relates to the fact that universities are key institutions of current knowledge economies but, at the same time, might lose their significance as key cultural institutions. Not all of us would like that to happen.

Different university worlds

Current universities advertise themselves. To do so, they employ professional staff, frequently more numerous than the staff of many academic departments. Their job is to create an image that is attractive to funding organisations,

¹ I take academic integrity to include issues relating to teaching. In general, such issues, although important, belong beyond the scope of this book.

² Barnhart, *Dictionary of Etymology*.

prospective industrial partners, professors with supposed star qualities and, not least, future students—sources of income from tuition fees or the public purse. PR exercises are a matter of course and PR officers are welcomed into the upper echelons of university management.

Current universities also tend to furnish themselves with strategies aimed at protecting research integrity—strategies, that is, to prevent fraud and academic misconduct in general among their researchers and students. The existence of such strategies is becoming increasingly widespread. It is almost a matter of course and seems, to some extent, to serve as a token of virtue. The research integrity strategies are somewhat easier to identify on university web pages than the strategies behind the PR exercises, the majority of which appears to be stored very discreetly indeed.

The two kinds of strategy relate to different understandings of the modern university as an institution. PR or marketing activities, belonging in the wider field of communication³, can be seen in a rather straightforward way as expressions of a view of universities as business corporations. From that point of view, students are consumers and prospective products, knowledge is a commodity, and researchers are labourers in a growing field of knowledge production. Strategies to protect and further research integrity, on the other hand, appear to be built on slightly more ambiguous foundations. However, there is an obvious connection to a view of universities as moral authorities, knowledge as a public and perhaps even sanctified good, and students and researchers as moral agents with particularly strong obligations to behave blamelessly and safeguard public trust in scientific knowledge claims or, more broadly, in academic activity at large.

The two kinds of strategy have something in common as well: they are novelties in the world of academia. Half a century ago, neither of them existed as a feature of universities. What has happened? Why did they not form part of the basic university equipment fifty years ago? Why are they taken to be standard accessories today? Are they somehow substantially connected, and how do they get on together?

They do appear an unlikely couple, the money-maker and the moralist, one ballyhooing in the marketplace, the other somewhat stern, thin-lipped and with raised fingers. Moreover, they do not appear to be on true speaking terms. Nevertheless, they are somehow interconnected. As university phenomena, they came into being at about roughly the same time; PR activities were taking the lead but research integrity concerns followed

³ I use the terms of communication, Public Relations (PR) and marketing activities interchangeably, as there does not seem to be any substantial difference in university settings.

close on their heels. Both can be seen as expressions of mentality transformations brought about by changes in the conditions for carrying out academic activity and affecting the understandings—within universities and in society at large—of the mores and means of universities.

It is not at all easy to figure out, however, how Public Relations exercises, on the one hand, and formalised efforts to protect research integrity, on the other, might be expressing, and perhaps even furthering, the very same mentality transformations. Do both kinds of effort draw in the same direction, or should they rather be seen as conflicting responses to the changing circumstances in academia, expressing different intellectual and moral positions towards those changes? Are they, in effect, supporting each other or should we rather see them to be at odds? It might prove fertile to view the almost simultaneous rise and subsequent growth of the two kinds of effort as a symptom of an innate but increasingly neglected split-identity condition of academia.

The fields of, respectively, research integrity maintenance and PR, then, can be seen as representatives of different stances towards recent and current developments within and surrounding academia. They appear as possible participants in a discussion, currently largely ignored, about the significance of universities: what are they for? What should they do? And, insofar as universities are key institutions of current knowledge societies, what understanding of the notion of knowledge society should they support and further? Are they seats of enlightenment and, if so, what understanding of enlightenment do or should they represent? The notion of *progress* in the sense of increasing human control of nature springs to mind as one such interpretation. The notion of cultivation (*Bildung*) to further the capacity for intellectual activity and ethical reflection in individuals constitutes quite another interpretation. Both notions occupy important and to a high degree conflicting positions in the history of the modern European university. Together, they constitute an intellectually stimulating tension of crucial significance to the institution.

Silent interaction

As already noted, the two fields do not appear to take much notice of each other. Rooted in different academic and professional areas, both forming part of the history of modern universities, each seems to go about its own business much as if the other field did not exist. Moreover, both fields rely on different modes of operation. The PR field presents models of successful behaviour, indirectly inviting researchers and students to mimic the models and do what they appear to be doing: “if you do what they do, you will get

on well”. The research integrity field uses a more direct approach, telling researchers and students how to behave: “do what you are told to do and be honest”. The models to be mimicked and the messages to be minded belong in different dimensions of reality, and the interaction between the fields is mostly indirect and silent.

PR exercises come with significant constitutive side effects that are likely to have an impact on efforts to maintain research integrity. The way a university presents itself to the world is, at the same time, an indirect message to the population of the university. It provides them with an official image of the institution—an image that it would be prudent to mirror. Thus, it may affect the identity and mentality of the university population, including understandings among scholars, researchers and students of what should be seen as, respectively, academic successes or failures, and what is considered praiseworthy and, thus, worth striving for. That, in turn, may influence researchers’ ambitions and criteria of success and inform attempts to emulate the bright images of success presented by the communication professionals. As a possible consequence, actual research conduct and attitudes to research conduct may be affected.

The other way around, efforts to maintain research integrity may have an impact on the public image of a university. The introduction of research integrity guidelines may do something to repair damages to the image insofar as guidelines are introduced in the wake of a spectacular and widely publicised case of misconduct, demonstrating that the university management is tough on poor conduct. However, it would of course have been preferable if such guidelines had been unnecessary in the first place. Although they may serve as tokens of virtue—in particular if they are introduced as a response to a case of fraud that has occurred at another institution—the very mention of research integrity as an issue tends to come with the implication that all is not well in the world of academe. The guidelines tell the university population how to behave and what kind of punishment they should expect in case they break the rules, but it is somewhat embarrassing that they have to be told. The topic does not form part of any recipe for success and it is hardly considered a temptation by communication officers. As a consequence, possibly, research integrity guidelines are rarely placed prominently on university web pages—they *can* be found, but not without some effort.

Conflicting understandings

The marketing efforts and efforts to protect academic integrity, respectively, can be seen as current expressions of conflicting understandings, not only

of the university as an institution but also of learning and knowledge in general. Counterposed, they might facilitate an otherwise almost muted conflict acquiring a voice, or rather several voices. It might then be dealt with discussion-wise.

Research integrity guidelines aim at maintaining an ethos of independent enquiry, keeping particular interests at bay. They include aspects of consideration for learning and knowledge in their own right and for universities as societal—cultural and economic—institutions. Conversely, PR efforts are of a strategic nature. They are unambiguous markers of universities as business corporations, competing in the marketplace to further their own particular interests, their prestige and financial means.

There are no time-honoured equivalents to today's extensive and systematic marketing efforts, targeted, at the same time, at university members and the surrounding world and aimed at blowing up the fame of individual universities to improve their competitive power. These efforts belong, in a straightforward way, in the global marketplace and may—to the extent that they affect the mentality of scholars, researchers and students—increase the demand for measures to protect academic integrity, for ethical or strategic reasons. Passages of national German, Dutch and Danish guidelines indicate an incipient recognition of the ethical significance of university PR endeavours as activities that may conflict with efforts to protect academic integrity.⁴

Both kinds of activity may affect the mental climate of an institution. At the same time, each can be seen as the expression of a mentality. Thus, they may be perceived as expressions of two different mentalities. Each draws on different strands of the history of universities and is carried by a professional community with roots in academia. Although both communities are concerned, one way or another, with the reputation of universities, they do not appear to be close or, indeed, to communicate about matters of shared concern.

The seeming conflict may, however, also be perceived as an imaginary one. The argument can be made that both kinds of activity are concerned with establishing and maintaining the reputation of particular universities and that both activities constitute modern management tools—efforts to maintain academic integrity preconditioning the marketing efforts. To follow the argument, one has to adopt an understanding of efforts to maintain academic integrity as, basically, strategic efforts, only concerned with ethics as an extra accessory if it is expected to pay off, or, if it might

⁴ *Netherlands Code of Conduct*; Universities Denmark, “Principles of Good Research Communication”; Wissenschaft im Dialog, *Leitlinien zur Guten Wissenschafts-PR*.

damage the reputation of the institution in question to abstain from demonstrating care for such concerns. Would that be a more adequate characterisation of current efforts to protect academic integrity? Or should we be looking for something in between?

The research integrity field seems somewhat ambiguous. Traces of collegiality and managerialism, and of ethical concerns and strategic considerations can be discovered at the same time. Whereas PR activities undoubtedly belong among the modern management instruments, it would be much less straightforward to make the case that efforts to maintain academic integrity belong in the same line of activities. Moreover, the seeming lack of mutual exchange does not indicate that representatives of both fields of activity have as a rule adopted a shared management identity.

The field of professional communication is concerned primarily with the efficiency of its efforts. To facilitate ethical considerations, they must be added on as an extra. Few things are clear-cut in the research integrity field. However, it seems basically informed by ethical concerns. Strategic and ethical concerns belong in different dimensions of human action: Lying or cheating may for instance prove inefficient, but that is an altogether different observation from the consideration that lying and cheating are wrong.

In everyday university life, it is hardly possible to avoid side effects of the PR efforts, informed by the competitive mentality of the global market and by the dependence of academic institutions on public images suited to attract students, researchers and funding and achieve top positions in rankings. The worst-case scenario, of course, would be the unintended creation of incentives to achieve success by way of cutting corners. Not quite as serious, but still problematic are incentives to sweep actual cases of misconduct under the carpet, thus introducing (or perhaps maintaining) a culture of secrecy or habits of turning a blind eye to kinds of fraud that might, if successful, improve the image of an institution.⁵ PR concerns, in short, are hardly conducive to a culture of openness about misconduct.

The case can be made—is in fact frequently made—that secrecy does not pay if an actual case of fraud has been disclosed. That, however, is merely a strategic consideration. From a research integrity point of view, openness about threats to academic integrity—including, but not delimited to actual cases of misconduct—may inspire critical exchanges and serve a purpose of learning by example, thereby buttressing the integrity of an institution from a long-term perspective. Furthermore, such openness can

⁵ See for example Burchard, “Plagiate im Studium”.

be seen as an element of academic integrity and an ethical obligation regardless of how it may affect the institutional image.

It is the express purpose of research integrity guidelines to further research conduct according with the highest academic standards. Such conduct, obviously, is not expected to come naturally. It does not seem a farfetched assumption that the accumulation of incentives to misbehave is and has been driving the introduction of research integrity guidelines. Scholars and researchers are no longer merely competing for “honour”—the history of universities tells us that could be bad enough. Much more is at stake, mostly of a financial nature and definitely not in line with ideals of science as an almost other-worldly enterprise with immunity to financial and social temptations. Uneasiness caused by the presence of such incentives probably forms part of the background of the efforts to protect academic integrity. Currently, the incentives are proudly on display in the marketing efforts of universities.

Undoubtedly, both kinds of activity—PR and marketing efforts and efforts to protect academic integrity—are recent phenomena in their present scope, but there may have been forerunners. When and where? We need to know more about the historical context that gave rise to and nurtured the present activities if we are to deal in a fertile way with what appear, at first glance at least, as manifestations of a fundamental, but muted conflict between or among different understandings of the university as an institution.

Conflicting interests

The introduction of PR strategies and research integrity guidelines has coincided with or followed in the wake of more fundamental transformations of academic institutions. In 1988, it still made some sense to argue that “[u]niversities, however, are not profit-oriented corporations”.⁶ It could be used as a premise, although already debatable in the 1980s, for discussions about deceptions in scientific research. Today, however, that premise is definitely no longer valid. Current universities are, indeed, profit-oriented corporations and it has become a commonplace to identify them as sites of (knowledge) production in the global marketplace.

During a very long stretch of time—we are talking about centuries, even millennia, although changes have occurred particularly rapidly during the most recent half century—the basic understanding of academic endeavours has been turned upside down. In antiquity, such endeavours were generally expected to be disconnected from the sphere of production

⁶ Woolf, “Deception in Scientific Research”, p. 86.

with its basis in biological and other material necessities and with its characteristics of coercion and aims of control.⁷ Knowledge and understanding were appreciated as goods in their own right. The classical understanding has been severely challenged but never annihilated and is likely to have retained some influence at the back of many academics' mind. In often curiously roundabout ways, it is still present in the language, for instance in the expression that something is "merely of academic interest", meaning that it has no instrumental significance.

Today's dominant understanding, however, is rooted in another view of learning and knowledge. Roughly, since the end of World War II, understandings from the tradition of the natural and social sciences have gained momentum and now inform ideas and ideals of the university as an institution worldwide. Instrumental understandings of learning and knowledge, as precursors of technological innovation and the generation of wealth, are predominant in the tradition of empirical science. Such understandings—major drivers of the development of knowledge economies—are no longer reserved for the sciences but have made their entry into the humanities as well. Forming part of a wider trend to interpret almost anything imaginable as a sort of production, academic endeavours are now widely seen to constitute precisely a kind of production, and thus, to be integrated into the sphere of production and tied to the marketplace. Thereby, of course, traditional ideals of academic independence and integrity are taking on new meanings and new complications arise.

In particular, conflicts of interest have become a major issue. Authors of research integrity guidelines struggle with the issue as their key challenge. Communication officers are there to further the interests of their particular institutions, which, in turn, cooperate and compete with lots of other interested parties.

Conflicts of interest form part of current university life and are unlikely to go away. They are companions of instrumental knowledge. But, how did the view of academic research as a kind of production become so dominant as to almost exclude any other understanding? And, how is it related to, first, the advent of marketing efforts on a massive scale on behalf of individual universities and, second, the apparent rise of sufficiently grave and extensive problems with academic integrity to trigger formalised efforts to protect that integrity?

Movements to achieve social equality by way of education for all became prominent when, in the 1960s and 1970s, instrumental understandings of learning and knowledge were adopted as mainstream understandings all

⁷ Arendt, "Kultur und Politik".

over Europe. If, according to the logic of the movements, knowledge was power and a tool for the generation of wealth, and if learning was a means to improve the social standing of individuals, then all ought to gain access to that power, those tools. The movements—particularly strong, probably, in the Nordic countries—have more or less withered away. Social equality was not achieved. As a negative side effect of the well-meaning efforts, however, a reductive view of learning—as primarily a symbol of status and a tool for improving one’s social status—may have become even more firmly embedded than it was in the first place. It may have left the academic world more vulnerable because the view of learning and knowledge as no more than tools lacks an inherent ethical dimension.

Theoretically, the present dominance of an instrumental view of learning might be taken to result in a need to compensate for its flaws through the introduction of integrity guidelines and control systems to protect academic integrity. One should keep in mind, however, that it is far from being a new assumption that universities confer elite status onto their members and provide them with a prestigious aura of learning.

Instrumental understandings of learning and knowledge are not exactly newcomers. Modern science has been influenced by the understanding of knowledge as a tool to control nature and better the human condition from its very beginning. So have modern universities. In their present size, at least, they would not have existed without it. Only, it has not been the completely dominant view. Other views have been around. There has been disagreement, tensions. When did they cease to inspire critical exchanges of any consequence?

Associations or operating agencies—or both?

There are no definite, correct or true answers to these questions. They are not empirical questions although they include aspects that might benefit from empirical enquiry. They are, first and foremost, matters for reflection and discussion. As such, they seem suited to the format of the essay: explorative; developing, probing into and qualifying a thesis; based on a point of view but aware that there are other views around; drawing on multiple sources; giving room for historical and philosophical aspects; committed to truthfulness but making no strong knowledge claims; and more concerned with asking questions than with answering them.

The essays that follow concern, respectively, the overall development of universities and idea(1)s of universities in Europe, the development of university communication and marketing efforts, and the development of efforts to maintain research integrity. Not being a specialist in any of those

fields, I am mainly concerned with their interconnections. There is an enormous amount of literature and documentary sources on offer that might contribute to throwing light on the questions, and any reader might be annoyed that I have skipped her or his favourite source or author or that I have quoted others so extensively. As it is, the quotations—many of them fairly old—mainly serve the purpose of documenting that certain positions have been held and certain influences have made themselves felt although they may be widely and conveniently forgotten.

My research has combined extensive background reading and web-based searches so as to get a grip of—and to some degree be able to document—the various understandings and positions that are or have been significant to the development of European universities, their communication and PR efforts and their dealings with challenges to the integrity of researchers. The outcomes of the research have come with a good deal of surprises when compared to my expectations. I take that as a reassuring sign of having achieved a degree of thoroughness that may serve my purpose of inspiring reflection and exchange on the future fate of the modern European university as an institution. It should be kept in mind, however, that I have drawn primarily on written material from the English, German and Nordic language areas.⁸ My perspective is European, mainly Northern European.⁹

The most attentive readers—those who read the notes—will discover that I have singled out a score of authors and other sources as particularly interesting specimens of their time and place and, therefore, have made frequent references to them and used them almost as participants in a series of panel discussion.¹⁰ The same group of readers will find that I have

⁸ The languages are not wholly comparable. Sometimes, therefore, the original wording appears in a note when I quote from Nordic or German sources.

⁹ Some might consider the choice of a European perspective a regrettable expression of eurocentrism. To me, however, the term of eurocentrism should be confined to those who simply deny the existence of any other valuable models of thought and insist that European models should be imposed on the rest of the world. That is not my point of view—only, I do think that everybody might have something to gain from European universities reconsidering the basic ideas and ideals that have formed part of their history and influenced their development.

¹⁰ The frequently quoted sources include: Andersen et al., *Videnskabelig uredelighed*; Andersen, *Forskningsetik*; Casadevall (in various combinations); Chaffee and Rogers, “Establishment of Communication Study”; (German) Commission, *Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice*; Eigesen et al., *Fusk i forskning*; Hiney, *Research Integrity*; House of Commons, *Research integrity*; Liessmann, *Theorie der Unbildung*; Merton (several items); Noir sur Blanc, *Higher Education and the Challenges of Communication*; Ombudsman der DFG, *Umgang mit wissenschaftlichem Fehlverhalten*; Port Huron Statement; Readings, *University in*

anonymised quotes originating in documents from specific universities and only mention the country of origin. I have done so to maintain a principled argumentation and avoid the exposure of individual institutions.

It is, of course, not my intention to carry out the major undertaking of documenting the whole history of universities or of presenting original historical research. The intention is only to provide an historical overview, drawing on well-respected sources; to retell the university history with a focus on aspects that appear significant to the rise of research integrity problems and PR and communication activities as well as to understanding the main concerns and development of both fields.

When giving the overview, my point of reference is the understanding of modern universities as shelters for intellectual cultivation and independent and critical thought—classic idea(l)s of the modern European university as they were formulated a couple of centuries ago by German and British thinkers who saw the university as a crucial, cultural institution. They represented academic virtues that seem to be going out of circulation but might serve to prevent academic misconduct and, therefore, are in need of custodianship. I am fully aware that modern universities are economic actors, but if they end up as nothing but economic actors they will hardly be able to deal properly with the conflicts of interest they encounter in the sphere of production—regardless of the extent and intensity of their integrity policing—nor will they be able to serve wider cultural purposes.

My interpretative framework is informed by the assumption that the historical development of universities has been driven by a continuous tension between ideas and ideals of universities as, respectively, associations or operating agencies; seats of independent and cooperative intellectual activity or sites of production; institutions of reciprocity and collegiality or of formal hierarchy and managerialism.¹¹ Different understandings of academic learning and knowledge can be connected to those different understandings of the mores and means of universities.

I consider such tensions fertile, even necessary to the long-time survival of universities as vivid, societal institutions of intellectual enquiry and exchange—constantly questioning each other (and others) about current practices and their possible side effects. The strategic use of communication in the shape of PR and marketing exercises is one current practice—the

Ruins; Rosendaal, “Misdirected Allegations of Breaches”; Schramm, *Beginning of Communication Studies*; Woolf, “Deception in Scientific Research”.

¹¹ See Barnett, *Realizing the University*, p. 58 on collegiality and managerialism. The concepts were introduced into the university debate by Trow, “Managerialism and the Academic Profession”; a recent overview was provided by Rodriguez, “Strategic Management in Higher Education”.

introduction of guidelines to maintain research integrity is another. To the degree that they draw in different directions, do they draw with similar force? During the development of universities from medieval guilds to cultural institutions of nation states and on to global business corporations and production sites—when and why did communication strategies and formalised efforts to maintain research integrity come to be conceived as relevant and necessary to universities?

Questions to members

A 2020 world ranking counted 11,994 institutions as universities.¹² Other estimates conclude that between 25,000 and 30,000 institutions worldwide lay claim to the title of university.¹³ It is a much sought-after title or name and has been described as a reputational asset.¹⁴ A reasonable explanation for its popularity seems to be that it comes with an aura of serious study, dignity and integrity.¹⁵ In the material, I have gathered from university PR, however, surprisingly few traces can be found of claims to such qualities, even in the sense of purely symbolic references. In general, universities are presented as successful business corporations, committed to technological innovation and economic growth and offering their potential customers—students and to some extent their parents—superb commodities and services in the sense of prestigious certificates, acquired in charming and entertaining environments and leading to even more prestigious careers. One does not easily come across idea(l)s of university life as inner-directed and associative activity, based on reciprocity and collegiality and committed to independent, critical thought and a high degree of intellectual self-discipline.

Apparently, the understanding of the university as a business corporation has become institutionalised and is now widely conceived to be so self-evident as to require no vindication, no discussion.¹⁶ Relatively few seem to mind.

Some questions, nevertheless, are significant to all who perceive themselves to be, in a binding sense, members of universities: what side

¹² *Ranking Web of Universities*.

¹³ Duffin, “Number of Universities”; TruOwl, “How many universities exist”.

¹⁴ Rochford, “Academic Freedom as Insubordination”.

¹⁵ During a series of research interviews with members of the Danish parliament in 2004 I encountered, across political parties, a deeply felt sense of awe of the university as an institution of dignity and integrity: Meyer, *Offentlig fornøft?*, in particular p. 209.

¹⁶ The wording paraphrases Merton, “The Puritan Spur”, p. 230: “Institutionalized values are conceived as self-evident and require no vindication”.

effects might arise from the communication-cum-marketing-cum-PR efforts of universities? How might those efforts affect attitudes and the actual approaches to academic practice and ethics and, thus, at the end of the day, general understandings of research integrity and its preservation? Finally, who are likely to be attracted to the universities—driven by what motives—by the PR activities? In the long term, those attracted today constitute the basis of the future population of scholars and researchers. It might be of some consequence whether they are addressed and attracted as consumers of up-market travel arrangements or as potential members of societal institutions with obligations towards society at large.

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CHAPTER I

FROM MEDIEVAL GUILDS THROUGH CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS TO BUSINESS CORPORATIONS

The modern European university was never pure. It was born with tensions among conflicting ideas and ideals, endeavours and social forces, the growing apparatus of modern nation states among them along with communities of scholars intent on independent, intellectual enquiry or, simply, on earning their living. An abundance of particular interests and different points of view were present from the very beginning. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), widely recognised as the leading thinker on the continental European variety of modern universities, was very much aware of the tensions and discussed how to cope with them so as to give various positions their due and introduce practices of checks and balances to prevent one set of interests and understandings from gaining the upper-hand.¹ As he saw it, disagreement and tensions formed part and parcel of the modern university as an institution. It was not something to get rid of or lament. Rather, it was a fundamental feature that could, if properly dealt with, serve to secure institutional multifariousness.

Thus, insofar as European universities of today are faced with a crisis—now and again, warnings are issued about such a crisis, seen as a threat to the intellectual and moral standards of universities²—what constitutes that crisis and what has brought it about? The presence of particular interests is not a new feature. Rather, it appears to be inherent to the institution. The same is true of the existence of different and sometimes conflicting understandings of the institutional identity. Actually, the split-identity condition of academia can be seen as a hallmark of the modern

¹ Humboldt, *Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten*.

² See for instance: Golding, “UK Experience”; Lenzen, *Bildung statt Bologna*; Liessmann, *Theorie der Unbildung*; Readings, *University in Ruins*; Wittrock, “Det moderne universitets forvandling”.

European university. As a consequence, the impression of a crisis might be induced by the loss of such ambiguity and controversy.

Participants in the research integrity discourse insist that something has become perverted. “Perverse incentives”, indeed, appears to be one of the most frequent expressions of the discourse and one easily gets the impression that those perverse incentives are merely outcomes of the neoliberalism of the most recent decades. But, if ever the course of academia were perverted—that is, literally, turned upside down³—then it began a very long time ago. It began, then, when academic endeavours, in stark contrast to the framework of thought that was dominant in antiquity, became connected to the sphere of production, which was precisely what classical thinkers saw as anathema to the search for knowledge. It began when the term “school” lost touch completely with its original meaning from classical Greek of “free time”.⁴ It began when an instrumental view of knowledge became dominant and gradually transformed the purpose of academic activity. Or, it began when learning came to be seen primarily as a symbol of status, to be acquired in order to rise in a hierarchical social order. This view was opposed to an older view of learning as a higher-order kind of activity, accessible only to those leisured classes who were already on top of the social hierarchy (or who were sufficiently ascetic to renounce most material needs) and, thus, were considered adequately free and independent to take part in the pursuit of knowledge. Certainly, we would have to travel far back in time to identify the beginnings of those radical but at the same time gradual changes.

Scholars do not agree on the timing. In 1999, American historian and sociologist Steve Fuller⁵ referred to “the transition in the idea of research from leisure to labour, specifically one out of which people had to earn their entire living”. He was not specific, however, as to the timing of that transition. Exactly a century earlier, in 1899, Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), another American sociologist, clearly considered himself a midwife of the transition⁶, but the seed had been sown much earlier. It was at least latent in the seminal, Baconian characterisation of knowledge as power and can be seen as one of the driving forces behind the rise of modern science, as distinct from the humanities and the arts. The sciences, in turn, used centuries rather than decades to become fully acknowledged by universities, to cut—in the early nineteenth century—the parental ties to philosophy and

³ Barnhart, *Dictionary of Etymology*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Fuller, “Fit for Critical Intellectuals”.

⁶ Veblen, *Theory of Leisure Class*.

obtain their present status as representatives of the dominant, instrumental understanding of and approach to learning and knowledge.

Reputation

The name or title of a university has been characterised as a reputational asset that, per se, provides institutions with a good reputation—from the Latin *reputare*: to reflect upon, to reckon.

A good reputation may be an outcome of admirable conduct or of successful persuasive efforts. Sometimes people ascribe a poor reputation to somebody or something, fairly or unfairly. Considerable amounts of Public Relations (PR) efforts are put into attempts to prevent that from happening and to provide universities with a good reputation. The university name helps but is not sufficient to keep or build up appearances.

Both PR efforts and efforts to maintain research integrity are concerned, although in different ways, with the reputation of universities. PR activities aim at supporting the good reputation of individual universities. So do, probably, some efforts to maintain research integrity. The majority of the latter efforts, though, appear to be directed mainly at the maintenance of the reputation of the university as an institution or, alternatively, science as an institution—and they may, to some extent be undermined by the former efforts. A variety of the paradoxical phenomenon known as the tragedy of the commons may set in. The common interest in the reputation of the university as an institution may suffer, to the extent that individual institutions merely care for their own particular interest, their own particular reputation. Individual institutions may for instance decide on a policy of secrecy to avoid bad publicity from a case of research misconduct. If revealed, the reputation of the entire university institution is likely to suffer.

The gaining of momentum of the idea(l) of Progress in the early twentieth century, putting science on the centre stage as the primary tool to achieve economic growth and wealth, can be seen as the defining move that turned the general understanding of learning and knowledge upside down. Undoubtedly, however, it would be possible to point to a good many other examples of defining chains of events. So far, it should be noted, none of them has succeeded completely in eradicating other understandings of learning and knowledge.

Something similar is true of the view of universities as status factories, not frequented out of any love of learning but for purely instrumental reasons, in order to gain access to higher-level areas in the economic and social order. Universities of the eighteenth century and earlier

have been described as professional degree mills and elite universities, catering primarily for students who had no personal interest in their academic topics, but only studied to get a degree.⁷ French historian Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893) criticised Napoleon's university apparatus of the early nineteenth century as "a 'machine', a diploma factory, which stifled individuality and originality, enthroned mediocrity, and prevented the emergence of a true elite".⁸

Others identify such features at a much later stage and, for instance, characterise universities as "credentials mill[s] since the end of World War II"⁹, and some recognise such features as elements of current developments: "The university is turned into an agent of certification [...] taking leave of yet another part of the university that was intended to be a community of students and teachers".¹⁰

On the other hand—and more in line with classical thought—understandings of knowledge and learning as valuable in their own right and as constituting components of cultivation and independent thought also form part of the legacy of today's universities. Those understandings, in turn, although on the retreat, have no doubt significantly contributed to the high esteem of universities that university communication efforts are now drawing on. To some extent, actually, the life of university marketing officers may have been made easier because of a widespread assumption that universities belong beyond the marketplace, and to some university members, probably, that remains a defining feature of universities proper while others may feel secure as long as there is more than only one understanding along. As it is, there was never a general agreement on any substantial definition of the modern university as an institution. Rather, it has been a matter for continuous debate, drawing on different strands of the history of universities and serving to keep the institution intellectually alive.

THE GUILD TRADITION: AUTONOMY

Since around 1300, the term "university" has been used in English to signify an "institution of higher learning" or a "body of persons constituting a

⁷ Brockliss, "Gown and Town".

⁸ Anderson, *European Universities*, chap. 3, p. 12.

⁹ Fuller, "Fit for Critical Intellectuals".

¹⁰ My tentative translation from the German: "Die Universität wird zu einem Zertifizierungsorgan [...] verabschiedet wieder ein Stück jener Universität, die als Gemeinschaft der Lehrenden und Lernenden gedacht war", Liessmann, *Theorie der Unbildung*, pp. 111-112.

university”.¹¹ Like the Greek *demos*, thus, it has been used as a term for an area or institution *or* for a group of persons who inhabit the area or constitute the institution: Universities have been seen as institutions made up by their members. Originating in the Latin *universitatem* (corporation, society) from *universus* (whole, entire), the term arrived in German at about the same time and with similar connotations. It was used to signify a totality of teachers and students.¹² Universities consisted of scholars and students. Universities were associations. The same was true of “colleges”—“a body of scholars and students within a university”—sharing roots with colleague¹³ and with the notion of collegiality.

The very earliest European universities, founded in the twelfth century¹⁴, were neither called colleges nor universities. It took a couple of centuries for the university term to be established. In 1211, Pope Innocent III recognised the university in Paris as *universitas magistrorum et scholarium parisiensis* and thereby provided it with the status of a legal corporation.¹⁵ A couple of decades later, the term *studium generale* was brought into use to signify what scholars and students were doing within the framework of their associations: They were occupied with general studies as distinct from training to learn a specific craft.¹⁶ At the same time, however, late medieval schools for lawyers and medics also formed part of the basis of universities. Some of their teachers gained a reputation so that they attracted students from other places, a phenomenon that facilitated the development of universities as “sworn associations and self-governing corporations made up by the totality of masters, or by the totality of masters and students, in a certain town”.¹⁷

The medieval guild served as a general model for the development of universities even though some early universities were founded by the church as continuations of convent schools—known from around 800—or, in particular at a later stage, by local princes. The guild was the medieval model for collective enterprises at large. Craftsmen and merchants, in particular, joined in guilds to serve and protect their trade and, at the same time, accepted a mutual obligation to offer guild brothers support and

¹¹ Barnhart, *Dictionary of Etymology*.

¹² Duden, *Herkunftswörterbuch*.

¹³ Barnhart, *Dictionary of Etymology*.

¹⁴ Brockliss, “Gown and Town”.

¹⁵ Kjærgaard and Kristensen, “Universitetets idéhistorie”, p. 40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-46.

¹⁷ My tentative translation from the Danish: “edsvorne sammenslutninger og selvorganiserende korporationer af lærere eller af de i en given by forsamlede lærere og studenter”, Kjærgaard and Kristensen, “Universitetets idéhistorie”, p. 37.

protection. Guilds were fraternities, providing services that were to be substituted by the developing apparatuses, including the legal systems, of modern states. Roman law facilitated an understanding of such corporations as legal persons.¹⁸

Guilds were sufficiently strong—some more than others, of course—to achieve privileges on behalf of their members. They were expected to carry out internal policing and administration of justice and, all in all, to mind their own affairs without any external interference: autonomy in the medieval sense. This kind of framework, in turn, facilitated the development of codes of honour allowing members to keep a tight rein on each other in order, not least, to protect and further the reputation of the guild.

The early university guilds managed to achieve recognition, rights and privileges that gradually evolved into a monopoly on the conferment of academic degrees and “a right to teach anywhere in the Christian world”.¹⁹ Internal judicial systems and tax and duty exemptions were privileges that withered away with the guild system.

During the thirteenth century, 16 universities were founded in Europe²⁰, and after another century, around 1400, Europe was in possession of 40 universities. By 1700, the number had risen to 170, the majority of which had been founded by church authorities or local princes. A university was now a standard feature of larger towns and was seen, at the same time, as a symbol of and a means to increase local wealth²¹, but during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the growth came to a stand-still. Partly due to Napoleonic policies and partly due to the development of technology-oriented science—as a rule not catered for by universities at the time—the number of universities decreased somewhat whereas more military and technical academies and schools were founded.²²

Historians seem to generally agree on the characterisation of the university institution as a genuine offspring of the Middle Ages. Older than the modern and currently troubled nation state, an international perspective forms part of the university heritage as does a deeply rooted adherence to the notion of institutional autonomy. Before universities could be reborn as *modern* universities, however, and find their place in modern nation states, they had to liberate themselves from the medieval understanding of learning and knowledge: scholasticism. The universities of the seventeenth and

¹⁸ Kjærgaard and Kristensen, “Universitetets idéhistorie”, p. 41.

¹⁹ My tentative translation from the Danish: “og gav ret til at undervise i hele den kristne verden”, Kjærgaard and Kristensen, “Universitetets idéhistorie”, p. 38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²¹ Brockliss, “Gown and Town”.

²² Kjærgaard and Kristensen, “Universitetets idéhistorie”, pp. 82-83.

eighteenth centuries have been described as “seats of conservatism and virtual neglect of science, rather than the nurseries of the new philosophy”.²³ Surviving renaissance humanism as well as the reformation, scholastic approaches to learning gradually succumbed to the enlightenment movements of the eighteenth century, but the modern natural sciences had a history of almost two centuries before the universities of Oxford and Cambridge opened themselves to the conferment of science degrees.

The development of universities in Britain and Southern Europe differed somewhat from the development in German speaking areas. There, the founding of universities gained momentum only in the wake of the reformation—later than 1517, that is—and those universities were, as a rule, founded by or closely attached to local princely authorities. Although undoubtedly informed by the guild tradition that formed the basis of the earliest universities in other parts of Europe, they were not founded as guilds themselves and may have been perceived less as corporations and more as operating agencies on behalf of the powers that be. Like elsewhere, they were preoccupied with the education of clergy—needed by the new confessions—and administrators to the growing apparatuses of states. They were, however, also shaped intellectually by renaissance humanism, and some of them—Halle and Göttingen are examples²⁴—opened themselves relatively early to modern science. “The close ties”, it has been remarked “among enlightenment movements, universities and the State [were] quite a unique feature of the development of the German universities in the eighteenth century”.²⁵

In present knowledge bureaucracies and economies, few institutions are as influential and as highly placed in the social hierarchies as the modern university. *En route* from the Middle Ages towards today’s globalised marketplace, universities—while expanding enormously—have managed to integrate themselves into rising nation states and, in step with the increasing globalisation, to loosen some of the national ties once again so as to cater for clients and customers on a global scale. University members have become knowledge labourers or customer-students. After some golden decades of extensive public funding by nation states, the early dependence on private funding has returned. Science and technology have replaced classical learning. Curiously, however, the guild tradition— a main object

²³ Merton, “The Puritan Spur”, p. 247.

²⁴ Kjærgaard and Kristensen, “Universitetets idéhistorie”, p. 85.

²⁵ My tentative translation from the Danish: “Det tætte bånd mellem oplysning, universitet og statsmagt var relativt unikt for de tyske universiteters udvikling i 1700-tallet”, Kjærgaard and Kristensen, “Universitetets idéhistorie”, p. 87.

of dislike and fought down fervently by modernisers—has lived on precisely in this key institution of late modernity.

Autonomy and independence

Modern universities have inherited the concept of autonomy from the medieval universities. They were, as a rule, based on the medieval structure of autonomous guilds. Originating in the Greek *autónomos*—composed by *autós*: self and *nómos*: law—the term means self-governance. Members of an autonomous institution or association are granted the right to mind their own affairs without interference from the outside.

Medieval understandings were hardly connected to modern idea(l)s of independent thought. Today, however, the notion of autonomy is frequently used interchangeably with the wider notion of independence, a classic virtue of the modern European university and appearing as shorthand for, precisely, independent thought. As a term, independence signifies the state of not being reliant on others. That, however, is different from simply being entitled to mind your own business. Indeed, claims to independence seem to be mostly made with respect to statements on issues that concern the wider society rather than merely the (autonomous) community of those who make the claims. Independent researchers and scholars are respected because they are trusted to have integrity and make their own judgements on matters of common interest.

The notion of intellectual autonomy is a recent construct aimed, apparently, at capturing the idea and ideal of self-governance in intellectual matters such as which research topics to pursue, what to teach, how to teach and carry out research or which sources of funding—and which conflicts of interest—to accept.

A pre-modern and pre-enlightenment version of the notion of autonomy was pivotal to the guild tradition. The medieval notion of autonomy did not come with modern idea(l)s of academic freedom and independent, critical thought. It originated in a kind of society constituted by closed communities, such as guilds, each of which minded their own business and, thus, had autonomy in the sense of self-governance. Along the way, the notion of autonomy seems to have morphed into a notion of independence in the sense of independent thought, implicating an academic right and obligation to offer such thought to society at large and, thus, to act as a co-responsible part of wider society. At the same time, however, the medieval version of autonomy appears to have lived on even within the presently dominant view of universities as business corporations. Strong and long-lived as the notion of autonomy has proved to be, it has also proved

to be ambiguous. As a consequence, it has remained equally unclear by whom—and why and how—research integrity should be protected and, for that matter, what should be regarded, respectively, as preventable or unavoidable integrity hazards.

Even the fraternity notion, closely related to the guild tradition, has lived on in the academic world. Informing the framework of academic disciplines²⁶ and, indeed, the very idea of a scientific community, it has influenced the development of universities. The fraternity identification is heavily taxed by contemporary appeals for loyalty, directed—by communication officers and others—at scholars and researchers who are employed by universities in a chronic state of mergers and, thus, lacking a stable identity.

DIFFERENT IDEA(L)S OF THE MODERN UNIVERSITY

Around 1800, several authors agree, the notion of “the end of the university” made its initial appearance. The number of universities were decreasing and new approaches to learning and knowledge were only reluctantly being let in. The number of technical schools had risen and might fill the gap. The crisis, however, resulted in the rebirth of the institution.²⁷ At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Europe had 150 universities.²⁸ Without having achieved a dominant position, science had been integrated, and the notion of universities as centres of higher learning carried out by a multiplicity of disciplines had survived the crisis.

Although drawing on significant elements of the medieval heritage, the born-again universities were modern universities—but modern universities, just as modernity in general, have many faces. In general terms, the rebirth of the university was influenced by those major events and processes that separate the Middle Ages from modernity: the renaissance, the reformation and the enlightenment—all of which were general European phenomena although unfolding in many varieties across Europe. The rise of modern science influenced the development in particular, although it took some time for it to gain momentum.

The contemporary enterprising university’s devotion to empiricism, technological innovation and wealth creation may have the appearance of a novel phenomenon. Its key features, however, are not of a recent date.

²⁶ For a characterisation and discussion of academic disciplines as tribes, see Becher, *Academic Tribes and Territories*.

²⁷ For instance Kjærgaard and Kristensen, “Universitetets idéhistorie”, p. 96; Wittrock, “Det moderne universitets forvandlinger”, p. 13.

²⁸ Brockliss, “Gown and Town”.

Rather, the case has convincingly been made, they originate in a Puritan framework of thought that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, influenced the rise of the academic tradition of modern science as a means to achieve control of nature.

The Puritan ethic's "ascetic imperatives established a broad base for scientific inquiry, dignifying, exalting, consecrating such inquiry", American sociologist Robert K. Merton (1910-2003) argued.²⁹ The founding fathers of modern science, he also found, followed in the footsteps of Francis Bacon when they identified with the ideal that science "was to be fostered and nurtured as leading to the improvement of man's lot on earth by facilitating technological invention".³⁰ Merton connected "Puritan tastes" to "two highly prized values: utilitarianism and empiricism"³¹ and even referred to the break with the classical identification of academic activity and leisure:

The Puritan insistence upon empiricism, upon the experimental approach, was intimately connected with the identification of contemplation with idleness, of the expenditure of physical energy and the handling of material objects with industry. Experiment was the scientific expression of the practical, active, and methodical bents of the Puritan.³²

Writing in the United States of 1938, Merton concluded that science had itself become a

dominant social value to which other values are subordinated. Today it is much more common in the Western world to subject the most diverse beliefs to the sanctions presumably afforded by science than to those yielded by religion; the increasing reference to scientific authority in contemporary advertisements and the long-standing eulogistic connotation of the very word 'scientific' diversely reflect the social standing of science.³³

In Europe 2021, that fundamental observation still stands. Present exchanges about research integrity as well as mainstream understandings of the university as an institution are influenced by the science tradition to a degree that makes it difficult to keep ideas and ideals of science and of the university, respectively, apart. It was not always so.

At the time of the rebirth of the university, around 1800, there were several and to some degree conflicting frameworks of university ideas and

²⁹ Merton, "The Puritan Spur", p. 228.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 239.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

ideals around in Europe, connected to different regional and national circumstances and understandings of learning and knowledge. For more than a century, the most dominant framework was indebted to classical understandings of learning and knowledge. Formulated in Berlin in 1809-10, it managed to combine in a unique way those understandings with enlightenment approaches.

Humboldt and neo-classicism

As late as 1806, Prussian authorities considered a proposal to do away with the university as an institution altogether.³⁴ The proposal was not agreed on, and a few years later, humanist scholar and diplomat, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), got a commission to sketch out the foundations for a new university in Berlin.³⁵ He then wrote *Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin*, which has been characterised as the undisputed model for university reformers³⁶ from the United States in the west to Japan in the east.³⁷ As a model, however, it has served in various rather different interpretations.

The sketch was made at a time marked by Napoleonic influence in Prussia. Significant societal changes were taking place and feudal traditions weakened. At the same time, centralistic and technocratic tendencies strengthened. Only one year earlier, the universities had been abolished in Paris, to be supplanted by a system of specialised schools, and it seems an obvious interpretation that Humboldt intended his considerations about the Berlin university to somehow constitute a counterweight to the centralistic and technocratic aspects of Napoleonic policies.³⁸ Without being hostile to the (growing) apparatus of state that he had served himself as an official it was one of his key concerns to make the case that a reserved, distanced approach by the state to institutions of higher learning would leave everybody better off. Such institutions, he found, were indeed societal institutions and had important tasks to carry out on behalf of the apparatus

³⁴ Wittrock, "Det moderne universitets forvandlinger", p. 16.

³⁵ See Geier, *Die Brüder Humboldt*, in particular pp. 266-70, for further information on Humboldt's university planning.

³⁶ Actually, Humboldt only used the university terminology sparsely in his sketch. He mostly referred to institutions for higher learning. Humboldt, *Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten*.

³⁷ Wittrock, "Det moderne universitets forvandlinger", p. 15.

³⁸ According to Lenzen, *Bildung statt Bologna*, p. 82, Humboldt perceived the university as a counterweight to schools and academies informed by utilitarian purposes.