A Response to Jacques Derrida's Plea

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Abstract

The definition of the mission of the University has always been a daunting challenge. For more than a century, the (British) University has been steadily straying from the creation and transmission of the light of knowledge to that of light knowledge. The present article has focused on this deviation and looked into its course to contend that it is the departure of the debate on defining the mission of the University from its original academic and liberal attributes to the recently assigned technical and vocational tasks which has actually compelled Jacques Derrida (2004) to make his groundbreaking call for the recovery of the enlightenment that the University has failed to follow. The participation of social philosophers of higher education is salutary and must bring the liberal purpose of the University (in the UK and worldwide) back to the core of the debate.

Keywords

debate;
university mission;
enlightenment;
liberal / academic;
vocational / technical.

استجابة لنداء جاك دريدا

ملخص

لقد كان تعريف مهمة الجامعة دائمًا تحديًا كبيرا. لأكثر من قرن من الزمان، ظلت الجامعة (البريطانية) تحيد تدريجيا عن مهمة إنتاج وتبليغ نور المعرفة إلى تلك المرتبطة بالمعرفة السطحية. وقد ركز المقال الحالي على هذا الانحراف ونظر في مساره ليؤكد أن خروج النقاش حول تحديد مهمة الجامعة من سماتها الأكاديمية والليبرالية الأصلية إلى المهام التقنية والمهنية الموكلة إليها حديثا هو ما أجبر جاك دريدا بالفعل على توجيه دعوته الرائدة لاستعادة مهمة التنوير التي فشلت الجامعة في إتباعها. إن مشاركة الفلاسفة الاجتماعيين في التعليم العالي أمر مفيد ويجب أن يعيد الهدف الليبرالي للجامعة (في المملكة المتحدة وفي جميع أنحاء العالم) إلى جوهر النقاش.

الكلمات المفتاحية

ليبرالي/ أكاديمي ؛
مهني/ تقني ؛
مهمة الجامعة؛
تنوير ؛
نقاش.

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I- Introduction

This article explores the two combined academic areas of history and social philosophy of higher education. It does not intend to define the mission of a university in response to the ever increasing distress of both academics and laymen, nor to promote the merits of one definition compared to the demerits of other ones. That there are as numerous definitions as the thinkers who are concerned with the problematic issue of what should the mission(s) of a university be need not be argued, not here at least. The matter is still subject to debate, as it has always been, and Jack Derrida's historic statement, "I am resolutely in favour of a new university Enlightenment" (132), is the latest episode in it. This incites reflection, and bears the question as to what has become of the 'old' university enlightenment and the curiosity it triggers. It is the author's contention that Derrida's (2004) statement outcries the demise of the noble aspiration attached to the university reflected in the shift of focus in the debate about the mission of a university from the liberal/academic to the technical/vocational education—leading ultimately to a 'flat' (tire?) situation. The historical perspective suggested here covers the long period extending from the middle of the nineteenth century to the turn of the twenty first, which, in turn, is divided into four major generations with regard to the most renowned scholars and philosophers and their contributions.

From Newman to Huxley (1850s-1880s)

The first reflection on the mission of a university ever to be made in Britain is attributed to Cardinal Newman (1852), an important figure in the religious history of nineteenth century England, prompted mainly by the emergence of the then called 'modern' universities. To his mind, the university should preserve and transmit knowledge much for its own sake, which he identifies as liberal education, as presented in the statement he made in 1852: "I am asked what is the end of University Education, and of the Liberal or Philosophical Knowledge which I conceive it to impart […] the end cannot be divided from that knowledge itself" (Newman 83). He maintains that "there is a knowledge worth possessing for what it is, and not merely for what it does" (94). The liberal education he promotes "is simply the cultivation of the intellect as such, and its object is nothing more or less than intellectual excellence" (100). He makes it clear that he was arguing "against Professional or Scientific knowledge as the sufficient end of a University Education" (141). There must be no contradiction in terms because universities have long taught professional or scientific subjects such as law, medicine, geology and political economy, but the way they were taught in the university, and not anywhere else, provided, as he states, "a special illumination and largeness of mind" (142).

Some fifteen years later, the argument that a university is home to liberal and not professional education finds another no less prominent champion in philosopher and political economist Mill. In his inaugural address as Rector of the University of St Andrews, in 1867, he declared that "Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. Their object is not to make skilful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings" (4). He added that "[w]hat professional men should carry away with them from [a] University, is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge, and bring the light of general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit" (4). The reference made to the *light* of general culture, as he conceives of it, could only be found in the Greco-Roman heritage.

Conversely, there is the argument that the university must provide for scientific and professional curricula. In a series of lectures and addresses from the late 1860s to early 1880s, Huxley (1899), an English biologist and anthropologist, expresses the view that there is a need to see more science in British universities, which were still showing some academic resistance against modern studies (78). He argues that, unlike ancient universities in Britain, the German universities have remarkably more modern studies and are striving "to represent and embody the totality of human knowledge, and to find room for all forms of intellectual activity" (78). He disapproves of the view that liberal education, that is instruction in Greek and Roman antiquity, is the only source of culture (98). The ideal university, as he imagines it, would offer knowledge made up of such topics as logic, psychology, moral and religious philosophy and the natural and social sciences (133-34)—which is not a bad mix after all.

From Löwe to Ashby (1940s-1950s)

After the days of Newman, Mill and Huxley, no major intellectual contributions targeting the mission of the university have been made until the emergence of a group of thinkers during the 1940s, forged in the Second World War. In 1940, Professor Löwe published a booklet, *The Universities in Transformation*, wherein he contends that the mission of the late nineteenth century Oxford and Cambridge—a mission which consisted in educating the "ruling type" and characterised by harmony between the university and society—have ceased (10). The university has become "a social agency" with a "threefold task" of general or cultural education, vocational or technical education and a larger diffusion of education, all of which have come as a result of an increasing demand for "professional specialists" and a new stratification of the student body (13). In his comparison of the 1940s to the mid-nineteenth century, Löwe observes that Oxford and Cambridge are "no longer educating a leisured class but are primarily regarded as agencies for social ascent and as training schools for remunerative professions" (13).

Löwe foresaw a period of radical social change that entailed a "planned democracy" where administrators would rise to prominence (24). Those administrators or "social functionaries," that he sometimes refers to as the "enlightened experts," should be educated in the universities and should be imbued with "qualities very different from the professional routine mind" (24). He intends to relate specialization and vocational studies to "the cultural process as a whole" in order to "balance and to underpin vocational education" (26). This could only be attained through a reorganization of the universities on the basis of what he calls "humanistic specialisation" (50). That is, scientific advances begin with the vocational subject but should include "bordering fields of study" such as the humanities, psychology and economics (62).

This call for the preservation of culture is echoed through the writings of Leavis, a lecturer in English literature at the University of Cambridge. He argued in 1943 for the necessity of the preservation and regeneration of cultural tradition; and not any tradition, but that found in the ancient universities. "The universities," he writes, "are recognized symbols of cultural tradition—of cultural tradition still conceived as a directing force, representing a wisdom older than modern civilization and having an authority that should check and control the blind drive onward of material and mechanical development, with its human consequences" (16). As for the ancient universities, they "are more than symbols; they, at any rate, may fairly be called foci of such a force" (16).

In the same year, Truscot's (1943) book, *Redbrick University*, is published. It is the first book in the twentieth century about British higher education to give an unprecedented impetus to the open-ended debate over the mission of the universities, which started in the nineteenth century. Truscot focuses remarkably on "research" being the natural function of the university. He asserts that a "university is a corporation or society which devotes itself to a search after knowledge for the sake of its intrinsic value" (45). He adds that "the primary aim of the university must be search for knowledge—re-search, as we call it today" (48). The researcher must, therefore, be the core of the university, as he says: "to the idea of a university only the 'fellows', the researchers, are essential" (49). He suggests that it was research and not teaching, researchers and not students that were vital to the existence of universities: "there could never be a university which had no researchers at all and which engaged in nothing but teaching" (49). He interestingly concludes that a "university without research would be nothing but a super-secondary school" (49). With such commitment to the purpose of universities as a search after knowledge, Truscot has made sustained attacks on academics in all faculties and universities for their failure to understand the need for research and the shallowness of research they conduct. He observes that once appointed, professors "produce practically nothing" (117).

In 1944, Dobrée, Professor of English Literature at the University of Leeds, has noticed that a traditional elite no longer existed in the shape of an old governing class or dominant Christian values, and that an elite of some sort is necessary and should be created consciously. He admits that universities are not the only path to leadership, and suggests that it is for them, especially arts faculties, to produce men and women "who share a sense of civilized values." For him, arts faculties have the duty of "making contact with the vital problems of the day" if they ever wish to "regain their proud place, now lost, as the real centre of the University idea" (In Silver 77).

Philosopher Macmurray (1944) holds a similar opinion, namely that universities are "primarily a centre of cultural life and cultural progress," and that they should be the source of "cultural leadership." He remarks, though, that universities have lost sight of their mission and became a "common house of disjointed specialisms" (In Silver 78).

In the same line of thought, Sir Livingstone (1948), a classical scholar, has criticised science for its lack of concern for human values. According to him, the most important task of universities is "to bring home to the student the greatest of all problems—the problem of living." He thought that it was ruinous for the student to graduate "without a philosophy of life, however provisional, a definite view of the ends to which it should be directed and of the principles by which it should be ruled, a clear idea of good and bad in conduct" (23). Philosophy and religion were therefore the solution by making the "study of religion or of philosophy an essential element in every university course" (25).

The contribution of the Spanish philosopher Gasset (1946) is historic. His book, *Mission of the University*, is an address he gave in Spain in 1930, which was translated into English in 1944 and after the war became widely known in Britain. The prime mission of the university for Gasset is the preservation and transmission of culture because, as he puts it: "We cannot live on the human level without ideas" (27). And culture in his eyes is slightly different from that advocated by Leavis or Livingston: it is "the system of vital ideas which each age possesses […] the system of ideas *by* which the age lives" (64). While explaining the meaning of culture, he focuses on the prevailing perception of the relationship between culture and science and how it should be reconsidered: "In our age, the content of culture comes largely from science. But […] culture is not science[….] Culture borrows from science what is vitally necessary for the interpretation of our existence" (57). Unlike Truscot, Gasset thinks that it is "disastrous" for universities to be dominated by "inquiry" because "the contemporary university has developed the mere seed of professional instruction into an enormous activity; it has added the function of research; and it has abandoned almost entirely the teaching or transmission of culture" (78). He believes that the main activity of the university should be teaching, not research. The centre of academics should then be the professor and not the researcher: "The selection of professors will depend not on their rank as investigators but on their talent for synthesis and their gift for teaching" (73). To ensure the preservation and transmission of culture, a 'Faculty of Culture' should become the nucleus of the university (68).

Another name is added, by the 1950s, to those who have attempted to help the university have a clearer mission: Sir Moberly, best known for his philosophical reflections on what he thinks to be the crisis in the university. Moberly, like Mill during the 19th century, has noticed that the modern university graduates are not of the standard he was expecting. He observes that they "go out into the world well qualified technically in the particular subject in which they have taken their degrees" but are not "specially qualified for posts of responsibility or for intelligent citizenship" (Qtd in Silver 102). In particular, his experience of modern universities has given him painful consciousness of "a hiatus." He argues that the older universities developed when there were "common convictions about the nature of man and the universe;" while the modern universities are evolving in a time characterised by "the uncertainty and the disunity of the modern world as a whole in regard to ultimate convictions" (102). The modern universities, as he notices, could not help because they are urban, local, non-residential and concentrating on lectures, with students who see the degree as a pathway to a job, and whose attitude to work is "illiberal." On the whole, the modern universities fail to answer such questions related to the nature of Man and Universe and how life should be lived (In Silver 103).

In his book *The Crisis in the university* (1949), Moberly defines the crisis in the universities as being historical and contemporary: "We had the Classical-Christian university, which was later displaced by the Liberal university. This in turn has been undermined but not as yet superseded, by the combined influence of democratisation and technical achievement. What we have, in fact to-day is the chaotic university" (50). The chaos he refers to is the outcome of the 'technological-democratic' or 'scientific-utilitarian' assumptions, which, in themselves, are the result of the rise and dominance of applied science and the emergence of an ever-growing constituency of students. The belief that their traditional role of training students for leadership in a stratified society has ebbed away, but no other ideal has taken its place (21-22). In fact, he suggests that universities are confronted with a crisis much bigger than customary; it is a world crisis that has resulted from two world wars and the threat of an atomic bomb. The crisis is one of "confusion, bewilderment and discord" (16). The solution is not in 'scientific humanism' and 'classical humanism', but in what he identifies as a Christian 'leaven'. The mission must be the breeding of a creative minority who could turn a neutral society into a Christian one. He calls it "positive neutrality" (107).

The place of humanities in the age of technology provides food for thought. Sir Ashby, a botanist, is one of the most prominent contributors in the field. He points to the evidence of a new technological age and its need for graduates in technology. He reflects on the relationship that should exist between technology and humanities within the university. Universities are requested "to ensure that those aspects of the humanities which neither science nor technology will ever render obsolete—discussion of moral issues, appreciation of works of imagination, and study of the past—are preserved as an integral part of university work" (Qtd in Silver 155). He argues that Arts faculties should stop pretending to be "innocent of the history and social implications of science and technology," and that the future leaders of a technologically based society need to be educated in humanities (155). Faculties of arts should therefore offer humane courses in technology that were 'integral', not 'extraneous' to it. He gave an example in an address to the Home Universities Conference in 1956 in London: "From the study of metallurgy (for example) it is a natural step to the history of industry since the seventeenth century, and from there to the sociology and ethics of industrial societies" (160).

Ashby believes in "making specialist studies (whatever they are: metallurgy or dentistry or Norse philology) the core around which were grouped liberal studies which were relevant to these specialist studies" (In Silver 163). For him, "the path to culture should be through a man's specialism, not by bypassing it" (163).

The Confusion (1990s)

The liberal-humanist vs. the professional-scientific (technological) mission of the British university that characterize the academic debate during the 1940s and 1950s has entered a stage of lethargy in the following decades. The interference of the state with the world of academia increased and soon the state has become more than a financial provider for higher education institutions; it dictates their very mission to them.

Critics suggest that the plethora of higher education plans and targets that the successive British governments (and most of the western countries for that matter) have designed and implemented from the 1960s to the late 1990s are narrow and ignore important implications of what 'learning' means. More seriously so, Conservative and Labour governments in the 1980s and 1990s have pursued commitment to the values of a competitive society and the community needs or the 'inclusive society', but their views are not always clear and consistent about the contribution higher education should make. Government control is so tight that even the academics are unable to generate sustained concern for the values of the 'university' or of 'higher education' (Silver 240).

With the widely-held view that universities can no longer exist as autonomous institutions, still less could they lay claim to their 'ivory tower' image, the overall mission of British universities must be redefined. According to Frostd and Taylor: "in responding to change universities have to 're-invent' and re-design themselves in ways that have fundamental implications for their own purpose and mission" (53). This implies a challenge to the teaching or research conception of

the university, as the 'socio-economic base' of the university system has been transformed; apart from becoming a mass system, the new form of the university is unclear yet (53). As to this state of confusion, Tapper and Salter (1992) argue that there has been no attempt to formulate a new model of the British university, and, more critically, that universities have failed to create their own vision of the future (145-46). This new learning age is ostensibly in a dire need of a Newman or a Moberly.

From Scott to Minogue (2000s)

A new generation of academics with a concern to debate the mission of the universities at the end of the twentieth century have emerged. One of the new contributors is Sir Scott (2000), Vice-Chancellor of King's College, and his view that the mission of the university today is to contribute to the creation of the knowledge society. He holds the assumption that by the 1990s Britain has been undergoing two revolutions, a growing 'reflexivity' of the knowledge production system and a 'transgressivity' of contemporary society. He adds that 'Society' is being suffused with 'knowledge', as the term 'Knowledge Society' in the British New Labour political discourse indicates, and 'knowledge' with the 'social'. This interpenetration of 'society and 'knowledge' suggests an end to the tension between the social and scientific roles of the university; that is, "between the open engagement of a democratic higher education and the disengagement of 'disinterested' science" (188). In other words, the development of mass higher education has enhanced the growth in proportion of university graduates (sometimes of low calibre), thus rightly contributing to the growth of a 'Knowledge Society' (190).

Yet, Scott is confident that the university, even in the era of mass higher education, still fulfils two old functions: the first, as an incubator of new researchers, a role "that no other institution is well adapted to undertake" (198), and which is not possible without an adequate research environment; the second, as a generator of cultural norms. Despite the fact that in recent times canons of elite ideas which built the bulk of these norms are less substantive, as a result of the democratisation of higher education, the role of the university "in the generation of cultural norms," as Scott puts it, "is not about to disappear" (198).

Another contributor to the literature on higher education is Wilson (2000), Vice-chancellor of the University of Leeds and a fellow of the British Academy, with his idea that the British universities are concerned with the conservation, communication and creation of knowledge. In his opinion, conservation and communication of knowledge are less problematic than the creation of knowledge itself, because it was not always easy to argue for a clear "objective set of knowledge foundations which universities have a responsibility to maintain and extend" (30). He argues that in a university setting, knowledge is composed of two essential elements: Core and professional. The more difficult question he ponders is to judge the balance of resources allocated to the core and the professional (30).

He interestingly points to the fact that the British universities (like most of universities in western societies) have always been concerned with both the professions and core knowledge, i.e. scholarship. In an elite university system, as he explains, the vocational role could be defined in terms of the 'higher' professions; while in a mass system, as participation rates have grown, a much larger percentage of the workforce is being university educated and, inevitably, the vocational emphasis has shifted towards utility and employability (30). The true mission of the university then is to preserve and transmit knowledge that meets the demands of a knowledge-based economy by offering courses targeting economic activities in need of specifically university-trained manpower.

Following this line of ideas, Waterhouse, Vice-chancellor of the University of Derby (2000), begins from the fact that the British political rhetoric during the 1990s "has emphasized 'employability' at all levels of education with its stress on skills and social interaction" (50). He then claims that "[u]niversities which work closely with employers will be aware of their changing needs" (50). Waterhouse provides an extensive presentation of the experience of the merged Derby University in trying to answer with "adequacy and efficiency" the very local needs in the spirit of the British official political discourse of the early 1990s (48). The key factor in the success of the Derby experience is the electronic delivery of courses. This new means of knowledge transmission has inaugurated what is now called the virtual age.

From her experience as Chief Executive and Vice-chancellor of the British Aerospace Virtual University, created in 1997, Kenney-Wallace (2000) argues for the revolution that has taken place in the mission of the traditional university to match the technology-intensive manufacturing and services and to keep pace with the fast-changing specialist knowledge and practical know-how (59). The Virtual University has been designed in response to the business needs of the British Aerospace Company. It is a company-based university whose mission is "to develop and capitalize on the human, intellectual, technological and process resources of the company" (60). The British Aerospace Virtual University (VU©) reflects the evolving business needs as well as cultural and organizational realities of the age; and seeks to liberate the talents and to enhance capacities and capabilities of its whole workforce within a learning organization (61-62). In considering the logistics and affordability, Kenney-Wallace asserts that the noble aspirations of learning could hardly be seen in the blunt business realities of delivering Airbus wings or aeroplanes to a tight schedule (62). Seen from this angle, traditional universities are no longer the dominant players in the creation and communication of knowledge, especially in

cyberspace: “Just-in-case education has moved to just-in-time and just-for-you, as self-managed computer-based learning plays an increasing and natural role for individuals and families.” Kenney-Wallace calls it: “Plato.com” (60).

With the previous view, liberal education would strive time and again to fit in what could safely be labelled a conventional mission of 21st century universities. Barnett (2000), a social philosopher of higher education and Dean of Professional Development at the Institute of Education, University of London, contends that the mission of present-day universities is to adapt to “supercomplexity” (112). He explains first ‘complexity’ then reaches ‘supercomplexity’. For him, a “situation of complexity exists when there is a surfeit of data, ideas or resource demands *within* a relatively given situation.” By contrast, a “situation of *supercomplexity* exists when the basic framework governing the situation is challenged” (112). In a world of ‘supercomplexity’ the commonly accepted definition and role of the university is being challenged. Still according to Barnett, the presently endemic multiplication of frameworks is not simply a technological matter. It is a matter of understanding, including people themselves, being challenged by new and rival frameworks. I n effect, ‘supercomplexity’ is this process of framework multiplication and framework conflict, which today is inescapably underpinning people’s lives (113).

What has the university to do with ‘supercomplexity’? The university has largely contributed towards producing ‘supercomplexity’. Despite the now-prevailing idea that the university has lost monopoly over knowledge production (Gibbons,1994), the university has always been “a major producer of new frameworks of understanding” (Barnett 113); that is, frameworks through which people understand themselves, the world around them and their relationship to that world. Then, the university is more or less compelled to imbue its students with human qualities, such as self-reliance, adaptability and flexibility, both to withstand and to make purposive interventions within a world of ‘supercomlexity’. It is the graduates’ being which is focused here not knowledge or competences. In addition, in the content of the modern world the university is called upon to reconsider its “enlightenment role” to help in the assimilation of supercomplexity.

Barnett focuses on a no less insightful point, likely to help the university regain some enlightenment. The new knowledge frameworks of the university have plunged the wider public in an age of ‘instability’ and the angst it has provoked. As for the “critical commentator,” maintains Barnett, “the academy has the responsibility to help society live with the unease that it has helped to bring about” (119). The lecturer can no longer maintain the authority the lecture confers on him. Instead, he is requested to expose uncertainty and contestability, and the student to frame his or her own responses—a pedagogy that allows the student to come to terms with uncertainty (122). It is probably cynical but one could be tempted to compare the lecturer to a psychotherapist, the university to a clinic, the student to a patient, and the lecture to a therapy. The entire mission is for the psychotherapist to help the patient(s) come to terms with the uncertain world—a mission that could succeed as well as fail.

Charlton, a lecturer in psychology at Newcastle, predicts that the future mission of most British universities shall be to mass-produce middle managers: “the job is to train half the work-force to a not particularly high level” (Qtd in Minogue 183). Minogue (2007), an academic and political theorist, has explained Charlton’s idea as follows: “So in the future, there will be no need for lecturers to pursue independent research: they will simply be glorified schoolteachers. Exams will give way to continuous assessment. Students will no longer fail; they will simply plod on until they have accumulated the requisite number of credits” (183). Minogue quotes the nineteenth century British Prime Minister Disraeli (who had not been to a university) once calling the university “a place of light, liberty and learning.” Today, argues Minogue, the university is rather “a place of light learning” (181). This state of affairs could be a prelude to what some describe as the chaotic university. We suggest to call it the ‘flat’ (tire?) university.

Why ‘flat’? Given that the modern and democratized technological diffusion of knowledge, which has given birth to the knowledge society, as referred to earlier, by virtue of the internet mainly, has deprived the lecturer of his position of dominance in the Sage-on-the-Stage mode of knowledge delivery. Given, also, that the university could hardly remain the major source of knowledge/learning in the face of strenuous challenges posed by the rich and limitless supplies of the internet (in fields related to the accumulation and assimilation of knowledge in addition to the development and acquisition of specific skills) suggest that both of the lecturers and the students sit on a flat ground. Seen from afar, none of them could stand out. Another meaning would be analogous to the flat tire—as inefficient as this latter might be. The mission of present day university (worldwide) would be to manage a flat (tire?) situation of higher education.

Conclusion

The debate on the definition of the mission of a university has started during the middle of the nineteenth century with a historic emphasis on the illumination role of the University inherent in the liberal education, which emanates from the cultivation of the intellect (Newman, 1852). The reference made to the *light* of general culture could only be found in the Greco-Roman heritage (Mill, 1867). There is, then, the claim that the university must provide for scientific and professional curricula including logic, psychology, moral and religious philosophy and the natural and social sciences (Huxley, 1899). By the Second World War, the enlightenment referred to earlier is now called humanistic specialisation (Lowe). The mission is to promote research and the researcher (Truscot, 1943); to transmit civilised values (Dobrée); to

promote cultural leadership (Macmurray, 1944) and a philosophy of life (Livingstone, 1948); to diffuse culture by supporting teaching and the teacher (Gasset, 1946); to encourage intelligent citizenship and positive neutrality (Moberley, 1949); and to integrate humanities in technology (Ashby, 1956). From the sixties to the nineties of the last century, the overwhelming intervention of the Government/State in higher education plunged the debate in a hiatus. The twenty first century has brought a new breed of theorists assigning new missions to the Universities: to contribute to the knowledge society (Scott, 2000); to favour utility and employability in response to a knowledge-based economy (Wilson, 2000); to liberate the talents and to enhance capabilities of the workforce within a learning organization by use of self-managed computer-based learning (Kenny-Wallace, 2000); and to help people come to terms with the 'anxiogenic' world of supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000). All of these missions forerun the chaotic university (Charlton and Minogue, 2007), which could arguably be called the 'flat' (tire?) university; hence Jack Derrida's (2004) plea for an enlightenment of universities—worldwide. The recovery from this fall from grace must be found in the revival of relentlessly enhanced debates amongst especially social philosophers of higher education in favour of the liberal mission of the university of the days of yore that (just) might affect the discourse(s) of present-day higher education decision-makers and politicians.

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