

In the classically understood culture of Europe, one recognizes the specific identity of the university and its irreducibility to other, albeit similar, institutions of culture. Universities have a particular way of upholding the ethos of intellectual work and manifesting the cognitive values that serve academic research and education.

The university should distinguish itself from other forms of intellectual culture by pursuing an integrated knowledge of reality, or at least by attempting to combine knowledge of different aspects of reality into a relatively coherent whole. Such a pursuit is motivated by the belief that the unity of the reality should be reflected in a unified knowledge of it. As Tadeusz Czeżowski (1889–1981) reminds us: “Universality is the principle expressed already in the term ‘university’ The circumstance that all the arts and sciences are related to one another in a multiplicity of ways is expressed in this principle.”¹⁰ Czeżowski presents a maximalist idea of the universality of the university and extends it to include a consistent outlook on the world: “All [the arts and sciences] seek to achieve a homogenous view of the world and they mutually support one another in this pursuit.”¹¹ The university is also *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*: a community of masters and students, i.e., a community of people responsible for teaching and learning.

The instability of the foundations of the contemporary university and the denial of the very ideas in which it is grounded stand in clear contrast to the memories of his university studies (at the beginning of the 20th century), as Karl Jaspers recorded: “Important teachers I viewed with reverence, all of them, even those of whom I disapproved, with respect for their position. The buildings, the lecture-rooms, the forms of the tradition were objects of reverence for me. What it really was which lent to all this a still visible lustre I did not yet clearly discern.”¹²

Thus the community of teachers and students is perceived as a community endowed with a specific aesthetic quality.¹³ One might ponder over the noble ‘lustre’ of the university: What does it consist in? Why is it no longer visible nowadays? What undesirable practices have hidden it from view? How can the lustre of university values be regained and made visible anew? Reflecting on the aesthetic dimension of academic education, Jacek Piekarski offers a potential

¹⁰ Tadeusz C z e ż o w s k i, *O uniwersytecie i studiach uniwersyteckich* (Toruń: Księgarnia Naukowa T. Szczęśny i S-ka, 1946), 8.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Karl J a s p e r s, *Philosophical Autobiography*, in *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schlipp (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1957), 46.

¹³ See Jacek P i e k a r s k i, “Estetyzacja praktyki akademickiej—głos w dyskusji na temat perspektywy uczestniczącej,” in *Innowacje w edukacji akademickiej: Szkolnictwo wyższe w procesie zmiany*, 235–51.

answer to these questions: “Participation in creating knowledge is of genuine importance when it is related to the deepest commitment, when it is directed towards the pursuit and discovery of the possibly most significant, individual meaning. This meaning should always be expressed in most perfect possible a way.”

This aesthetically attractive and noble lustre of the university appears to originate in the perfectionist attitudes of the members of academic community, in their personal commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, and, in particular, in their striving for the greatest possible excellence in epistemic and social sense.

An emphasis on the traditional values of the university is often accompanied with an anxiety about the decline of these values, as it has been expressed, among others, by John Paul II: “The institution of the university is among the masterpieces of human culture. At the same time, one may feel concern that nowadays this masterpiece is being deformed on a global scale.” The social functions of the university are currently considered from the vantage point of the so-called science policy, education policy, or research productivity management, and thus the emphasis has been shifted to the effectiveness of the university in terms of economic profit. Research and teaching are subject to an increasingly close monitoring which involves a jargon alien—or even hostile—to the ethos and values of the traditional university.