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## 5. *Reclaiming Democratic Values in the Future University*

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*Abstract:* The changing role and interpretation of values within higher education and its curriculum needs to be understood by reference to a series of (re)appropriations connected with the successive influences of the church, the state and, more latterly, the market. This essay explores the role played by religious, democratic, performative and transformative values and argues that the university has become increasingly self-conscious in endorsing *values of positionality* that have largely displaced *values for learning*. This shifting meta-narrative poses a threat to academic freedom on campus by validating contemporary normative values, such as global citizenship, social justice and sustainable development, as opposed to providing students with the learning environment they need to scrutinise knowledge claims critically. The future university needs to reclaim the centrality of democratic values as a means of nurturing and protecting student academic freedom and maintaining a genuinely ‘higher’ education in which students can learn in peace.

*Keywords:* values, curriculum, positionality, academic freedom, liberal education

### *Introduction*

This essay<sup>1</sup> explores the evolution in the interpretation of values in higher education with particular reference to the curriculum. Such values have been the subject of regular and ongoing re-interpretation over several hundred years, re-shaped as the sponsor of the university has passed from the church to the state and, more latterly, become subject to the effects of global market forces. The university, and the education it offers, has reflected these shifting influences through the way in which the transmission of values to students is understood. The affect has been appropriated and re-appropriated according to the social milieu. A key element of my argument is that values understood

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1 I would like to thank Mayble Pitt for proofreading the manuscript.

in the liberal education tradition for much of the twentieth century, or what I call ‘values for learning’, have been supplanted by values shaped by a more self-conscious and performative age which I label ‘values of positionality’. Values for learning are about respecting democratic principles necessary to participate and learn in higher education with an emphasis on tolerance and a willingness to listen to the views of others. Values of positionality, by contrast, are about the endorsement of contemporary social and political values, such as global citizenship or sustainable development, that sanctify such beliefs as beyond the bounds of academic scrutiny. I argue that the institutionalisation of values of positionality threatens the academic freedom of students to contest the knowledge claims they encapsulate, closing down rather than opening up ideas to critical scrutiny.

In tracing the reinterpretation of values, this essay draws on the concept of student performativity defined as the measurement of observable student behaviour and attitudes audited in a public learning space.<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon has grown as universities have instituted student engagement policies in response to financial penalties imposed by governments in relation to student non-completion. Student engagement policies impose strict rules and often grade incentives in relation to the attendance of lectures and other classes, the assessment of class participation via other easily audited means, such as asking questions or making other oral contributions, and compliance with the social values promoted by the university, such as global citizenship. Students are subject to increasing surveillance as a result of universities deploying the technology of learning analytics to monitor their ‘engagement’ via data collected through online learning and swipe cards. These systems are a very real illustration of the way in which Foucault’s panopticon is now a contemporary reality in the modern university. The students are the prisoners spied on and controlled by the surveillance technology of the twenty-first century.

### ***The Appropriation of the Affect***

When talk of the school or higher education curriculum occurs it invariably involves reference to a three-fold classification of educational aims in terms of knowledge, values and skills. This draws on classic definitions of learning

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2 Bruce Macfarlane, “Student performativity in higher education: Converting learning as a private space into a public performance”, *Higher Education Research and Development*, 34, no. 2 (2015): 338–350.

objectives in education, notably the one associated with Bloom<sup>3</sup> who identified three domains: the cognitive (knowledge), the affective (values and attitudes) and the psychomotor (action-based skills). Bloom's classification applies to all phases of education and can often be found, either implicitly or explicitly, in both theoretical and policy-based analyses of the aims of higher education. In addressing the higher education curriculum, Bligh, Thomas and McNay<sup>4</sup> summarise its aims by reference to cognition (knowledge and understanding), the psychomotor (skills), and the affect (values and attitudes) identifying the ways in which fulfilling these aims benefits both individuals and society as a whole. Barnett and Coate<sup>5</sup> similarly recognise these domains through the terminology of 'knowing', 'being' and 'acting'. The aims of the curriculum are further reflected in policy-based visions with respect to the purposes of higher education. The Robbins report on UK higher education<sup>6</sup> argued that a proper balance needed to be found between the acquisition of knowledge 'to promote the general powers of the mind', 'instruction in skills', 'the advancement of learning' through research and the search for truth, and, finally, 'the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship'. Here, with the addition of the research function, this is essentially a restatement of the three-fold classification of the aims of the curriculum. According to a number of theorists of higher education, such as von Humboldt and Jaspers, the research function of the university is one of its distinct features although others, notably Newman,<sup>7</sup> have taken a contrary stance.

Yet, despite the centrality of values and attitudes both as an aim of a higher education, and more specifically within its curriculum, attention to this subject has been limited for a number of years, something Cowan<sup>8</sup> has described as the 'atrophy of the affect'. Glance at any higher education course, unit or module within a contemporary university syllabus and there will normally be a long list of learning outcomes organised under the twin headings of

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3 Benjamin Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals* (New York: McKay, 1956).

4 Donald Bligh, Harold Thomas and Ian McNay, *Understanding Higher Education* (Exeter and Portland, OR: Intellect Books, 1999).

5 Ronald Barnett and Kelly Coate, *Engaging the Curriculum in Higher Education* (Maidenhead: OUP/ Society for Research into Higher Education, 2005).

6 Lionel Robbins, *Higher Education Report of the Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins* (London: HMSO, 1963:6–7).

7 John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (London: Longman's and Co, 1910, orig. pub. 1852).

8 John Cowan, "Atrophy of the affect in academia or what next, after 40 years in the wilderness?" In *Values in Higher Education*, edited by Simon Robinson and Clement Katulushi, 159–177 (Leeds: Aureus & University of Leeds, 2005:159).

'knowledge' and 'skills'. Explicit reference to values or attitudes within the university curriculum seems to occur rarely, if at all. However this apparent neglect belies a subtle trend: the appropriation of the affect as dispositions now commonly labelled under the heading of 'skills'. This appropriation of the meaning of the affect within the higher education curriculum is just the latest twist in a long history of re-interpretation. Any appropriation of a word into a new meaning assumes that it must have had a previous one. Until the 1960s, for example, the word 'gay' referred to a person who appeared to be cheerful, happy and led a carefree existence. Subsequently this word has been appropriated as a descriptor for individuals and cultures associated with homosexuality. Similarly, the meaning of values has shifted as the dominant purposes of higher education have been recast. Successive appropriations of the affect are linked to historical changes in the power and influence of the principal sponsor of the universities with the baton passing from church, to state, and, more recently, the (global) market. In this respect, the medieval university was largely organised to serve the interests of the Church in training the clergy and, then, through the expansion of universities, especially in the UK, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the state allied to the need for men to serve in leadership roles within the British Empire. During the latter half of the twentieth and early twenty-first century, especially since the Second World War, the needs of the market have become an increasing locus of power and influence in addition to that of the state. These changes in 'sponsorship' have brought about concomitant and quite fundamental shifts in understandings about values in higher education. This essay explores these transformations within the higher education curriculum via a framework that seeks to explain competing meta-narratives.

### *From Religious to Democratic Values*

The history of the medieval university is intimately connected with that of the established Church, shaped by both the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, in a Western European context. In England, until the early part of the nineteenth century only Anglicans who were prepared to conform with the 39 Articles of the Church of England were permitted to attend university. These articles and doctrines date from the sixteenth century and represent a summary of the beliefs of the Church of England. The requirement to pledge obedience to the 39 articles excluded non-conformists such as Roman Catholics, Methodists, and Quakers as well as atheists from a university education. It was not until 1871 that the Universities Tests Act was passed by Parliament abolishing the communion 'Tests'. In Scotland, three of its ancient

universities—St Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen—were founded by Papal Bull, a decree issued by the Pope. All students and faculty of these institutions were Catholic. The ancient universities of Bologna and Paris, while not formally founded by Papal Bull, were granted one in the thirteenth century.

Whilst the formal ‘curriculum’ of higher education, as we might understand the term today, did not exist in terms of statements in respect to aims and learning outcomes, the educational goals of universities did, symbolised through their mottos. Many of these demonstrate the religious origins and commitments of universities at this time. *Dominus illuminatio mea* (‘The Lord is my light’) was the motto of Oxford University, while the relevantly similar *Lux et veritas* (‘Light and truth’) was adopted by Yale University. The regular appearance of the Latin word for truth (*veritas*) in university mottos needs to be understood in the sense of this being God’s truth as opposed to one born in the spirit of the enlightenment. Even in the seventeenth century this interpretation of the core values of a university held sway as the founding motto of Harvard—‘truth for Christ and the church’—testifies. Harvard’s motto was altered to *veritas* alone in the 1840s, an illustration in itself of the way that the university has consistently re-interpreted its own mission and values.

It was not until the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that newly founded universities incorporated values into their mottos that reflected more meritocratic ideals. Examples include University of Birmingham’s *Per ardua ad alta* (‘Through hard work, great things are achieved’) and *Cuncti adsint meritaque expectent praemia palmae* (‘Let all come who by merit deserve the most reward’) at University College London, the first English institution to permit non-conformists to attend. John Henry Newman’s vision for the Catholic University of Ireland (now University College, Dublin) came about as a result of his own conversion to Catholicism and resignation from a teaching position at Oxford, offering an alternative for Irish Catholics in similar fashion to the goals of University College London for non-conformists.<sup>9</sup> Newman’s vision of a liberal education and the development of character was highly influential in connecting religious values with the extension of the role of a higher education, in a British context, from training the clergy to developing young men of good character to administrate the British Empire. While the zenith of faith-based influences on universities in Western Europe has long passed, the religious foundations of institutions are still apparent—and in some cases comparatively recent—such as the former church colleges

9 David Willetts, *A University Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

of higher education in the UK founded largely in the 1960s, most of which became universities after 2002.

The emergence of new civic universities towards the end of the nineteenth century in both the UK and US led to a gradual shift away from the dominance of religious values. The new civics were substantially shaped by politicians, industrialists and wealthy individuals such as Josiah Mason who helped to found the University of Birmingham, with commitments to widening access to the middle and working classes and to women.<sup>10</sup> The curriculum of the civics incorporated emerging subjects, such as engineering, reflecting the world that had been shaped by the industrial revolution. However, the Humboldtian model of the university, representing the unity of teaching and research and the search for truth as an egalitarian pursuit, which both students and faculty share in common, has been most influential internationally in bringing to the fore the importance of *democratic values*. These were considered essential pre-conditions for the achievement of a 'higher' education that treated knowledge as a continuous search for truth. Both the student and the teacher, while not social equals, were seen as co-investigators in this scholarly enquiry. Jaspers<sup>11</sup> provides, perhaps, one of the clearest expositions of the Humboldtian philosophy arguing in the very first sentence of his book, *The Idea of the University*, that 'the university is a community of scholars and students engaged in the task of seeking the truth'. In order to make this vision a reality the style of teaching needs to be Socratic, through questioning, rather than via transmission which Jaspers labels 'scholastic instruction'.<sup>12</sup> The student needs the freedom to learn in order to become an independent thinker, a critical listener, and to take responsibility for his or her own learning. Socratic teaching places students on a more equal footing with university teachers as learners than the scholastic approach. Following Jaspers, Barnett<sup>13</sup> identifies a number of values which he argues are central to higher educational learning. These include 'the pursuit of truth and objective knowledge', 'a neutral and open forum for debate', and the 'development of the student's own critical abilities'. Both Jaspers and Barnett regard such values as essential in order to make a 'higher' education possible. This vision finds its way into the policy

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10 Eric Ives, Dian Drummon and Leonard Schwartz, *The First Civic University: Birmingham, 1880–1980: An Introductory History* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2000).

11 Karl Jaspers, *The Idea of the University* (London: Peter Owen, 1959).

12 Ibid., 62

13 Ronald Barnett, *The Idea of Higher Education* (Buckingham: Open University/Society for Research into Higher Education, 1990).

arena in the late 1990s via the Dearing report<sup>14</sup> which contained a statement about ‘shared’ values that are squarely derived from the liberal democratic tradition including a ‘commitment to the pursuit of truth’ and ‘a willingness to listen to alternative views and judge them on their merits’. At the macro level the state and civil society benefits from democratic values as it encourages attitudes that underpin a healthy democracy—such as tolerance of difference, debate, and a willingness to participate in co-operative processes.

### ***The Shift to Performative and Transformative Values***

Democratic values are focused on what happens within the learning process at university and may also help to inculcate attitudes that will contribute towards the maintenance of a participative social democracy. They are not principally orientated towards the benefits that students may derive in terms of future employment although, of course, this does not necessarily preclude their application in the workplace as has been widely recognised.<sup>15</sup> The university can have practical objectives and students come in order to prepare themselves to enter the professions, but the best means of achieving these is through the unfettered pursuit of truth.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, the argument that democratic values will provide indirect benefits to society and the economy is no longer seen as sufficient justification. The emphasis has shifted firmly from values to skills as the forces of neo-liberalism have re-shaped the role of higher education to serve the labour market more directly. The apparent omission of values or attitudes, in favour of skills within the curriculum, does not mean that they have necessarily disappeared though. They have simply been re-packaged as a constituent element of ‘21st century skills’, a phrase now in vogue and the title of a hugely influential book by Bernie Trilling and Charles Fadel,<sup>17</sup> the authors of which identify the centrality of learning and innovation, digital literacy, and career and life skills. This framework colonises a number of values and attitudes, especially with respect to so-called ‘career and life skills’, such as the exercise of ‘responsibility’ or dispositions towards ‘collaboration’. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (or ‘P21’) is a powerful alliance of business, policymaking and school education

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14 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, *Higher education in the learning society: Report of the National Committee* (London: HMSO, 1997:97).

15 Harold Silver and John Brennan, *A Liberal Vocationalism* (London: Methuen, 1988).

16 Jaspers, 1959.

17 Bernie Trilling and Charles Fadel, *21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).



interests in the US. It was formed originally in 2002 and is now closely linked to the work of Trilling and Fadel with Intel, Pearson and the Ford Motor Company named among its members.

21st century skills has become an educational mantra about the preparation of students for the changing nature of the knowledge economy and the digital society in particular. Those who promote this vision are often intimately connected with the technology companies that benefit most from this interpretation of skills.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes the term ‘competency’ or the phrase ‘graduate attributes’ is also applied in a relevantly similar sense conveying work-readiness. The development of quality assurance frameworks for the university curriculum, such as that in the UK and others relevantly similar on an international basis, reinforce this trend. Here, values, such as respect for the cultures of others, are operationalised as the possession of (inter-cultural) skills that will help students to succeed in the workplace. These may be described as *performative* values since they require the student to commodify how the acquisition or mastery of such values will enable them to perform better in a workplace setting.

The skills meta-narrative is firmly embedded in the quality framework for awarding university degrees in the UK developed by the Quality Assurance Agency.<sup>19</sup> This provides another example of the appropriation of values through a series of so-called descriptors for bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees. These descriptors are limited to the use of the terms ‘understanding’ and ‘skills’ to define the types of achievements that are expected of students in higher education. The word skills appears 34 times in the UK Quality Code, whilst the word ‘values’ is absent. As a result, UK degrees identify aims and learning outcomes in relation to knowledge and skills but not in relation to values and attitudes. A blizzard of largely undefined phrases appear in the Quality Code seeking to differentiate different sorts of skills including ‘higher-level skills’,<sup>20</sup> ‘analytical skills’,<sup>21</sup> ‘subject-related and transferable skills’,<sup>22</sup> ‘general and specific skills’,<sup>23</sup> as well as ‘transferable skills for employment’.<sup>24</sup>

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18 Jim Greenlaw, “Deconstructing the metanarrative of the 21st century skills movement,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47, no. 9 (2016): 894–903.

19 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, *UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards* (Gloucester: QAA, 2014).

20 *Ibid.*, 9

21 *Ibid.*, 9

22 *Ibid.*, 25.

23 *Ibid.*, 31.

24 *Ibid.*, 26.

With respect to this latter category the definition includes ‘the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility’.<sup>25</sup>

In the UK, perhaps one of the most significant signals of the shift to performative values came in the shape of the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative (EHEI), a government programme that sought to embed enterprise and employability as legitimate concerns within the university curriculum between 1987 and 1996. Symbolically, the EHEI was originally funded by the Employment Department (and later by the Department for Education and Employment). The emergence of performative values has also taken place against the backdrop of the re-packaging of values as skills. A good example of operationalising and, in the process, re-packaging a value as a skill is provided by the disposition of co-operation. To work or learn with others in a co-operative manner is, it might be argued, an essential value for liberal learning. Jaspers,<sup>26</sup> refers to the centrality of ‘respect’ in education without which only ‘...industriousness at best remains’. Echoing this value Barnett<sup>27</sup> identifies ‘a neutral and open forum for debate’. However, this value has taken a performative turn and is now more commonly described as ‘collaboration’ or ‘working with others’. This is a term closely associated with the needs of employers and the workplace for individuals with a preparedness to work on tasks and projects as part of a team. It is further reflected in the shifting language and priorities in major government reports concerning its future direction, with the Dearing report in 1997<sup>28</sup> signaling a significant change of direction for UK higher education from the language of its predecessor, the Robbins report of 1963.<sup>29</sup>

Resilience is a more recent example of a performative value within the curriculum. Many universities, such as Bristol and Brighton in England, now identify resilience or self-reliance as one of the qualities or dispositions that students need to develop. The emergence of ‘resilience’ needs to be understood in the context of growing concerns about the mental health and well-being of university students. Building the resilience of the future workforce for high stress professions, such as social work, is seen as critical.<sup>30</sup> It needs to be

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25 Ibid., 26.

26 Jaspers, 1959, 64.

27 Ibid., 8.

28 Ibid.

29 Ronald Barnett, “The coming of the global village: a tale of two inquiries.” *Oxford Review of Education* 25, no. 3 (1999): 293–306.

30 Louise Grant and Gail Kinman, “Enhancing wellbeing in social work students: building resilience in the next generation”, *Social Work Education*, 31, no. 5 (2012): 605–621.

understood as a performative value that will help students to adapt both to the demands of university life and to that of the workplace that awaits them.

Finally, universities now commonly stress that students must develop a commitment towards normative concepts such as social justice, global citizenship, and sustainability, often linked to community action or volunteering.<sup>31</sup> These are *transformative values*. Expectations that students will participate as members of a democratic society have long held sway as a by-product of liberal values, but now higher education is called on in a more directive manner to produce ‘good global citizens’ or ‘leaders for the 21st century’.<sup>32</sup> Evidence of social commitment is required and these expectations are enacted in the curriculum through a variety of initiatives, such as service learning programmes in the US, work placements with charities and other non-governmental organisations, study abroad programmes, electives or general education courses in four-year undergraduate degrees, and via cross curricular themes within a student’s major.<sup>33</sup> Elwick’s study<sup>34</sup> of the values of English universities reveals that a number of newer UK institutions, such as the University of Winchester, identify social justice as a core value whereas this type of language is absent from the value statements of the older, more research-intensive Russell Group.

Transformative values play an increasingly important role in the assessment of students in higher education via the growing popularity of reflection and reflective practice within subjects across the spectrum from engineering to nursing. Through reflective assignments the extent to which students have ‘transformed’ in their understanding of concepts and attitudes to professional practice is monitored and assessed. The assessment of professional practice, mobility programmes and experiential learning projects lend themselves to reflections ‘before’ and ‘after’, calling on students to emotionally engage with the ways in which their understandings and attitudes have been re-shaped through such experiences.

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31 Doug Bourn, Chris McKenzie and Chris Shiel, *The Global University: The role of the curriculum* (London: Development Education Association, 2006).

Alexander Astin, “Higher education and the cultivation of citizenship”. In *Cultivating Citizens*, edited by Dwight Allman and Michael Beaty, 91–102 (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002).

32 Alexander Astin, “Higher education and the cultivation of citizenship.”

33 Bruce Macfarlane, *Freedom to Learn: The threat to Student Academic Freedom and How It Can Be Reclaimed* (Routledge/Society for Research into Higher Education, New York/Abingdon, 2017).

34 Alex Elwick, “The values of English universities: Questioning the role of value statements and mapping their current focus”, *Higher Education Policy*, 2018, available online at <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-018-0112-x>.

	Performative	Transformative
Private	Career success (e.g., resilience)	Personal happiness (e.g., spirituality)
Public	Economic growth (e.g., entrepreneurialism)	Social justice (e.g., global citizenship)

*Figure 5.1: The appropriation of values*

Transformative values can be thought of both as related to the private rather than the public sphere since there are ways they are perceived to benefit the individual by increasing their personal happiness and wider society via social justice (see Figure 5.1). Here, spirituality is an example of a private transformative value that has come to the fore in recent years connecting religious values with a multi-faith world and secular interest in human potential and well-being.<sup>35</sup> Religion, it has been argued, is giving way to spirituality representing a value that is socially acceptable in largely secular societies.<sup>36</sup> When contemporary higher education institutions express their values through mission statements, newer universities with religious foundations, such as Winchester, Canterbury Christ Church and Bath Spa in the UK, often identify well-being and personal development as a key commitment.<sup>37</sup> In the public sphere, the term social justice is a catch-all frequently used to denote a commitment to bringing about greater equality. Here, global citizenship is an example of a public transformative value since it is indicative of concerns across the planet such as world poverty or the movement to protect the natural environment

35 Michael D. Waggoner, "Spirituality and contemporary higher education", *Journal of College and Character*, 17, no. 3 (2016): 147–156.

36 Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

37 Elwick, 2018.

for future generations. The latter example is seen as securing inter-generational equity.

Performative values represent the economic benefits that derive from a higher education both to the individual and society more broadly. Such values are seen as conferring private or individual benefits by making students more employable and likely to enjoy career success. Both resilience and punctuality are examples of work-related dispositions that are seen as critical. In the public sphere entrepreneurialism or enterprise are popular expressions of the disposition students as a group can bring to the economy once they fully enter (or re-enter) the workplace.

### ***Renewing the Commitment to Democratic Values***

Values in higher education have undergone many shifts as a result of the waning influence of the church, and the rising importance of state sponsorship and the market. As suggested earlier, a useful distinction in understanding this landscape can be made between *values for learning* in higher education and *values of positionality*. Values for learning include respect for intellectual property, tolerance, self-reflection, openness, and respect for others. These are a set of values that make it possible for higher learning to take place on the university campus. They essentially facilitate the learning process and help to ensure that the primary mission of higher education—the critical scrutiny of propositional or professional knowledge—can be carried on. On the other hand, *values of positionality* institutionalise a commitment to a set of normative values that are currently fashionable in society (e.g., global citizenship, social justice, sustainability, etc). Such values have displaced the emphasis on religious values up until at least the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Democratic values—or *values for learning*—are still essential to a genuinely ‘higher’ education premised on the idea that all knowledge claims need to be openly and rigorously scrutinised. Respect for others and their intellectual property, openness, tolerance, and a preparedness to listen are widely acknowledged as dispositions critical to protecting this participative and democratic ideal. However, in the university curriculum, and via the mission statements of institutions, values of positionality appear to be more strongly on the rise. These are commitments to socio-political values aimed at some form of social change. Such values relate to the identity and beliefs of individuals within society rather than behavioural norms essential for democratic learning. One of the pernicious effects of this development is that universities have contributed toward a culture that is becoming increasingly intolerant to debate on campus through sanctifying socio-political norms. Student bodies in the UK, US and elsewhere have instituted so-called ‘no platform’ and ‘safe spaces’ policies that

classify speakers or organisations with views that deviate from the received wisdoms of the age as a threat to the safety and well-being of students.

The university has always been a battleground of ideas, and rightly so. In the 1960s students pressed for more participation in university affairs and brought high profile social and political issues to the fore such as nuclear disarmament, apartheid in South Africa, the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. On today's campus, the de-colonisation of the university/why is my curriculum white? and other populist movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have risen to prominence. These campaigns are owned by students who, crucially, can choose to either opt in or opt out of related protest and debate and determine their own stance. The agenda can include matters that cause discomfort to the university authorities, such as student protests that took place at Birmingham and Sussex universities in 2013 against plans by the senior management to outsource campus services. This is real student engagement, as opposed to the compliant and domesticated form that institutions would prefer. However when the university authorities seek to domesticate normative political agendas within the formal curriculum students do not have any effective choice. They must demonstrate their compliance. This corporatisation of values does not sit easily with academic freedom for students or academic staff.

It is important, therefore, that the university of the future rebalances the claims of competing interpretations of values—religious, democratic, performative and transformative. In so doing, democratic values should be recognised as central to the essence of the higher education curriculum since they alone provide the basis for nurturing student academic freedom and securing the conditions necessary for the development of intellectual independence. A number of institutions, led by the University of Chicago, have recently stood up to the growing censorship of freedom of expression on campus and re-asserted the importance of democratic values.

In a word, the University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to action those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose.<sup>38</sup>

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38 The University of Chicago. *Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression*, 2015 <https://freexpression.uchicago.edu/sites/freexpression.uchicago.edu/files/FOECom->

The rise in performative and transformative values threatens student academic freedom understood as a meta-value in the liberal, Humboldtian tradition. Here, forms of student performativity have emerged as a means by which learners manage the demands of these new expectations. Student behaviour and attitudes are audited, measured and assessed in a public learning space aided by the increasingly widespread use, and acceptance, of learning analytics. Compulsory attendance requirements, often justified on the basis of developing work-related skills such as punctuality, have resulted in bodily performativity while forms of assessment and learning, such as reflective assignments, have instituted emotional performativity.<sup>39</sup> These forms of performativity require learners to enter into inauthentic practices that are based on observations of their social and behavioural compliance; a ‘forced’ form of engagement with learning and assessment to satisfy performative expectations. The increasing emphasis in higher education globally on the merits of student engagement, and the reward of ‘time and effort’ in respect to learning, has accelerated this trend.

It is further clear that transformative values, such as community volunteering, have a performative worth in the crowded marketplace as a means for a student to differentiate his or herself from another student looking for a job. The academic freedom of the student is compromised by the way that transformative values require students to enact the rituals of emotional performativity. Students are encouraged to capitalise on the performative value of transformative values, such as gap year tourism, a process that has been labelled self-commodification<sup>40</sup>

Students need to be able to express their ideas in an atmosphere of tolerance where all views are subject to critical scrutiny promoting rationality in relation to knowledge claims in the process. Asking students to adopt positional values, such as global citizenship and social justice, contrasts sharply with Jaspers’ argument that the only purpose of the university is to allow people to congregate ‘for the sole purpose of seeking the truth’.<sup>41</sup> Hence the rise of transformative values runs counter to the liberal tradition of Popper’s open society<sup>42</sup> and means that universities are seeking to impose a normative positionality on students without problematising the knowledge claims contained

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mitteeReport.pdf, Accessed 31 August, 2018.

39 Macfarlane, *Freedom to Learn*.

40 Bonnie Urciuoli, “Skills and selves in the new workplace”, *American Ethnologist*, 35, no. 2 (2008): 211–228.

41 Jaspers, 1959:19

42 Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1945).

within them. The classroom should be a safe space for discussion and dialogue rather than a pseudo-political one. As Hannah Arendt argued, education should not be used as a political tool and students should not be treated as political pawns.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

The medieval origins of the university were intimately connected with religious values through the training of the clergy and in compliance with the established faith of the state. This understanding was gradually displaced during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by democratic values based on the Western liberal tradition of higher education shaped by the development of the Humboldtian model of the university. More recently, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this interpretation of values in relation to the university curriculum has given way to one based on the assumptions of the market. This has resulted in the rise of performative values, associated with neo-liberal interpretations of the purpose of a higher education. The university is also increasingly self-conscious about how to market its social role and promote values that align with societal norms. This has led to the emergence of a greater emphasis on transformative values based on global social justice. These values seek to shape the student's positionality on social issues or influence their state of personal happiness and are increasingly in evidence in the contemporary HE curriculum across the world.

Promoting socio-political agendas, such as global citizenship, social justice, and sustainability, undermines the freedom of students—and academic faculty—to question, debate and contest the knowledge claims that are wrapped up in these concepts. Such normative agendas pose a risk to both student academic freedom and the authenticity of the learning process. It means that certain topics cannot be seriously debated in the modern university without those entering into this process risking censure if they take issue with received wisdom. In reality the most potent threat to academic freedom is self-censorship as the student, and the academic faculty member, learns to comply with the tacit boundaries as to what is contestable. The university of the future needs to reclaim the centrality of democratic values and be wary of espousing commitment to values of positionality. This demands a commitment to the opening up, rather than closing down, of debate and encouraging the unfettered intellectual scrutiny of ideas.

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43 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1954).



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