

The University and Postmodern Times

Alyson da Silva Leal, Unifenas, Brazil
Virgínio Cândido Tosta de Souza, Universidade Vale do Sapucaí, Brazil
Kátia Rejane Rodrigues Leal, Unifenas, Brazil
Carolina Rodrigues Leal, Unifenas, Brazil

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Abstract

Around the 1950s, in the so-called “post-industrial era”, science and the University, given the technological impact of knowledge, underwent substantial changes in their statutes, by marginalizing the theoretical framework provided by the philosopher, relegating ontological issues to the sidelines and prioritizing gnosiological issues. From the moment that the metaphysical framework of modern science was invalidated, concepts dear to modern thought such as “truth”, “subject”, “totality”, “reason”, “progress” give way due to disbelief in the face of philosophical-metaphysical metadiscourse, with timeless and universalizing pretensions (LYOTARD, 1998). The pursuit of university efficiency and excellence can no longer be based on the traditional alchemy of cost-benefit calculation with increased productivity (manpower production that meets market needs). Success evaluation criteria begin to incorporate dimensions that go beyond the economic organization that sees the University as a company that must be guided by managers, but that concern social, cultural life and environmental preservation. It can be said that efficiency is not just “doing things well”, according to market rules, but “doing good things” according to ethical principles. It is the duty of the Academy to bring to those who enjoy it directly or indirectly the *eudaimonia* that is not based on riches, nor pleasures, nor on honors but on a virtuous life, raising the thought for the common good, in which one stops seeking one's own pleasure and elevates the thought of the common good, bringing enthusiasm in living.

Keywords: Postmodern Time, University, Ethics, Citizenship, Philosophy

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Introduction

Since their inception, Universities represented a unique product of Western civilization, with a remarkable associative spirit between masters and students, researchers, artists and philosophers, who led man in the search for solutions to his broadest interests, for the formulation of answers to enable the resolution of common problems. The University, prior to the modern era, was faced with a context where the whole was more important than the part, in an organization that overlapped with the freedom of men, who, in fact, were not masters of their destinies.

Currently, with society in constant change, in a logic marked by democratic individualism, where all individuals are, in principle, free and equal, the University must adapt to the new imperatives linked to the challenges of the 21st century, in a model completely revolutionary.

If before the education offered to the great masses of society was reduced to the dissemination of skills such as reading, writing, performing calculations, sufficient to work in a factory or in the field, today this is no longer sustainable: humanity needs other skills, more complex and capable of responding adequately and satisfactorily to problems in the social, health, food, and ecological fields.

It is in this paradigm that the research on screen proposes a hermeneutics about the socio-cultural responsibility of the University committed to the Ethics of values and responsible Citizenship in postmodern time.

Theoretical foundation

The work presented is an analysis and discussion of the role of the University in the face of instability in the postmodern era. It seeks to explain the role played by Higher Education for the consolidation of a critical and humanist spirit, thus enabling the establishment of a productive dialogue with the aim of contributing to the formation of an ethical individual with full citizenship.

Methodology

The methodology of the research on screen is theoretically based, qualitative, bibliographical, dissertative, not systematized, directed towards an approach to the University, Ethics and Citizenship in Postmodern time.

Discussion

The times we live in: divorce between scientific and humanistic culture

The progress of knowledge, science and technology has been shown to be uncoupled from politics, ethics and thought. What in times of Modernity the reason seemed to be a certain promise of a human flourishing, in postmodern times, paradoxically, reverts to questions that generate multiple regressions that go back to barbarism.

The development of society, leveraged by reason, brings with it scientific, medical, technical and social progress, as well as destruction in the biosphere, new inequalities, new servitudes

replacing former slavery, threat of annihilation (nuclear, ecological) and frightening powers of manipulation (MORIN, 2011).

Since modernity, science and technology have become productive forces, ceasing to be a mere support of capital, becoming agents of its accumulation. Scientists and technicians gradually became key players in capitalist strength and power, which are based on the monopoly of knowledge and information (CHAUÍ, 2003).

The point is that science is not seen as an enterprise that develops on some higher moral or spiritual level, but shaped by economic, political and religious interests, where most scientific studies are funded not by mere altruism, being unable to establish your priorities or determining what to do with your findings. Indeed, this cycle between science, empire and capital was the main engine of history in the last five hundred years (HARARI, 2021).

Harmful symptoms of postmodern ideology

The current model of capital accumulation, called neoliberalism, marked by the vertical disintegration of production, electronic technologies, speed in the qualification and disqualification of labor, acceleration of the turnover of production, trade and consumption due to the development of information techniques and distribution, with the proliferation of the service sector, brings with it a by-product: the postmodern ideology (CHAUÍ, 2003).

Post-modernity relegates to the condition of totalitarian Eurocentric myths the ideas spread during modernity: rationality, universality, history as endowed with immanent meaning. It is marked by a passion for the ephemeral, for fast images, for fashion and for the disposable. It affirms fragmentation as a way of being of society. It leaves behind the importance given to man and his values, the distinction between good and evil, the search for knowledge of virtue, knowing how to master one's impulses and the reflection of knowing oneself.

The individuals of this current society base their relationships on superficiality and solitude: a liquid society, where there is fear and apprehension of deep relationships. The search for the new (in goods and interpersonal relationships) is fostered by the psychology of consumer life that everything old is bad, as opposed to the stability and security of the past society of producers. The consumerist ethic exempted society from cultivating compassion and tolerance (BAUMAN, 2008).

Much more than the conquest of freedom and autonomy, there are the delights of narcissism and hedonism, with the promotion of permissive values. Modern individualism, far from being virtue and autonomy, means passivity and even apathy, in an era of empty men and focused on private and narcissistic choices (RUSS, 2015).

Two dimensions of modernity were lost in this process: the dignity of the citizen and the social contract. The values of modernity evaporate due to the commodification of everything: feelings, ideas, products and dreams. Love and idealism become innocuous words where what prevails is profit and personal gain (BETTO, 2011).

For an emancipatory, ethical and citizen reform of the University

For nearly a thousand years, the University has survived by adjusting to the changes and demands of the world: changes in teaching and research methods, in the contents of

intellectual life, in the urgent need to readapt to the new knowledge and behaviors acquired by the human being.

The scholastic University evolved into the scientific, technical, market-oriented University, but little has changed in the basic features arising in Bologna, Paris, Oxford, at the beginning of the second millennium. Before your basic strategy was able to meet knowledge challenges.

Today, with the speed at which ideas evolve within each area of knowledge, with the speed with which knowledge spreads in the world directly, without the need for intermediation from the University, the crisis of hegemony that the University is going through is clear, among other factors, due to the contradictions between the traditional functions that it insistently refuses to maintain and those that postmodern society has been trying to attribute to it.

Starting with the need to break university isolation and its epistemology of separation, the result of modern rationality and the necessary resumption of the interconnectivity of knowledge.

In this sense, it is necessary to understand the University as a center for the production of epistemological and socially privileged knowledge. It has; therefore, more than any other incorporation, social responsibility, and it has the irrefutable commitment to accept being permeable to social demands. The University, with all the epistemology capable of producing, cannot be an island in itself.

Social responsibility presupposes, in this case, much more than responsible action by the University that acts correctly, considering awareness and commitment to social change. Such practices and social objectives cannot be mixed with commercial and economic interests, in which all the benefits of performing acts that contribute to society in a proactive way in the fight against social problems are indirectly reversed in the medium and long term.

It is fundamental, therefore, to observe one of the varied roles to be played by Universities in the process of development and social justice: which implies stepping out of their isolation in relation to the most needy masses at an economic and cultural level.

If in the Greek academies teaching was done individually, between the master and the student, the new technologies allow the transmission of knowledge on a planetary scale, not being restricted to the use of the word, authorizing an unprecedented range of free, creative, knowledge, without attachment to dogma.

Without isolation, the post-university will be related in a network formed not only by specific teaching and research centers, but in any higher education promotion unit (industry, houses, laboratories, offices). Wherever there is a thinking person, there will be the University connected in this knowledge generation network (BUARQUE, 2020).

The University without walls in the 21st century is not restricted to the use of technology. In a practical example, the reform of the University must give a broad meaning to extension activities: through them the University starts to have an active participation in the construction of social cohesion, in the deepening of democracy, in the fight against social exclusion and the environmental degradation and the defense of cultural diversity.

Its recipients are the most varied: popular social groups and their organizations; social movements; local or regional communities. For the extension to fulfill this function, it must have as a priority objective, to provide solidary support to the resolution of problems of social exclusion and discrimination (SANTOS, 2021).

To the extent that it provides an evolution of the means of communication and information technologies, postmodern society also influences the conduct of the academic world, since academic acts become increasingly public and, therefore, noticed, demanding a greater care with the zeal for the practice of knowledge without any reprehensible conduct such as abuse of the environment, exploitation of its employees and faculty.

But it must be said that the social responsibility of Universities must be more than a concern that could scratch the image and harm interests that are undeniably aligned with the market, and, rather, start from a voluntary integration, not limited to respecting and fulfilling the needs legal but privilege the vision of the mission as a responsible part of an environment and a society.

The pursuit of university efficiency and excellence can no longer be based on the traditional alchemy of cost-benefit calculation with increased productivity (manpower production that meets market needs). Success evaluation criteria begin to incorporate dimensions that go beyond the economic organization that sees the University as a company that must be guided by managers, but that concern social, cultural life and environmental preservation. It can be said that efficiency is not just “doing things well”, according to market rules, but “doing good things” according to ethical principles.

It so happens that many businessmen in the educational sector still insist on basing their ideas on the STOCKHOLDER THEORY (MILTON FRIEDMAN), according to which shareholders acquire company shares with the sole purpose of maximizing the return on their investment, with managers task, making the company obtain the highest possible profit.

This results in an individualistic view, where the directors of a company feel obliged to prioritize the interests of shareholders, who do not see at first that business can coexist with ethics and that such a partnership is necessary and beneficial to the lives of human beings and companies, above the issue of profit.

According to Santos (2021, p. 90), social responsibility does not remove university autonomy and academic freedom, since society is not an abstraction and the contextual challenges depending on the region where Universities are located must be faced by them.

It is worth resuming here the teachings of Hans Jonas, by emphasizing that the development of knowledge must be attentive to the individual, and not the opposite: it is up to the University to act in such a responsible way that it does not contribute to jeopardizing the indefinite continuity of the Earth (not only the physical destruction of humanity but its essential death arising from deconstruction and the random technological reconstruction of man). The knowledge produced and offered in academic spaces should also privilege future generations, helping in the exercise of curatorship of natural resources.

Another point of extreme relevance to be reflected by Universities is the epistemology of separation, noted and rooted in the traditional and fragmented way of transmitting knowledge.

Education in post-modernity must favor knowledge together with realities and their problems in a multidisciplinary, transversal, multidimensional, global and planetary way. Knowledge must be recognized in its historical, economic, sociological, religious dimension, fighting what has long been engraved in the knowledge process, leading to the reduction, separation, simplification and concealment of major problems (MORIN, 2014).

It is the role of the University and educators to work on training individuals in a changing world. In this, it is necessary to recognize a positive influence with the end of metanarratives that erase important differences and obfuscate complexities and nuances of interests, cultures, places. Individuals should be prepared for the transience of all aspects of life, with the need for constant updating and emancipation as historical subjects. The new reality demands educational attributes such as vision of the whole, autonomy, flexibility, initiative, analytical reasoning, skills to interpret and reinterpret situations, skills to process information and make decisions, skills for political activities, to learn about other cultures, about advances in technology, about social changes and constant changes in professional activities (PEREIRA, 2000).

It is necessary to rethink the role given exclusively to science and technology, leaving a secondary role for the humanist culture on the social and human consequences of its applications. The University is being called upon to rebuild a more fraternal society, capable of reinventing a more humane culture.

It is necessary to reconsider the knowledge offered by the University, which cannot essentially focus on production and the market. The Academy should provide students and their surroundings (local, regional and universal) with their ability to reflect on the major axes of current culture, thus ceasing to submit to the system, having to submit to debate (both from the point of view of scientific-technological point of view, as well as from the humanistic-cultural point of view) (GOERGEN, 2000).

Education, at all levels and segments, cannot be reduced simply to getting information or getting a job. Education is about healing and wholeness. It's about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, it's about renewing life's vitality. It's about finding and reclaiming ourselves and our place in the world (PALMER, 2017).

In this sense, post-modernity and its side of disastrous consequences bring to the agenda of the University the irrefutable fact about the indispensability of working for the formation of individuals, deepening the democratic claims arising from modernism, in the search for social justice, freedom and critical citizenship: the University was born by the humanities and for humanity.

Without sectarianism, the University will need to modify the cold scientific method and incorporate feelings and moral commitments: ethics becomes part of knowledge itself, relating rationality to moral values. Legislative codes are overshadowed by culturally accepted behaviors, according to which engineers will feel the need to protect the environment, economists not to cause unemployment to increase wealth, biologists not to induce biological mutation for the benefit of only a part of the population (BUARQUE, 2020).

On this basis, the University must be a place that, in fact, confronts preconceived ideas, rationalizations based on arbitrary premises, the inability to self-criticize, paranoid reasoning,

arrogance, refusal, contempt, fabrication and the condemnation of culprits, egocentrism, ethnocentrism, sociocentrism, the nurturing of xenophobia and racism. It is necessary to combat the reducing and simplifying spirit, the possession by an idea, a faith, an absolute conviction of truth, which generate misunderstanding (MORIN, 2011).

University professors should be democratic educators, making room for learning to take place in the most inclusive way, placing themselves in front of students with confidence and openness to listen to them, respecting their freedoms, contrary to the authoritarianism that, in the academic space, makes the repressive and oppressive, dehumanizing study. Democratic educators must work to find ways of teaching and sharing knowledge in a way that does not reinforce existing structures of domination (hierarchies of race, racism, gender, feminism, class and religion), which generates significant impact far beyond the academic space (CASSIO, 2019).

The ethics of understanding must be reinforced: an ethics that calls for arguments, refutation, rather than excommunication and anathematization; understand why and how one hates or despises oneself; it is to understand the error, the deviations, the ideologies, the drifts, avoiding the peremptory condemnation, as if the individual himself had not already known the weakness or committed a mistake (MORIN, 2011).

Multidisciplinary and humanist integration is incomplete if the University does not leave political sectarianism: it needs political practice and must be a field for confrontation in the formulation of doubts and alternative thoughts. Passivity and the absence of civilized dialogue on how to make politics with a sense of responsibility and proportion, not being seen as a struggle between good and evil, only empower the digital environment more, which generates extreme politicization and alienation.

Returning to Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics", the University must contribute to the pursuit of happiness, since all practical rationality is teleological, oriented so that the individual develops in his fullness, being able to use all his capacities and possibilities.

It is the duty of the Academy to bring to those who enjoy it directly or indirectly the eudaimonia that is not based on riches, nor pleasures, nor on honors but on a virtuous life, raising the thought for the common good, remembering that the happiness that comes from the carnal life, where you have satisfaction with sex, drugs, shopping, passes quickly; the happiness generated by political life (or ethical life), in which one stops seeking one's own pleasure and elevates the thought of the common good, brings enthusiasm in living; finally, the happiness that comes from the contemplative life comes from the ability to get rid of material things and, therefore, smaller ones.

The Aristotelian conception of golden mean, also called average in "Nicomachean Ethics" has never been so pressing and necessary: the University must walk imbued with those who benefit from it, emphasizing that the search for virtue lies in the practical wisdom of a life prudent and balanced, guided by good habits, which depends on an excellent education: the average means reaching the right mean, balance, avoiding both lack and excess, in each individual's search for excellence in doing what must be done in a well-done manner, where there is the virtue for the citizen endowed with prudence and educated by habit in its exercise, with conscience and firm character to choose well.

Conclusion and Final considerations

Given the scenario presented, the University is required to question its identity and reposition its mission for the coming decades, through a new model that can meet the demands of post-modernity.

It is necessary to understand the University as a center for the production of epistemological and socially privileged knowledge. It therefore has social responsibility, with the irrefutable commitment to accept being permeable to social demands. Its social practices and objectives cannot be exclusively aimed at commercial and economic interests.

Education in post-modernity must favor knowledge together with realities and their problems in a multidisciplinary, transversal, multidimensional, global and planetary way. Knowledge must be recognized in its historical, economic, sociological, religious dimension, fighting what has long been engraved in the knowledge process, leading to the reduction, separation, simplification and concealment of major problems (MORIN, 2014).

The University was born by the humanities and for humanity: it must be a place that, in fact, confronts preconceived ideas, rationalizations based on arbitrary premises, the inability to criticize oneself, paranoid reasoning, arrogance, refusal, contempt, the fabrication and condemnation of culprits, egocentrism, ethnocentrism, sociocentrism, the nurturing of xenophobia and racism. It is necessary to combat the reducing and simplifying spirit, the possession by an idea, a faith, an absolute conviction of truth, which generate misunderstanding (MORIN, 2011).

Priority must be given to the humanities, philosophy and social sciences, which must be linked to the development of new technologies at all times. It is not enough for the University to teach the individual a specialty. In order for it to perform its social function, it must provide rational and humane training, so that its graduates acquire personality, with a sense of what is morally correct and fraternal.

The countless answers to be found in the face of the new imperatives linked to the imminent challenges in postmodern times can only be achieved with the development of a critical spirit in intelligence, in a thought that does not compartmentalize or separate but that reconnects what is separated, multidimensional and systemic, in an ethics committed and responsible with the whole present and with what is to come.

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Contact email: alyson.leal@unifenas.br