

# The GENEROUS UNIVERSITY

By CLAUS HOLM

\* In 1797 French philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy suggested the word *ideology* as a term for social sciences. Destutt de Tracy used – and promoted – ideology as a term for the production and communication of constructive ideas. At the same time, he criticised intellectuals who worked with metaphysics and psychology, as *ideologists*' aspiration was anything but contemplative. It was philosophy in action – sheer politics. Ideology was a weapon of control. To rule the world, you need first to understand it! Ideologists leaned on the idea that civil servants with a scholarly background would be able to create a civilised, decent and happy society. Politically, Napoleon was flirting with the ideologists, and he demonstrated his enthusiasm for more action-oriented science in the late 17th century when he closed the universities. He then chose to increase the number of vocational schools and institutions of specialised studies for practical professions (*grandes écoles*). The purpose of these *grandes écoles* was to generate and utilise scientific knowledge for practical purposes.

Without comparison, a couple of hundred years after Napoleon, universities all over the world are once again changing. Research and education are not only expected to comprise largely exclusive and internally justified activities, but also, at the same time, externally justified activities that emphasise generous relationships between universities and the surrounding world. At the head of this change is not a new Napoleon, but the leading idea that the contact between universities and the outside world should be renewed. In other words, while research and education should offer their services to the nation, at the same time the production of knowledge should be an end in itself. This discrepancy corresponds to the disparity between the traditional French and German university forms, but as it is, it may also comprise the disparity between the universities of yesterday and tomorrow, respectively.

A point of orientation for tomorrow's universities might be the wide-ranging conception of generosity which focuses on the mobilisation of knowledge via dissemination and communication. This is already happening, of course; not least as long-established boards of studies translate and transform research results into teaching. More can be done, however. Teaching might change from being defined solely by professional research progress to being structured equally by the competencies required in the given labour market.

Universities could choose to co-operate with journalists to a greater extent to present their knowledge to a wider audience. And universities could establish working relationships with authorities and companies to produce research on specific social problems.

The objective of the generous university is twofold. One is to improve the basis for evidence-based politics and practice. The future labour force, for example, needs to be more research-informed. That is, among other things, future teachers should be able to understand, interpret, criticise and utilise the numerous pieces of research on schools produced today in many countries worldwide. On the one hand, this means that teachers should no longer simply have blind faith in practice and do what they have always done. On the other hand, it does not entail blindly obeying the instructions offered by research. The motto is that good and useful theory is the most practical option. Obviously, though, there is a difference between theory and fitting use thereof.

The second objective is to link research and practice via a range of partnerships. Partnerships consist of asym-

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metrical relations between experts in diverse fields; and a proper system of experts is able to produce and communicate clear explanations for the surrounding world. University representatives need to translate all academic activities, making them comprehensible to representatives from the surrounding world. And then again, it is equally important that practice representatives translate their activities, making them understandable to the universities and thus spawning mutual generosity and partnerships.

In other words, Napoleon's sympathy for the ideologists ended with the gradual disclosure of the pivotal conflict between Napoleonic authoritarian rule and the ideologists' devotion to republican administration ideals. The modern world needs partnerships to which respect for differences is central. Researchers' dedication to research and practitioners' dedication to practice together make up the basis for a dynamic and productive relationship. People go together, because they make up one side of the discrepancy between one and the other. ■

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