

# The Idea of the University: Some Problems of Modern Higher Education\*

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**Abstract**—The article analyzes the main ideas related to the system of higher education, the Russian philosopher and teacher S. I. Hessen. Being a follower of the Neokantian trend in philosophy, the Russian thinker supports the ideas of continuous education, the connection between learning and science, the joint creativity of the teacher and student, university freedom, the freedom of the teacher in choosing the courses to be read, and the freedom of the student in choosing a teacher.

**Keywords**—education; upbringing; the idea of the university; S.I. Hessen

## I. INTRODUCTION

Numerous discussions about the place and role of education in human life and human society, about what education is and how it is related to child-rearing, including patriotic one, what is happening with the education system at the present stage of human development indicate both the importance of this topic and the complexity of the period of existence of the human community, which is characterized by various and diverse processes, not yet fully understood not only by ordinary people, but also by specialists.

And in this case, the historical experience, especially the historical experience of philosophical understanding of education problems should certainly be updated in these discussions. The philosophers' reflections on the idea of the University as a universal, that is, all-inclusive formation of human in a human being belong to this as well.

The discussion about the idea of the University was initiated by a series of lectures "The Idea of the University" (1873) by John Newman. Apart from him, Wilhelm von Humboldt can be considered as the ancestor of this discussion, a German encyclopedist and reformer of the University of Berlin. Subsequently, the discussion is joined by such authors as F. Nietzsche, Ortega y Gasset, K. Jaspers,

A. Whitehead and many others.

## II. PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Turning to the concept of the philosophy of the education of the Russian thinker, it should be pointed out how Hessen himself understands the specifics of "applied philosophy" [1], which he develops. V. N. Belov, as one of the Russian researchers of Russian neo-Kantianism, notes that the nature of applied philosophy by S. Hessen is interpreted as a closer and verified connection between theory and practice. What does the Russian philosopher achieve by noting such connection? According to Belov, Hessen opposes both empty theorizing, which results in metaphysics or mysticism, and narrow-practical approach that ignore all theorizing. If we turn to the positive point in the structure of the philosophical justification of the close connection between the theory and practice of Hessen, involvement of the dialectical method comes to the fore [2]. How Hessen understands it is explained in the Preface to his fundamental work "Fundamentals of Pedagogy": "Although in the book itself I did not have the opportunity to dwell in detail on the problem of philosophical method, I hope that the reader will catch the essence of the philosophical point of view protected by me from those specific applications of it to the pedagogical issues that make up its own subject of this study. This opinion could be described as an attempt to synthesize reason and intuition, monism and pluralism, rationalism and irrationalism. As it approaches the "principle of heterology", developed by Rickert in his last works and marked in a peculiar form by Lask prematurely lost in the war. However, if the essence of "heterology" is to see how the confrontation between the two beginnings turns into a unity of two moments and that for it "one" comprehends and retains itself as the same thing only through the discovery of the "other" in it, then we can say that it is essentially updated eternal motif of philosophical thought, the motif of dialectics" [3].

Referring to the problem of philosophical orientations of Hessen in the formation of his pedagogical concept, it is

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necessary to emphasize one important detail. Even though the Russian thinker is referred to the Baden school of neo-Kantianism, to the disciples G. Rickert, Hessen's constructions of the philosophy of education recognize the affinity of his views with Paul Natorp — one of the leading representatives of the Marburg School. According to Hessen, Natorp's work "Social Pedagogy" is the only "conscious and consistent construction of pedagogy as an applied philosophy" [4] in the modern pedagogical literature.

However, with all the reverence for the position of the Marburg master, Hessen notes the shortcomings of his philosophical constructions in the field of pedagogy. Particularly, he notes: "Contrary to Natorp's own demand that pedagogy should be based on the system of philosophy as a whole, 'Social Pedagogy' gives in essence only the theory of moral education: scientific, aesthetic and religious education is completely left aside, and not only because Natorp as the author of the book limited his idea to the theory of moral education, but also because in essence Natorp shares Kant's moralistic theory of "the primacy of practical reason" in his work. On the other hand, in the pedagogical system of Natorp there are also many traces of intellectualism: his ideal of scientific knowledge, which stands exclusively under the sign of mathematical natural science, is too abstract, his scientific monism, which sees in philosophy (in particular, even in ethics) the completion of scientific education, is too little, finally, he gives place to feelings and imagination, ignoring the self-sufficient importance of individual age periods in human life. Hence the excessive constructiveness of his entire pedagogical system, in many ways, no longer satisfies the modern reader"[5].

What does the Russian philosopher offer to overcome the shortcomings of Natorp's pedagogical system? What ideas, in his opinion, should form the basis of a truly holistic and truly humanistic system of education, including higher education?

First of all, S. Hessen substantiates the idea of continuity in the process of education and the need for age specifications, the search for truth in the cognitive interest of a person should unite all one's efforts in this direction. "For there is no two knowledge – scientific and "ordinary" - emphasizes the Russian thinker - and all knowledge, if it is only true, is already a scientific knowledge. The cognizing child, making one's first observations of reality and conclusions from them, unconsciously obeys the laws and rules that regulate the work of the scientist. "Scientific thinking", "scientific education" is the only highest stage of the process, the initial stages of which are ordinary reasoning and life knowledge of the child" [6].

### III. IDEALS AND PROBLEMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

As for high schools, in Hessen's opinion, they have to combine the learning process and the process of scientific inquiry in a natural way. There should be a complementary learning process for scientific work and scientific work for learning. Therefore, the student must also be involved in the research and should not receive the knowledge as a ready-

made substance. "Higher school of science should, therefore, be primarily the focus of scientific research, its teacher should be an active researcher, an independent scientist, that expands the field of knowledge with one's scientific work, a student should be a participant in the research work of the teacher and so far a novice scientist, the place of study– the lecture hall, laboratory, seminars – a place where new scientific truths are revealed, where the results of recent discoveries are presented and verified. Higher school of science, or the University, is, therefore, an inseparable unity of teaching and research. This is the teaching via research produced in front of the students" [7]. Since lecturing should also be subordinated to the joint creative process of the lecturer and the audience, the declamatory skills of the teacher recede into the background. The main part of this process is finding the truth, so the lecturer is not a speaker, but first of all, is a scientist. Public speaking is not important here, but the ability to "think during the speech, to open new knowledge and shades of thought developed by one during the lecture. Therefore, the external roughness of the speech, since it is an expression of the struggle of thought with the word, is often the true charm of scientific speech" [8]. The professor, the teacher, according to Hessen, should not stoop to the level of questioning, if you please, "the adaptation of the Professor to the audience not only improves teaching scientific course, but harms one, taking away the nature of research and thereby relegating one to the level of a systematic course" [9].

Teaching as a scientific creativity is an approach possible only with the ability to choose the courses to be taught, preferences of the teacher cannot be limited to the top-down programs and external regulations. On the other hand, the student should have complete freedom in choosing a teacher and courses. Therefore, students should be able to move freely between departments, faculties, any Universities in any country in the world. S. Hessen writes: "the Unity of universities, their mutual recognition of credits and degrees is a prerequisite for freedom of teaching" [10].

Therefore, such ideas of the Russian thinker about the development of University education, namely the ideas of the connection between education and science, joint creativity of the teacher and the student, University freedom, freedom of the teacher in the choice of courses, the student's freedom to choose the teacher — sound extremely attractive today. With all the schematism and ideality, they guide both the teacher, educator, scientist, and pupils, students to collaborate and establishment through such joint efforts of the truly human in a man.

However, a century later, as modern universities increasingly deviate from the ideals of the past, which have never been fully realized, these ideas should be re-evaluated by analyzing their preconditions and assumptions.

The idea of the University that teaches students through their involvement in scientific research, guaranteeing the freedom of teaching and learning, is based on a certain idea of a human and a certain idea of society. Very roughly they can be expressed as follows: "all people want to be scientists, because to be a scientist for a person is the best, and the best

society is a society where all consist of scientists". Formulated in this way, they express the essence of progressive utopias, such as Bacon's "New Atlantis", the origins of which are found in the first sentence of Aristotle's "Metaphysics": "all people naturally strive for knowledge".

The idea of the University as an institution that universally forms a person, shaping one's personality on the basis of a natural desire for knowledge through the inclusion to a living community of teachers and students, is designed to realize several dreams of a person involved in the University Corporation.

First, it is a dream of an ideal family, to which you belong not on the fact of birth, but on the basis of your free choice, hence the idea of the University as an alma mater. A teacher, a Professor is a reasonable and fair father, and your fellow students are brothers. "Student brotherhood" can be a real organization of students with its own rules and rite of initiation.

Secondly, it is a dream of a righteous happy life. Once having taken the path of knowledge, perfecting oneself, and then perfecting others, turning from a disciple into a teacher, a University scientist spends one's life in the tireless service of truth, that is, God ("I am the way and the truth and life" (Jn. 14:6)). One's life is the life of a secular monk.

Thirdly, it is a dream of an ideal social order, where power belongs not to the rich and powerful, but to the knowledgeable and wise, and where the knowledgeable and wise care for the not knowing and the unwise, enclosing them to knowledge and wisdom, and anyone can be enclosed to knowledge and wisdom.

Explicitly formulated, these dreams assume that all humans possess a mind sufficient to

- participate in joint scientific activities;
- agree on the truth or falsity of any statement of science;
- recognize the highest authority of knowledge and truth, and, consequently, the highest authority of the University among all other public institutions.

It is easy to show that neither the first, nor the second, nor the third is wrong. The idea that all people have by nature the same mental inclinations and are capable, with proper education, of independent scientific creativity, belongs to the age of Enlightenment. Before this era, the opposite thought could be found: "there is an innumerable amount of rude and stupid minds. The truth they do not inspire - all the correction of such minds can only be to convince them to be limited to the objects available to them and to refrain from judging things that are above their understanding" [11].

Inequality of people in their abilities at least to mathematics is so obvious that led to the modern education system to the creation of special classes and special schools for gifted children in this science. But if the cognitive abilities of people are not equal to at least one scientific

discipline, we cannot say that they will be equal in relation to science as a whole.

As the development of science has shown, even the almost complete agreement of scientists on the truth of such a fundamental scientific theory as Newtonian mechanics does not guarantee science from revolutionary shocks and the emergence of new alternative fundamental theories. The universal scientific language of Leibniz, which was intended to stop the disputes of scientists, turned out to be an unrealizable utopia. At present, the agreement of scientists on the solution of a problem seems to be the exception, not the rule. But even if at some point it is achieved, it does not mean that it is achieved forever.

Finally, the authority of the University may have surpassed that of the Church in a certain historical era, but it has never been higher than that of the Central or local authorities, both for the educated and uneducated parts of society.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

"The idea of the University" as a community of wise and knowledgeable, involving more and more members, and somewhere in the distant future turning all adults into "eternal" teachers and students, contradicts its real existence in society as an institution in which young generations spend several years of their lives, completing their formation as a person, but then forever leave its walls.

The new "idea of the University" must accept its "limitation" and "finiteness", the fact that University education through science is not the only possible and not the only correct way to form new generations of people, that knowledge and science is one of many human occupations and not the only worthy human business to which all others must be subordinated.

This new "idea of the University" may include the content of the former. Freedom of teaching and freedom of choice for students, as well as their involvement in the learning process to scientific work, are quite compatible with the recognition of alternative ways of human formation. But the fact that the new "idea of the University" should be based on new philosophical foundations seems certain.

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