

## Raúl Fornet-Betancourt

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The program for the XII International Congress for Intercultural Philosophy, as you can see, calls us together, to work with the topic: “Formation, University and Spirituality”. During the previous congress held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from September 17 to 20, 2015, we had already touched on this topic.<sup>2</sup>

Why then do we revisit this subject once again?

In these brief introductory remarks I will try to explain the reason behind this apparent repetition. The explanation will also result in the presentation of the working perspectives which, in my view, ensue from the previous congress.

For me, the fundamental reason for stating this issue again, lies simply in the importance that the institution we call university has for the future of humanity.

I believe, without any doubt, that the university is, in fact, the European Institution par excellence<sup>3</sup>, which has reached a global projection that makes it today an international reference not only as an “interconnected” entity or a “network” for transmission and production of knowledge, as well as for investigation and formation, but also as the foundation for the political, social and economic development of current societies in general.

Again, without any doubt, in my opinion, we evidence that the university is an institution with a history that is quite honorable and also quite ambivalent; it is intertwined by many chapters where both glory and misery become inseparable in its constitutive dimension as an association/guild for science and culture as well as for its social and political function. Two examples illustrate my point. In the XVI Century,

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the XII International Congress for Intercultural Philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (Hrsg.) *Bildungstraditionen, Spiritualität und Universität/ Traditions of Formation, Spirituality and University/ Tradiciones de formación, Espiritualidad y Universidad*, Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, Aachen 2015

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Walter Rüegg (Hg.), *Geschichte der Universität in Europa*. Tomo 1: *Mittelalter*, Beck, München 1993, pagina 13. Ver también Ludger Honnefelder, “Bildung durch Wissenschaft. Eine Einführung”, en la obra editada por él: *Albertus Magnus und der Ursprung der Universitätsidee. Die Begegnung der Wissenschaftskulturen im 13. Jahrhundert und die Entdeckung des Konzepts der Bildung durch Wissenschaft*. Velbrück, Weilerswist 2017, páginas 9-23.

over and above the narration and wisdom knowledge, the priority of “modern” instrumental knowledge is geared up in order to dominate the World<sup>4</sup>; however, it is also the space where the “dignity of the indigenous people” is defended.<sup>5</sup> And, in the XX Century, the university becomes an ally for the emerging diversity of totalitarianisms<sup>6</sup>, while at the same time it is the space where the sanctity of the human person is proclaimed together with a call for the humanization of science.<sup>7</sup>

To be more precise regarding the fundamental reason for repeating this topic from the previous congress, I should underline that I am speaking of the importance of an institution which, from its beginnings, writes its history wrought by ambivalence.

This, however, does not diminish or contradict its importance. On the contrary, this confirms its importance. We should bear in mind that the university is ambivalent in history due to the general recognition that it undeniably has. In other words: there are struggles between intellectual and social strengths that precisely due to their relevance are constantly in dispute over their service and control, which therefore explains the ambivalence.

Summarizing, I speak of the importance of an institution which reveals in its history, a disputed ground.

Regarding our work then, what follows? To revisit the topic for the reasons stated which means that we are willing to enter the dispute regarding the university and to take a stance in that dispute. Of course this means that we wager in favor of the university. In other words we (as a movement for intercultural philosophy), recognize its importance and even more so, we declare that for a humanity with a cultural and political will for

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Arno Bammé, *Homo occidentalis. Von der Anschauung zur Bemächtigung der Welt. Zäsuren abendländischer Epistemologie*, Velbrück, Weilerswist 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Recordemos aquí a título de ejemplo las famosas lecciones *De Indis*, dadas por Francisco de Vitoria en 1539 en la universidad de Salamanca

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Thomas Laugstien, *Philosophieverhältnisse im deutschen Faschismus*, Argument, Hamburg 1990; Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Ed.), *Philosophie im Nationalsozialismus*, Meiner, Hamburg 2009; y Ulrich Johannes Schneider, *Philosophie und Universität. Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert*, Meiner, Hamburg 1999. Heidegger

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1969; y Antonio Caso, *La persona humana y el estado totalitario*, en *Obras Completas*, Universidad Autónoma de México, tomo VIII, México 1975.

cultivating its diversity, the university is an institution of too great an importance to be left in the hands of the filibusters of today.

Which comes to show that the reason that motivates revisiting this topic needs to be specified; that is, it needs to be presented at the same time as a requirement for an academic and political commitment within the university ambiance. A few words in this regard that have to do with the direct commitment with the work perspectives I mentioned earlier.

We are certainly not responsible for the whole history of the university to which I have referred to; although, as members of the university, this history definitely affects us and challenges us precisely because of its ambivalence. We could discuss our relationship with that history and ask ourselves, for example, what we can do with it. However, the point is to understand that the current history of the university is written with (and by) us. We are part of that history today, and, consequently, we are responsible for the pathways that are unfolding before us, or that are closed, or otherwise impassible; or still more prosaic: unproductive...

To this regard, we take on the topic once again to sharpen our conscience and our sense of responsibility, in order to design and foster concrete forms of intervention in the current history of the university.

This is the main point that should gear the debate during this congress. And, the three questions heading the three-section structure of this program have been stated around this discussion. With these questions one can see the indications that lead to a search for action lines for the renewal of the university.

For example, in the current context of the growing economy-guided trend and its consequent tendency as a “factory” to supply the specialists needed by the current market<sup>8</sup>, the question at the head of the first section, regarding the university as a space for formation, is formulated from the critical interest for defending, within the university itself, the space for an open formation that is required for fostering the *humanity* of the human being, in the line of the continuity with religious traditions which, as with Christianity, see that formation process as a consequence of a theological concept of the human being as *imago Dei*, or, in other words, in continuity with lay illustrated traditions that conceive this formation process as a

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<sup>8</sup> Para la percepción de este problema a principios y mediados del pasado siglo XX ver por ejemplo: Ortega, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sacristán

requirement that stems from the capacity for reason and liberty that signifies the human condition.<sup>9</sup>

And, regarding the question for the second section that examines whether or not the university is a space for spirituality, there is another indication or clue to search for other interventions in the dispute for the idea and mission that the university has for societies today. This question connects with the question for the third section: Is spirituality a source of renewal for academic formation?

And, seen in this overall set, it points to a heuristic interest for spirituality, oriented towards the recognition of the critical reserves that the different traditions or schools are able to offer by subverting the prevailing logic in the university programs today, in other words, taking into account the need for renewal of superior education and with it the mission of the university in general.

Still more, we need to add that the proposal to consult the spiritual traditions is not something casual or a tribute to esoteric forms. It is not something casual because it is etched in a working perspective articulated in agreement with the history of spirituality as a source of knowledge<sup>10</sup>; neither is it a variation of esoteric modalities, because it does not strive to foster practices of some sort of occult science for a group of initiates; rather it seeks to promote cognitive and social intervention strategies, to liberate whatever is occult, or has been hidden. It has to do with liberating, and not with hiding, or to keep hidden. It has to do, following Plato, with coming out and helping others to come out of the famous cavern. That is the reason for which the spirituality towards which we direct our heuristic interest that is expressed in the human being as the force of transcendence, that motivates a manifestation against the imprisonment of life in the networks and traps that with such cunning and enmeshing, has been able to “entangle” it in that other “spirit” that since Comte, we call “positive”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ver por ejemplo: Kant, Fichte, Humboldt, Herder. Honnefelder

<sup>10</sup> Algunos resultados de nuestro grupo en la línea de esta perspectiva de trabajo se pueden ver en: Jorge Castillo Guerra / Rolando Vázquez (Coordinadores), *Conocimiento y Espiritualidad. Propuesta para una justicia posible*, Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, Aachen 2016; Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Filosofía y espiritualidad en diálogo*, y también su libro *Elementos para una crítica intercultural de la ciencia hegemónica*, Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, Aachen 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Auguste Comte, *Discurso sobre el espíritu positivo*, Aguilar Ediciones, Buenos Aires 1965.

I finish these remarks by returning to the idea of responsibility. I think that we can agree that as a group we seek to work for a different university at the service of the human formation of people, of a good co-existence, and of peace. However, that other possible university cannot be realized if, today, we don't proclaim the veracity of our intellectual commitment, here and now, for example, by opposing the noise of competitiveness, to the silent density of the "conjointness" of those who search for the truth, or counteracting the technical, bureaucratic and administrative "management", of professional knowledge, with the intensity of holistic processes that seem "useless", but which, however, establish communities and hone the horizons for a humanity in peace with itself and with the Earth. This is our responsibility; and I believe that we need to take it on even when we consider that because of the weight of the hegemonic system, the dispute for the university takes place in asymmetric conditions, and therefore it is quite possible that we do not reach our goal. With our commitment however, we will be contributing to keep the game going, that is, to nurture the hope for change. In the end that is what it's all about.

In this sense, I only wish for all of us, days of earnest debates with hope and veracity.