

Gabilondo, *Reflections on President Rosenberg's address*, September 17, 2009

First of all, let me start by thanking Provost Wartzok for inviting me to participate on this panel. It is an honor to form part of FIU and to be part of this panel.

The launching off point for my remarks is the exchange between President Rosenberg and Professor Pyron yesterday about what the 'life of the mind' means. I want to make two points. First, I want to identify two elements that I consider to be essential the 'life of the mind.' Second, I want to show that the life of the mind is faced with some major challenges.

1. LIFE OF THE MIND DEFINED

The life of the mind includes at least two elements: (i) the pursuit of understanding for its sake and (ii) the power to self-regulate as an autonomous community.

Creating and transmitting understanding

At the core of the life of the mind is the project of *creating and transmitting understanding for its sake*. This definition suggests a selfish notion of the academic as pursuing knowledge for the pleasure of that knowledge without, necessarily having to justify her activities in terms of secondary gains to others. Granted, understanding has lots of practical applications with secondary value: medical knowledge produces health, business knowledge produces wealth, and many forms of technical knowledge can support patents with real in-the-world value. For the sake of this definition, though, these are incidental by products of what the academic enterprise is really about, i.e., the pursuit of understanding for its sake. Because there are markets for secondary applications of knowledge, these by products may come to overshadow the more fundamental aspect of the academic enterprise.

Self-regulation

The life of the mind is also *self-regulated by its own norms and authorities*. That is, it is only academics who have the last word on the quality or value of what a university produces. This too is a selfish norm because it may turn its back on the external constituencies who want a say about the organization of the life of the mind. Self-regulation flows functionally from being organized around the production and transmission of understanding for its sake because it is the only way of avoiding the undue influence of authorities that want to impose external criteria on academic life. In terms of governance, then, a community organized around the life of the mind is like a religious enclave that is separated from the world by a wall of virtue.

2. DEFENDING THE LIFE OF THE MIND

Flowing from this conception, my second point relates to President Rosenberg's point that faculty are 'fiduciaries' and 'guardians' of the life of the mind charged with policing its 'boundaries' for us and for students. The value of this type of advocacy rang true for me as a jurist. So, as a first step, let me identify what seem like the major threats to the idea that the academy is a self-regulating community of persons working on building and passing on understanding. Tom Breslin's warning yesterday about subjecting creativity to the cost calculus anticipated the thrust of my remarks.

The threats come from at least a couple of major fronts. First, the need to survive as a market-rather than government-financed institution is changing not only what we do in our development and advancement offices but also, of equal import, how we think about academic value. Students become

'clients,' insight becomes a commodity, and justifying knowledge for its sake may not be enough if academic value demands an external market.

Second, the social contract between the state and public universities has been renegotiated such that we get less money from the state but are, at the same time, subject to more oversight under the rubric of 'accountability.' This trend may threaten our core autonomy to decide – on our own – what gets produced and passed on to other generations.

I am not suggesting that we can opt out of the neoliberal model. You cannot put the toothpaste back in the tube. And none of this is to trivialize or put down what we have to do in order to stay afloat, be that financial adaptation or appeasement of accreditation authorities. There is value, however, in understanding what is happening to public universities and why. So my goal is just to understand what is happening because having the right account may help counter the threats to the life of the mind.

Again, thank you very much.

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