

Met het oog
contains English version
op goed leven
Cobbenhagen en
onze universitaire cultuur



PROF. DR. MARTINUS J. H. COBBENHAGEN

Hoogleraar algemene leer en geschiedenis der economie 1929–1954

Rector Magnificus 1932–1933, 1937–1938 en 1945–1946

TILBURG UNIVERSITY

Met het oog op goed leven

COBBENHAGEN
EN ONZE
UNIVERSITAIRE
CULTUUR



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Redactie, concept en projectleiding: Communications and Marketing, Tilburg University

Vertaling: Vertaalbureau VU

Fotografie omslag: Ton Toemen

Vormgeving: Sander Neijns

Druk: PrismaPrint, Tilburg University

Deze uitgave is tot stand gekomen dankzij Stichting Steunfonds

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Inhoud / Table of contents



7	Voorwoord door mr. Hein van Oorschot <i>Foreword by Hein van Oorschot LLM</i>	33
9	Tilburg University: Understanding Society <i>Tilburg University: Understanding Society</i>	35
9	Inleiding <i>Introduction</i>	35
9	De erfenis van Cobbenhagen <i>The legacy of Cobbenhagen</i>	35
10	Geïnspireerd vanuit de katholieke traditie <i>Inspired by the Catholic tradition</i>	36
11	Gemeenschap in opbouw <i>A community in the making</i>	37
12	Wat heet universiteit? <i>What does university mean?</i>	38
12	De missie <i>The mission</i>	38
13	Niet alleen kennisoverdracht... <i>More than merely the transfer of knowledge...</i>	39
14	... maar vorming van creatieve vakmensen <i>... but the education of creative professionals</i>	40
15	Geen eenzijdige hyperspecialisten... <i>Not one-sided hyperspecialists...</i>	41
16	... maar verkeners in het licht van vernieuwend inzicht <i>... but explorers in the light of innovative understanding</i>	42

17	Geen ivoren toren, maar een huis van de samenleving <i>No ivory towers, but a place for society</i>	43
18	Een Europese erfenis <i>A European legacy</i>	44
18	Het erfgoed <i>The heritage</i>	44
19	Martinus Cobbenhagen <i>Martinus Cobbenhagen</i>	45
20	Met het oog op goed leven <i>With a view to living a good life</i>	46
21	Wilhelm von Humboldt <i>Wilhelm von Humboldt</i>	47
22	Academische vrijheid <i>Academic freedom</i>	48
24	John Henry Newman <i>John Henry Newman</i>	49
25	Deel van een ongekend geheel <i>Part of an unknowable whole</i>	50
26	Praktische wijsheid <i>Practical wisdom</i>	51
26	De toekomst <i>The future</i>	51
27	Ten dienste van het leven <i>In the service of life</i>	52
28	In een onoverzichtelijke veelvoudigheid <i>In a complex multiplicity</i>	53
29	Met het oog op verantwoordelijkheid <i>With a view to responsibility</i>	54
30	Erfgenaam en erflater <i>Heritage and legacy</i>	55

Foreword



What is a university and what is it actually for? This has again become a source of fierce debate in politics and in the press in recent times. The discussion about the specific nature of academia and the identity of our own institution is also high on the agenda here in Tilburg. Our Supervisory Board, our Executive Board and the Deans have regular discussions about the inspiration offered by the degree programs we provide, the responsibility of researchers for their work and its impact and about the education we aim to provide to our students. At many levels, there are also regular consultations on the values we aim to cherish and project as an institution.

Universities are nothing new. They have existed in Europe as places of academic education and research for almost a thousand years. They were and still are instrumental in the development of society and the way it functions. Our own university has also had an enormous impact on the region since 1927 and continues to play an important role in Dutch society. We now have professors from across the world, provide education to students of around 85 nationalities and we operate at the highest levels internationally in many fields. This makes our role and values a case of *noblesse oblige*. We must continually answer the question of who we are, why we exist and what we are here for.

In addition to general views and opinions about universities, it is important to take full account of our own history and tradition. This is something that we have tried to encapsulate in the concept of *Understanding Society*. We have also asked our Professor Dr. Erik P.N.M. Borgman, to write a booklet about the links with our tradition

and the present-day responsibilities of our institution. Our Catholic Higher Education Support Fund has agreed to finance the publication of the book, for which we owe it a debt of gratitude.

This publication is the result. It enjoys the full support of the Executive Board and the Deans. We believe it is important that you take the time to read it. Students should perhaps read it after leaving the institution, because the publication also says something about how we hope they will use what we have given them in their later lives. It will be useful for staff in providing an effective grounding in the tradition in which we operate, in motivating them to think about the challenge they face and in encouraging them to develop ideas about the nature and identity of our institution as it moves forward into the future. Finally, our associates outside the university should read it in order to find out who we would like to be and what significance we would like to have. I hope and expect that you will find the book an enjoyable and inspirational read.

Hein M.C.M. van Oorschot LLM
President of the Executive Board

Tilburg University: Understanding Society



INTRODUCTION

In the past, the university was the realm of the gentlemen. In order to qualify to be educated as someone who would be capable of governing the Netherlands, you had to hail from those families who already played an instrumental role in the governance of the Netherlands. Martinus Cobbenhagen's desire to educate the children of the Catholic middle classes in Brabant to become economists, future leaders and government administrators was therefore revolutionary.

It was largely thanks to Cobbenhagen (1893–1954) that the *Roomsche Katholieke Handelshoogeschool* was founded in Tilburg in 1927. Changing its name from *Katholieke Economische Hogeschool* (1938), *Katholieke Hogeschool Tilburg* (1963) and *Katholieke Universiteit Brabant* (1986), this institution was later to become *Universiteit van Tilburg* (2001) and ultimately, in 2010, Tilburg University.

THE LEGACY OF COBBENHAGEN

For Tilburg University, Cobbenhagen's legacy is of paramount importance. The university's motto is *Understanding Society*. This is a true reflection of the spirit of Cobbenhagen, who saw the study of economics as a way of understanding and shaping society.

In his view, anyone who wants to understand society must themselves play an active and conscious role within that society. Locking oneself away in an ivory tower, attempting to encapsulate the world in diagrams and models far away from the madding crowd, in the belief that theory can replace contact with everyday life: that is not the way it works. Independence and impartiality may be important,

but real society is made up of people with desires and needs, ideas and convictions. It is not a machine that can simply be reduced to a series of laws. According to Cobbenhagen's vision, an institution for academic education must be a place to study living society, made up of living people, and young people must be equipped with the tools they need to contribute to the society of the future. From this perspective, a university is part of society and works with society on its further development. It trains people in freedom and responsibility to become inspired professionals who work to achieve a good life for themselves and others.

Anyone who wants to work to improve society must have a vision of that society. Not an ideological vision, since that creates a blinkered rather than a clearer view. But anyone who wants to understand economics and law must also grasp the role of these fields and their importance to society. Anyone who wants to understand collective and individual behaviors must develop and maintain a perspective on what people are and how they function. Anyone who wishes to truly understand culture cannot ignore the theory about how people shape their lives and give them meaning. But these kinds of views, ideas and theories can never exist in isolation. If one wants to work for the benefit of society, it is necessary to study them, weigh them against each other and thereby develop one's own perspective.

This is why debate about what constitutes society and when a society may justly consider itself to be good is essential for understanding and developing society. It plays a central role in a university whose motto is *Understanding Society*.

INSPIRED BY THE CATHOLIC TRADITION

According to its mission statement, Tilburg University is 'rooted in the Christian and humanist traditions of European culture'. It is 'inspired by the Catholic tradition'. However, opinions vary greatly on what exactly the significance is of these roots and this inspiration. For the university as a whole, the Catholic tradition acts as a guide towards a humane society: a society in which people can fulfill their

potential and in which their lives have a meaning that can constantly be renewed.

Following in the spirit of Cobbenhagen, who was a Roman Catholic priest as well as a doctor in economics, Tilburg University takes particular inspiration from the tradition of Catholic Social Thought. Within this tradition, the central idea is that people are both the goal and the origin of society. This gives *Understanding Society* its specific focus. The idea that people are the goal of society means that a society functions well if it makes a good life possible for people. Ultimately this means that society cannot be deemed to be good or effective as a result of possessing specific formal or abstract characteristics – being a democratic state, or enjoying economic prosperity, for example – but by virtue of its ability to offer people opportunities to shape what they believe constitutes a good life.

The idea that people are the *origin* of society means that people ‘from their nature’ are inclined to create a community. Their desire for a good life brings them together and their ideas of what a good life means are what unites them. This leads to the formation of the collectives and associations, the institutions and organizations that form the basis of our complex, continually restructuring society. Structure and standards, legislation and regulations are an indispensable part of this society: although people may desire to be good, they also have a regular tendency to do evil. But laws and rules do not bring or keep people together. They certainly do not inspire them. Society develops and continuously renews itself on the basis of people’s desire for a good life, a desire which creates community.

A COMMUNITY IN THE MAKING

People create communities, including university communities. A university ‘inspired by the Catholic tradition’ lives through its capacity to appeal to the desires, visions and ideals of its students and staff. What is your perspective on education and how can you contribute to it? What do you believe to be the meaning of research and how can we ensure it remains on the right track? In what way do you believe

that *Understanding Society* can be a meaningful academic mission? The debate about and the confrontation between the wide-ranging responses to these questions, both within the university, but also, of course, with people in the rest of society, is what creates the university community.

This publication presents an image of the university and its role in society, an image in which this discussion and this confrontation are of paramount importance. But it remains one single image, from one single member of the university community. It is a great honor to be invited to present my ideas on this subject in brief outline. I have been especially gratified to see that my ideas have been acknowledged by others. But my primary aim is for this publication to stimulate the discussion about the meaning of the university both within and beyond the Tilburg campus. In recent years, the discussion about the essence of the university has fallen into neglect at our universities. This is a matter for regret.

In the first section, I examine the task and the mission of the university. The second section presents a vision of Tilburg University's roots within the Christian and humanist traditions of European culture. The third section explains the role within society that a university must enable students to fulfill and the role that the university itself plays within society through its research, education and services to society.

The ultimate hope that inspires the university is, I believe, aptly expressed in the opening prayer said on official academic occasions in Tilburg: *Moge de Geest van wijsheid en barmhartigheid in ons allen groeien en tot volle wasdom komen* [May the Spirit of wisdom and mercy grow and fully flourish within us all]. May it be so.

WHAT IS A UNIVERSITY?

THE MISSION

Imagine the scene: someone is wandering across the Tilburg campus, in search of Tilburg University. When informed that his search

is over because the destination has been reached, he responds that he may have encountered buildings with illustrious names and signs indicating Schools and other institutions, a café and a Faculty Club, but he has yet to find *the university*.

It's a fascinating question: where exactly *is* the university? Or put more aptly: how do the students, the academic and other staff come together to form Tilburg University? Sometimes we achieve this through role-play: when the professors among us don their gowns, the rector magnificus puts on his chain of office and we enter the Aula building in procession while the other staff and students stand in recognition, we are acting out that we are a university.

But the university does not exist solely as a symbol. It receives and spends money. It appoints and dismisses people. It is the owner of buildings. It organizes education and awards academic degrees to those it deems worthy of them. It ensures that academic research is carried out, that the results of this research are published and its quality monitored. But what exactly *is* the university? Nothing that the university does happens only at the university and none of the people who work at the university are unable to do exactly the same work elsewhere.

What unites the university is a narrative about what it is actually there to do. Or more exactly: a multiplicity of narratives, all of which slightly overlap. This publication takes a closer look at some of these narratives.

MORE THAN MERELY THE TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE...

For most outsiders, the university is primarily a place where students are educated. Nowadays in the Netherlands, students sometimes refer to the university at which they study as 'school'. The government appears to see universities primarily as institutions which educate students to enable them to contribute to the future prosperity of the Netherlands.

Does the university exist because society needs highly educated people for economic and administrative reasons? This view has cer-

tainly made its mark within the universities. University programs are described in the utmost detail. The knowledge and skills that students must acquire are precisely defined and research is continually being conducted to ensure that degree programs reflect the needs of the labor market. A university is not only expected to provide an education for economic reasons, it must also do so economically. Pass rates on university programs are continually being measured. Measures are taken to ensure that programs can be completed in the designated time and students are encouraged to do so. All of this encourages students to consider their university education as an investment, as a means of gaining access to the higher echelons of the labor market.

Since its very early beginnings, the university has owed much of its right to exist from the fact that it provides education. However, when it first originated in medieval Europe, the notion of a university was one of an all-embracing community – *universitas* – of academics and students. Indeed, the modern colloquial abbreviation ‘uni’ may even be seen as a distant reminder of this. The model for the medieval university was the guild, where those who were highly skilled in a specific craft acquainted their pupils first with the basic principles, and then with the finer details. Rather than the transfer of knowledge, this old narrative of the university is more focused on initiation in a trade.

... BUT THE EDUCATION OF CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS

Thanks to the Bologna Declaration (1999), almost all European countries now use terminology for academic titles that recall the medieval university modeled on the guilds: Bachelor (pupil) and Master. It would be good if this could also serve as a reminder that universities aim to educate people in the ways of the world and to be of significance by teaching young people with a view to the future, but that it does them an injustice if universities are primarily referred to in terms of yield and output.

Society seems to have less and less need for people who are specialists alone. There is an increasing call for people who are capa-

ble of deploying their knowledge and understanding creatively and responsibly. In his book, *The Craftsman* (2008), American-British sociologist Richard Sennett calls for a return to thinking in terms of mastery rather than specialisms. No doubt it was not his intention to exclude women from this.

Following Sennett's thinking, I would say that Tilburg University can be said to have done its job well if those to whom it awards a Master's degree have a cohesive vision of the subject area in which they have been educated; that they are able and willing to deploy this vision in the service of society and its future, and that they have the necessary expertise to do so. Bachelor's programs should lay the foundations on which such mastery can be developed.

NOT ONE-SIDED HYPERSPECIALISTS...

According to this notion, a university is not a haven for hyperspecialists. Nonetheless, the image of the absent-minded professor, remote from society, is difficult to dispel and the idea that the most valuable knowledge is pursued by scholars who know everything about an extremely tiny portion of reality is still maintained by many. From this perspective, academic knowledge has little or nothing to do with social responsibility.

Of course, devotion to academic research, however inconvenient its results may be and however little direct use to society they may have, is of fundamental importance. A university thrives on its freedom to follow the dynamic of academic development and not to be compelled to pursue what is economically advantageous or politically opportune. But this freedom is actually *anything but* remoteness from society. Anyone who pursues the path signposted by academic developments enriches knowledge of the world of which we are a part and enhances our understanding of what is meaningful behavior. This is of supreme importance to society.

In the context of this narrative, the pursuit of high-quality and free knowledge does not constitute a neglect of social responsibility, but is a very specific way of accepting it. This is even more the

case for a university whose focus is on *Understanding Society*. Human and social scientists accept their social responsibility by focusing on knowledge of society, among and in association with others who, in other places and in other ways, as citizens, administrators, entrepreneurs and volunteers, wish to contribute to a healthy society in the future. The fact that academic study is a social activity that is distinct from, but also related to other social activities, can be seen in the numerous different alliances between the university and a range of other social organizations. It can also be seen in academics' involvement in public debate, where they not only focus on society but also relate society's questions to their own academic work in a way that aims to be productive.

... BUT EXPLORERS IN THE LIGHT
OF INNOVATIVE UNDERSTANDING

In the spirit of Cobbenhagen, *Understanding Society* is a perfect way of making a constructive contribution to the society of the future. Within the Catholic tradition, praying and working, contemplation and action, reflection and conduct, thinking and doing all belong together. Anyone who increases understanding of how society works is also contributing to its effectiveness. Anyone who can acutely observe issues in society and use this knowledge to identify possibilities to find solutions is clearly demonstrating their understanding of that society.

All of this leads to a view of the university as a place where knowledge is gathered, acquired and shared. Knowledge is *gathered* from society about what works well and what does not, about where the problems lie and where potential solutions have been found, about how people experience these solutions and how they respond to them. *Gathering* also applies to perspectives and approaches that can help or have helped people to live in specific circumstances and to deal with problems. At a university, knowledge is *acquired* by actively tracking down specific data, applying theories that have been passed down and investigating the consequences of doing so. Knowledge

is also *acquired* by developing and testing new theories in order to check how what happens is understandable, explainable and, if necessary, changeable. Knowledge is *shared* in academic and popular publications, by teaching students, and through a range of communication media. Knowledge is also *shared* in direct contact with and recommendations made to people across society.

When working on the basis of this narrative, academic knowledge is part of humankind's endeavor to find its way in a world that is chaotic and threatening, but also a potential source of happiness and a good life. As part of this, academic knowledge is a committed quest for the light of understanding that enables people to find and follow a path towards the future. How do we protect the natural world, how do we preserve plants and animals, what contributes to individual happiness and what enables people to build communities and achieve a good life? Academia alone cannot answer these questions. But alongside empathy and the practical skills required to unite people around a shared vision, the reliable knowledge and tried-and-tested understanding acquired by academic means is of fundamental importance.

NO IVORY TOWERS, BUT A PLACE FOR SOCIETY

The university is sometimes known as the temple of knowledge. This implies that the university is a venerable institution and that academic knowledge has almost divine status. It is perhaps more useful to remember that the university of the Middle Ages had its origins in the monastery schools.

A fundamental idea within Christian tradition is that God took human form in Jesus Christ in order for people to become as gods. The most sublime became part of human history so that everyday human existence became the place where the sublime was present and to be brought into the light. Since time immemorial, monks have attempted to shape their everyday existence to make room for God's presence. For them, true holiness is not to be found remote from daily life, but in direct contact with it.

The more serious the medieval monks became in their belief that everyday life, including interaction between mankind and the natural world, was the place of God in whose communion they wished to live, the more they focused on knowledge of the important things in this life and on the skills that contribute to improving its quality. It was this that would ultimately lead to the development of the university. The knowledge and skills that the monks developed and taught, also proved to hold appeal for those outside the monastery who were attempting to lead a good life..

From this perspective, the university can be seen as a place in which the whole world resides. The world is revealed as a place in which to seek, cultivate and identify fragments of the good life. As such, a university devoted to *Understanding Society* is a place for society.

A EUROPEAN LEGACY

THE HERITAGE

The universities first came into being in the Europe of the Middle Ages. As early as 1088, there was a university in Bologna and the University of Paris was founded around 1150. But modern universities are not simply modeled on their medieval predecessors. The oldest university of the Low Countries, the University of Leuven, was founded in 1425 and closed in 1797. In 1835, it was re-established as the Catholic University of Leuven that we know today.

The universities of the Middle Ages grew organically as a result of an increasing need for a place in which to cultivate, promote and teach knowledge and understanding. However, the modern university came about because of the need of European nation-state for a highly qualified elite to rule their countries.

In the wake of the French Revolution of 1789, the *Convention Nationale* founded the *École Normale Supérieure* in 1794 in order to educate teachers and administrators in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Their task was to reform France and to govern it in accord-

ance with Enlightened principles. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) designed a comprehensive French education system, with a national university at its core. Its aim was to raise French children as virtuous subjects of the French state. The system was also intended to educate civil servants to become loyal servants of this state.

In the 19th century, the university was to become a key institution in the formation of the state. This led to intensive discussions in various countries about the specific nature of the university, its relationship to government and the significance of university education for society.

MARTINUS COBBENHAGEN

The legacy of Cobbenhagen, which forms the inspiration for Tilburg University, is an inextricable part of these discussions. In them, Cobbenhagen adopted an particular stance, but in the process aligned himself closely with ideas that enjoyed much wider support.

Martinus Joseph Hubertus Cobbenhagen studied at Rolduc Seminary and was a priest in the diocese of Roermond. He was also an expert economist who published work on pricing, on needs and how they could be satisfied, on production and distribution, and on responsibility within business. Cobbenhagen advocated a Catholic academic degree program in economics in order to ensure that greater numbers of Catholics could be educated to the same level as the students of Rotterdam's *Economische Hoogeschool*, where he himself had studied and gained his doctorate. This would increase their opportunities to take up positions of leadership. But Cobbenhagen explicitly wanted a degree program that did not concentrate on economic theory – as he felt they did in Rotterdam – but which focused on actual economic practice. It was his belief that the principles that regulate human life can best be revealed by examining real-life practice, rather than abstract models.

In Cobbenhagen's view, the science of economics is not focused on the purely logical behavior of abstract economic actors. Economics studies an aspect of the actual behavior of real people, who

together form a concrete society. As such, Cobbenhagen may be seen as a pioneer of what is now known as behavioral economics. Cobbenhagen's view implied that he regarded economics as closely related to other social sciences, which focus on other aspects of the same human behavior. He believed that the study of economics should explicitly provide scope for sociology and psychology. Studying the social aspects of human existence and attempting to shape them more effectively calls for a range of different approaches to be brought together.

According to Cobbenhagen, the aim of the social sciences was to contribute to the development of society. He therefore believed it was not possible to exercise these disciplines in the absence of moral values. Cobbenhagen derived his own view of society primarily from the Catholic Social Teaching as laid down by Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical *Rerum novarum* and further elaborated in 1931 by Pope Pius XI in the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*.

WITH A VIEW TO LIVING A GOOD LIFE

Cobbenhagen believed that every action or decision, however practical or pragmatic, is based on a view of what it means to live a good life. The social sciences focus on human social behavior and how to make the decisions this necessitates more effective and rational, which means that they too were linked to a view of what constitutes a good life. This is why, in Cobbenhagen's view, discussions about views on living a good life and about their justification are at the heart of the university.

As Cobbenhagen saw it, the Catholic nature of the *Handelshoogeschool* he helped to establish was based primarily on its focus on the link between economics and other academic disciplines. His aim was to scrutinize life as it is lived in order to facilitate the good life. Cobbenhagen believed that the relationship between the disciplines was ultimately based on the unity of reality, which was an expression of God's unity as the creator and guard, redeemer and perfecter of this reality. This made it possible for him to accept the potential tensions

between the different disciplinary approaches without stinting in his search for the relationship between their results.

By adopting this view of the university, Cobbenhagen took a position in a wide-ranging debate and aligned himself with impulses that originated from it. Two now classic views of the modern university are of particular relevance in this regard: those of the German philosopher, linguist and statesman, Wilhelm von Humboldt and the English theologian and cardinal John Henry Newman.

WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT

The scholar and diplomat Friedrich Wilhelm Christian Carl Ferdinand – more commonly known as Wilhelm – von Humboldt (1767–1835) spearheaded the reformation of the Prussian education system at the start of the 19th century. He became particularly renowned for initiating the founding of Berlin University in 1809. With his educational reforms, Von Humboldt sought to break with the Prussian status quo, which dictated that educational programs were organized in accordance with social class, with academies for knights, cadet corps schools and middle-class institutions for professional skills. His aim in doing so was to give room for expression to the desire for freedom felt by the middle classes in his country, triggered by the French Revolution. His intention was to enable the middle classes, alongside the nobility, to also feel a sense of responsibility for the Prussian State and for the state itself to benefit from the entrepreneurial spirit of the bourgeoisie. Like Napoleon, Von Humboldt primarily had the interests of the state in mind when instigating his educational reforms. However, unlike Napoleon, he was not an advocate of a detailed educational program imposed by government. He was much more interested in what he termed ‘general human education’.

Von Humboldt’s name remains linked, even today, with this free, humanist ideal of knowledge. He believed that only freedom forged into responsibility could enable a country to flourish and therefore, according to his vision, the university was to become a sanctuary for the free development of ideas, for debate, research and cultural

development. As early as 1792, he had written about the need to set boundaries on the powers of the state (*Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen*):

The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom is the first and indispensable condition which the possibility of such a development presupposes.

Von Humboldt argued that the freedom required to achieve the purpose of life is not the exclusively individual. Social relationships must also be allowed to develop without compulsion, dictated only by reason. In order to achieve a good society, Von Humboldt saw it as key that the state does not attempt to take control. Society must be allowed the opportunity to discover the principles that can enable it to lead itself.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Von Humboldt defined the task of the university as educating young people to become free, rational, self-directing individuals committed to shaping and reshaping society. To achieve this, he believed that the university should be a place for multifaceted education. According to Von Humboldt's educational ideal, students are not only imbued with knowledge and taught skills. They are educated to become rounded individuals, capable of leading a meaningful life in a world that they experience as meaningful. In order to achieve this goal, the university acquaints them, alongside their specific discipline, with culture, philosophy and religion. Cobbenhagen's conviction that economics is not to be set apart from other human and social sciences, philosophical perspectives or religious beliefs and that Tilburg students should therefore be exposed to these areas therefore represents a modest echo of Von Humboldt's program.

The most significant part of Von Humboldt's legacy is the principle of unity between education and research. According to his vision,

the primary purpose of the university is not to archive and pass down existing knowledge, but to seek out new knowledge and develop new understanding. This dynamic is what determines the students' curriculum, since it enables them to adopt for themselves the spirit of exploration that drives knowledge forward and which Von Humboldt regarded as essential to any dynamic society.

Von Humboldt believed that education and research must be free. Only research and education that have this freedom can stimulate people to develop themselves and to build a free society in a responsible way. In 1970, the Flemish-Dutch theologian Edward Schillebeeckx explicitly stated that the pursuit of knowledge inspired by the Catholic tradition must, of its essence, demonstrate this freedom:

All forms of paternalism... be they from society, based on a belief system, or from the church, are an infringement of the academic freedom that must be pursued in the face of the restraints placed on it by the specific requirements of the object and the field of research.

According to Schillebeeckx's vision, the voice of God makes itself heard in academia through the truth that is revealed in the study of the objects of research. In his view, 'the specific contribution of the university to human culture' lies in the detailed knowledge it delivers in countless subsidiary areas. Its subsequent task is to apply 'critical self-reflection' in order to enquire into the wider context of this knowledge and the links between these subsidiary areas.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

In 1854, the Bishops of Ireland invited John Henry Newman (1801-1890) to become the rector of the relatively new Catholic University in Dublin, which is now University College Dublin. Newman was a theologian and public intellectual who had converted from the Anglican to the Roman Catholic faith. In his new capacity, Newman held a series of lectures in which he set out his vision of the university. He published an edited version of the lectures in 1873, under the title *The Idea of a University*. They went on to become world famous.

As the title suggests, Newman was not of the opinion that a Catholic University should be driven by a specific Roman Catholic perspective on academic endeavor or knowledge. As Newman saw it, the Catholic university shapes the university's mission based on a Catholic perspective on the world, society and humanity. For Newman, as for Von Humboldt, the primary function of the university is not to facilitate the transfer of concrete knowledge. The true aim of a university is ultimately to teach what Newman termed 'intellectual culture'. According to Newman, the university 'educates the intellect to reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it.' In order to achieve this, students must be taught the power 'of viewing many things at once as one whole (...), of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence'.

Newman argues that no one is capable of gaining an overview of the whole of reality. No single discipline can encapsulate all knowledge in a coherent and comprehensible system. This means that a university must teach students to understand that they need other people and representatives of other disciplines in order to transcend their own limitations and those of their discipline:

Not Science only, not Literature only, not Theology only, neither abstract knowledge simply nor experimental, neither moral nor material, neither metaphysical nor historical, but all knowledge whatever, is taken into account in a University, as being the special seat of that large Philosophy, which embraces and locates truth of every kind, and every method of attaining it.

At the university that Newman envisages, students learn to adopt their own, limited but valuable, position within an all-embracing quest for knowledge and understanding of life and what it is to live a good life.

PART OF AN UNKNOWABLE WHOLE

According to Newman's vision, a university is the seat of a 'large Philosophy', which he also refers to as the 'universal knowledge'. However, this philosophy and this knowledge are not themselves manifest anywhere, but only exist in the idea of a university, in which the sepa-

rate disciplines represent essential but fragmented understanding that must be placed in a wider context. This context is not embodied by any all-embracing theory, but by all the disciplines together, represented in an opaque, but real way.

The university must make it clear to its students that economists need lawyers, sociologists, psychologists and humanities scholars. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* to the representatives of other disciplines: academics and academic disciplines need each other. None of them can predict how the understanding acquired from the different disciplines interrelates. Even philosophical and theological systems of thought cannot provide this context, although they may propose suggestions as to how it may be revealed. This context can only be found by academics who engage in concrete debate with each other, place the results of their disciplines alongside each other and experiment with the results of this debate and this confrontation.

The exploration of a multiform reality calls for a multiform university. *Understanding Society* calls for a university that is itself a varied and mixed community that continually reforms and rebuilds itself. In this way, the university reflects society in which everyone is part of a greater whole no one can control or oversee. This greater whole transcends all models and refutes all theories but also lies at the basis of every individual life and every concrete experience, every insight and every concept. These ideas, reflecting those of Newman, are linked directly to Cobbenhagen's belief that real life unites and holds together the fragmented and fragmenting theoretical ideas and not the other way around.

PRACTICAL WISDOM

THE FUTURE

Since the start of the 19th century, the modern university has sought to identify its position at the heart of a rapidly changing modern society. It has tried and continues to try to understand society and

was and is focused on equipping students to cope with these changes and to help ensure that they are for the better.

The more society is subject to change, the greater the link between understanding and developing society. The Dutch sociologist Hans Boutelier has coined the term 'improvisation society' to describe the current situation (*De improvisatiesamenleving*, 2011). In this type of society, structures and changes determined by policy are still important, but the future depends to a large extent on people's capacity to improvise. The future takes shape as people (entrepreneurs, administrators and policymakers) succeed in their everyday lives in anticipating what confronts them in concrete and practical ways. In this scenario, the success of a university focused on *Understanding Society* may be measured by the extent to which it succeeds in increasing the powers of improvisation of its members through knowledge and understanding.

Knowledge and expertise become meaningful if they ultimately are part of a practical wisdom that accepts the future by anticipating and shaping it. Whatever happens, our future will be characterized by the further growth of globalization and the increasing integration of the Netherlands within Europe. The Netherlands will be linked to this world via Europe, and by making use of the common European cultural heritage in its own way. In other words, *Understanding Society* will take on the form of *Improvising Society – the European Way*.

IN THE SERVICE OF LIFE

In this context, Cobbenhagen reminds us of the importance of taking concrete, everyday life as one's point of departure. Europe consists of millions of people who all strive towards a good life in their own ways, creating associations, developing visions, building society. They take care of the Earth, the plants and the animals, and of each other. The various ways in which they do this and the different views and perspectives that inspire them often lead to conflicts. But it is in bringing to light these tensions and conflicts, and ultimately in vanquishing them, that the true richness of Europe lies.

Europe has learned, through its own bitter experience, that any attempts to impose a single vision and a single way of life result in oppression and war. If only a single type of good life is deemed legitimate, it is not a good life at all. Europe has remained united since 1945 through its continuous attempts to deal with fundamental differences of opinion, a multiplicity of religions and world views, a plurality of ethnicities and nationalities. Europe is at his best when all its population groups understand that they are a minority and realize that their own happiness depends on granting other minorities what they would wish for themselves: contributing on one's own terms to a society in which everyone can find their own place on equal terms.

For the thinkers quoted in the previous section, it went without saying that students and academics at the universities were men. Nowadays, women are in the majority among students of numerous disciplines. The number of women academics, and especially women professors, continues to lag behind, but is nevertheless significant. Cobbenhagen envisaged a university in which talented young men from what many saw as the backward Catholic area of Brabant could secure a high-quality qualification in economics. Today, the 12,000 to 13,000 students at Tilburg University represent as many as 85 different nationalities. The all-important question is whether the university is capable not only of surviving and managing this exponential increase in diversity, but also of making it productive. This concrete diversity, productive in concrete terms. As Cobbenhagen knew only too well, real life as shaped by real people is the place where it is revealed what makes life good.

IN A COMPLEX MULTIPLICITY

In a pluralist society, one's is confronted with the limitation of one's. This applies even more to a pluralist university. During the last century, there has been an enormous proliferation of new research techniques, methodologies and theoretical perspectives. This has resulted in a significant expansion of knowledge and understanding of the world, society and culture, but it has also made it even more diffi-

cult to gain an overview. How do we really know what we know and how can we ensure that our multifaceted knowledge and fragmented understanding are productive?

Our current situation makes Newman's ideas about the restricted nature of any individual approach all the more relevant. In order to conquer our limitations, we need a new form of wisdom, a new type of prudence. There is always more we can know, but what is it that truly expands knowledge? What do we need to know and understand in the here and now? And to achieve this, how do we bring together representatives of different disciplines and subdisciplines, methods and theories in a way that is productive? In order to answer this type of question, what we need above all is practical wisdom.

Boundaries between disciplines and subjects are being transcended and the desire to understand and shape society creates new alliances. The real questions we face in the future are neither sociological nor legal, neither psychological nor part of the study of governance, neither economic nor theological, part of business sciences nor of the humanities. They are all these things at the same time and yet none of them. In order to respond to them through improvisation, we need to make careful use of all the available expertise.

In a similar way to jazz, where one improvisation stimulates another, which triggers a third until the fourth enables them all to blend into a synthesis, however brief. Above all, the university of the future must be a *jazzy* place where people repeatedly recreate improvised order in the chaos that we face.

WITH A VIEW TO RESPONSIBILITY

This is how the university teaches responsible freedom in the spirit of Von Humboldt. It means the freedom to research what needs to be researched in order to find a good life of the future, and taking responsibility for this research and its results. The future is already dawning, as are the questions it raises. Answers need to be found to these questions and action needs to be taken. Such action reveals new questions that must be asked and answered through research.

In their turn, these answers again lead to action that generates further questions and so on.

A free society in which people thrive and allow others to do so calls for a place in which it is possible to consider and debate the conditions of such a society in perfect freedom, to conduct research into the possibilities of these conditions and to share the results of this research with everyone who has an interest in them. A place in which this freedom is exercised as a form of responsibility, since a free and responsible society can only be shaped by free and responsible people who have learned to work with others to ask and answer questions.

HERITAGE AND LEGACY

The university is living European heritage. In turn, it also leaves a legacy for its students. This consists of the knowledge and understanding generated within its walls, but more importantly in the students it educates and sends out into the world. So that, partly thanks to them, the Spirit of wisdom and mercy may grow and reach full maturity. As the spirit of the society of the future.



