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Introduction to the Interviews

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INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWS

Phil Fetzer, Managing Editor

Examining the modern university as a product of its origins in medieval university, we see shifts in theory and practice ranging from the subtle to the dramatic. In *Compulsory Miseducation*, Paul Goodman describes the medieval university's standards for graduating its students and asserts that the "grueling trial of the candidate was whether or not to accept him as a peer. . . It was not to make comparative evaluations. It was not to weed out and select for an extramural licensor or employer."¹

By the mid-nineteenth century, John Henry Cardinal Newman had taken this idea of mastery (and its attendant goals of entering a guild) and expanded it substantially. In *The Idea of a University*, Newman argues that the purpose of the university can be found within the word itself: "teaching universal knowledge." For Newman, humans need to acquire:

The force, the steadiness, the comprehensiveness and the versatility of intellect, the command over our own powers, the instinctive just estimate of things as they pass before us, which sometimes indeed is a natural gift, but commonly is not gained without much effort and the exercise of years.²

German universities in the 19th century represented the unity of the nation-state and were the fount of national culture. These universities were to train the political elite and to provide an intellectual elite. The ideal was that those trained in the Great Tradition would become the leaders of a unified nation.

In the early part of the twentieth century, criticism in the U.S. began concerning the relationship that universities have to corporations. Thorstein Veblen wrote in 1918 that he "detected the hand of business control dominating every aspect of the modern university," including the "prominence given to intercollegiate athletics and vocational instruction."³

In 1963 Clark Kerr, the UC Berkeley Chancellor, wrote a book called *The Uses of the University*, in which he said that the "University's invisible product, knowledge, may be the single most powerful element in our culture, affecting the rise and fall of professions and even of social classes, of regions and even of nations."⁴ His sense was the university's mission was to serve the larger society, to assure prosperity, to advance scientific and technological revolution and "freedom."

Some have said that Clark Kerr paved the way for the student power movement in the 1960's. Mario Savio, a Berkeley graduate student, was one of the most articulate and out-spoken advocates for the free-speech movement: "President Kerr has referred to the

University as a factory; a knowledge factory—that's his words—engaged in the knowledge industry. And, just like any factory, or in any industry—again his words—you have a certain product. The product is you. Well, not really you. And not really me. The products are those people who wouldn't join in our protest. They go in one side, as kind of rough-cut adolescents, and they come out the other side, pretty smooth. They're dependent upon the University, to go out and become members of other organizations—various businesses, usually—which they are dependent upon in the same way. And, never at any time is provision made for their taking their places as free men!"⁵

The interviews that follow respond to some questions about the role of education in the training of students to work in corporations. Is the csu a corporate university? 

Notes

1. Goodman, Paul, "A Proposal to Abolish Grading," in Annette Rottenberg, *The Elements of Argument*, 7th ed (New York: Bedford, 2003), 207.
2. Newman, John Henry Cardinal, *The Idea of a University* (Chicago: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982/1854), Preface.
3. Veblen, Thorstein, in Stanley Aronowitz, *The Knowledge Factory* (Boston: Beacon, 2000), 17.
4. Kerr, Clark, in Aronowitz, 30.
5. Savio, Mario, in Aronowitz, 33.