

## “University – A Lost Forum for Knowledge about Wisdom?” (0089)

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The title of this conference: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?” mirrors something, which most of us will recognize as the experience we have of the development in present days. We do experience a loss of something valuable, reliable, useful and true; - something we have held as ground for ontological trust in human existence and life. The immediate experience indicates a change from a humanistic orientation to new management and commercialization of basic human needs, relations, development and education.

If this is the experience, we have to cope with the question of what it is we are missing and, further, how we constructively can meet and act on this loss and lack in accordance with present and future perspectives.

It does, in fact, open to the vast dimensions of the very foundation for our understanding of humanity, existence and life as well as the constitutive structures hereof. In this perspective we may be at the threshold of an entirely new interpretation of the foundational ground for human existence. It implies a strong calling for visions for the future both in terms of humanity, (co-)existence and life. This again pose questions of purpose, meaning and realization, - all of which relate to the issue of human formation, education and “Bildung”, indicating an image or ideal for human development and realization.

As a first step in approaching these questions, given by the framework of the title of this conference, one has to ponder, firstly, upon the distinction between wisdom and knowledge and, secondly, the experienced loss in the relation between the two concepts. This leads to questions of the nature of the loss and, further, to the possibility of how the loss can be regarded as a change or transformation into new conditions and potentials for humanity and life.

This paper will introduce a distinction between knowledge and wisdom, based on an understanding of wisdom as a dimension of experiential, personal, real and realized insight and of knowledge as related to the criteria defined in science and research. It is a common distinction, which has characterized the development of the knowledge-tradition in the Western culture from classical over the humanistic era up to present time, where changes in this tradition are experienced as consequence of a loss of the foundational background behind it.

In the secularized Western culture wisdom is connected to an existential dimension, which has become *the* space of emancipation, and thus following the development of radical individualization it has been considered, first, a private matter and, next, a vanishing matter as it is gradually changed into the enterprise of modern identity-work.

As such it parallels the dynamic between truth and liberation, which makes the core of some of the most significant institutions of the Western culture. Among those are the University, the Nation State and the Individual, - all made in order to secure a principally undefined space for liberation

and truth. It creates a certain paradox, as the institution is supposed to constitute a space for liberation from the same institution itself.

It is what we meet in the pedagogical paradox, known as a significant challenge in education and human formation.

This paradox has served as a difficult, but constructive challenge, and it has brought forth some of the most significant thinking in the dynamic field among crucial positions as: wisdom – knowledge, individual – institution, teacher – learner, experience – truth, liberation – power, existence – being - life.

Now, however, the inspirational power of this paradox between liberation and institutions of truth seems to have faded and undermined its own ground. At least, it is severely threatened by a new order of things, which is not concerned with the relation between liberation and truth, but only liberation in the rather libertine way: as consumers and merchandisers engaged in the market of self-centered identity work.

In this present development all the institutions are jeopardized and replaced by parameters of competition and calculations of out-come rather than existential inspiration for human knowledge and wisdom.

The University is one of these institutions, which since the academy of Plato has been identified as a forum for free pursuit of truth and liberation, based on dialogue and exchange of experience and understanding. The University as institution in this sense is now undergoing severe changes, and it is one of the significant places, where we experience loss. The loss is related to this free forum, as the University is no longer engaged in the dynamic of truth and liberation connected to the idea of humanity and life, but instead concerned with the business of education and science as a strictly commercial issue.

Thus, the University has up to now made a unique forum for the relation between wisdom and knowledge, which, in a subtle formulation, can be defined as a *“forum of knowledge about wisdom”*. Thereby the University has employed the liberating aspect to create a free space for reflecting upon truth rather than stating truth. This, of course, is an idealized image of University, which, on the shadow side, has had all kind of more dubious impact on truth.

Here, however, the concern is about the potential of the University as a *“forum of knowledge about wisdom”*, and this is what we want to propose as an issue, worthy for status as a UNESCO World Heritage. Furthermore, and just as important, we want to make this potential of the University as *“forum for knowledge about wisdom”* a focal point, which can generate attention and inspiration for the development of constructive visionary work with future images of humanity, existence and life and the related issues of meaning, knowledge and wisdom.

This paper will especially focus on the potentials of University as *“forum for knowledge about wisdom”* in regard to education and human formation, “Bildung”, in a visionary perspective for the

future. It will draw on works by I. Kant, J.-J. Rousseau, M. Buber, M. Heidegger, M. Foucault, D. Benner, and G. Bateson and R. Safranski.