

ФИЛОЛОГИЯТА У ДОМА
PHILOLOGY IN BULGARIA
THE PRIORITIES OF THE PRIORITY

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ABSTRACT: In the recent years, the fact that the humanities are in crisis has become the subject of numerous and lengthy publications. The Eastern and the Western criticism analyze and explain this fact in different ways. Various reasons have been pointed out – connected with the nature of the humanities (it has been maintained that the outflow of students from the Faculties of Humanities is related to their turning into generators of theories that become obsolete even before one manages to study them, which inevitably demotivates and deters young people), the futility of the value of the humanities in the contemporary hedonistic and materialistic society (Nussbaum 2010), the ultraliberal pragmatic spirit of the time, or even theories like the one of the historian Nikolay Kaposov, who relates the crisis in the humanities to the disappearance of the middle-class dominated society in the end of the 20th century and its replacement with the mass society, which can be manipulated by means of the electronic media.

KEYWORDS: Philology, humanities, technological boom, priority, education, The future of humanity.

Statistics show that the outflow of students from the humanities has been across the board. Over the past forty years, the number of those specializing in the humanities in the USA, for example, decreased by more than 50 % and now, according to William Chace's calculations, they are approximately 10 % of the total number of students. To a great degree, this might be due to the fact that the humanities are traditionally associated with the past and nowadays they attract people with contemplative and archivistic inclinations. Chace, who is a professor of English in Virginia (Chace, 2009), provides accurate data. If in the period 1970 – 2003, 7,6 % of the students enrolled at the Department of English and Literature, nowadays they are 3,9 %; regarding the foreign philology programs, the percentage have fallen from 2,5 to 1,3, and for those like history, the decline is from 18,5 % to 10,7 %.

A common challenge to the philology in Bulgaria and of the West is the economy. According to the chief financial officer, philology is a budget ruining nightmare, a laborious, preindustrial activity. Few Western universities allocate enough resources, and if they do, this again depends on the reducing implicit civilization value of this type of knowledge.

At the dawn of university education, the humanities were considered to be its heart, but nowadays, in an attempt at being in step with the times, the focus has been shifted onto the natural sciences. This is reasonable because the natural sciences imitate better the productivity metrics that characterize industry. The result is the amassing of demands that are based on the principle “the more, the better”, demands that lay the emphasis on the appearance of more publications, patents, quotations. And this program is imposed on us without considering to what degree (if at all) its measures contribute to something of higher social, cultural, or even economic value.

It is well known that the initial goal of the academic citation index was to help researchers reveal the general trends in the complicating object of the sciences and it has aided productivity measuring. However, if these tendencies are absolutized, they become prerequisites for gauging the activity of the different universities, faculties and researchers. What is measured more easily is identified with what is more valuable to be measured. And here I mean not only the processes in Bulgaria. In the book *Not for Profit: Why democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010), for instance, Martha Nussbaum quotes Barack Obama's speech on education, in which the American President, in relation to the education in Singapore, talks about the fact that the American school does not prepare the children adequately for the things that

matter. In the context of the speech, “things that matter” are considered to be equivalent to “things that prepare for a career.” Thus, as Martha Nussbaum observes, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the “things that don’t matter” are the humanist values, since active citizenship is hardly ever mentioned among the values that matter regarding a life full of meaning and respect. (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 138)

If we consider that the university is an intellectual society organized as a public sphere with its internal and public discussions, in which the phenomena are the subject of a constant criticism and the clarifying of new arguments, then the humanities are the logical guarantee of the autonomy in such a public sphere.

Another challenge that the humanities face nowadays is the new technological boom. Unlike the technical sciences, the humanist knowledge does not usually serve directly the object-instrumental activity of humanity, but it is directed to the ways of creating spirituality. However, here come the difficulties, for the term *spirituality* involves various interpretations, as long as the natural sciences knowledge is also the result of some spiritual activity. Furthermore, the technical knowledge is not separated from the humanities by the Great Wall of China and sometimes it is not so easy to differentiate them. Even in the technological situation of today, it is not recommended to draw a dividing line between them: their relation becomes even closer with the development of technologies; the very understanding of the philological knowledge and art is undergoing some changes. In this regard, the practice of the humanities education undoubtedly has to be developed on the basis of bringing together the technological and the humanities culture. Nowadays, it is important to break the vicious associative connection between the humanities and the past; the idea that philology deals only with interpretation and integration of texts from the past.

However, the humanities do not comprise of philology only, but also of philosophy, cultural studies, history, art studies, psychology, anthropology, history of ideas, theology – that is to say the whole body of disciplines that traditionally have determined the future of humanity. As a rule, a new epoch in the history and culture of humanity was marked by proclaiming some new religious theory, thesis, philosophical treaties or literary manifest. Such was the case of Classicism, Romanticism, Symbolism, Futurism and other cultural epochs. Yet, can we imagine the new era being signified by a specific treatise in the sphere of aesthetics, philosophy, or meditative poetry? Not by politicians, scientists or technologists, but by a new Novalis, Byron, or Hugo? It is evident that the intellectual innovations of today seem to occur somewhere else – in Mikhail Epstein’s words – in genetics, information technologies, cosmology, etc.

In his book *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto* (2012), published in English, Epstein discusses the future of the humanities contradicting the gloomy predictions. He puts the following provocative question: what constitutes the special value of the humanities in the society? How many new ideas come from the literary, philosophical, historical departments, or from the interdisciplinary debates? Why are the society and the academic communities of the 21st century so far away from the humanities? Probably because, as he suggests, the 20th century, especially its second half, is so far away from the humane. Epstein claims that the humanities have ceased to deal with the human; they have ceased to be humanities and have become merely textology. Thinking over the question why “the orientation to the future [has] become the exclusive privilege of natural sciences and science-based technologies” (286), Epstein observes a relation between the threat against the humanities as a result of the latest technological postulates and the inability of the specialists in the humanities to get rid of terms like postmodernism, poststructuralism, post-colonialism: for Epstein these terms signify a scientific dependence on the past, which contradicts to the increasing demand for innovations that the contemporary higher education imposes on the literary and philosophical research. Using as his starting point Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of “embryonic genres”, as long as the Bakhtinian thought contradicts finalization, Epstein is driven to the “proto-global, proto-virtual, proto-biotechnical” (28). In fact, Epstein’s work pragmatically accentuates how the digital humanities and the interdisciplinary intersection with the sciences can draw the attention of the society to the humanist research anew. In a post-human epoch, Epstein suggests, the humanities must take the role of a cultural transformer.

Bearing in mind this responsibility, Epstein's book declares its ethical basis and repeats the ideas that the humanities can cultivate perceptions and make the human life meaningful. Epstein's pragmatics functions at the crossroads of technological innovations, philosophical ethics and discipline. One of the rules that his book formulates is: "*Do that which others need and **no one else** can do in your place*" (217, original accent).

What does he suggest – he puts forward the idea of the transformative humanities, which unlike the purely research approach, construct their own, tentatively called technologies, create alternative, virtual, parallel worlds. The humanities of the future, in his opinion, will not transform the world, but will create new worlds. In this regard, the future collaboration between philosophical and computer departments and faculties seems to be completely logical. Even nowadays, computer games are consciously based on historical, literary, etc. plots, and the creation of every world is accomplished through philosophy, as long as it can be considered a discipline that studies the world itself. Epstein's idea about "techno-sophy", "a technically armed philosophy or philosophically oriented technology" (155, orientation in the original), marks the analytical and empathetic human features as obligatory even in the post-human context.

The humanities' upgrade is impossible without their passing into an active phase. These disciplines need to become practically-oriented not despite the technological development, but because of it. The times in which the intellectuals avoided technology are long gone now. If the 20th century saw a boom in *science fiction*, now the period of *fiction science* has come. Science is currently becoming more and more fictional and fantastic; the boundaries of the empirical, observable reality are being blurred and we are entering the improbable and the paradoxical. More and more rarely the contemporary science means: 2 times 2 makes 4. The fantasy authors of today, unlike the fantasy authors of the past, cherish their ideas from technologists.

It was considered that by studying specific sciences, the universities deal with something already existing, rather than invent new technologies, because the very engineering departments are not part of most of the universities. However, this assumption will be less and less valid regarding the universities of the future, which should have a section, department, or center for humanist inventions, *creative thinking*; the projective method should be adopted. And against the background of the more rigid structure of higher education, a structure built in the course of decades and centuries, it is far easier to accomplish this by creating inter-university centers and programs that will develop the impulses for intellectual creativity and will spread those impulses in different disciplines. We all need a research space that is interrelated, structured, mobile and effective.

What is demanded from the humanities of the 21st century: at least historical self-awareness, universality, methodological and conceptual pluralism. The disciplines of the 21st century cannot be indifferent to their own historicity - this is an epistemological necessity. Furthermore, these disciplines can no longer be just separate forms of knowledge, but they should be generated by a new, global, comparative episteme and aim at global-comparative knowledge. And finally, the understanding of the means and criteria according to which the scholars from the past epochs grounded their pretensions to veracity should be part of our own understanding of what is truth.

What does it mean to be a priority area of the academic knowledge nowadays? Without underestimating the collective efforts of all the classical universities in Bulgaria, which have helped philology become one of these priority areas, I would say that this fact, in itself, means nothing essential; for without decisive, constant, purposeful actions in support of the priority majors, on behalf of both the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and the philologists, everything will remain only a good wish. The world is different now and the priorities of the priority should be connected with an active, dynamic, social-changes-sensitive position. If the academic life is in its practice led by democratic ideas, it is evident that we must insist that the humanities fulfill their pivotal social function – to be a school for democracy.

However, I would like to go back to Martha Nussbaum's book that claims that the scariest future is the future in which there are nations of technically trained people who cannot criticize authority, obedient engineers without imagination. According to her, such education threatens the life and dialogue,

and positively obstructs the creation of a normal world culture. In this regard, if we do not support actively the key place of the humanities, they cannot survive in a profit-based world. But is it worth living only in a world in which the people do not see the other human beings as full of thoughts and ideas, as deserving respect and sympathy, as well as nations that cannot overcome the fear and suspicion in favor of the considerate and reasoned debate?

In the following decades, colleagues, obviously we are going to face fundamental changes. We are going to need transdisciplinary strategies to integrate science and inventiveness. To paraphrase Craig Calhoun – the privilege of dealing with philology at university is not an award for past achievement, but a possibility of moving forward, towards the future.

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