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The place of teaching, learning and student development in a framework of academic freedom: Attending to the negative freedoms of our students

Yunus Ballim

School of Civil & Environmental Engineering, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
Yunus.ballim@wits.ac.za
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5764-7428

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue for approaches to teaching, learning, and student development to be considered as important facets of the way in which the principles of academic freedom are conceptualised at university. The idea of academic freedom has been significantly expanded and better nuanced, particularly in its meaning at South African universities in the post-apartheid years, than the earlier T. B. Davie formulation that is more strongly focused on institutional autonomy aspects of academic freedom. Considerations of institutional autonomy relate to the positive freedoms that universities are to enjoy. However, I argue that consideration of student development in an academic freedom context requires that universities give thought to the negative freedoms that students are to enjoy such as the freedom from harm, or prejudice, or cycloptic approaches to ways of knowing. This requires careful attention to all the interactions that students will have with the university, particularly with the ways in which patterns of exclusion and prejudice are woven into institutional culture in ways that hamper their learning development.

Keywords: teaching and learning; university; academic freedom; negative freedoms; institutional culture

This is an expanded and revised version of my T. B. Davie Academic Freedom lecture, presented on 25 August 2021 and hosted by the Academic Freedom Committee at the University of Cape Town.

Introduction

Throughout the world, the concept of academic freedom holds central place in the idea of what a university is meant to be. There is a heightened sense of the place of academic freedom in higher education in South Africa, where the impact of the effects of its curtailment in the apartheid years are still manifest and the memories still intact. The importance of this matter was well considered in the Higher Education, Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom (HEIAAF) project report commissioned by the Council

on Higher Education (2008) in that it sought to better understand academic freedom in a post-apartheid South Africa and to expand the concept beyond the T. B. Davie (1953) formulation that, appropriate for its time, was more focused on matters of institutional autonomy.

Notwithstanding these important recent developments in our conception of academic freedom, it is necessary to pause briefly at the shrine. There are times of human madness when those with their hands on the levers of power become unhinged, become convinced that the gods speak directly into their ears, and that they alone are the custodians of the truth. Decisions about right and wrong are made by the trigger-finger and unspeakable hurt and horror are visited on the innocent and the powerless. In times like these, when the alternatives include going out to stop bullets or suffer serious personal injury and deprivation, university-based intellectuals serve best by rising above the pollution, breathing clearer air, thinking again about the first principles, and speaking honestly to their publics. The era of totalitarianism and fascism in Europe and Asia during the early 20th century was a frightening experience for many. But perhaps more frightening for us was the number of academics and intellectuals who went out in support of that brutishness. Julien Benda (1928) and Hanna Arendt (1973) have both written eloquently on this matter and academics would do well to visit such texts. Apartheid was one such time in recent history and Professor Thomas Benjamin Davie, then Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town, chose to speak out when many of his academic and administrative colleagues in South African universities were either silent or actively supportive of state policy at the time. Davie loudly pronounced that there is a corner in society called the University where the shadow of unreason cannot be allowed to fall. Given the conditions at the time, it was correct that Davie should focus more strongly on the institutional autonomy aspect of academic freedom. Thanks to this and similar efforts, we rest more comfortably today because we live in a country where the principle of academic freedom is captured in our Constitution, and we are granted the opportunity to think more broadly about the ways in which the principles of academic freedom may guide practices at a university.

As a contribution to broadening the understanding of academic freedom and its expression at a university, in this paper, I consider the place of teaching, learning, and general student development and what it may mean for a university that declares a commitment to the principles of academic freedom. Importantly, I argue for consideration of the so-called negative freedoms that students are to enjoy in their learning experiences at a university. In this context, negative freedoms refer to the right that students should have to enjoy freedom from harm, prejudice, narrow-mindedness, or dogma in the ways in which their educational development takes place, but also as an objective of their learning. The custodial responsibility for these negative freedoms lies with the university and particularly with those who, in being charged with the academic leadership of the institution, are to ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are in place and that the institutional culture is directed towards ensuring that students find these freedoms to be in place.

Much of the post-apartheid discussion on academic freedom in South Africa has focused on the distinction and overlap between academic freedom and institutional autonomy (see

Bentley et al., 2006 and Council on Higher Education, 2013). The issue is complex, and readers will find that discussions are carefully nuanced because of the many contending interests in the ways in which academic freedom is understood (see also Jansen, 2005). Global developments concerning the fragile nature of our environment, our healthcare, and our economic systems have added many layers of complexity to academic freedom and the ways in which universities are to operate in relation to their publics. However, while this complexity has bearing, the main concern in my argument here is with the nature and characteristics of a university that acknowledges and accepts the principle of academic freedom as one of the foundational values that will guide its processes, operations, and internal relationships. In particular, I reflect on the obligations that the principles of academic freedom place on a university regarding the ways in which it will approach the educational development of its students and the reasonable expectations that students may hold in regard to the educational experience they will have when they choose to attend such a university.

Of course, it is unlikely that one will find many universities in the world where an institutional antagonism to the principles of academic freedom is openly and officially professed. Indeed, the apartheid government argued that racially segregated universities were not in conflict with principles of academic freedom (Centlivres & Feetham, 1957). But this is not what I mean here by an institutional commitment to academic freedom. The reference is, rather, to an institution that consciously and purposefully wishes to go beyond policy statements and committee structures in trying to ensure that academic freedom finds expression, as value, in the ways in which different sectors of the university community relate to each other in the teaching and learning process or, stated differently, that these values will find expression in the institutional culture of the university in how it relates to student development and how it understands what I refer to as the *graduateness* of students, by which I mean the attributes and generic competencies of a graduate that amount to more than merely an ability to pass examinations.

Students and the idea of negative freedoms at a university

For the purposes of this argument, the academy, its administrators, and its academics, as distinct from its students, are clustered together into what is meant by the term university. Also, the notion of values is used to refer to the things that direct our decisions and behaviour in the absence of rules, such as the impetus that makes us choose to help a stranger carry their heavy groceries across the road, for example. Importantly, it is easy to see that this notion of what we think of as values includes what we commonly think of as undesirable or harmful motivators of behaviour, such as selfishness or racism. In this argument, such negative values must also be considered, particularly in the ways in which they are sometimes threaded into the large tapestry of the institutional cultures of our universities to manifest as shared values within particular institutions.

The conventional understanding of academic freedom, in its formulation according to Davie, confers on the university the freedom to choose what shall be taught, who shall teach, who shall be taught, and how they shall be taught, thus capturing freedom over curriculum

(including research) and pedagogy. Relying on Berlin's (2001) conceptualisation of two forms of freedoms or liberties—he uses these terms interchangeably—the Davie formulation confers positive freedoms on the university in terms of the freedom to make choices and do certain things, as Tabensky (2013) has correctly argued. It is in this sense that the Davie formulation can be seen to be focussed primarily on institutional autonomy, in that it calls for the freedom to make choices about the form of the academic project. It is not difficult to see the limitations of this formulation, primarily because it also allows the university to exclude particular students and ideas based on institutionally normalised prejudice. However, thinking about the place of students in a framework of academic freedom—my primary concern in this paper—requires a greater focus on the negative freedoms that students can reasonably expect to find in their learning experience at the university. This is the freedom from harm, from prejudice, and from unwanted exclusion based on identity.

Berlin (2001) draws a distinction between positive and negative freedoms that provides a helpful reference for understanding the imperatives for university leadership in the context of teaching and student development. He notes on the one hand that

> [t]he 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's acts of will. (p. 178)

Negatives freedoms, on the other, take for granted the need for the freedoms of some to be limited to ensure the freedom of others or that some coercion is necessary through general agreements such as legislation, rules, or what is known as the social contract, to ensure that conditions in the community or institution are suitable for the best expression of positive freedoms. The importance of this distinction between positive and negative freedoms is that positive freedoms belong in the domain of the individual or the entity. Having positive freedoms takes autonomous and reasoned decision-making for granted and allows individual agency to choose the path that the person or the institution deems best to achieve the ends that they have willingly chosen to serve. Negative freedoms belong in the domain of the authority of communities, societies, or nations. We grant the custodianship of these freedoms to those in authority, and we expect that our freedoms from harm or from unjustified exclusion or discrimination will be properly attended to. It is in defence of such negative freedoms that citizens are willing to grant to their state authorities the legitimate right to exercise violence. Of course, the delicate nature of this relationship between citizens and their state can be recognised in the ways in which negative freedoms become the subject of abuse by bad governments or institutional authorities. Personal surveillance or persecution of people who hold dissenting views is often justified by the need to defend the negative freedoms of a community.

Some of the negative freedoms are quite obvious when we think of the needs of students at a university such as, for example, the need for security systems to provide freedom from physical harm or the need for policies to prevent prejudice in the ways in which learning opportunities are accessed. However, it is necessary to stretch this argument a little further

and say that the principles of academic freedom also oblige a university to give expression to the liberating value of education by being proactive about ensuring that students have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that allow them to maintain a sceptical attitude towards received wisdom and be able to reflect critically on prejudice, dogma, and misconception of their own making as well as that of others in their living and working lives as graduates. The duty to free students from forms of unreason lies with the university and it is in this sense that I argue for the liberating value of education as a negative freedom in the learning needs of our students. Together with competent classroom teaching and functional learning facilities, students should also find a university that is responsive to the liberating value of education. Such responsiveness is best expressed by a university that is open to different ways of knowing and universal in its approach to the world of ideas and one that is purposeful in ensuring that these values are to be found in the general operation of the university as well as in the individual academics who will teach the students.

The university, its public, and its institutional culture

During the development of its Higher Education Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom project, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) hosted a consultative discussion in 2006 during which one of the participants asked a question that can be paraphrased as "Can society trust academics with academic freedom at the modern university?" This is an important question in relation to academic freedom, not because it requires a yes-or-no answer but because it is a warning about how fragile academic freedom is and how easily public confidence in our higher education institutions can be lost when we neglect the first principles of our purpose in the ways in which we live and work at a university. It seems that one of the important reasons for the increased social violence and mayhem that we have been witnessing around the world over the past decade or so is the loss of confidence by communities in their social institutions that, in many ways, have not delivered on the promise of a dignified life for all. We have to ask why angry protesters run past a church or a mosque or a temple to burn a school, or a clinic, or a library. As social institutions, universities must always act to sustain the confidence of their public—to whom they speak and those on whose behalf they speak as academics and intellectuals—in the value of what universities do, so that what universities actually do is worthy of their support and of their defence. In many ways, this need to attend to the confidence of the university's public frames my argument in this paper.

In thinking about the institutional culture of a university and the ways in which it is constructed, intentionally or otherwise, to attend to the negative freedoms of its students, it may be helpful to describe this in three layers of experience of the people who engage with the university. The first layer relates to the experience of a casual visitor who spends a short time at the university such as the parent of a student, say, or a possible donor, or a likely research collaborator from another university. Such a visitor will consciously or unconsciously acknowledge the state of the buildings, the neatness of the gardens, and the posters on the walls that make statements about institutional values or carry invitations to lectures, art events, or protest meetings. They may even get a glimpse of the teaching spaces,

student residences, and research facilities. Those who have visited under-resourced or otherwise troubled universities will recognise how important this first-layer view is in formulating judgements about the general operational and academic culture of such an institution.

The second layer of the experience of institutional culture relates to the formal regulation of the relationships between different sectors of the internal university community such as the academic, human resources and operational rules, the policy statements of the university, and the ways in which these are meant to regulate the power and authority relationships across the institution including, for instance, the role of the Vice-Chancellor to approve the content of individual courses. These rules are also meant to provide the requirements and processes for accountability by staff and students such as, for example, whether a student will be called out for smoking in the hallway, or playing music too loudly in the residence, or how academics are to account for the study performance of students in their classes.

The third and perhaps most important layer on which I focus in particular, is the thick and complex network of unwritten rules that direct individuals and committees into making choices while creating the illusion that these choices were rationally or freely made. These are what Zizek (2008) referred to as the meta-rules that make up the habits of a society or a community, including things like the rules for what is to be taken as polite behaviour or the subjects that we are not to speak about in open discussion and that may only be mentioned in low tones in private conversations. To quote Zizek more directly,

> Every legal order or every order of explicit normativeness has to rely on a complex network of informal rules which tells us how we are to relate to explicit norms: how we are to apply them; to what extent we are to take them literally; and how and when we are allowed, even solicited, to disregard them. (p. 158)

Trying to pin down these meta-rules is much like the proverbial attempt at nailing our porridge to the wall. We feel their effects, positive or negative, without being able to point exactly to the thing or the behaviour that stimulated the feeling.

The importance of my characterisation of three layers of institutional culture is that, in different ways, they each hold the opportunity to promote or to restrict the negative freedoms of students. It should also be noted that the nature and character of each layer of institutional culture lies in the directing hands of university leadership, including its senate on matters of academic arrangements and regulations. However, it is relatively easier to rewrite rules and policies or to make positive change to the architectural arrangements and use of buildings and spaces than it is to make changes to the ways in which the meta-rules influence negative freedoms of students, mainly because their roots go so deeply into the very fabric of the institution.

Let me illustrate my point. Many academics and senior administrators will have had the experience of proposing a new operational approach or floating an idea at their universities and of then being met with a fellow academic, more senior in years and status or a senior

faculty administrator who, after momentary reflection, might say something along the lines of "That's not how we do things at this university." Aside from the question of how "the way we do things at this university" became the way that things are done at the university, it is more interesting to consider how the unwritten ways in which things are done at this particular university became so deeply infused into the psyche of mid-level academic and administrative staff as to almost automate their choices on matters of practice and strategy. All institutions can speak of the unique ways in which they do things to arrive at the same outcomes as their neighbouring institutions and this, in itself, is not a bad thing. It is good that students graduate with a distinctive flavour, if you will, or a particular characteristic of what it means to be a graduate of a particular university and that this characteristic will include the habits of mind and values that the university wishes to develop in its graduates. But ensuring that the impact of this characteristic is always positive demands an acute awareness, particularly on the part of institutional leadership at all levels, of the complex internal network of informal rules and the need to act, consciously and continually, to direct and shape their form and nature.

It is not difficult to recognise that the preceding characterisation of the layers of institutional culture locates the habits and patterns of exclusion based on identity in the third layer, where the network of unwritten rules for normative behaviour will have been constructed over time. This seems to be the way to explain the complicit behaviour of staff and students at White universities in apartheid South Africa that actively prevented the participation of Black academics and students in their institutions. Prior socialisation was obviously an important contributor, but it seems that this explanation does not go far enough to explain how such universities that are meant to acknowledge the universality of ideas as a core value were able to sustain the general compliance of almost the entire university community over such a long time. Most people in social institutions will learn quickly to genuflect before the rules of behaviour that count for affirmation and that turn each of us into *one of us*.

While institutional culture is important in reinforcing and defending the negative freedoms of students, it is also important in developing in students the idea of the negative freedoms of others, to which they are to attend both as students and as graduates. A university that neglects this aspect of its institutional culture can serve to reinforce patterns of prejudice and social exclusion that students acquire from prior socialisation, which must then be seen as a failure of student development. As we acknowledge the importance of ensuring that the process of learning is also aimed at dispelling superstitious belief or irrational argument from the minds of our students, so, too, must we acknowledge the importance of dispelling their acquired habits of social exclusion based on identity, both in how they learn and in what they learn. It is in this sense that attention to negative freedoms in institutional culture is essential to student development.

Institutional culture and the 2008 "Reitz Incident"

Even upon casual reflection, most people did not expect that the positive and progressive changes to regulations and policies in South Africa after 1994 would see the end of the

racism that was so strongly woven into this third level of many institutional cultures in South Africa. Its persistence was well-illustrated with the infamous Reitz incident at the University of the Free State (UFS) in 2008[1] that led to what is referred to as the Soudien Report on transformation in South African Higher Education (Department of Education, 2008). The primary offensiveness of the incident did not lie in its illustration of racism in our country. Rather, it was offensive because the students involved were close to completing their studies and graduating. A student who is academically successful and graduates from the university with such social attitudes may have been well trained but was certainly under-educated and it may be argued that, beyond the purely technical matter of passing their examinations, such students have forfeited the right to call themselves graduates. But more importantly, the institution had failed in its duty to properly educate its students and it is for this reason that the Vice-Chancellor's decision at the time to forgive the students was supportable. This was an appropriate acknowledgement that the real accountability lay with the university and that it needed to bring directed effort into mending the error of its ways of engagement.

There are a few further points to be made from my reference to this UFS incident and the many other such instances at universities that did not make the media headlines. It is important and correct that a university takes for granted that its students will arrive with a wide range of prejudices about all sorts of other identities that were constructed in their lived experiences with family, friends, and community. It is the task of the university to ensure that its students find sufficient opportunity to test and reflect on these prejudices and to leave the university as successful graduates having had an opportunity to see the world through the eyes of the Other. We cannot expect that the Catholic students will leave as Protestants or that the supporters of the Palestinian people's cause will leave our university as champions of Zionism, but we must expect our students to leave with an intellectual attitude that guides them on the path of the reasoned and sensitive search for the truth in all that they will encounter as university graduates in the world of ideas.

Events like the Reitz incident also alert universities to the fact that all the engagements that students experience during their studies are part of their learning experience. Universities must be more consciously aware of all informal contributions to learning and, as with formal classroom learning, must try to ensure that all student experiences and interactions are positively directed. A badly cleaned lecture room or an ill-spoken word from a lecturer or an administrator all contribute to negative learning opportunities for students. The negative attitudes and approaches that staff at the university may hold about their students, about students' learning abilities, or about their academic achievements derive from what is referred to as the pathologies of institutional culture. These pathologies are the attitudes and behaviours that operate at the level of the meta-rules and act to marginalise, exclude, or hurt particular groups of the university community. Left unchecked, such pathologies act to corrupt the primary purpose of the university that is to bring meaning to complexity in the process of developing the next generation of graduates and intellectuals who will go out to engage with the critical questions of the human condition in more positive and more

1 Four White students were video recorded while belittling a group of Black university residence cleaners, including apparently urinating in the food that they then fed to the workers.

developmental ways than their teachers did. Universities can rise to this task only if students learn in, and about, an environment that is free from harm, threat, prejudice, or unyielding dogma. Developing such an environment in which negative freedoms are taken as important, should be purposefully directed by university leadership rather than being left to happen by chance.

Exploring the pathologies of institutional culture

To return to the matter of institutional pathologies, I use the word pathology in its medical sense to indicate a disease or an abnormality that requires specialist attention, time, and remedial treatment if it is to be healed. Like the metaphorical vampire, these pathologies are ideas and habits that skulk around in the dark, feeding on and infecting those who are nearby. However, their hollowness is exposed, and they crumble as soon as they are faced with the light of open and reasoned argument. Sometimes, these habits may be well-intentioned but have seriously hurtful consequences such as, for example, that most corrosive form of racism that expects less from people considered as other and is at pains to apologise for poor behaviour or performance on the basis of their Blackness or Brownness or their poorness. In a country like South Africa where policy and regulation are aimed strongly at removing the hurtful habits of othering that were acquired during apartheid, negative discrimination based on identity can operate only in the umbra at the level of the informal network of meta-rules that directs the behaviour of those who work and learn in the institution. The fact that our staff and students arrive with prior socialisation that includes these pathologies of behaviour is not a reason for their continued existence in our institutional cultures. Universities must resist the paralysing argument that it is no more than a microcosm of its society. They should aim, rather, for the university to be a microcosm of what society could be like.

To illustrate the point, imagine that an academic accepts a post at a university and upon arriving at work, realises that fellow academics commonly accept bribes from students to inflate their assessment grades. If our newly appointed academic further finds that the university leaders are unwilling to hear protestations against such practice, he or she will have to conclude that this is part of the institutional culture and, if clear minded, would find such values so offensive that they would choose to leave the institution. Equally, if someone joins our university and holds firmly to their sense of their own racial or gender superiority, they should find the university so affirming of all in its community that they would either be convinced to change their views or choose to resign. The values that are embedded in the institutional culture of the university and that are meant to direct its choices and behaviour, even in the absence of rules, must permeate the walls of the institution so that all can recognise its presence and feel its effects.

At this point, a particular comment is necessary on that most pernicious form of informally institutionalised harm—gender-based violence in all its manifestations that is directed mostly by men against women. It touches on a sensitive part of our souls where we do not like to be touched because it reminds us of all forms of brute human power and their relationship with powerlessness. I am attracted to Pumla Gqola's (2015) argument that

> [r]ape has survived as long as it has because it works to keep patriarchy intact. It communicates clearly who matters and who is disposable. (p. 21)

While it is factually correct to say that most men will not rape a woman, this is not a useful starting point for understanding the place and meaning of gender-based violence in society. We need to remember that each time a man goes out to rape or purposefully hurt a woman, all men become beneficiaries. What the rapist does is reinforce the patterns of masculinity and patriarchy that are part of the meta-rules of society and that form the habits of our social institutions. The rapist is part of the mechanism that ensures that the patterns of patriarchy are continually reproduced. Thanks to the rapist, men are much more likely than women to have their hands on the levers of power in society. A similar argument can be made in consideration of racism. Not all White people did terrible things to Black people in apartheid South Africa nor did all Germans in Germany persecute Jewish people during World War II. But all White South Africans and all German people were beneficiaries of the exclusion of Blacks or Jews respectively from a social justice system that was meant to protect their freedom to pursue a happy and meaningful life in their society. In these examples, it is not possible to make an argument for collective guilt, but it is possible to make an argument for collective responsibility. Similarly, in relation to gender-based violence, all men have to acknowledge their responsibility and must work actively to develop an institutional culture that will not accommodate such brutish behaviour, much less make excuses for it.

Returning to the role and development of institutional culture, these and similar structural forms of exclusion based on identity should be the subject of regular institution-wide scrutiny with the aim of recognising and responding to harm caused by such behaviour. Even as it is about defending the negative freedoms of students, this reflective process should also influence the learning development of students in the classroom and in the so-called second or hidden curriculum that enables students to learn through their interactions with the university and their fellow students. To emphasise the point, the values that the university wishes to develop in its graduates should also be the foundation stones of its institutional culture.

Academic freedom and the liberating value of teaching

Institutional values and the institutional culture are meant to and do find expression in the structure of the curriculum and the ways in which we teach our students. In its formal sense, teaching is the front end of our task in engaging with the process of education as a liberating experience for the next generations of intellectuals who, as mentioned earlier, will do better, and will see differently and much further than the generation of their teachers managed to do. There is a defensible belief and I do not care to dispute with those who disagree on this matter, that the teaching space and the relationship between those who wish to teach and those wish to learn, is sacred. Such a relationship cannot be described in purely pecuniary or resource-related terms. It is here that teachers are to make good on the promise that a university gives to society, to the parents, and to the families of their students that they will be provided with a good quality and proper education and that, to the best of its institutional

ability, the university will try to ensure that students leave as positively engaged graduates. There may be times when it is necessary to interfere in the learning space but, like national declarations of war, such choices must always be made with great circumspection and reluctance. Apartheid's interference in this space in the education of both Black and White South Africans perpetuated one of its greatest harms from which we certainly have yet to recover. Political movements around the world that are driven by one or another crackpot dogma and that turn children into soldiers or keep girl children out of school, will visit equal harm on the heads of all their citizens.

In reflecting on the form and process of teaching and learning at the university that has chosen to actively express the principles of academic freedom in all its functions, it is important to keep in mind Max Weber's (1917/2020) caveat about the limits of a university education. A university education is not meant to answer the big questions to which all human beings have to respond: Who am I? How should I live? What choices should I make? These are questions that our students must answer for themselves, and, at the broader level, our task is to give context to such questions and to develop in our students the reasoning ability to arrive at defensible answers in a world that is complex and frighteningly ambiguous. It is in this sense that we understand the often-repeated maxim *ours is to educate and not to captivate* as meaning that we are not to make our students captive to particular world views, particular social or political views, or particular forms of knowledge about the empirically observable world. Of course, this does not mean that those who teach should pretend to be completely neutral on all matters of debate or dispute. Nor does it mean that teachers should be accommodating of bad science and flawed reasoning in their classrooms. Such an approach may well cause great harm to the learning experience of their students.

Teaching in the context of the liberating value of education means to enable our students to engage positively with the unfamiliar while also helping them see the familiar in unfamiliar ways and encourage in them a sceptical attitude towards all received knowledge, including the theories and hypotheses that they receive from their lecturers. This requires that we develop in our students the habits of mind and reasoning characteristics of intellectuals: a sense of the value of knowledge for its own sake; a capacity for critical reasoning outside of one's discipline; an ability to keep two diametrically opposing ideas in one's mind and still be fully functional; celebrating, rather than merely tolerating, diversity of opinion as a core value; recognising respectful criticism as the finest gift that one can give or receive and, at the end of a hard day of argument, of analysis, or in defence of a strongly-held view, being willing to say quietly, "I may have been wrong today." It is our capacity to develop our students in this way that leads people like O'Hear (1989) to refer to the university as a "Civilizing Force" (p. 17) and Scott (1989) to speak of the university as contributing to "a political world more sensitive to reason and more civilised in its search for truth" (p. 16).

Our students should experience this approach to learning development in both the first curriculum, the formal engagements that students have with course material, as well as the second or hidden curriculum from which our students learn about being at and engaging with a university that sees its values as being commendable. This second curriculum is also about

the architectural approach that we take to organising the university campus and particularly the teaching and learning spaces. This was one of the most valuable lessons put to use in the development of Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley where careful attention having been paid to beautiful and functional learning spaces encourages better and deeper learning in students. To return to the casual visitor to the campus, it is important that universities ask themselves questions such as: “What is it about the architectural arrangements of the physical spaces that will tell a casual visitor that this is a university that is seriously positive about, say, women’s rights?” and “Is this a university where no one should feel pressure to apologise for their identity?” Here is an important part of the university’s expression of commitment to defending the negative freedoms of its students. As mentioned earlier, the values embedded in an institutional culture must be so strongly expressed that they permeate its very walls.

It is fair to say that the university that valorises one cultural view or one way of knowing above all others cannot help but under-educate its students. Those students who enrol at a university that commits to the principles of academic freedom can reasonably expect that their lecturers will be open to the possibility of other ways of knowing and that there are types of problems that are insoluble unless one is willing to be led by the hand to stand in an unfamiliar or sometimes uncomfortable place from which to view them, as is often expected of students, particularly at a university. This is not an unusual approach in many knowledge disciplines and the area of complex number theory makes a useful illustration. This is a branch of mathematics that relies on the starting argument that the equation $x^2 + 1 = 0$ has a solution. To all that is known and all one has been taught about the counting number system, this looks like a ridiculous proposition because it requires acceptance of the idea that the square-root of -1 exists. Yet, there is a wide range of problems in disciplines from electrical supply to quantum mechanics that cannot be solved unless we accept complex number analysis as another way of knowing numbers. Similarly, the teacher who acknowledges only a European worldview and speaks only English, say, will lack both the words and the conceptual understanding of family or community connectedness in much of Asia, Africa, or South America. Such a teacher would find it strange that these are peoples who have more than one word for uncle or for grandmother. In an anthropology, politics, or public health class, faced with African, Chinese, or Indian students, such a teacher would be the educationally disadvantaged one in the classroom and may have to attend a bridging course to improve their capacity to teach. There are some aspects in which the university and its teaching staff are under-prepared for the learning needs of the students who attend their classes.

The educational development of students is best served when those who teach them are sensitive to the complexities and ways of reasoning in disciplines outside of their own. Of course, a lecturer cannot simultaneously be a specialist in many disciplines but all who lecture should at least aim to be reasonably enlightened amateurs in as wide a range of disciplines as possible, through the habit of broad intellectual engagement. Too often do we meet academics who believe that the only subject worthy of intelligent intellectual discussion is their own research area and that all other knowledge areas are obvious to an average mind. This is most unbecoming of anyone who wishes to claim the title of academic or intellectual

and a sectarian approach to disciplinary knowledge can only be harmful to the learning development of our students. While students in the pure and applied sciences certainly need greater engagement with issues and arguments in the humanities and liberal arts, there is an equally concerning threat to society in the poverty of scientific understanding of our humanities graduates and the ease with which they hand their futures over to technocrats on important matters of the relationship between technology and society. If knowledge is truly to be about challenging power, then developing a foundational understanding and a respectful approach to ways of knowing in other disciplines is essential for our graduates and these are the habits of mind that our students should also find in those who teach them.

Closure

I have argued that, beyond a mechanism for defence against outside interference with intellectual work, an institutional commitment to the principles of academic freedom also obliges a university to find expression of such principles in all its internal relations and operations, particularly in relation to the intellectual development of its students. Knowledge development is the only real social good of a university, precisely because of the liberating value of knowledge. Proper attention to all forms of student learning in the ways we teach and the ways in which students experience the university, and its institutional culture is essential to give expression to the principles of academic freedom and this demands awareness of what has been referred to as the negative freedoms that students should not only enjoy but also develop in relation to themselves and others in their learning at a university. Shoddy approaches to teaching and learning and a neglectful attitude to developing the critical intellectual engagement of students leaves the university hollowed of its core purpose.

I offer a final word on the liberating value of education and its relationship with the decolonising project. Concerns have been expressed elsewhere (Ballim, 2018) about the wooliness of recent discussions on decolonising the curriculum at South African universities. The primary concern is that the discussion confuses the curriculum with the content of the curriculum. There is a level of silliness in the idea of removing Shakespeare or Western science, whatever that might mean, from the teaching activities at a university. It is worth taking a mirror-reflection from Aimé Césaire's caution (cited in Mbembe, 2017, p. 158) to European intellectuals against their self-satisfying reductionism which, he said, has the potential to ". . . amputate man from the human and isolate him, permanently, in a suicidal pride if not in a rational and scientific form of barbarism." We should further note Césaire's point that rationalism and the scientific method can also be instruments of barbarism and are often harnessed in the service of unspeakable purpose.

The decolonising project is better framed around the task, as wa Thiong'o (1981) describes it, of decolonising minds. It is here that a university can make its most significant contribution to its public, through the educational development of graduates who will stretch the front ends of human endeavour with warm hearts and fine minds and who are awake to the big questions of human suffering, environmental sustainability, and the relationships between power and powerlessness. But this requires that university lecturers develop their

understanding and commitment to the idea of a university that holds academic freedom principles, including the negative freedoms, at the core of its values. To be fair, our students deserve no less.

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