

ARTICLE

**HIGHER EDUCATION AND SOLIDARITY:
A TURN OF THE EXTENSION FACING THE SOCIETY OF MERIT¹**

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the role of higher education, especially regarding its new guidelines on extension, to build a more supportive and less competitive society. Firstly, based on the methodology of the reconstruction of social processes, stemming from a bibliographical analysis and the proposition of ideal types, it shows the origins and contemporary influence of the “University Mode 2” model proposed by the sociologist Michael Gibbons, emphasizing his adherence to *individual anthropology* and an appreciation of meritocracy. Then, the article presents a critique of this paradigm whilst rescuing a *solidarity-based anthropology*, to think about a higher education project capable of reducing the perverse effects of a competitive society. In this sense, based on the inductive method, I propose a reflection on the ways of accessing higher education and the role and potential of extension activities, particularly from Resolution n. 7, of 2018, which stipulated that such activities should make up at least 10% of the total curricular workload of undergraduate courses. The article concludes that it is possible to reread the thesis of historian Burton J. Bledstein to think of higher education as one of the main mechanisms for transforming society, not in the sense of forming a “culture of merit”, as diagnosed in the 20th century, but in the perspective of an appreciation of the “culture of solidarity”.

Keywords: higher education, extension, solidarity, meritocracy.

**ENSINO SUPERIOR E SOLIDARIEDADE: UMA VIRADA DA EXTENSÃO FACE
À SOCIEDADE DO MÉRITO**

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa o papel do ensino superior, em especial no que toca as suas novas diretrizes sobre a extensão, para constituir uma sociedade mais solidária e menos competitiva. Em primeiro lugar, com base na metodologia de reconstrução de processos sociais, a partir de uma análise bibliográfica e da proposição de tipos ideais, ele mostra as origens e a influência contemporânea do modelo de “Universidade Modo 2”, proposto pelo sociólogo Michael Gibbons, dando ênfase na sua adesão a uma *antropologia individual* e uma valorização da meritocracia. Em seguida, o artigo traz uma crítica desse paradigma, ao mesmo tempo que resgata uma *antropologia solidária*, com o intuito de pensar

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um projeto de ensino superior capaz de reduzir os efeitos perversos de uma sociedade competitiva. Nesse sentido, valendo-se do método indutivo, propõe-se uma reflexão sobre as formas de acesso ao ensino superior, o papel e o potencial das atividades de extensão, em especial pela Resolução n.º 7, de 2018, que previu que elas devem compor, no mínimo, 10% do total da carga horária curricular dos cursos de graduação. O artigo conclui que é possível uma releitura da tese do historiador Burton J. Bledstein, de modo a pensar o ensino superior como um dos principais mecanismos para transformar a sociedade, não no sentido da formação da “cultura do mérito”, como diagnosticado no século XX, mas na perspectiva de uma valorização da “cultura da solidariedade”.

Palavras-chave: ensino superior, extensão, solidariedade, meritocracia.

EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR Y SOLIDARIDAD: UN GIRO DE LA EXTENSIÓN FRENTE A LA SOCIEDAD DEL MÉRITO

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza el papel de la educación superior, en particular en lo que se refiere a sus nuevos lineamientos de extensión, para construir una sociedad más solidaria y menos competitiva. En primer lugar, basado en la metodología de reconstrucción de procesos sociales, a partir de un análisis bibliográfico y la proposición de tipos ideales, muestra los orígenes y la influencia contemporánea del modelo “University Mode 2”, propuesto por el sociólogo Michael Gibbons, destacando su adhesión a una antropología individual y una apreciación de la meritocracia. Luego, el artículo presenta una crítica a este paradigma, al mismo tiempo que rescata una antropología solidaria, con el objetivo de pensar un proyecto de educación superior capaz de reducir los efectos perversos de una sociedad competitiva. En este sentido, a partir del método inductivo, se propone una reflexión sobre las formas de acceder a la educación superior y el papel y potencial de las actividades de extensión, especialmente a partir de la Resolución n. 7, de 2018, que dispuso que deben constituir por lo menos el 10% de la carga curricular total de los cursos de pregrado. El artículo concluye que es posible releer la tesis del historiador Burton J. Bledstein, para pensar la educación superior como uno de los principales mecanismos de transformación de la sociedad, no en el sentido de formar una “cultura del mérito”, como se diagnostica en el siglo XX, pero en la perspectiva de una valorización de la “cultura de la solidaridad”.

Palabras clave: educación superior, extensión, solidaridad, meritocracia.

INTRODUCTION

“more than in any Western country in the last century, the development of higher education in America made possible a social faith in merit, competence, discipline, and control that were basic to accepted conceptions of achievement and success.” (BLEDSTEIN, 1976, p. X.)

The observation by Bledstein from the mid-1970s brought a paradox. Like the face of Janus, it was possible to look forward and backward at the same time. From one perspective, he made a diagnosis: the great North American universities – or the multiversity model, as defined by Kerr (1982) – were consolidated as institutions inserted in the market society, preparing students for what Bledstein (1976), in the title of his book, defined as the “culture of professionalism”. But there was also a prognosis there: the advent of neoliberal policies, from the 1980s onwards, would take the concepts of “achievement and success” to another level; and North American universities would continue to be, as Michael Sandel (2020) has shown, the main culprits of the “tyranny of merit”.

This mention of the American model is necessary. From the philanthropic turn of the robber barons (ZINN, 2002) to the work of Flexner (1968), including the Morrill Act (LEE, 1963), North American universities have become reference institutions, consolidating in the second half of the 20th century as a model for higher education reforms around the world. The clearest result of this genealogy is found in the “Michael Gibbons phenomenon”, whose analytical framework, called “Mode 2”, is found everywhere (RESENDE; OVIEDO, 2020). According to Gibbons (1998), we are experiencing a new form of knowledge production (*applicable, transdisciplinary, diversified*, etc.), and the only way for universities to adapt is through what he defines as an “economically-oriented paradigm”. In other words, the main role of higher education is to train the necessary workforce and contribute to economic growth (GIBBONS et al., 1994; GIBBONS, 1998; NOWOTNY; SCOTT; GIBBONS, 2003).

Criticism of this institutional vision is old. When the Sophists emerged in Athens, offering young people an education that prepared them for a career of personal advancement in the political and social life of the time, Socrates and Plato's reaction was immediate: education could not ignore its commitment to citizenship (MONROE, 1968). Sandel's observation, centuries later, is not very different: North American universities have made personal merit in the market economy the quintessence of higher education, constituting a dynamic of “winners and losers” that has had perverse effects on society, leaving aside the idea that we need to live together as a collective (SANDEL, 2020).

There were several alternative institutional proposals to this *ideal of higher education*. In the 19th century, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the transformations of the university to meet the demands of a new emerging workforce, both Humboldt (1979) and Newman (1996) realized what could happen: higher education should not be limited to a mere pragmatic instrument for economic growth; it was the place for the formation of a ruling elite (Newton's humanistic proposal) or the development of pure research (Humboldt's scientific proposal). It is true that this battle between the “two cultures”, as classified by C. P. Snow (1965), continues to this day, but the demographic explosion and the massification of universities, on the one hand, and the contextualization of research and the controversies surrounding scientific progress, on the other, have made the Newmanian and Humboldtian models obsolete for the contemporary world (RUBIÃO, 2013a).

Another reaction emerged in Latin America at the beginning of the 20th century. Hugo Biagini (2002) tells an anecdote from 1913 that illustrates the novelty: during a student congress held in New York, while the North American and European delegations were concerned with enjoying the meeting in a hedonistic way, in addition to being content with discussions of classical themes, the Latin American students decided to abandon the congress, claiming that they were concerned with the social problems that were occurring in the world and with the transformative capacity of the university. It was no coincidence that, four years later, the Grito de Córdoba broke out, a movement that would influence all of Latin America (PORTANTIERO, 1978). As its main leader, Deodoro Roca (1978, p. 431), summarized: “university reform is the same as social reform.” In other words, the university should be seen as an institution capable of acting on the main demands of society, not through a ruling elite, whether “humanist” or “scientific”, but in a dialogic way with the social body. In this sense, the Córdoba model brought several new features: democratization in access to and management of universities, social responsibility of the institution, concern for national problems, fight against imperialism, etc. (TUNNERMANN, 1978, p. 44-45).

These characteristics can be *summarized* in the idea of extension. Indeed, the concept did not emerge in Latin America. During the Industrial Revolution, the English spoke of an extended university, in the sense of an institution that could expand its borders to train the emerging workforce. There are even records of specific initiatives by universities around the world linked to social responsibility. However, after the Córdoba movement, this concept was transformed, becoming institutionalized as a function of the university, alongside teaching and research (RUBIÃO, 2013b). To get an idea of this originality and Latin American identity, a 2005 article, speaking of the European reality, announced a novelty with the creation of a “third function” of the university, linked to the “civic mission” and “social responsibility” (KANTANEN, 2005). In Latin America, this institutional role was developed throughout the 20th century, with numerous successful experiences in the field of extension (ORTIZ-RIAGA; MORALES-RUBIANO, 2011).

There is not much new in the reflection on this institutional role. What seems to be emerging is an observation of the perverse effects of a model that takes professional training based on merit to its extreme (LAVAL, 2003; SANDEL, 2020). This is not about denying the importance of this dimension, but about thinking about the externalities of higher education in the contemporary world. In this sense, extension has a lot to contribute, especially in Brazil, with the new guidelines of the National Education Plan (PNE-*Plano Nacional de Educação*), which foresees that 10% of the curriculum be allocated to this function. This is an opportunity not only to value what has always been the weakest pillar of the university (ALMEIDA FILHO, 2007) but to rethink its contours in a context of overvaluation of the “economically-oriented paradigm” (GIBBONS et al., 1994; GIBBONS, 1998; NOWOTNY; SCOTT; GIBBONS, 2003).

This article aims to reflect on the transformative role of higher education, especially through forms of access and the valorization of extension, to combat the perverse effects of the overvaluation of merit. If for Bledstein the North American university was the main institution for forming the “culture of professionalism”, this is to adopt a hypothesis in the opposite direction, that is, in what way can higher education foster what we will define as a “culture of solidarity”?

To answer this question, it is necessary to better define “University Mode 2” (section 1), to understand not only the risks of this institutional model (section 2) but also how it was constituted based on *individual anthropology* (section 3) and a discourse on meritocracy (section 4). This diagnosis is important for considering the opposite path, that is, how the observation of a *solidarity-based anthropology* (section 5) can justify a higher education model that values not only alternative skills to meritocracy for student access but also extension activities throughout their education, aiming to rebalance the excesses of a competitive society (section 6).

METHODOLOGY

First, it is important to make it clear that this article uses ideal types (WEBER, 1974), especially regarding the concepts of “Mode 2 University”, “*individual anthropology*” and “*solidarity anthropology*”. It is, therefore, an approximate construction, not found empirically in a complete form, but serves as an analytical instrument to explain social reality, having heuristic value.

Using these ideal types, based on a bibliographic analysis, the article used the qualitative method of “reconstruction of social processes”, that is, it sought a historical generalization, in an attempt to capture structural changes and long-term patterns, without there being a direct observation of the phenomena or interaction with individuals, but a reconstruction that seeks to highlight a “path dependency”, that is, “the idea that the action that comes before conditions the one that comes after, in the sense that it limits the possibilities of changing its course, and can even give it a certain direction”. (ALONSO, 2016, p. 7).

This “path dependence” is exposed in the formation of the “Mode 2 University” and in its association with the overvaluation of individual anthropology throughout the 20th century. The article then uses the inductive method (SOUZA, 2020) to work on the hypothesis that outreach activities and changes in the form of access to higher education can value a supportive anthropology, aiming to reduce the perverse effects of the “merit society”.

“UNIVERSITY MODE 2”

“Economic imperatives will dominate, and universities that fail to adapt to these changes risk becoming obsolete” (GIBBONS, 1998, p. 9).

Michael Gibbons was one of the World Bank's (WB) main consultants on higher education issues and one of the most cited authors on higher education in citation indices. Christian de Montlibert is one of those who draw attention to the fact that this analytical framework proposed by him has been dominating discussions about universities (MONTLIBERT, 2004). Gibbons launched the concept of “Mode 2” in 1994 in the book *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in*

Contemporary Societies, together with other authors (GIBBONS et al., 1994). This same idea was perfected in a second book, *Rethinking Science*, also in partnership with other authors (NOWOTNY et al., 2003). Gibbons, in addition, reflected exclusively on the application of “Mode 2” of knowledge production in higher education in a report for the WB, called *Higher Education Relevance in the 21st Century* (GIBBONS, 1998). But what does this analytical framework mean?

According to Gibbons, a new form of knowledge production was emerging in society. This new form (“Mode 2”) differs substantially from the old one (“Mode 1”). In the classical mode, which emerged from the Scientific Revolution, universities were the hegemonic centers of knowledge production. There was a fixed cognitive framework, with independent disciplines, focused mainly on “fundamental research”. Science was seen as an autonomous activity, governed by its ideas, rules, values, and norms (MERTON, 1973). As the slogan went: “science discovers, industry applies, man conforms.”

What has changed? According to Gibbons, a series of increasingly visible transformations began in the second half of the 20th century, leading us to believe in the emergence of a new form of knowledge production. The main characteristics of this new “Mode” are the following: i) *Knowledge is produced in the context of application*. In other words, there is no longer a distinction between “pure research” and “applied research”; ii) *Transdisciplinarity*. Unlike the old rigid disciplinary framework, “Mode 2” brings together specialists from different areas. Far from seeking to establish ultimate truths, these teams work towards consensus, focused on solving temporary problems; iii) *Organizational diversity*. The university has lost its hegemony in the production of knowledge. Now it has to share it with research institutes, government agencies, industrial laboratories, think tanks, etc.; iv) *Reflexivity, social accountability, and quality of control*. Given this new reality, there is an increasing number of people involved in the production of knowledge. The old system of “judgment by peers” gives way to a complex network of actors. Decisions are “negotiated”, having to balance economic, political, ethical, environmental, social, and cultural interests, etc. (GIBBONS et al., 1994; GIBBONS, 1998).

If we think exclusively about the university, it is possible to state that this analytical framework proposed by Gibbons was already present in Kerr's multiversity. When he wrote the book that launched this concept, in 1963, Clark Kerr was the president of the University of Berkeley, with more than 50 thousand students. According to him, the multiversity was “neither Oxford nor Berlin”; it was an “institution of a new type” (KERR, 1982, p. 19). The idea of this institutional model was to aggregate all the functions of the university: in the undergraduate course, a British line of “liberal education” was sought, whose origins went back to Plato; in the postgraduate course, a German line of research was sought, also present in Pythagoras; and finally, the other activities followed an American model, whose diversity was already found in the Sophists (KERR, 1982, p. 29-30).

Furthermore, this multiverse included students, professors, leaders, government, foundations, federal agencies, alumni, the press, business, sports, professional, rural, and union communities, etc. (KERR, 1982, p. 30-36).

On several occasions, Kerr speaks of the “governance of the university,” that is, how these various actors interacted, each contributing to a function, and how the president became a true political (or community) leader to manage often conflicting interests (KERR, 1982, p. 117).

However, although this dynamism resembles “Mode 2”, Kerr never subscribed to the thesis of an “economically-oriented paradigm”. It is true that some critics have spoken of marketiversity (RENAUT, 1995, p. 224), referring to the utilitarian excesses of the new model, and that Kerr’s vocabulary often approaches “market-oriented” discourse; but the fact that multiversity was attacked by both the right and the left, amid the turmoil of the 1960s, shows how his self-definition as a “conciliator” is more appropriate (RUBIÃO, 2013a).

The same cannot be said of Gibbons. One example is his opinion on university funding. This topic was much debated at the first World Conference on Higher Education, in 2009. Marco Antônio Dias, representative of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), responsible for organizing the event, made the following observation:

While more than 180 countries and representatives of the international community were preparing to define *education as a public service in Paris in October 1998 (Article 14 of the WCHE Declaration)*, indicating that it should base its long-term orientations on social objectives and needs (*Article 60 of*

the same Declaration), other very active groups worked to ensure the adoption of [...]opposite principles (DIAS, 2003, p. 52, emphasis in the original).

Among these groups, the World Bank is perhaps the greatest example. The organization has indeed abandoned its radical stance of the 1990s when it recommended that governments stop investing in higher education (WORLD BANK, 1994; WORLD BANK, 1998), but it continues to advocate a balance between public and private investments, without ceasing to give preference to the latter (WORLD BANK, 2000). As Gibbons summarizes (1998, p. 23) in his report to the Bank:

Although in most highly industrialised countries the state will remain the predominant source of funding for higher education, block-grant funding is likely to be replaced by a more targeted approach, especially in research, and in undergraduate education by allocation mechanisms mimicking the market.

A second example can be given with the idea of a market institutionalization of higher education. Let us look at some illustrations in the text by Gibbons (1998, p. 8-9):

Universities must serve society, primarily by supporting the economy and enhancing the quality of life for its citizens. [...] The emerging paradigm is introducing a new culture of responsibility, marked by the rise of managerialism and a strong emphasis on the value of money across international higher education systems. [...] The relevance of higher education will be evaluated based on its outputs and its contribution to national economic performance.

This “economist turn” is complex and involves a series of actors. Gerard de Selys (1998) draws attention to the role of the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), a think tank dedicated to increasing competitiveness. One of the first reports of this body, *Education and Competence in Europe*, from 1989, stated that “education and training [...] are considered vital strategic investments for the success of companies”. In the same sense, Christian de Montlibert highlights the influence of ERT on the European Commission, which over the years has adopted suggestions and terminologies such as a focus on “distance education”, the “production of educational software”, the “business world as a conceptualizer of the content taught”, “continuous training for the market”, the “flexibility of disciplines”, the “inefficiency of universities”, etc. (MONTLIBERT, 2004, p. 22-24, free translation).

Thus, Montlibert highlights the convergence, at the end of the 20th century, between multinational bosses, experts from international agencies, and sociologists such as Gibbons to transform higher education, inserting it within the perspective of a neoliberal discourse. He condemns this instrumental rationality, which aims, in the words of Viviane Reading (European Commissioner), “to make each university a company” (MONTLIBERT, 2004, p. 14); or, in the words of the “Lisbon Strategy”, to make education and training, within the perspective of the “knowledge society”, the main factors of economic growth (MONTLIBERT, 2004, p. 36).

THE RISKS OF THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

“Commercialization is changing the nature of academic institutions in ways we will all regret.” (BOK, 2003, p. X, free translation).

Derek Bok has the authority to speak. A former president of Harvard and author of several books on higher education, he is no outsider, no “far-left” protester, no agitator. Quite the contrary, Bok has a very pragmatic view of universities, a view that does not differ much from “Mode 2”. But Bok has been warning about the excesses of this format, about the risks of what he calls “Universities in the Marketplace” (BOK, 2003).

What are these dangers? The first of them, as Bok warned us in a book from the 1980s, is the risk of subjects or research that bring little economic profitability disappearing (BOK, 1988). With

the mercantilist logic – of results, efficiency, outputs, private financing... – there may be a concentration of resources on topics with high profitability and a neglect of those that are not so attractive. This concern has been expressed in several other countries. Cameroonian sociologist Jean-Marc Éla, for example, warns not only about the disappearance of disciplines that are not economically viable but also about the extinction of any critical thinking and the idea of social responsibility in universities on the African continent (ÉLA, 2004, p. 95-100).

Another important point, according to Bok, is the devaluation of education, which counts for almost nothing in international university rankings (BOK, 2003, p. 160). Marilena Chauí (2001 p. 191, free translation) summarizes this issue well: free translation

Teaching is designed either to provide rapid qualifications for graduates who need to enter the job market quickly, from which they will be expelled in a few years, as they quickly become obsolete and disposable young people; or as a transmission belt between researchers and training for new researchers. Transmission and training. Therefore, the essential mark of education has disappeared: training.

Another point to which Christian Laval and Thomas Piketty draw our attention is the tendency towards inequality between institutions. In this context of fierce competition between universities, private funding, partnerships with industries, etc., “there is a growing social polarization with, in certain cases, apartheid between institutions for the rich and the poor (LAVAL, 2003; PIKETTY, 2020). This division is clear in the United States, a country that has taken this “market logic” to the extreme. Christopher Newfield shows us how, in addition to the enormous difference – in quality, opportunities, visibility – between elite universities and other higher education institutions, the path to reaching the former, in most cases, involves the financial situation of students: as if the high prices, which end up inhibiting the most disadvantaged, were not enough, around 20% of students admitted to major American universities resort to the services of a personal coach, which can cost up to 30,000 dollars (NEWFIELD, 2007).

When it comes to research, there are several concerns. Naomi Klein (2001) cites two examples that illustrate very well the risks of industry-university partnerships. Dr. Dong, a researcher at the University of California, received a proposal from the pharmaceutical company Boots to test a thyroid medication that had been patented by the company, comparing it with a generic medication. The goal was to show that, despite being more expensive, the medication was more effective, but the studies concluded that they presented similar results. When Dr. Dong wanted to publish the results in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, she was prevented from doing so due to a contractual veto clause on publications. Only two years later, through a scoop, the case ended up in the *Wall Street Journal*. The other case, which occurred at the University of Toronto, is even more serious. Dr. Olivieri, a specialist in a blood disease called thalassaemia, was conducting research for a pharmaceutical giant (Apotex) in conjunction with the Hospital for Sick Children when she discovered that one of the company's medications (Deferiprone) was harming children. Contractually prevented from showing the results, she reported the episode to *The New England Journal of Medicine* anyway and ended up losing her research position at the university (KLEIN, 2001).

Other worrying data: Eliot Marshal (1997) cites an assessment published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, in which 20% of the 2,167 academic scientists interviewed admit that they delay publications for more than six months due to the commercial interests of their sponsors; Sheldon Krinsky (2003) also cites an article published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, showing that studies sponsored by companies are significantly more likely than studies not sponsored by them to reach conclusions favorable to the sponsor.

This scenario is extremely worrying. Dominique Pestre draws attention to what some American jurists are calling the enclosure movement, that is, how science is being privatized, ceasing to be a public good, and beginning to serve new economic actors (PESTRE, 2001). An example can be seen in a recent report by OXFAM (Oxford Committee for Famine Relief), to which Ricardo Abramovay (2008, [s.p.]) alludes, demonstrating shocking data on the production and consumption of medicines:

Only 15% of the world's population consumes no less than 90% of the medicines that the industry puts on the market. The industries focus their research on products that do not correspond to the most common diseases. Of the 163 new products launched between 1999 and 2004, only three were related to diseases prevalent in poor countries. The industry focuses excessively on seeking protection of intellectual property rights to the detriment of the poorest people's access to what they need.

The university that could be a balancing factor in the search for a “science of the common good”, has been increasingly under pressure to associate it with private capital, entering into this mercantilist logic. As Bok (2003, p. 6-7) says, there is no collusion by the business world to end public science or the “university of common interest”, but to believe that this relationship between private capital or donations does not change higher education institutions is a great naivety.

INDIVIDUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

“Nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a solidarity with all the emotions of our breast, and nothing shocks us more than the appearance of the contrary.” (SMITH, 2002, p. 11, free translation).

Reading *The theory of moral sentiments* can reveal some paradoxes to us. If Adam Smith became known for his defense of liberalism, no less important was his contribution to the idea of sympathy or solidarity. As the opening sentence of the book announces: “However selfish man may be supposed to be, there are some principles in his nature which make him take an interest in the fortunes of others, and consider their happiness necessary to himself, though he derives nothing from it the pleasure of assisting it.” (SMITH, 2002, p. 7, free translation).

In this sense, seeing Smith as a militant of individualism, in which the social contribution of citizens would be limited to their contribution to economic growth, seems to be a limited image of his thinking. It is true that in *The Wealth of Nations*, he did not establish a dialogue between his moral theory and reflections on political economy, which is why the invisible hand of the market appears as the guiding thread of the social fabric. But one cannot fail to take into account the context in which the book was written: Smith denounces the perverse effects of state regulation, within the scope of the mercantilist paradigm, seeing free trade as a more effective alternative for economic growth, in addition to an important factor for harmony between individuals and nations (SMITH, 1983). But what about the social contradictions that were to come? As a man of the 18th century, Smith did not witness the rise in inequality, the workers' revolts, and the climate of disharmony arising from liberalism. Claiming him today as the apostle of an individualistic worldview, confined to the magnifying glass of economic growth, seems to us not only a historical short-circuit but also a contradiction in the face of his idea of morality. As Smith reveals (2002, p. 294, free translation): “At every moment the wise and virtuous man is willing to sacrifice his private interest to the public interest of his order or society.”

But nothing contributed more to this individualistic worldview, centered on economic growth, than “social Darwinism.” Spencer, the main promoter of this idea, had been studying the transformation of species. After reading Darwin's work and discovering the concept of “natural selection,” he incorporated it into his anthropological theory, based on the hypothesis that human progress occurs through competition that results in the survival of the strongest, that is, in the success of these to the detriment of the weakest, a continuous process that leads to the improvement of society. In Spencer's words (2012, p. 96, free translation):

The development of higher species is guided by progress toward a form of existence capable of seeking happiness free from deplorable needs. In the human race, this happiness must be performed. Civilization is the final stage of this performance. The ideal man is the man who lives under the conditions in which it is realized. While waiting, the well-being of existing humanity and the progress toward final perfection are assured, both one and the other, by a beneficent but severe discipline to which all nature is subject: a merciless discipline, an inexorable law that leads to happiness, but which never yields to the possibility of inflicting partial and temporary

suffering. The poverty of the incapable, the anguish of the imprudent, the nakedness of the lazy, and the crushing of the weak by the powerful, which abandons a great number “in the depths and misery” are the determinations of an immense and provident goodness.

It is important to highlight that Spencer was one of the most influential intellectuals of the 19th century (DUNCAN, 2014). His ideas served to justify the inequalities resulting from the Industrial Revolution and imperialist expansion, making the dominance of one race, class, or nation over another be seen as something natural or as a better capacity for adaptation. It is not surprising that this evolutionism inspired some eugenic theories (BOLSANELLO, 1996), but Spencer's main legacy is perhaps the theoretical framework to defend economic disparities, free from state intervention, and the competitive nature of human beings in a market society. To give just one example, here is the opinion of Andrew Carnegie, one of the richest and most influential men in the world at the time, in an article that became known as the *Gospel of Wealth*:

We accept and welcome therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment, the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few, and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential for the future progress of the race. (CARNEGIE, 1889, p. 655).

These ideas have been consolidating, especially in the United States. The figure of the self-made man, embodied among others by Carnegie, continues to inspire generations. Given this scenario, a new education was needed that considered the idea of “natural selection”. It was about competitiveness in search of progress or what Spencer (1861) defined as a useful teaching model.

It is interesting to note the role of universities in this process. Howard Zinn (2002), in his classic *A People's History of the United States*, narrates how the robber barons (Rockefeller, Carnegie, J. P. Morgan), after making a fortune through the creation of monopolies, price controls, collusion with authorities and repression of demonstrations, saw in the culture of philanthropy a path not only to moral redemption but above all to political influence. How? By financing universities. As Dorothy Ross observed in her genealogy on “the origins of the social sciences in America,” the patrons of capitalism were prepared to “neutralize world history” (ROSS, 1991, p. 23-24).

To give just one example, Rockefeller donated 41 million dollars, most of it to the University of Chicago, to develop neoclassical economics and behaviorism. In other words, as Ross observes, topics that should have been the subject of open discussion ended up becoming methodological monopolies, bringing with them a scientism whose main basis was financial abundance (ROSS, 1991, p. 400-403). Much more than that, as Zinn pointed out, the robber barons began to create academic establishments that did not encourage critical thinking at all:

They formed the typical servants of the American system – the teachers, the doctors, the lawyers, the administrators, the engineers, the technicians, the politicians – all those who would one day be paid to watch over the maintenance of the system, to be the loyal defenders against any form of disturbance. (ZINN, 2002, p. 305, free translation).

The consolidation of this model was concomitant with the rise of meritocracy and the decline of a civic educational project for society. Little by little, Jacksonian America, which enchanted Tocqueville (1997) with its dynamism and balance between the pursuit of professional success and the capacity for association, gave way to an individualistic worldview, without many counterbalances to the stimulus of competition.

THE PATH OF MERITOCRACY

“The classless society would be one in which [... everyone] possessed and acted on plural values. We would come to evaluate people not according to their intelligence and education, their occupation and power, but according to their kindness and courage, their imagination and sensitivity, their sympathy and

generosity; there could be no classes. [...] The classless society would also be the tolerant society, in which individual differences were actively encouraged as well as passively tolerated, in which full meaning was finally given to human dignity. Every human being would then have an equal opportunity, not to rise in the world by any mathematical measure, but to develop his/her special capacities for leading a full life.” (YOUNG, 1961, p. 169, free translation).

In Michael Young’s dystopian and prophetic book (1961), the words of the Chelsea Manifesto represent the dream of freeing oneself from the “dictatorship of meritocracy.” Set in 2034, the story reveals the rise of a disharmonious and stratified society, in which the most intelligent people find a justification not only for their success but for the contempt of those who were not able to achieve the same results. Young warns of the role of education in fostering this climate of discord between the “intelligent” and the “ignorant”: meritocracy appears as the purpose of the social order and the only condition for a good life.

It is interesting to observe the transformation of the term meritocracy since then. When he coined it in 1958, Young gave it a pejorative tone, warning us about the potential for segregation and justification of social differences, based on standardized measurements of ability. Today, meritocracy is seen as a virtue within society and is hegemonic in education plans (VIEIRA et al., 2013; BROWN; TANNOK, 2009) and in various ideological currents of the political spectrum (LITTLER, 2018). It is about defending the idea that the valorization of individual performance, based on talent, effort, and equal opportunities, regardless of social position, is the best criterion for achieving a fair society (LIPSEY, 2014).

This paradigm, however, has been criticized. McNamee and Miller, Jr. (2014), for example, analyzed the factors that determine success in people's lives, comparing meritocratic variables (being talented, having the right attitude, working hard, and having a high moral character) with non-meritocratic variables (the role of inheritance, sociocultural capital, luck, unequal access to educational opportunities and forms of discrimination), to reveal the predominant role of the latter and the need for structural reforms in society, denouncing what they defined as the “myth of meritocracy” (MCNAMEE; MILLER JR., 2014).

Michael Sandel corroborates this complaint, especially in the reality of the United States. He shows that when asked about which factors are “very important for getting ahead in life”, 73% of Americans indicate hard work in the first place, while in Germany this percentage drops to half of the people and, in France, to only a quarter. The paradox is given by research that shows that the capacity for economic mobility in the United States is much lower than in countries such as Germany, Spain, Japan, Australia, Sweden, Canada, Finland, China, etc., which demystifies the idea of the meritocratic self-made man (SANDEL, 2020).

Case and Deaton (2020), in a revealing study, showed the disastrous consequences of this society that takes the role of economic success in people's happiness to its extreme consequences. When trying to understand why the health and life expectancy of older people were improving while the one of younger people was getting worse, the authors came across data indicating that this reality (full of suicides, depression, alcoholism, opioids, etc.) applied especially to young white people who did not enter higher education. In other words, it was not something linked to poverty (they were young people with access to employment) or to classic forms of prejudice (race, gender, religion). As the authors defined it, this was the reality of those excluded from meritocracy or those who were unable to achieve greater success in life. These were “deaths of despair”² (CASE; DEATON, 2020).

This scenario described by Case and Deaton reflects Michael Young's prophecy very well. After all, in Young's dystopia, the advent of meritocracy represented an achievement. Free from the class-

² In the same vein, Viapiana, Gomes and Albuquerque (2018) reflect on “mental illness in contemporary society”, based on the “social determination of the health-disease process”, revealing the catalytic role that the competitiveness of the capitalist economy has played in this dynamic, especially since the second half of the 20th century. Specifically, regarding the academic environment, Walburg (2014) provides a review of the literature involving several countries, showing the increase in Burnout syndrome among students, a phenomenon previously linked to the professional world.

based society, individuals were able to focus their hopes on their productive capacity and intellectual development to move up in life. Equal access to schools and IQ tests, which were taken at all times, guaranteed the success of the best citizens in the most diverse activities. But the advent of this full meritocracy soon generated perverse effects: convinced of their superiority, successful individuals found a moral justification for despising failures; it reached the point where marriages were arranged between intelligent people to perpetuate families in the privileged class. Thus, the gap between rich and poor became increasingly greater, generating a tense and stratified society, the consequence of which could only be the revolt of the ignored ones (YOUNG, 1961).

We need to take Michael Young's warning seriously and think about the role of higher education in preventing it. As Bledstein (1976) found, universities were the privileged locus for the constitution of this "social faith in merit," which ended up spreading to society as a whole. This is not about denying the achievements of this value, as Case and Deaton (2020) warn, but about showing its dark side in the search for alternatives. Could "Mode 2" be this option? It is clear that Gibbons' "economically-oriented paradigm" is much more consistent with the exponentiation of this process than with the mitigation of some of its disastrous consequences. Therefore, it is necessary to think of alternatives, especially in higher education, capable of acting as a counterpoint to the individualistic and competitive culture. The legitimacy of this proposal depends on the valorization of a new anthropology.

SOLIDARITY ANTHROPOLOGY

"If it is true that feeding a stranger occurs throughout Nature to the point of having the character of a general law, many enigmas are explained." (Goethe, 1848, apud KROPOTKIN, 2009, p. 13).

In his famous *Mutual Aid*, Kropotkin (2009) refers to the correspondence between the zoologist Eckermann and Goethe, revealing the latter's surprise upon learning that wren chicks, which had escaped from their home, were found in the nest of robins, who were feeding them along with their chicks. Enthusiastic, Goethe proposed that they conduct an in-depth study on the subject, certain that they would discover "treasures of incalculable value in terms of results" (KROPOTKIN, 2009, p. 13-14).

Although the study was never carried out, Kropotkin followed the same path. Gathering a vast amount of material, especially from Russian biologists, his goal was to show that, "in addition to the *Law of Mutual Competition*, there exists in Nature the *Law of Mutual Aid*, which is much more important than the first for the success of the struggle for life and especially for the progressive evolution of the species" (KROPOTKIN, 2009, p. 13, emphasis in the original).

This point of view was shared by Darwin, whose work had been distorted in both the natural and social sciences.³ Kropotkin recounts the episode in which, shortly after the publication of Huxley's manifesto, *Struggle for Existence and its Bearing upon Man*, he sought out the publisher W. Bates, proposing a critical reading of the work, and the answer was straight to the point: "Yes, it is horrible what 'they' did to Darwin" (KROPOTKIN, 2009, p. 15).

But the main target of the criticism was Spencer. As we have seen, he was largely responsible for associating the "struggle for life," described by Darwin, with an individualistic anthropology capable of justifying inequalities in a competitive society. Kropotkin sought to show several examples of mutual aid, to combine this biological factor of the animal kingdom with human sociability. The book's main thesis is that the hostilities present in the process of evolution of species are consequences linked more to the environment or the place than to the nature of the animals. In other words, in a harmonious

³ As an example, it could be an editorial published in the Times shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. Speaking about the absurdity of claiming the struggle for life, to justify the horrors of the battlefields, the text drew attention to the work of Kropotkin, who interpreted "biological and social progress in terms not of the exercise of brute force and cunning, but of cooperation". (KROPOTKIN, 2009, p. 8).

environment, there is a tendency for solidarity between species, something consistent with what Darwin (1981) had described as the “social instinct.”⁴

In recent years, Frans de Waal has been one of the greatest advocates of this idea. His studies, especially with primates, reveal not only a spirit of cooperation but also a moral sense or a feeling of justice present in animals (WAAL, 2010). Waal also became famous for his dialogues with evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. In Dawkins' famous thesis, biological evolution occurred through a genetic perspective, with the natural selection of those molecules that were best adapted to the environment. This struggle for survival in a molecular environment created a “selfish gene” that was passed down from generation to generation. This does not mean that genes have their wills or moral values; they simply reveal behavior that would be seen as selfish by human beings (DAWKINS, 2007).

This thesis is criticized by Waal in at least two aspects. First, he defends a psychological approach, called motivational autonomy, which explains solidarity behaviors in different species, such as the dog that protects a child from a snake, the dolphins that circle a person swimming in waters full of sharks, or even a human being who risks his life to save a stranger. These behaviors reveal an *altruistic nature* that the “selfish gene” thesis has difficulty explaining (WAAL, 2010, p. 61-71).

Furthermore, Waal criticizes the use of terminology that had “everything to be misunderstood” (WAAL, 2010, p. 63). He cites the example of former Enron CEO Jeff Skilling, responsible for one of the largest corporate frauds in the United States. Inspired by Dawkins' book, the executive implemented an evaluation system in the company in which employees scored each other so that at the end of the year at least 15% of them had to be fired. Seen as a management visionary, Skilling sought to foster greed and fear, feelings inherent to human selfishness and which, according to him, were essential for employees to succeed in a market economy. The documentary *ENRON: the smartest guy in the room* (2005) shows the disastrous consequences of this methodology and the path that led Jeff Skilling to prison.

For Waal, this is not about denying the violence and competition present in human beings, but about affirming that “social ties limit competition between us [... in other words] we are not necessarily aggressive. It is all a question of balance.” (WAAL, 2010, p. 71). One of the main factors that can influence this counterbalance is education. Dawkins (2007) claims that it is possible to overcome the “selfish gene” by transmitting values such as altruism. But the argument becomes much stronger if we start from the premise that the feeling of solidarity – based on “empathy”, as the title of Waal's book (2010)⁵ suggests – is inherent to human beings and that culture and education have been unbalancing it in favor of individual anthropology. How then can higher education play a leading role in the search for this stabilization?

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

“A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a form of associated life, of joint and mutually communicated experience.” (DEWEY, 1959, p. 93, free translation).

The main objective of Dewey's work (1959) was to replace “traditional education” (receptive, submissive, and obedient) with “progressive education” (based on the interactive relationships of individuals in society). It was not a question of abandoning the theoretical (“traditional”) content, but of reconstructing it (in a “progressive” way), based on the experiences and challenges that human beings face to live together. In this sense, there is a convergence between democracy and education.

⁴ “Any animal, endowed with well-marked social instincts [...] would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience as soon as its intellectual powers had become well developed or nearly as well developed as in man.” (DARWIN, 1981, p. 72, free translation).

⁵ Or “rational compassion,” as suggested by psychologist Paul Bloom (2016), criticizing the term “empathy.” Bloom's (2014) research focuses on children's behavior. He argues that children are capable of making moral judgments and having feelings of justice from the first months of life, which is in line with a supportive anthropology.

This purpose was not new. As Jean Vial (1995) shows, it can be found in Greek Paideia (in opposition to totalitarian education), in Montaigne's defense of an education linked to the art of living and character development (to balance scientific instruction), or in Rousseau's proposal for social education (against the excesses of rationalism). Dewey would then be one of the main heirs of this tradition in the 20th century, influencing the curricular basis of several institutions around the world (LATASHA, 2020), especially in Brazil, given his legacy in the work of Paulo Freire (MURARO, 2013).

But the central point of this pedagogical plan – in contact with others, reflective, in the search for the transformation of social reality (DEWEY, 1959) – has always been basic education, that is, focusing on the education of children and adolescents. This does not mean that Dewey neglected higher education, but it appears more discreetly, as the last stage in the education of human beings. It is therefore a chronological project, which goes from the base to the top, and whose main objective is to prepare young people to live collectively.

However, what if we think about it the other way around? As we have seen, Bledstein defended the thesis that “social faith in merit” was consolidated in American universities. From this institution, there was an influence on the whole of society, including the various stages of basic education. It was necessary to prepare over the years, to obtain the best grades and secure a place in the most prestigious schools. In the United States, this dynamic is reflected in the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), a standardized scholastic aptitude test taken by all students interested in entering higher education. It is similar to the National High School Exam (ENEM), whose objective is to assess cognitive ability and general knowledge in various subjects. The focus of education becomes the preparation of students and the meritocratic logic surrounding these tests. This is how higher education influences the educational base. It becomes difficult to establish a pedagogical project, as conceived by Dewey if excellent universities seek different skills. As Christian Laval (2003) suggests, this dynamic ends up establishing an ethos of competitiveness and preparation for students' professional success, making schools an alter ego of companies.

Higher education could reverse this trend. The American model, at least in theory, has mechanisms for this. The SAT is not the only means for students to access higher education. The curriculum throughout the school career, sports practice, participation in extracurricular activities, sociocultural diversity – all of these factors can count towards students getting a place in the most prestigious institutions. But what should be the rule to effect a structural change is presented much more as an exception. On the one hand, the number of places destined for broad recruitment is limited. To give just one example, at Harvard almost 50% of admissions are destined for children of donor parents, people of interest to the dean, children of employees, etc. (BERO, 2021). As for broad recruitment, not only is the SAT overvalued to the detriment of other curricular activities, but the dynamics surrounding this test involve, as we saw above, an economic stratification, placing those who can afford to pay for instructors or preparatory courses on a higher scale. As Sandel (2020, p. 616-617, free translation) observes:

The higher your family's income, the higher your SAT score. With each step up the income ladder, the average SAT score increases. For scores that qualify students for the most selective colleges, the gap is especially large. If you come from a wealthy family (with an annual income of more than \$200,000), your chance of scoring above 1,400 (out of a possible 1,600) is one in five. If you come from a poor family (with an annual income of less than \$20,000), your chance is one in fifty. People in the high-scoring category are also overwhelmingly the children of two college-educated parents.

It is also necessary to question the predictive capacity of other tests, such as the Intelligence Quotient, General Mental Capacity, and Cognitive Reflex Test, among others. Behavioral psychology has been providing us with data that relativizes the association between professional success and passing these exams. In an enlightening study, Haran, Ritov, and Mellers (2013) show that there is no reliability between cognitive ability, measured by these types of tests, and higher performance throughout careers. Surprisingly, the authors reached another conclusion, summarized as follows by Kahneman, Sibony, and Sunstein (2021, p. 227, free translation):

The only measure of cognitive style or personality that they found predicted forecasting performance was another scale developed by psychology professor Jonathan Baron to measure “actively receptive mindset”—that is, having an open mind to deliberately seek out information that contradicts one’s preexisting hypotheses. This includes the dissenting opinions of others and the careful weighing of new evidence against one’s old beliefs. People with an actively receptive mindset agree with statements like “Being convinced by a contrary argument is a sign of good character.” They disagree with statements like “Changing one’s mind is a sign of weakness” or “Intuition is the best guide to making decisions.”

If we consider the analytical framework developed throughout this article, it is possible to state that these characteristics, linked to the “actively receptive mentality”, are part of an anthropological-educational perspective that is more *supportive* than *individual*. After all, contrary to a solipsistic subjectivity, a search for one’s merit, and a valorization of competition, forms of dialogue, searches for cooperation, mechanisms of otherness – or an “openness to the other”, to use Lévinas’s formula (1980) – come into play.

Higher education could overvalue these characteristics for student access, giving institutions autonomy to promote their selection processes. These could take more into account credits in basic education or practices outside of schools related to the construction of citizenship, collective projects, dialogues with society, search for solutions to conflicts, participation in associations, research groups, etc. It is not a question of abandoning the merit of grades in individual exams, but of balancing the appreciation of different skills, in addition to instituting an educational project more in line with the need to live in a collective, as advocated by Dewey (1963).

In this sense, the increasingly wide range of extension courses or credits in higher education would be natural, continuing a project that began at the grassroots level. The new PNE guidelines, which provide that 10% of the curriculum should be allocated to these activities, are a first step in this direction.⁶ These credits may involve social responsibility projects, knowledge exchange with communities, service provision clinics, innovation workshops outside universities, practices for integrating students into social reality, etc., in dialogue with the vast experience of extension in Brazil (FÓRUM DE PRÓ-REITORES DAS INSTITUIÇÕES PÚBLICAS DE EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR BRASILEIRAS, 2012).

The implementation and consolidation of this curriculum⁷ would then allow for the expansion of the scope of the “pedagogical role of university extension” (COELHO, 2014), especially concerning the formation of a “culture of solidarity”. In this sense, there are several studies, with students who participated in extension projects, that indicate an increase in confidence in the ability to contribute to the community and an appreciation of actions of civic value (SEIDER; GILLMOR; RABINOWICZ, 2012; WEILER et al., 2013); an increase in skills in social work (OSBORNE; HAMMERICH; HENSLEY, 1998); the acquisition of political awareness (SIMONS; CLEARY, 2006); an appreciation of the role of social responsibility of the university and an increase in the exchange of knowledge with the community, etc.⁸ (SANTOS *et al.*, 2013). Also, increasing the scale of these projects, which would include all students and not just those interested in these activities, could open a new field for research that seeks to evaluate the transformative potential of extension.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

“The reform [...] was everything it could be. It could not be more than it was, in drama and actors. It gave its all! It gave quickly, within its insurmountable limits. It made a magnificent discovery. Only this would save it: upon discovering the root of its emptiness and its notorious infertility, it came across this

⁶ In this sense, it would be important to change the criteria for evaluating and promoting higher education (by the MEC, CAPES, ranking agencies, etc.), placing greater value on extension.

⁷ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of this extension curriculum is still being carried out at most universities. For a map of some initiatives, see the National Extension Network portal, available at: <https://www.ufmg.br/proex/renex/>.

⁸ For a more detailed description, cf. Coelho (2014).

discovery: university reform is the same as social reform.”
(ROCA, 1978, p. 430-431, free translation).

Roca’s reflection, many years after the *Grito de Córdoba*, indicates the relevance of higher education. It is in line with Bledstein’s observation that universities have the capacity for social transformation. We start from this hypothesis to defend the thesis that higher education institutions can be a critical point for establishing a *solidarity culture*, to balance the excess of *individual culture* in contemporary society. After all, from the loss of social capital (PUTNAM, 2000), through “deaths of despair” (CASE; DEATON, 2020) to the “tyranny of merit” (SANDEL, 2020), the diagnosis of this existential solipsism is recurrent, requiring social institutions to take measures that can mitigate its perverse effects.

On the other hand, we saw that the hegemonic institutional proposal for higher education – Gibbons’ “Mode 2” – does not consider this critical dimension, prioritizing the rationality of *homo economicus*. In this way, the university is seen as an institution capable of training the necessary workforce and contributing its research to the “economically-oriented paradigm”. It is no coincidence that Gibbons advocates a reduction in public investment in higher education, believing that the dynamism of the market is more efficient in producing economic outputs.

This article defended the opposite thesis, in the sense that the excess of economic rationality and “culture of professionalism” has been generating perverse effects on society as a whole (WALBURG, 2014; VIAPIANA; GOMES; ALBUQUERQUE, 2018) and that higher education, especially through a transformation of its forms of access and an appreciation of extension activities, can be the privileged locus for the transformation of this reality.

Contrary to what Gibbons proposes, this understanding of the institutional role of higher education would justify its public investment, since it would bring several externalities, linked to the social responsibility of the university (DA CUNHA RIBEIRO; MAGALHÃES, 2014), especially by bringing students closer to a culture of solidarity, that is, of cooperative practices, of a relationship with the other, of intersubjectivities, of respect for differences – much of what Naomar de Almeida Filho claimed, in his New University project, with the Habermasian notion of “ideal communities of dialogue” (SANTOS; ALMEIDA FILHO, 2009, p. 174).

After all, as Nobel Prize winner in Economics James Tobin (1999, p. 50) said, referring to private rationality in higher education – and in a way summarizing what was developed throughout this work –, “it is short-term selfishness”.

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