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# Exploring an Educational Vision for Tilburg University

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# MARTINUS COBBENHAGEN

‘THE CATHOLIC BUSINESS SCHOOL’  
(‘DE KATHOLIEKE HANDELSHOGESCHOOL’) (1927)

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*Students should [...] regard studying as a sort of interim phase,  
a preparation for what is really important in their life –  
which is practical work[...]*

*What you are is more important than what you know.  
The combination of the two gives the best conditions for success,  
but taken separately one’s being is more important than one’s knowing.*

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## Introduction

Universities are accountable to the democratic society they are part of, and more particularly to the students studying there. What is it that we train our students for and why?

While universities have to be able to answer this question, this does not mean that over the years the answer will remain the same. Particularly in times when societal changes are rapid and manifold, the answer too will change. Tilburg University’s answer should do justice to the character it has acquired since the days it was founded. Being a university specialized in sciences centered on humans and society (economics, law, social sciences, the *humanities*, and theology), the goal Tilburg University has set itself is not only to meet the social need and demand for expertise, but also to leave its mark on the very character of society.

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In this essay, we will explore an educational vision for Tilburg University (TiU). In line with its history and the profile it has acquired, we will formulate a proposal for a vision on education. We will argue that our central objective is to educate students to become thinkers aspiring to work for the benefit of their community, their society, and humanity as a whole (in other words to train them to become *thinkers of character*, or, as we also call them in this essay: *TiU-shaped professionals*. The reference is to the T-shaped professional, but one with a difference, an extra quality added: TiU-shaped. TiU-shaped professionals are academics that not only combine – on the vertical axis – in-depth knowledge of a particular field with – on the horizontal axis – a broad range of academic skills. As a third dimension, TiU-shaped professionals have also built their character, especially their moral character, and are ready to work together with others to get (the right) things done.<sup>1</sup> T-shaped professionals as such are problem solvers, able to deal with a high level of complexity. As critical thinkers, they can analyze a problem and critically review possible or presented solutions before they start working on finding a definitive solution. In this process, they apply forms of what is known as *slow thinking* (a way of thinking explained in more detail in section 5). They are experts in their fields, with well-trained minds. In addition to being knowledgeable, they have the right communication skills, the skills it takes to interact effortlessly with experts and specialists from all kinds of disciplines. While they are good at cooperating and collaborating with others, their critical and independent minds keep them from simply going along with the rest of the group. TiU-shaped professionals, however, possess distinctive attributes. In the course of their studies, students of Tilburg University not only acquire knowledge and skills, but they very much build character. As a result they graduate from our university with a high level of ethical awareness. Tilburg University alumni are T-shaped professionals.

In the first section of this essay, we present a brief outline of the history of academia. We describe the birth and first changes of universities and we discover valuable insights of academic education that have withstood the test of time. One important change concerns the idea of the university as involving a life of reflection as it gradually evolves into a life of action. The humanistic view has gained prominence, but then waned again. Over the centuries, the small elitist university has evolved into a university for the many and the common, carrying with it the danger of becoming an industry churning out diplomas. There has been an explosive increase in specialized scientific disciplines and knowledge bringing about

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<sup>1</sup> David Guest introduced the term T-shaped professional in 'The hunt is on for the Renaissance Man of computing,' which appeared in *The Independent*, September 17, 1991. He used the term to indicate that professionals need to be able to look for and manage to find in-depth knowledge as well as broadly based skills. In this respect, see also: University of Cambridge Institute for Manufacturing (IfM) and International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) (2008), *Succeeding through service innovation: A service perspective for education, research, business and government*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: University of Cambridge Institute for Manufacturing. Here 'adaptive innovators' are described as follows: 'People who are entrepreneurial and capable of systems thinking in the many project roles they may fill during their professional life. In contrast to the specialised problem solvers of the 20th century, who are sometimes called 'I-shaped' professionals for their knowledge depth, adaptive innovators of the 21st century are still grounded in their home disciplines but have strong communication skills across areas of business, technology and social sciences. Hence, they are sometimes called T-shaped professionals. [T-shaped professionals are those] who are deep problem solvers with expert thinking skills in their home discipline but also have complex communication skills to interact with specialists from a wide range of disciplines and functional areas.' (pp. 16 and 19)

a concomitant growth in our understanding of the world, its societies, and its members. But at the same time there has been a real danger of educational programs becoming too specialized, and the overall training received becoming too lean.

In the second section, using the results of earlier forms of academic education, we explore the current importance of education in relation to character building. We introduce what we think ought to be the goal of the academic programmes in Tilburg: educating students in becoming *thinkers of character*. In section three, we show how Tilburg University as a 'third generation university' fleshes out the idea of thinkers that act (as opposed to merely being given to reflection), and in section four we focus on the required nature of its academic community and how the human dimension plays a vital role in the way people 'weave' their character. We have opted for the expression 'weaving one's character' in reference to the textile industry, which played such a prominent role in the emergence and transformation of Tilburg as a city.<sup>2</sup> In the process of weaving, warp and weft combine to create cloth, tapestries, or clothes (of differing threads and colors), yielding a unique fabric ultimately meant to serve a purpose, but also having an esthetic value of its own. It is a metaphor that we feel fits the education and training of Tilburg students in the course of Tilburg University's pedagogical history and tradition.

In the fifth section, we argue how old and brand-new insights into the reasoning powers of the human mind (particularly in the overlapping fields of economics and psychology) contribute to the goal of and the method employed in Tilburg University's education. We focus on new research on the human brain and show how this research into *fast and slow thinking* ought to shape academic teaching at Tilburg University. In section six, we zoom in on the challenges facing enterprising thinkers, in light of what we think the world of the future needs, and how educational programs help prepare students for this task by training them to become *TiU-shaped* professionals.

In the concluding section seven, we employ the labels 'knowledge', 'skills', and 'character,' to succinctly indicate what should be the distinctive features of the educational programmes at Tilburg University. We illustrate the merging of the historical positioning of the university as a third-generation academic institution with the idea of *students weaving their character*. At Tilburg University, students are trained to face a world of new uncertainties and new social challenges. They are taught that this combination of uncertainties and challenges requires social innovation. As graduates of Tilburg University, they will be eminently suited to make the necessary and desired contributions to society – thanks to their knowledge and skills, but thanks even more to the kind of people they have become in the course of their university training. In this sense, we give new meaning to Cobbenhagen's adagium that what you are is more important than what you know.

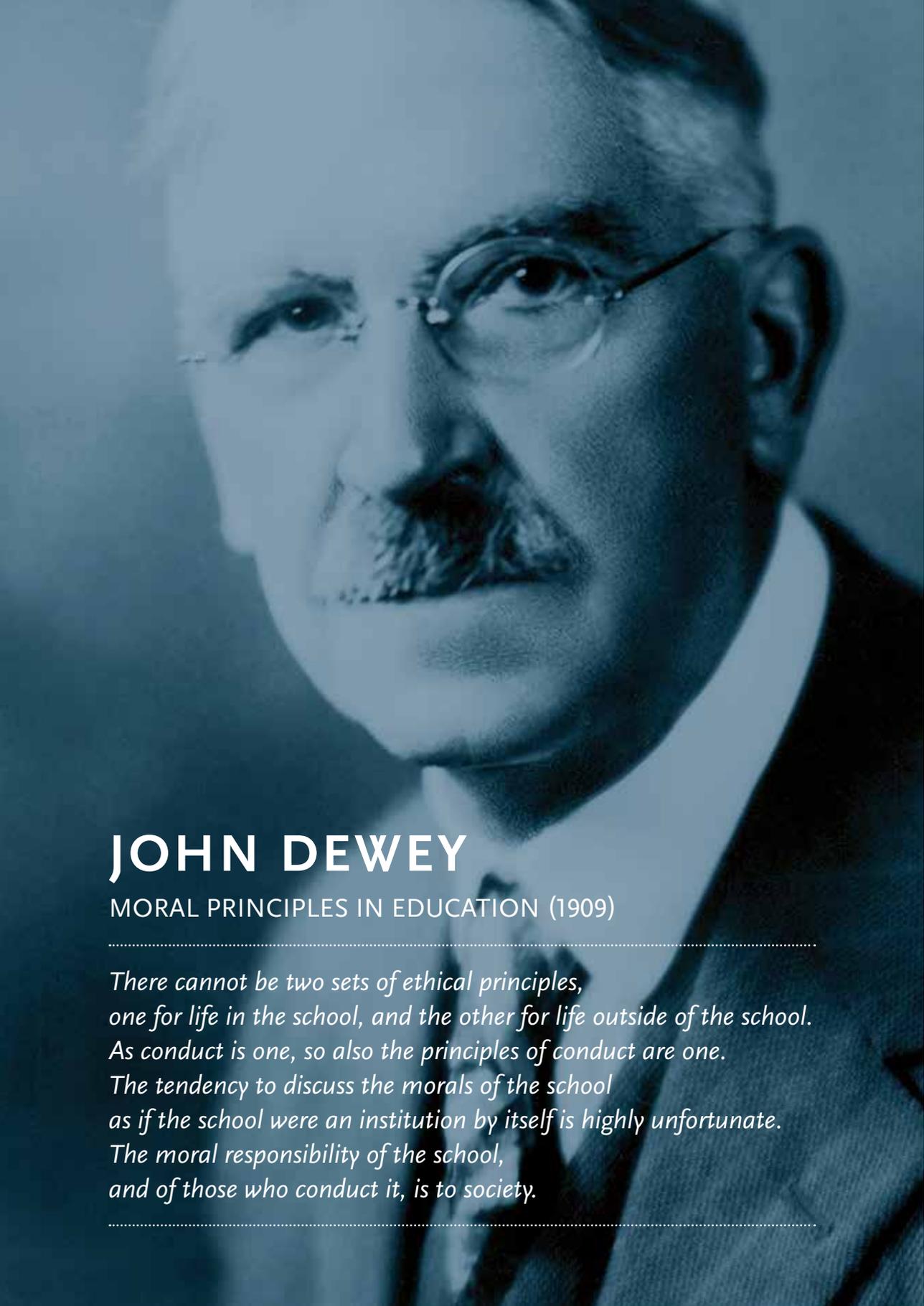
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<sup>2</sup> Gorisse, J.J.A.M. & Adriaenssen, L.F.W. (2001) *Tilburg, Stad met een Levend Verleden. De geschiedenis van Tilburg vanaf de steentijd tot en met de twintigste eeuw*. Tilburg: Regionaal Historisch Centrum Tilburg. Boom, N. van (2010), 'De transformatie van Enschede en Tilburg; van textielstad tot comeback city', in *Textielhistorische Bijdragen* (Patronen in beweging. Veranderingen in de Nederlandse textielgeschiedenis 1960-2010), no. 50, pp. 45-62.

PART I

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**OUTLINE OF AN  
ACADEMIC TRADITION**

A blue-tinted portrait of John Dewey, an older man with a mustache and glasses, wearing a suit and tie.

## JOHN DEWEY

MORAL PRINCIPLES IN EDUCATION (1909)

*There cannot be two sets of ethical principles, one for life in the school, and the other for life outside of the school. As conduct is one, so also the principles of conduct are one.*

*The tendency to discuss the morals of the school as if the school were an institution by itself is highly unfortunate.*

*The moral responsibility of the school, and of those who conduct it, is to society.*

## 1

# A European History: from Bologna to Bologna

Since the first few universities emerged in Europe, European universities have gone through a history and development spanning nearly a millennium. Positioning the origin and development of Tilburg University in this process, the educational vision of this university is identified as a continuation of a specific tradition. Summed up, it can be described as a far-reaching and ongoing process of increasing awareness of the role universities need to play in a complex and fast-changing world: to educate young people to become thinkers of character, and thus responsible citizens of the world, working toward improving the sustainability of our society.

### First-generation university<sup>3</sup>

Originally starting out as cathedral schools, the first Medieval Latin universities (such as the very first, the University of Bologna, dating back to 1088 and concentrating on law) were centers of expertise for the training of young people. Their purpose was to guard, maintain and disseminate generally accepted knowledge. The selected and privileged pupils climbed the steep academic ladder to eventually become scholars. They would start in the faculty of arts by studying the liberal arts, the *artes liberales*, after which they could continue their studies at one of the three oldest faculties: theology, law and medicine.

The first major reforms to be introduced at the universities took place in the thirteenth century. The existing ideal of universities being made up of and training scholars focusing on the eternal was replaced by the perspective of students graduating from universities as

<sup>3</sup> For the historical part of this essay, we consulted Ruegg, W. (2011) *A History of the University in Europe*, Volume IV Universities since 1945. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. For the changing character of universities, see Wissema, J.G. (2009) *Towards the Third Generation University. Managing the University in Transition*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. Wissema distinguishes three generations of universities, a distinction that we also refer to in our analysis, even though from a historical point of view a great many details can be given that make such a threefold distinction a little too simplistic. However, focusing as we do on characterizing academic education, we find this threefold distinction to be useful and enlightening.

enlightened citizens. They received their education from craftsmen on the one hand, sharing their practical knowledge with them and showing them how to work with instruments and from learned persons on the other, inspiring them with their knowledge and familiarizing them with great ideas from the past. The ongoing change of mentality during the Renaissance propelled the university further forward thanks to the newly discovered method of learning: science.<sup>4</sup>

### Francis Bacon and the scientific method of learning<sup>5</sup>

The English philosopher, lawyer, statesman and researcher Francis Bacon (1561-1626), living in the late-Renaissance period, had a great influence on the world of learning by proclaiming and describing what we tend to call the ‘the scientific revolution,’ which in fact was a revolution in our thinking about learning. Bacon was studying at Trinity College, Cambridge at a time when newly discovered methods of research slowly but surely began to erode the power of the argument from authority. In his famous work *Novum Organum*, published in 1620, Bacon writes how research is to be done, namely by conscientiously gathering empirical data and by using the principle of (eliminative) induction – arriving at an exceptionless general hypothesis on the basis of observations. In short, it is to be done by adopting a scientific approach. This makes Bacon a herald and defender of conducting experiments, meticulously observing, and using induction to slowly proceed from the particular to the general. It is the only way to discover which empirical generalizations hold water and – more importantly – which do not. In formulating this approach, Bacon described a method of establishing truth now thoroughly familiar to us, but entirely new in his day, whereby truth is arrived at through formulating hypotheses and subsequently testing them: the method of *eliminative inductivism*.

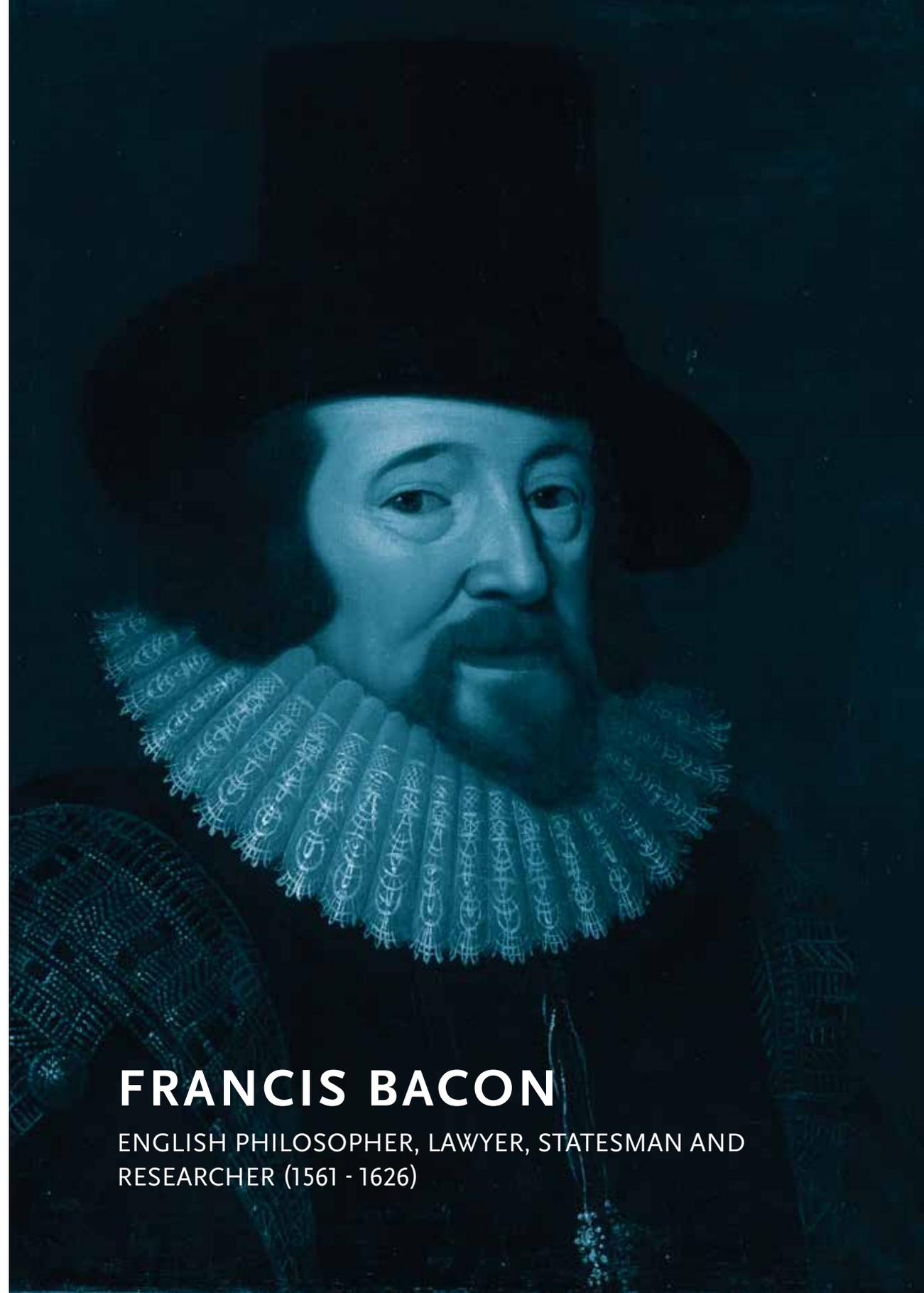
For Bacon, the goal and the value of science, besides the fact that it slowly reveals the truth, lies in what we can do with scientific knowledge, in its practical application and use. The new experimental, eliminative-inductive science yields the knowledge that enables us – to the extent that it is possible, of course – to control nature.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Examples we have in mind here are *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (1543) by Nicolaus Copernicus, *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* (1543) by Andreas Vesalius, and *De magnete* (1600) by William Gilbert. One of the new elements of science is ‘fact checking’ in regard to old dogmas, to see if they could stand up to rigorous scrutiny. A nice example of this in the fifteenth century is the Donation of Constantine being exposed as a fraud. According to this decree, the emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) had transferred his worldly authority to Pope Sylvester I. It was a legend that was often adduced by popes as proof of their claims in their conflicts with emperors. Humanist Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457) proved that the document the legend was based on had been written as recently as the eighth century (Fried, J. (2007), *The Donation of Constantine and Constitutum Constantini*. Walter de Gruyter. Berlin, New York). Obviously, the revolution in learning does not truly gain momentum until the publication of Galileo Galilei’s *Discorsi e dimostrazioni matematiche intorno a due nuove scienze* (1638) and particularly Isaac Newton’s *Philosophiæ naturalis principia mathematica* (1687).

<sup>5</sup> Eiseley, L. (1973), *The Man Who Saw Through Time. Revised and enlarged edition of Francis Bacon and the modern dilemma*. Scribner; Jardine, L. & A. Stewart (1998), *Hostage to Fortune, The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon*, Wellington House, London; Peltonen, M. (ed.) (1996), *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK).

<sup>6</sup> For a correct understanding of this remark, it may be important to know that for Bacon science was an instrument to return to man the dominion over nature (as, according to Bacon, had been originally intended by God), and thus, combined with the right faith, in a manner of speaking, ultimately restore the true innocence of the Garden of Eden.



**FRANCIS BACON**

ENGLISH PHILOSOPHER, LAWYER, STATESMAN AND  
RESEARCHER (1561 - 1626)

The idea of scientifically gathering new knowledge in order to apply it and strive for control was not adopted straight away by the universities. However, kings soon understood the instrumental value of new knowledge and supported the emergence of scientific societies between 1600 and 1670: the Accademia del Lincei (Rome), the Accademia del Cimento (Florence), the Leopoldina (Schweinfurt), the Royal Society of London, and the Académie des Sciences (Paris). At the end of the 18th century, partly also as a result of the French Revolution, universities ceased to exist in their traditional form. Many European universities disappeared: in 1789, there were 143; in 1815 only about 60 remained. This was due also to the mentality of the Enlightenment. The general idea was that higher education should yield predominantly practical knowledge, knowledge that served the public interest. However, the emerging bourgeoisie – where the revolution had originated – regarded universities as places of and for the nobility, and serving only the interests of these elites. The idea of life at the university being mostly one of contemplation was objectionable, as Bacon argued centuries before, and abandoned in favor of a life focused on society as such, a *vita activa*, a life of acting and activity based on knowledge and reflection.

The first generation of educational institutions, the first universities, were characterized by reflection and thinking as the central elements in an academic program intended to transfer knowledge. This heritage, the transfer of knowledge and the importance of reflection, remains a central element in the present day programs of Tilburg University as well, but in our times, this is most certainly not enough.

### Second-generation: the modern scientific university

The University of Berlin opened its doors in 1810. Strongly influenced by the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), this university, like a number of other German universities, stood for the dissemination of knowledge, for scientific inquiry, and for teaching its students scientific methods, the ultimate goal being contributing to society. The way Von Humboldt saw it, universities were to be sanctuaries for the education of academics, affording them the intellectual freedom and independence to offer critical contributions to and thereby stimulate the progress and the quality of all manner of debates and possible ways of addressing societal issues.<sup>7</sup> This is the university as a place where research is conducted in a disinterested manner, without let or hindrance, entirely independently. While then as now there were all kinds of societal preconditions and priorities determining and restricting the means available, universities truly strove to protect the academic freedom of scientists, while the education offered concentrated on scientific training. In light of the progression of science, the task the university set itself was extended to include teaching students how knowledge could be gathered and how truth could be *found*. The importance of (methodical) scientific research was emphasized, and students were trained to become researchers or citizens aware of the ever-stronger presence and importance of tested scientific knowledge. A fairly new aspect at the university was the fact that this scientific journey of discovery could be

<sup>7</sup> This ties in with the emergence of the idea of freedom in German philosophy (and the political movement that fueled the American and French Revolutions, but did not end there).

made relatively independently. Scholars from all over the world came to the German universities, whose combination of research and education became a model for the academy of the future.

Clearly, a modern university cannot and must not underestimate the importance of scientific inquiry. Academic education is education buttressed by scientific research *results* and scientific research *techniques*. Thinking, acting, and reflecting academics think, act and reflect in light of the most recent robust scientific research available at the university and the wider world outside. They understand the latest scientific results and apply the appropriate techniques in their search for new knowledge. Within Tilburg University, science, its results and its research techniques, will also have to be part and parcel of every student's education. But even knowledge transfer, methodical knowledge acquisition, and academic reflection are not enough for a university like Tilburg University. Tilburg University wants to make a positive contribution to an increasingly complex society, of which it is a member and by which it is sustained.

### John Dewey: science as an instrument<sup>8</sup>

In the Baconian tradition of conducting science for a purpose beyond that of conducting science for its own sake, we also find American philosopher, political thinker, psychologist and pedagogue John Dewey (1859-1952). In 1931, Dewey, well known for his University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, writes the article 'Science and Society.' In it, he echoes Bacon's famous adage 'knowledge is power.' The ultimate purpose of science lies beyond science itself. The goal of science is to help ourselves and others escape from precarious situations and to find an environment in which we can flourish. Seen from this perspective, science is a successful generator of reliable judgments, resulting in effective and efficacious actions.

Dewey clears the way for saying: science is an instrument that allows us to navigate successfully through a dangerous world. Conducting scientific research is like making a map. This map first and foremost needs to be useful in the light of its intended objective (in our case, creating the desired sustainable society); the intellectual question of to what extent this success is dependent on the 'truthfulness of the map' is a matter of secondary concern.<sup>9</sup>

According to Dewey, it is precisely because of the role of science in our desire to control, which in the physical domain we have succeeded in doing to a spectacular degree since the beginning of the Scientific Revolution, that the great scientific revolution is still to come, namely in the social field: 'the great scientific revolution is still to come. It will ensue when men collectively and cooperatively organize their knowledge for application to achieve and make secure *social values*; when they systematically use scientific procedures for the control of *human relationships* and the direction of the *social effects* of our vast technological machinery.'<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Dooremalen, H., de Regt, H., and Schouten, M. (2015, 5th impression) *Exploring Humans, Philosophy of Science for the Social Sciences, A Historical Introduction*, Chapter 10. Amsterdam: Boom Publishers.

<sup>9</sup> A pragmatist like Dewey would argue that these two aspects actually coincide, but this need not concern us here.

<sup>10</sup> Dewey, J. (1931) 'Science and Society', in: L.A. Hickman & T.A. Alexander (eds.) (1998) *The Essential Dewey, Volume 1, Pragmatism, Education, Democracy*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis; p.368. Our italics.

Also in matters pertaining to the family, the state, the army, legislation, religion, health care, management, banking, and (international) trade, we need to take a scientific approach and look for the right kind of control to realize what we want to realize: the vital control that it takes to simply survive in a highly dangerous world. That is why, alongside those of the physical world, we also want to ‘draw scientific maps’ of our social world – sooner rather than later.

### Science for the world

The goal of science, which Bacon identified and Dewey later worked out in more detail ultimately – lies beyond science itself. They started a tradition that we believe Tilburg University considers itself to be part of. Science is – or ought to be – instrumental in realizing control, our control over and improvement of situations we experience as problematic.

When asked the question ‘Why engage in science?’ the answer of the Tilburg academic community will tend to be this one: we want science to help us realize a world most closely resembling our ideal world; a world in which the values that we consider worth aspiring to are made palpable through the use of knowledge and skills that have been gathered and acquired. For Tilburg University, the values the community considers worth aspiring to follow from the university’s rich history and its cultural tradition: that of a Western university in an initially compartmentalized Dutch society. There are several historic events that show and illustrate the importance of the values that the Tilburg academic community wants to commit to. These values include: *solidarity with the less fortunate, empathy for and openness toward people with dissenting views, and responsible management of our vulnerable (social) world.*

Solidarity with the less fortunate is not only a value that is ingrained in the tradition of the university, it is also a vital force in its objective to expand the circle of ‘neighbors’ – often in the religious sense – to eventually bring about a more caring world. Globalization, large-scale migration, and social media unfortunately also create sudden and sometimes very serious conflicts between cultures and (world) views, forcing us to reflect on a variety of philosophies of life and points of view. In this process, our famous tolerance, bordering in fact on indifference, turns out to be in rather shorter supply than we might have hoped, and empathy with people whose views are different from ours is a precondition before we can engage in any kind of open discussion. Careful management of our vulnerable (social) world is a pressing and urgent problem. The first climatological consequences of global warming are alarming and undeniable, as are the social effects following in their wake: the near future will see new and unprecedented migration flows caused by droughts, crop failure, and famine. Conversely, social upheavals, technological innovations, and people’s desire for prosperity will put livability on this planet under further pressure.

Getting anywhere near an ideal world with people striving to realize these values can only be achieved if we use a powerful instrument like science in our continuous urge to bring about *social innovation*, a process which requires *enterprising thinkers* trained to do precisely that. Only in this way, only by truly understanding society, can society be advanced toward *less misery and suffering, fairer distribution of wealth and sustainable well-being, and ampler*

*opportunities for (necessary) talents to develop.* This is why the socially engaged educational programs of Tilburg University will always have to be *science-driven*.

### Martinus Cobbenhagen: against the compartmentalization of science

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the number of European universities began to grow again, reaching 201 in 1939, twice the number of European universities that there were a century before. In this proliferation, we also see the Handelshogeschool, Hogeschool voor Maatschappij-wetenschappen – the Business School that Tilburg University started out as – opening its doors for the first time on September 1, 1927 in Tilburg. Priest and economist Professor Martinus Cobbenhagen (1893-1954) left his indelible mark on the educational programs of what was later to become Tilburg University. He worked out the academic curriculum in such a way that it was to do justice to his adage ‘What you are is more important than what you know.’<sup>11</sup> For Cobbenhagen, the focus on the humanities and the social sciences, which has made Tilburg University the excellent specialist university that it is today, followed naturally from the idea that the expert economist ‘[will feel the need to] look over his neighbour’s fence and ask how his own discipline “applies in the general schemes of things.”’<sup>12</sup> In order for one to become a complete, well-rounded person, mental and spiritual enrichment is a vital component, which will be totally absent if one remains engrossed solely in one’s own specialization.<sup>13</sup>

The rich disciplinary content of the humanities and the social sciences can thus act as an antidote against a one-sided and scanty view of the social domain. This ties in with the deep wish felt by Cobbenhagen and the other founders of Tilburg University to ensure that the educational programs were more than just a means of conveying the *cutting-edge* internationally oriented expertise of scientists. Others were just as convinced of the idea that the university ‘share[s] a responsibility for new social developments.’ Cobbenhagen understood that to realize this, students need to be taught to act and to reflect on their actions in the light of all the knowledge of humans and society that they have at their disposal. Both the urge to act and the ability to form and exercise good judgment need to be grounded in the extensive knowledge and insights acquired in proper training. ‘Truth is expansive, it needs to be disseminated and applied; and graduates are the first to come into consideration as agents of this dissemination and application. They are in the closest possible contact with academic centers on the one hand and the various sectors of society on the other. They are the ones who determine whether scientific results can be put to good use in society.’<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cobbenhagen, M. (2016) *Cobbenhagen Essays. The Founding Father’s Idea of Tilburg University*. A. Hinten, L. Jeurissen, H. Klerx, M. Peeters, J. Schiks (eds.), Tilburg University, Valkhof Pers; p.36. All references to the Cobbenhagen essays are references to this bilingual collection.

<sup>12</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.52.

<sup>13</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.68.

<sup>14</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.44.

<sup>15</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.188.

In his essay 'On the nature and task of our academic community' (1942), Cobbenhagen writes: '*Man soll auf Bergen leben* it has been said, and that is true if we need a wider perspective. But once our insights have been strengthened and made sharper by the view from the mountain tops, we need to come down from the mountain to share to the best of our ability in the work of shaping life here below.'<sup>16</sup> As enterprising thinkers, alumni of Tilburg University contribute to social innovation in a very rapidly changing world.

Cobbenhagen was interested in more than one scientific discipline. His thinking was based on the view that the economic sciences are organically linked to sociology, psychology, law, theology, and philosophy. Economics as an isolated science, divorced from its related disciplines, was something Cobbenhagen considered dangerous, because he felt it would contribute to undesirable materialism. He advocated solidarity over individual capitalism, social capital over self-interest. In Cobbenhagen's view, the position of the economic sciences is midway between the natural sciences and the humanities, which accordingly makes the economic sciences preeminently suited to bridging the gap between them, since they connect quantitative and qualitative elements. The positivistic analysis of economic quantities as concrete, measurable elements in a closed system of causal chains and functional relations is something Cobbenhagen considered relevant, but at the same time much too one-sided. Such an analysis needs to go hand in hand with an understanding of the essential nature of things and more particularly of human nature, in order to be able to judge the social efficacy of the actions that are based on this analysis and this understanding. This is precisely what characterizes the curricula at Tilburg University and what students need to make their own.

### Reconstruction after the war, democratization, and efficiency

After the Second World War, there was a great shortage of people with a university education in Western Europe. Universities opened their doors more widely and began to focus more and more on the general public. The traditional class-structured nature of the educational system had to be adapted to meet the needs and demands of modern industrial dynamics and a society increasingly dominated by services. With a wide range of new positions emerging in industry and services, all talent had to be put to good use. Factories and offices were in great need of personnel trained according to the latest modern insights. In the Netherlands, as in other countries in Western Europe, the idea of 'equal opportunities in education' came to be shared by many and was strongly promoted. Children of factory workers and lower-ranking civil servants could now participate in higher forms of secondary education and from there go on to university. In the years following 1950, this was still referred to as 'democratization'; later on equal opportunities were couched in language stressing 'hidden talent' and 'individual development.'<sup>17</sup>

The years following 1960 saw a spectacular rise in student numbers. The scientific staff available to teach these students was not expanded accordingly, and their numbers lagged

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<sup>16</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.202.

<sup>17</sup> Schuyt, C.J.M. and Taverne, E. (2000) *Welvaart in zwart-wit*. The Hague, SDu Publishers.

behind right from the start. It was the birth of the 'university for the masses.' As a result of the huge number of students, universities experienced the emergence of social movements against the prevailing morality of the time and massive protests against the executive boards and the university curricula. The Paris student riots in May of 1968 are a well-known and telling example. Tilburg University – still called the Catholic Business School at the time – was the first to follow suit in the Netherlands<sup>18</sup>: it staged a velvet student revolution to gain students the right of consultation in the management of the university. A wall poster put up at the time said: 'We've all of us just about had it with the bunch of aging governors that disregard any wish for democratization. We have only one option left, and that is to occupy the Business School.'<sup>19</sup> The occupation in Tilburg led to a solidarity meeting of students in Amsterdam, where the Maagdenhuis was later occupied for the same reason. The Tilburg students thus stood at the cradle of the democratization of Dutch higher education, laid down in the University Government Reorganization Act of 1970. Across the board, waves of student protests forced governments to introduce democratic reforms at universities.

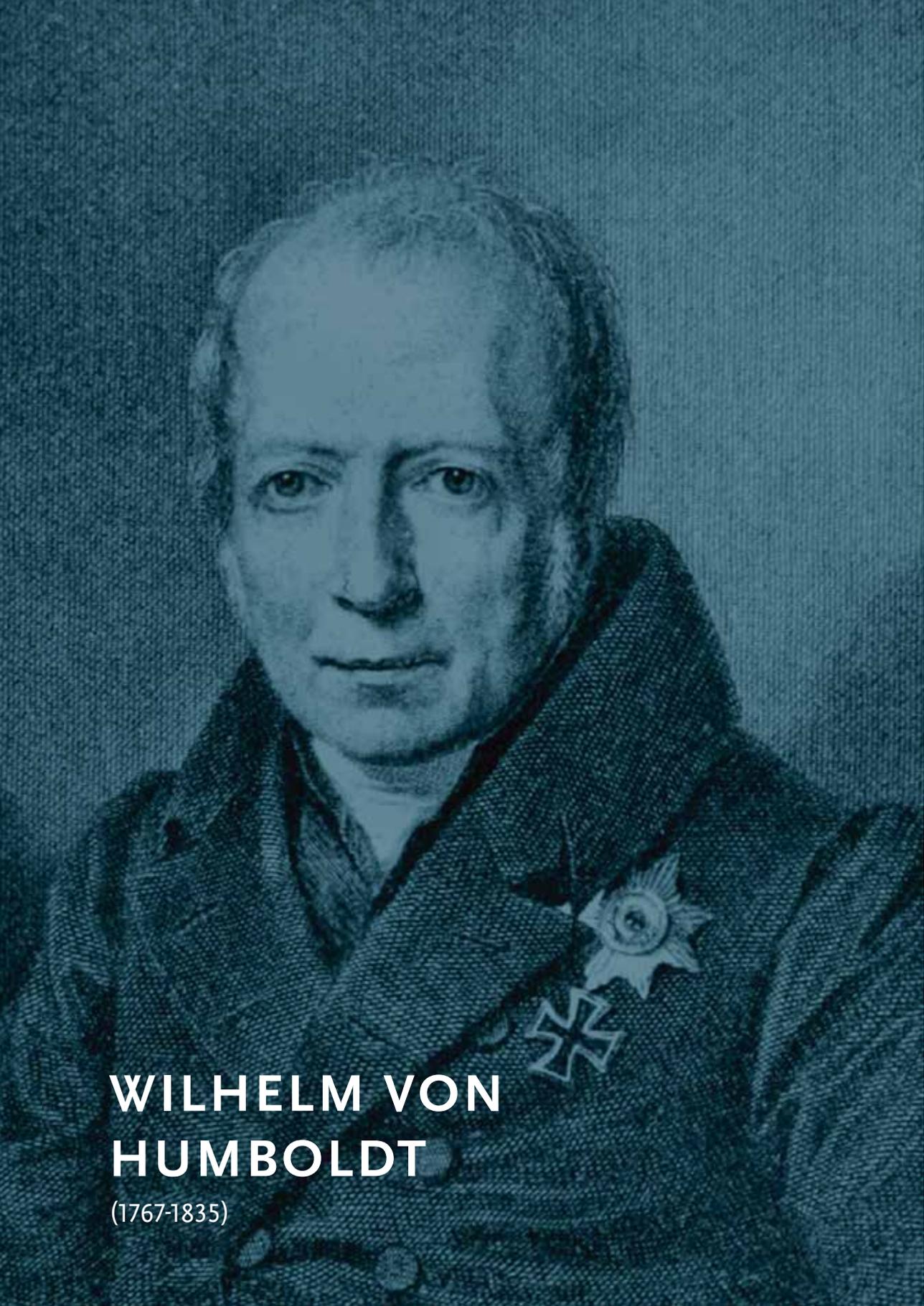
Round about the same time, a new financial model was introduced at Dutch universities: while still being funded by the government, they now also had to compete with each other for the size of their budget. The combination of the explosive growth of student numbers and government funding not keeping track with this led to program routes being specifically created to enable students to successfully complete their studies in the shortest possible time – an emphasis on academic success rates. In this highly efficient study trajectory, self-development and self-realization were relegated to the back seat as these hardly make any difference in boosting output figures. The educational programs were trimmed down and reduced, with students' broad general knowledge, which Cobbenhagen set such great store by, suffering badly as a result. It almost spelled the end of universities as institutions building students' characters ethically, intellectually, and culturally, and turned them into 'degree mills' churning out diplomas.

After 1955, fueled also by the need to increase our international competitive power, a reevaluation of education and research took place in Europe. On the one hand, we sought to work together with the Americans to stay ahead of the Russians in the Cold War; on the other, we wanted to strengthen the competitive power of European institutions, also in relation to American universities. Not only student numbers went up after 1960, so did the number of European universities, and very rapidly too. In 1995, the number had risen to over 800. While there was great fear of loss of autonomy and of curricula becoming frozen, the boards of European universities understood that the exchange of persons and services made it necessary to recognize each other's diplomas, study load credit measures, and certificates. In 1999, the decision was made at a conference in Bologna to harmonize credits and diplomas in Europe. In 2002, the Bachelor-Master structure was introduced at Dutch universities. This European overall harmonization has greatly simplified student mobility. This ends our journey through nearly a thousand years of history, and we have ended up where we started, at Bologna.

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<sup>18</sup> Godfroy, F., Kuypers, P., Vermijs, R. (2013) 1969. *Opstand in het Zuiden*. Utrecht: IJzer Publishers.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.geheugenvantilburg.nl/verhalen/lees/14341/muurkrant-bezetting-hogeschool>

A monochromatic, blue-tinted portrait of Wilhelm von Humboldt, an elderly man with receding hair, wearing a dark coat and a large, ornate star-shaped medal on his chest. The background is a textured, slightly mottled blue.

# WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT

(1767-1835)

## 2

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### Academic Education and *Bildung*

Cobbenhagen and Tilburg University are part of the same pedagogical tradition as the earlier mentioned Wilhelm von Humboldt. The true purpose of man, according to Von Humboldt, was self-realization, in other words: to become a complete and consistent whole – a person marked by unity. In order for this to be achieved, people need true personal freedom allowing them to develop; a freedom that consist in being confronted with, or finding out about, myriad social and political dimensions, positions, points of view, visions, or perspectives embodied by as many people representing them: individuals can only achieve self-realization in a community of people. A university can only truly call itself a university if apart from offering its students a proper education in a particular scientific field it also offers them the *Bildung* required to achieve self-realization.

Tilburg University alumnus Herman Wijffels gives us a personal illustration of what Cobbenhagen meant.<sup>20</sup> In a very open and frank manner, Wijffels looks back on the training he received at Tilburg University<sup>21</sup>:

When I look back at the path I've travelled to get to where I am today, I can appreciate now – in a way I couldn't before – just how much my university education has contributed to the success of my career. (...) In retrospect, I am most grateful for two things that I was taught here. The *first* of these was the capacity to analyse problems and construct creative solutions. The second was the ability to look at a situation from the outside, to examine a problem and one's own role and position in it – the ability to think “out of the box”, as it's called today. I'm inclined to attribute the first of these capacities – the ability to analyse and resolve problems – to the vocational aspects of my education. The second – the ability to step outside a situation and see it from the outside – is, I think, attributable to the more general aspects of my degree. Of these, philosophy and social ethics were by far the most important. [As] the years have gone by, and as I've advanced from one job to another, I've noticed that what I have learned here has only gained in relevance and meaning. It has taught me constantly to ask the question: “Why?” Why are things as they are? Why do events happen as they happen? And why don't we look at economic changes in the broader perspective of social developments? These kinds of questions are, in many cases, simply ignored, even in present-day academia.

The academic education offered by Tilburg University goes beyond the content and skills aspects of the various disciplines, and is best described by the German word *Bildung*. In the course of their education, our graduates will not only have acquired the knowledge and skills required in their field of expertise; they will also have gone through a process of *recalibration* and *enrichment* on a personal level. This education should not be understood as being about modeling basically passive students after some ideal image; it involves making young people aware of possibilities and opportunities, offering them means they can choose to use in their own way. This takes place in constant interaction with the students, as a result of which there is no one single type of Tilburg University graduate. Nevertheless, this wide variety of alumni will have something important in common: in addition to knowledge and skills, they will have acquired *character*. This *Bildung* element is forced into the background if the sole purpose of academic education lies only in transferring the knowledge required for professional

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<sup>20</sup> Professor Wijffels was CEO of the Rabobank Group. He gained experience as a civil servant in the European Commission and the Dutch government. As Secretary-General of the Dutch Confederation of Christian Employers, he learned to adopt yet another perspective in the societal spectrum. Wijffels was chairman of such widely differing organizations as the Dutch Social and Economic Council (SER), the Society for the Preservation of Nature Monuments in the Netherlands, the University Medical Center Utrecht, and President of the Board of Governors of Tilburg University. He became an Executive Director at the World Bank and, among other things, investigated Paul Wolfowitz's dubious dealings. At the same time, he acted as 'informateur' - a person investigating whether a coalition cabinet can be formed - following the Dutch general elections in November of 2006. The deliberations under his chairmanship led to the formation of the Balkenende IV cabinet. He subsequently became a Professor of Sustainability and Societal Change.

<sup>21</sup> Buekens, F. (ed.) (2006) *Wisdom and Academic Education: Proceedings of the 25th anniversary conference of the Faculty of Philosophy of Tilburg University*. Tilburg: Tilburg University, pp.11-12

expertise. In the Tilburg academic community, the central objective is to educate our students to become well-rounded people, by having their training contribute significantly to their intellectual, moral and social development as well as the development of their character. To this end, every Bachelor's program contains required courses or course components in which students practice reflecting on their own discipline and scientific activities, in which they are trained in academic ethics to reflect on their personal moral and ethical values and those of others, and in which, on a more general level, they acquire insight into broader social and philosophical contexts. Students are not passive receivers in this; they are responsible for their own learning process; they decide for themselves how much value they attach to educational components, and whether or not they choose to call their fellow students to account for positions taken or actions performed. They decide what direction their personal *Bildung* process will take, and thus shape their own development.

### Becoming a well-rounded person

Tilburg alumni are not just experts in their field, they are true academics who, from the positions they will be taking at the heart of society, will also be an influential force in determining the nature of that society. There should not be a split between the scientist and the person as a human being: 'A true academic should combine both of these qualities.'<sup>22</sup> Cobbenhagen wrote: 'The businessman, the perfect embodiment of the idea of *homo oeconomicus*, who gives absolute priority to corporate objectives, is not a man of culture; neither is the scientist who puts his own research objectives first. To deserve the name of man of culture, you must know how to subordinate your partial goals to the aims of full humanity.'<sup>23</sup> The ageing of the population and pensions, the regulation of economic competition and the free market; care and the psychological aspects of somatic diseases; privacy and security; the legal position of victims; sustainability, culture, communication- and cognition processes that mark our society; and wherever else we are challenged by complex social problems – in all these fields, Tilburg University graduates – ideally – are the *right* people in the *right* place. Tilburg alumni are people who, academically educated and experts in their fields, will be leaders, managers, motivated employees or 'social innovators' – in business, government, and societal organizations – in a society that Tilburg University feels should cherish and uphold certain values. In this respect, we have already mentioned *solidarity* with the less fortunate, *empathy* with and *openness* toward people with dissenting views, and *responsible management* of our vulnerable (social) world. The university wants to deploy enterprising thinkers, in all positions in society to help bring about necessary social innovation. By offering concrete new ideas, the university can contribute to the solution of substantial social problems. In this, the university's greatest responsibility lies in developing young people's *talents and character* while simultaneously making them aware of the needs of society. In reference to the Tilburg University teachers, scientists and scholars, Cobbenhagen remarked: 'The future cultural level of the Dutch nation lies to a very great extent in our hands.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.192.

<sup>23</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.64.

<sup>24</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.80.



# MARTHA NUSSBAUM

CLASSICS SCHOLAR, ETHICIST, AND PHILOSOPHER OF LAW

## Thinkers of character

Tilburg University not only supplies the manpower, the brainpower, and the enterprising spirit that business, government and NGOs are looking for; it also wants to be an influential force in shaping the nature of businesses, government, and NGOs. Together with others, it educates generation after generation of responsible decision makers in state-of-the-art humanities and social sciences and in the system of values it advocates for advancing the prosperity and well-being of as many people as possible: 'Ever since its inception, Tilburg University's goal has been more than just developing and disseminating knowledge. Our intention has always been to make an active contribution to society through our activities. We want to serve society and make it a better place for all citizens.'<sup>25</sup>

Tilburg University educates *thinkers of character*. Naturally, its students possess (1) expertise in their fields, (2) the curiosity to employ all their knowledge and skills to attempt to find solutions to urgent national and international social problems, and (3) the intelligence to take calculated risks without losing sight of the human dimension, but above all they are (4) *enterprising thinkers*, thinkers of character. They take action and follow through on the insights they have acquired, and in the social domain they do not merely understand, but also propel things forward, driven by strong feelings of solidarity and empathy.

In her book *Not for Profit*, classics scholar, ethicist, and philosopher of law Martha Nussbaum stresses the importance of creativity and human imagination in university education. If students are also trained in these aspects, there is a far better chance they will continue to regard as equals people with entirely different views, habits and customs. It will enable them to resist the all too human inclination to simply regard 'the others' as strange objects. Nussbaum shows that respect for and caring for the other, who may seem strange, is an indispensable part of the foundation of democracy. The ability to extend one's loyalty, to go beyond local loyalties, and to approach the problems in the world as a real citizen of the world and eventually approach other people's problems with empathy, is something that should be acquired at university.<sup>26</sup> According to Nussbaum, education in culture and art offers students the possibility of placing themselves in other people's positions, of stepping into other people's shoes. This ability to empathize with others can also be trained by reading historical works and having discussions in the *international classroom*. We are seeing more and more of the latter taking place at the university. Not only are English-taught programs attracting students from abroad; children of people who came to this country to find work or seek asylum are also finding their way to university. These groups bring their own experiences and considerations to the discussions, enriching them, for instance by pointing out the restricted and one-sided character of things we tend to regard as standard or as representing the norm. This way, debates can be conducted in a well-informed and academic fashion on a wide variety of normative and other issues. These are developments we are currently also witnessing on the Tilburg University campus.

<sup>25</sup> Tilburg University Strategic Plan 2014-2017.

<sup>26</sup> Nussbaum, M. (2010) *Not for Profit. Why democracy needs the humanities*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press; pp.6 & 7.

### Innovation and character building

Being a center of expertise in the humanities and the social sciences, Tilburg University is an agent of social change, but particularly as an institution of academic education it will significantly contribute to *social innovation*, by nurturing society with young people with the right attitude and disposition, that is: characterized by a critical-constructive *habit*. Educating in the sense of merely increasing the students' knowledge is not sufficient here. 'The conclusion that the acquisition of more knowledge automatically leads to better people [...] has led to the artificial separation of teaching and education, of the transfer of knowledge and character formation. [...] Scientific knowledge in man is only good when it is accompanied by character.'<sup>27</sup> In Nussbaum's view, well-educated independent critical thinkers will always think beyond the usual borders and boundaries, and be able to look at the world and its problems in a fresh way.<sup>28</sup>

In these turbulent times, all the more so because they are so turbulent, Tilburg University sets great store by offering its students opportunities to work on their character. They do so *both* in their educational programs *and* through the acquisition of academic discourse, enabling them to face 'grand societal challenges' and pressing current issues<sup>29</sup> with creativity and an urge to act. Next to knowledge, the university wants to offer its students intellectual experiences and experiences working in social environments. Together, these will enable students to build their capacity for (self-)reflection, their intellectual independence, and their ability to judge for themselves, and thus ultimately to build their character. Tilburg students should learn not to settle for less than making other people's lives better – and in this respect they can rightfully consider their own lives valuable.



<sup>27</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.98.

<sup>28</sup> Nussbaum (2010), p.24.

<sup>29</sup> As described in the *Horizon 2020 initiative* of the European Commission; <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-sections>.

## 3

# Beyond Bologna: The Third-Generation University

Tilburg University has to respond to and accommodate global as well as local developments: economic and cultural globalization and glocalization, extensive and far-reaching digitalization and datafication, reduced public funding, and changing legislation. A new perspective is unfolding for the university. Precisely as a result of this globalization and digitalization, and because of the changing views of what a university ought to be for students and for society, the idea of a *third-generation academic educational institution* is beginning to take shape. A third-generation university is an institution that wants to do more than merely transfer knowledge and skills to the next generation. Nor is it satisfied with the expansion of this to include training students in scientific research that will guide them toward new insights in the future. Its objectives are more ambitious than this.

### Thinkers active in society

A third-generation *educational* institution wants its students to become *thinkers of character*, which means that, now and later, they can and must make their knowledge valuable to a society that is facing enormous social challenges – and they should do so also by *acting*, by *taking an active part in society*. This is the perspective underlying Tilburg University's academic programs: 'A society-oriented university par excellence will endeavour to convert its knowledge and understanding of society into research activities involving application, development, and innovation. This will lead to the development of best practices that can result in real improvements and innovations based on a thorough understanding of society.'<sup>30</sup>

As we have shown, looking at the university from a perspective like this is not a modern invention, nor is it a fashionable trend. It is part of a long-standing tradition, a tradition extending from Bacon to Dewey, which Cobbenhagen picked up on and which determines the nature and task of the university in our own times: to be a third-generation academic educational institution.

<sup>30</sup> Tilburg University Strategic Plan 2014-2017, Chapter 5.

That we are dealing with an idea that is in no way foreign to and indeed is an integral part of what Tilburg University has always stood for, is also apparent from the fact that as a socially engaged academic institution it has always operated from, and over the years has attached more and more weight to the following three-fold objective: conducting scientific research (research), transferring and training scientific knowledge (teaching), and making its students aware of their ethical mission to make their knowledge count for an open and democratic society struggling with all manner of problems ('valorization,' also known as 'impact creation').<sup>31</sup> In the field of research, this works out slightly differently than in the field of education. Our focus in this essay is on academic education. The fact that Tilburg University is and chooses to be part of the tradition described, has consequences for what it offers its students in the way of *knowledge, skills and character building*.

### Student-centricity

As we have seen, a third-generation academic educational institution is not an institution that merely preserves and passes on knowledge, or even looks for new knowledge for the sole purpose of acquiring that new knowledge. What we mean by a third-generation academic educational institution is, first of all, an academic institution that coaches and facilitates students by supplying them with the knowledge already gathered; secondly, it is an academic institution that familiarizes students with the scientific methods enabling them to collect reliable information on the world; thirdly, and most importantly, it is an institution that allows its students to build, to *weave*, as we have chosen to call it, *their character*, as a result of which its alumni will never forget why they value the knowledge we have so painstakingly gathered. Tilburg alumni realize that this affords them the unique (albeit often limited) opportunity to achieve innovations in the extremely complex social world by acting in the light of scientific information and objectives worth pursuing. Their training involves learning through actively conducting research, and in doing so each student draws (the start of) their own academic learning curve, in which the desire to make a significant contribution is leading.

In this regard, Tilburg University is entirely *student-centric*: it looks for ways to make its educational programs serve committed students who feel attracted to its moral mission and who (together with the academics) want to work toward making our society more sustainable. It realistically prepares its students for a future in which they are needed to keep our society at its current level, to perhaps even improve it, and to do likewise in other societies. It looks to a future with new problems that demand creative action, where the effort put in and the remuneration received are fairly matched in a context of life-long learning. That way, there is also valorization (impact creation) in education, and quite considerable valorization too.

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<sup>31</sup> In his famous work, *The Idea of a University*, (1854), John Henry Newman, speaks of 'knowledge [to] its own end', 'knowledge viewed in relation to learning', and 'knowledge in relation to professional skill.' Others refer to this as 'science for science,' 'science for education,' and 'science for society.'

### Learning as a habit and conscious living

What we now know about ourselves and about the world in which we live shows that the learning process and education will never be finished; increasingly, students are finding out that education is a 'way of life.' Academic training and *Bildung* are instrumental in nurturing and expanding intellectually active capital, but to the extent that the training and *Bildung* are successful students will have found that learning and informed action have become integral parts of their lives, have grown into a *habit*. As Dewey phrased it:

A narrow and moralistic view of morals is responsible for the failure to recognize that all the aims and values which are desirable in education are themselves moral. Discipline, natural development, culture, social efficiency, are moral traits—marks of a person who is a worthy member of that society which it is the business of education to further. There is an old saying to the effect that it is not enough for a man to be good; he must be good for something. The something for which a man must be good is capacity to live as a social member so that what he gets from living with others balances with what he contributes. What he gets and gives as a human being, a being with desires, emotions, and ideas, is not external possessions, but a widening and deepening of conscious life – a more intense, disciplined, and expanding realization of meanings. What he materially receives and gives is at most opportunities and means for the evolution of conscious life. Otherwise, it is neither giving nor taking, but a shifting about of the position of things in space, like the stirring of water and sand with a stick. Discipline, culture, social efficiency, personal refinement, improvement of character are but phases of the growth of capacity nobly to share in such a balanced experience. And education is not a mere means to such a life. *Education is such a life*. To maintain capacity for such education is the essence of morals. For conscious life is a continual beginning afresh.<sup>32</sup>

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that there are two extremely important implications. First of all, Tilburg University has the responsibility to prepare its students for 'life after university', and will therefore have to provide job orientation and equip and train its students for useful working lives after graduation. Secondly, Tilburg University will have to help students weave their character in such a way that they will want to keep on learning for the rest of their lives.

In *The Road to Character*, interdisciplinary thinker David Brooks describes two academic archetypes.<sup>33</sup> The first lives according to utilitarian logic: input leads to output, effort creates reward, and practice makes perfect. At first sight, there does not appear to be anything wrong with that. But Brooks shows that these types of students mainly work to improve their CV or résumé, want to impress others, and are only looking to serve their own self-interest. Brooks

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<sup>32</sup> Dewey, J. (1916) *Democracy and Education: an introduction to the philosophy of education*, New York: Macmillan. Chapter 26, Section 4.

<sup>33</sup> Brooks, D. (2015) *The Road to Character*. New York: Random House.

contrasts this type of student with a second archetype. Students of this second type live according to an inner morality, strive to serve a higher purpose beyond their own self-interest, and seek self-realization through service to the world. In the current prevalent culture of self-promotion, a university like ours must help students acquire knowledge and skills, but also a *moral compass* that makes them continue to work on their character, continue to invest in their self-development, and ultimately to embrace permanent education as a 'way of life.'

## 4

# The Tilburg Academic Community

A good three hundred years after Francis Bacon's pioneering essays on the new science and its envisioned role in society, Martinus Cobbenhagen, contemporary of Dewey, voiced similar ideas for what has become Tilburg University.<sup>34</sup>

### The human dimension

In the eyes of Cobbenhagen, the academic community is the institution for the education and *Bildung* of people well-grounded in science.<sup>35</sup> In Cobbenhagen's view, students can only weave their character if university campuses adhere to human dimensions. In an essay titled 'Onze Hogeschoolgemeenschap' ['Our Business School Community'] (1939/1940) he stresses the importance of the *universitas*, the community of teachers, students, and alumni. Before he wrote this essay, he had already anticipated the danger inherent in the growing number of students: 'While the growth that has since taken place has many positive sides, it has some drawbacks too. It could lead to a reduction in the reciprocal contact between teaching staff and students, and in the stimulus this produces on both sides. Moreover, a rise in the number of students could mean that more students are not really dedicated to their studies, which could reduce the motivation of others.'<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Cobbenhagen, M. (1957) *De Economist Cobbenhagen. Economische geschriften van Prof. Dr. M.J.H. Cobbenhagen*, Amsterdam/Brussels: Elsevier; Borgman, E. (2011) *Met het oog op goed leven. Cobbenhagen en onze universitaire cultuur*, Tilburg: Tilburg University; Bornewasser, H. (1978) *Katholieke Hogeschool Tilburg*, vol. 1: 1927-1954, Baarn: Ambo; Bots, A. (2008) 'Cobbenhagen, Martinus Joseph Hubertus (1893-1954)', in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland 1880-2000*, The Hague: Huygens ING, 2008; Cobbenhagen, M. (1945) *De Tilburgse Hogeschoolgemeenschap. Verzamelde opstellen en voordrachten over wetenschapsbeoefening, economisch hoger onderwijs en academische levensstijl*, Tilburg: W. Bergmans.

<sup>35</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.191.

<sup>36</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); p.140.

Cobbenhagen thus considers the relation between students' weaving their character and the number of students studying at the institution an important element of the university community:

Character building and cultural education in the widest sense of the words must be combined to form a complete, harmonious personality. All students should welcome constructive interaction with their professors, both during and outside lectures. The possibility of such personal contact is one of the privileges associated with a small institution of higher education. My own experience has taught me the great educational value of contact between pupil and teacher. [It is up to the pupil to take advantage of the opportunity offered to him.] All I can do at this point is remind my readers of the availability of such opportunities. It is only when such cooperation is achieved to the fullest possible extent that the *universitas* can live again in the old sense of a community of teachers and pupils who are working together, both groups giving and receiving.<sup>37</sup>

In spite of the growth it has seen since the days of Cobbenhagen, Tilburg University remains a small-scale university with a beautiful and compact campus. In the future, it will continue to offer education on a scale appealing to students, keeping an eye on the human dimension and not treating its students as anonymous numbers. To make this possible, we now have means at our disposal that Cobbenhagen could not have dreamt of: think of the information and communication technology now available to us, mentor systems, and buildings designed for teaching with an eye to the future, properly accommodating larger numbers of students; there is nothing wrong with serving large groups of students in plenary sessions, as long as there is plenty of room as well – both literally and figuratively – for small group-sessions, and as long as students receive personal attention and coaching.

### Small-scale education

Cobbenhagen showed great commitment to the academic community; his valuable insights on this are core elements of the educational vision of Tilburg University. It has been a conscious choice to organize the teaching in such a way that it is essentially small-scale in character. The campus feeling has a lot to do with this. Students and teachers increasingly form a close-knit international community, in which they learn and develop. Programs taken by relatively large numbers of students are frequently organized on a 'small-within-large' principle. Students are part of a smaller, fixed group: a 'class' or 'college,' in which they are taught and are supervised by a fixed team of teachers. It is possible that this group will attend (theoretical or abstract) lectures together with others, but there too the students will remain part of their own group, which can also review the lecture afterwards, and discuss it in the smaller group. Students are known by name and they are certainly not a number. Teachers and staff pay attention to the students, and teachers are easy to contact. Use is made of 'scalable teaching concepts', and tutor- and mentor groups. Care is taken that students and

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<sup>37</sup> Cobbenhagen (2016); pp.142/144.

teachers do indeed have the opportunity to build the personal relationship that Cobbenhagen envisaged, and which is essential in transferring knowledge, practicing skills, and weaving one's character.

### Students' responsibilities

Not only teachers are assessed on their performance and dedication. These days students too are expressly assessed on their overall performance and they are required to show dedication and commitment, by teachers and other staff, but also by their fellow students. Inspired by Cobbenhagen's idea of responsibility, Tilburg University emphatically sees students not as consumers or as clients, but as committed and responsible *members of the academic community*. Responsibility for the teaching process is shared with teachers;<sup>38</sup> it is a process involving several parties rather than a product that can be bought. Students are expected to make an active contribution, to be strongly committed, and to put in considerable effort. They contribute to their group, to their program, and to their university. Student associations and study associations play a vital role in this too. The *student-centricity* we referred to earlier is impossible without intensive cooperation between student- and study associations and the board of the university, which in turn sets great store by student input as well – the sixties have rightfully left their indelible mark on Tilburg University.

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<sup>38</sup> See Healey, M., Flint, A. & Harrington, K. (2014) *Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*. York: Higher Education Academy; and Healey, M., Bovill, C. & Jenkins, A. (2015) 'Students as partners in learning', in J. Lea (Ed) *Enhancing learning and teaching in higher education: engaging with the dimensions of practice*. Open University Press, Chapter 6, pp.141-172.

PART II

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**TILBURG UNIVERSITY'S  
EDUCATIONAL GOAL**

## The goal: Corrective Action through *Slow Thinking*

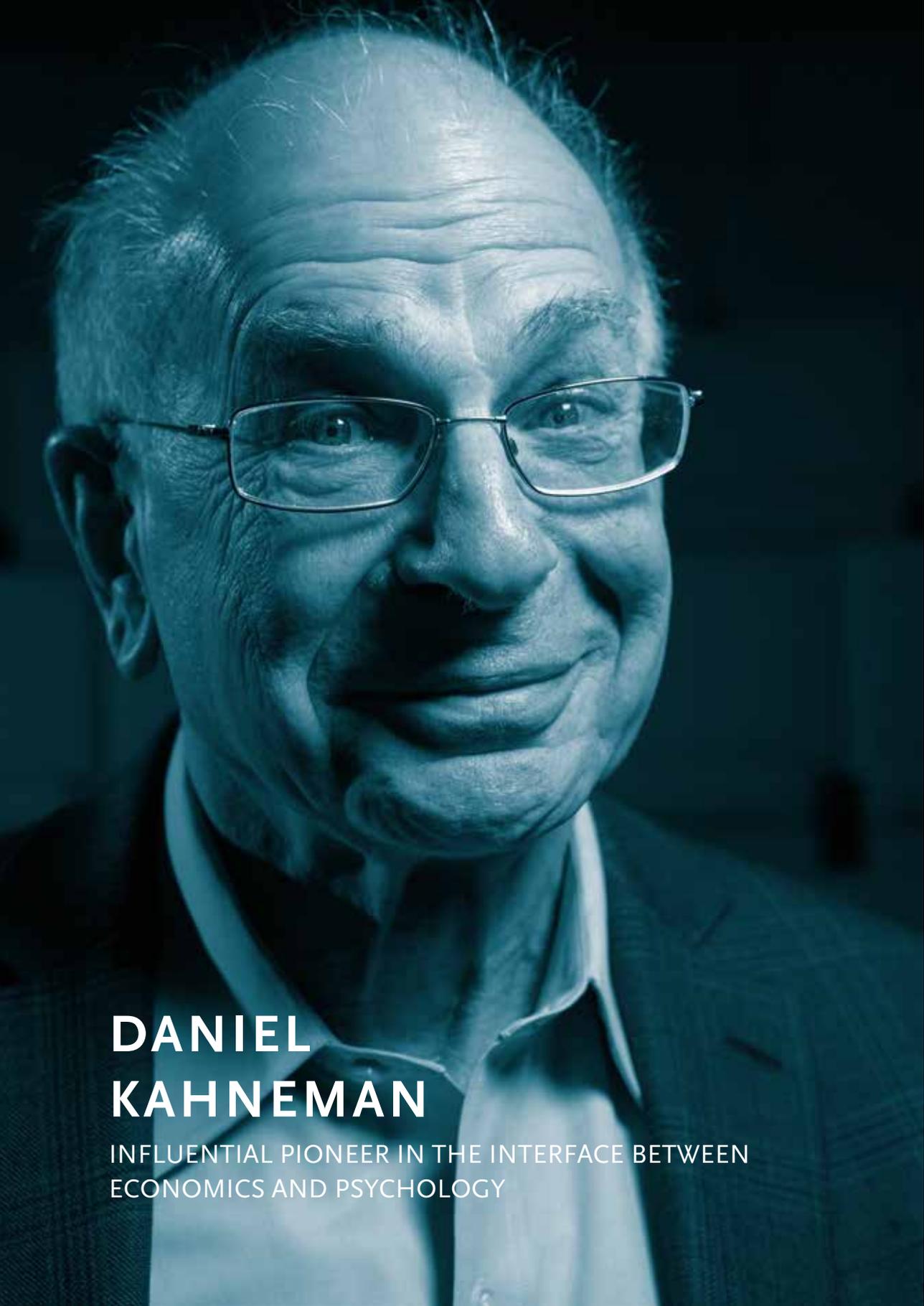
Tilburg University wants its alumni to be brave and creative enough to act in a scientifically well-informed, critical and effective fashion in a world that is full of challenges in the fields of economics, law, the environment, sociology, psychology, communication, ritual and culture. Its students need to have the knowledge, skills and character that it takes to be able to face these challenges successfully. One of the powerful characteristics of good academic education is small-scale classes facilitating the transfer of knowledge, the acquisition of skills, and character building. It makes it possible to train students to consciously *slow down their thinking*. Only if they do so will they be able to be scientifically well-informed, to think critically, and act effectively. Practicing *slow thinking* will therefore have to be an essential part of the educational programs at Tilburg University.

### Bacon: idols of the mind

In his well-known doctrine of idols, which was alluded to earlier, Francis Bacon made an important and as it turned out also very modern step towards truly academic education and *Bildung*. The idols Bacon points out are fallacies that stand in the way of the use of the new, instrumental, effective and efficacious science. Bacon distinguishes four of these fallacies: idols of the tribe, idols of the cave, idols of the marketplace, and idols of the theater.<sup>39</sup> These represent biases (distorting ways of thinking) that generally speaking help us act quickly and effectively, but that tend to get in the way in more complex contexts, causing us to misjudge situations and to act ineffectively. These idols 'must be abjured and renounced with firm and solemn resolution, and the understanding must be completely freed and cleared of them.'<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Bacon, F. (1620) *Novum Organum*, aphorism 39.

<sup>40</sup> Bacon, F. (1620) *Novum Organum*, aphorism 68.

A close-up portrait of Daniel Kahneman, an elderly man with glasses, smiling slightly. The image is tinted with a blue-green color.

## DANIEL KAHNEMAN

INFLUENTIAL PIONEER IN THE INTERFACE BETWEEN  
ECONOMICS AND PSYCHOLOGY

The fact that we are mere humans – and are therefore subject to human nature (tribe), are raised a particular way (cave), utilize language (market place), and are steeped in a particular tradition (theater) – makes it impossible for us to avoid having prejudices and biases. The idols – whether ingrained or taught – cloud our view of reality and make it more difficult for us to reliably navigate our way through life, according to the scientific map we have acquired and the moral compass we have learned to sail by.

However, we can use science to recognize and map these idols. Naturally, this is not an easy thing to do, because we ourselves are the ones using this scientific instrument, but the instrument can and must be used nevertheless. We are thus taking into consideration that as humans we have a side that is instinctive, innate, and automatically acquired, while at the same time taking full advantage of the fact that we also have a conscious, controlling, intelligent and correcting side. We have subconscious tendencies instinctively operating according to fixed patterns, but we also employ conscious, intelligent and corrective considerations formed on the basis of learning processes.

Our science shows that, on the one hand, humans are vessels situated in time and space, full of urges and tendencies, and constantly distorting their view of reality and of themselves; and on the other it also shows that we are pupils that all through life can and need to learn to readjust this distorted view of reality and of ourselves – to in our lifetime get closer to reality and closer to realizing a more desirable society. To effectuate this correction, we use science itself as an instrument; and this rather complicates matters.

### Kahneman: System 1 and System 2

Modern scientific insights obviously influence the way academic education is organized. There is one recently acquired insight that has a strongly guiding influence on our programs. It elaborates on Bacon's doctrine of idols and was found and described by Daniel Kahneman. Like Bacon, Dewey, and Cobbenhagen, this Israeli Nobel Prize winner does not limit himself to one scientific discipline. Kahneman is an influential pioneer in the interface between economics and psychology. In his now famous publications he relegated to the realm of fantasy the idea of people being rationally calculating humans acting only for their own benefit, and he introduced into economics the peculiarities of the human psyche, and with it human (ir)rationality.

Just as Cobbenhagen would have wanted, Kahneman integrates psychological insights into economics, particularly with regard to the human ability to judge and to decision making in uncertain circumstances. Together with Amos Tversky (1937-1996), Kahneman investigated the way people take decisions in conditions of uncertainty. They show us that human choices and actions are not just the result of rational thinking, but that instincts and all kinds of real or seeming irrationality play a role in them as well. Using terminology introduced by

Stanovich and West,<sup>41</sup> Kahneman categorizes our thinking into two systems: *System 1* or *fast thinking* and *System 2* or *slow thinking*.<sup>42</sup> Our fast thinking in System 1 is dominated by instincts, automatic responses, and habits. This kind of thinking is useful when we have to act very quickly, as when we have to swerve to avoid a collision, for instance. The problem is that we often also show System 1 thinking when we ought to switch to System 2 thinking, for instance when making calculations or when we have to take a complicated decision that requires intelligence and reflection. In System 2, thinking takes more effort – and indeed demonstrably more energy – and more time, proceeding more slowly, making it only natural and tempting to base our actions and our convictions on System 1 thinking while we should really be using System 2 thinking. The idea now is that through schooling and training we can correct ourselves by accessing System 2, making us aware or more aware of our considerations.

### Slow thinking and academic education

In academic education at Tilburg University students are stimulated increasingly more actively to practice slow thinking, and thus to access their System 2. This is done, among other things, by offering them interactive and varied classes. Learning situations are created in which students are confronted with their *cognitive biases*: their (seemingly) irrational, erroneous ways of thinking. To discover these, students need each other and their teachers. Knowledge and insights into how students learn effectively, and appreciation of and confidence in teachers' professionalism are important pillars of the Tilburg educational model.

*Biases* become apparent most readily when students find themselves in a wide range of pedagogic-didactic situations. Education should not be restricted by the straightjacket of a fixed *format*. How courses are structured and taught, and how they feature in the educational program as a whole, is determined on the basis of the course objectives, the available content (also digital), and the professional strengths of the persons teaching them. As a result, the courses offered are characterized by a great variety of teaching methods aimed at maximum involvement of both teachers and students. Variation in teaching methods and well-considered use of digital teaching tools make active participation more attractive, and indeed inevitable: students cannot and must not make themselves inconspicuous or hide behind others, and will unavoidably be confronted with their own *fast thinking*. Feedback from their teachers and fellow students will *slow down their thinking* and make it more academic.

Online education is used as a support tool and in some cases replaces part of the course that would otherwise be taught on campus. However, personal contact, as already indicated by Cobbenhagen, is crucial to the Tilburg model, as it is through personal contact that 'embodied' confrontation of differences in character, knowledge and skills takes place.

<sup>41</sup> Stanovich, K.E. & West, R.F. (2000), 'Individual differences in reasoning: Implications for the rationality debate?', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 23, 645–726.

<sup>42</sup> Kahneman, D. (2011) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

If a teacher feels that students would benefit considerably from tailored arrangements with regard to the transfer of knowledge, the acquisition of skills, or character building, he or she can advise them on the educational options open to them that would yield the best results in terms of overall development. In any case, there will have to be curriculum teams making sure that there is a proper balance between teaching methods, a responsible mix of testing methods, crisp and clear learning lines, and a coherent program to realize the desired final attainment level in terms of knowledge, skills and character.

Academic education that takes scientific insights seriously, as is the case with academic education at Tilburg University, will almost automatically zoom in on training *slow thinking*. Particularly in situations that appear transparent and clear-cut, students learn to take a step back and reflect upon them. This is possible only if teachers, apart from being experts on content, also act as coaches and process supervisors. It is not self-evident that academic scientific staff have the skills and the professionalism to facilitate such student learning processes. The university will therefore have to be committed to further professionalizing and supporting its teaching staff to be able to realize this goal in every curriculum.

## 6

# Thinkers of Character: An Eye to the Future

*As thinkers of character, Tilburg alumni show a strong sense of social commitment in their work. Tilburg students are prepared for a position as knowledge workers in international society in the world of tomorrow. The future-oriented teaching encourages students to ask new questions and to develop creative ideas relevant to problems in the social domain. They learn 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to be able to operate successfully at a high level in future professions and employment situations. These include knowledge of various disciplines, the ability to take on responsibility, and the capacity to practice slow thinking.*

In the future, Tilburg students, already known for their high level of knowledge, will also be praised, and quite deservedly, for the way they can apply this knowledge and convey it clearly to others. They have the ability to deploy their skills and their theoretical knowledge in reflecting on and working on societal issues. Tilburg students know what is expected of them in the labor market and they can be successful in it as a result. In short, they are increasingly trained to be *enterprising thinkers* – thinkers that take an active part in society, and more specifically, thinkers that work for the benefit of society.

### International orientation: a *must*

Scientific training, international orientation, and *Bildung* and the implied acquisition of academic discourse are obviously priorities, going back to Bacon's views of science as the enterprise of a worldwide community of truth-seeking researchers employing the scientific method in search of greater (necessary) control and improvement (where possible), of our local, and indeed our global living environment. Particularly in the social domain, the demand for this control, or for a measure of control, and the questions surrounding this, feature prominently not only at the national level, but also internationally, in the economic and legal sectors, but also in the healthcare sector and the cultural world. As a result, the current international demands made on the content of education from the scientific disciplines and current requirements from the job market also determine how the educational programs and the *Bildung* component are organized at our university. Students need to be able to

participate in international teams consisting of members of diverse cultural backgrounds and a variety of disciplines, working on so-called *wicked problems*. Students learn all about the classic elements of their discipline but also acquire extensive knowledge of the state of the art in their field. It goes without saying that this knowledge is international knowledge, gathered over time by the international community of scientists. This is why Tilburg University advises its students, and accordingly gives them the opportunity, to spend a period of time abroad in their Bachelor's and/or Master's program. To facilitate this, every Bachelor's program has what is called a 'mobility window', allowing students to take part of their program abroad without incurring delays in their studies. The cultural knowledge and experience acquired this way also contributes to the development of their character and personality and to their awareness of the vast social and cultural diversity there is to be found outside of their own tradition.

#### Values and international orientation: solidarity

We have mentioned before that solidarity with the less fortunate, empathy with and openness toward people holding different views, and responsible management of our vulnerable (social) world, are values that Tilburg University sets great store by. These values acquire a deeper meaning as we expand our little circle, and make it bigger and more international. Tilburg University welcomes international students, particularly students from countries and areas where circumstances would not have allowed them to develop their talents, and that can be given the opportunity to do so in our programs; students who after graduation employ their knowledge, skills and academic character toward removing those circumstances that make it impossible for talent to develop, and thus increase the chances of people from the same region to receive higher education and academic training.

#### Values and international orientation: empathy and openness

Studying in an international student community is generally recognized as enriching one's academic experience. It goes without saying that an 'international classroom' not only consists of students of different nationalities, but also of students with different points of view, ingrained in them by their culture. While obviously challenging, being confronted with fellow students holding (quite) different views can also be an enriching experience. In principle, empathy ought to go quite a long way with Tilburg students, but corrective *slow thinking* will have to tell them which views are ultimately acceptable and useful, that is to say, which views have the effect of helping to achieve a society Tilburg academics envision. There should therefore be ample room for informed discussions in all programs of the university – and beyond these on campus – about answers to the question of what direction the world should take, and how we envisage its future.

#### Values and international orientation: sustainability

The importance of responsible management of our vulnerable world can hardly be overestimated, as is clear not only from recent developments in climate, biodiversity, natural resources, energy and the environment, but also from culture clashes, human rights issues, poverty, labor legislation, social security, privacy violations, overall security, and

new technologies. In contacts with members of an internationally operating community of scientists, scholars and students, Tilburg University programs show that scientific education and academic *Bildung* go hand in hand, particularly in terms of the contribution made by our alumni toward increasing the sustainability of a complex global society on a planet that is not hospitable to man by definition.

#### Self-critical thinkers

Students are trained to be critical thinkers. In Tilburg this also means, and perhaps even first and foremost, students who are trained to be critical of their *own way* of thinking. Students are taught to develop an inquiring attitude and the research skills required to investigate things properly and successfully. These skills are trained right from the start. Tilburg students stand out in their level of knowledge of the humanities and the social sciences. They have learned to ask relevant (research) questions, and to go in search of answers themselves, and can thus contribute to the development of new knowledge in their field, and what is more, can correctly assess the practical value of this knowledge to society. In this educational process, they are taught from the start, according to the Baconian method of conducting science, to formulate their convictions and hypotheses in refutable terms and to yield to the better argument and the more powerful empirical evidence. If we say that Tilburg University wants its graduates to be critical, independent and active thinkers, this also means that these highly educated individuals need to be able to look at themselves and at their actions in a critical manner. Life-long learning should include owning up to one's mistakes. The 'critical attitude' Tilburg University likes to see in its students therefore does not just mean them being critical of others, but also being critical of themselves. Students learn to apply *slow thinking* to their own convictions and points of view. Partly also through their participation in the international classroom, students will become aware of *de facto* moral pluralism, and will learn to place their points of view in an international landscape of convictions. They will be well-trained in their ability (resulting in willingness) to yield to the better argument.

The educational approach of Tilburg University allows its students to combine their high level of expertise with an openness to, and a willingness to communicate, cooperate and collaborate with, people from other fields, people with different personalities and from different cultural backgrounds. In light of the ever-growing globalization and glocalization, this openness on the part of its students and thereby this characteristic of the Tilburg educational programs will only increase in importance.

#### Dealing with an uncertain future

Nobody knows with any degree of certainty what the future will bring. The students of Tilburg University contribute toward increasing the sustainability of our social world because they have learned to deal with this fundamental uncertainty: they have learned to assess when the tentative solidifies into a sufficiently underpinned insight that can be acted on with confidence, and when the tentative remains so conditional that acting on the basis of such provisos is tantamount to a blind gamble.

With the world being subject to constant change, academic education will have to prepare its students for a situation of continuous change:

With the advent of democracy and modern industrial conditions, it is impossible to foretell definitely just what civilization will be twenty years from now. Hence it is impossible to prepare the [student] for any precise set of conditions. To prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities; that his eye and ear and hand may be tools ready to command, that his judgment may be capable of grasping the conditions under which it has to work, and the executive forces be trained to act economically and efficiently. It is impossible to reach this sort of adjustment save as constant regard is had to the individual's own powers, tastes and interests – say, that is, as education is continually converted into psychological terms.<sup>43</sup>

In spite of this uncertainty, voiced by Dewey at the end of the 19th century, we can nevertheless identify a number of important trends in the (near) future. Datafication and the management of 'big data' are developments that are going to have such a profound effect on social life in general that Tilburg University, in collaboration with Eindhoven Technical University, has developed new programs, such as *Data Science*, *Data Science & Entrepreneurship*, and *Data Science: Government & Business*. The demand in society for data scientists will only grow in the years to come. Here too, alumni will have to display the characteristics of a Tilburg University graduate: knowledge, skills and character, with a strong moral focus on social problems in society. After all, they need to be enterprising thinkers taking the initiative – thinkers who act, and act for the benefit of society.

Another important trend, according to Klaus Schwab (*World Economic Forum 2016*), is what is increasingly referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution: after the application of steam, electricity and electronics, we are now witnessing the emergence and introduction into our lives of 'cyber-physical systems':

There are three reasons why today's transformations represent not merely a prolongation of the Third Industrial Revolution but rather the arrival of a Fourth and distinct one: velocity, scope, and systems impact. The speed of current breakthroughs has no historical precedent. When compared with previous industrial revolutions, the Fourth is evolving at an exponential rather than a linear pace. Moreover, it is disrupting almost every industry in every country. And the breadth and depth of these changes herald the transformation of entire systems of production, management, and governance.<sup>44</sup>

Change is indeed here to stay! This Fourth Revolution might well spell a new and dramatic change for society, which Tilburg academics are trying to understand and advance by educating enterprising thinkers. With their expertise in the humanities and the social sciences, they will be part of the shaping forces in this new society, in innovative programs like Global Law, Public Governance, and Global Management of Social Issues.

It appears that Tilburg students will also increasingly be judged on the *combination* of knowledge, skills and character. Expert scientific knowledge will always be highly regarded, but characteristics such as 'critical thinking,' 'creativity,' and 'emotional intelligence' are becoming more and more important. As said previously, we do not know exactly what kind of jobs the future will bring, but they will doubtless involve collaboration in interdisciplinary knowledge teams, with team members from different cultures. The impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on life in our society, on who we are as people and what we are developing into, on what we are supposed to consider important, should be incorporated in our educational programs. We will increasingly have to shape these programs in cooperation with businesses, organizations, and institutions that our students are educated for, trained to eventually be part of. Tilburg University is well on its way to realizing this through the idea that its alumni are to be *thinkers of character*, who do not let things slide and who are not afraid to be enterprising in their pursuits.

### Maintaining the professionalism of academic teachers

If Tilburg University thinks of itself as a third-generation academic institution that educates critical enterprising and entrepreneurial thinkers, its teachers will also have to be proficient enough to give shape to such an institution. We have already alluded at various points in our discussion to the advanced level of professionalization of its teachers. While the pursuit of science is an indispensable characteristic of any academic institution, it is becoming increasingly clear that academic teaching is absolutely vital as well. Within a third-generation academic educational institution, which sets great store by the transfer of scientific knowledge and teaching its students scientific research methods as instrumental in understanding society and even more so in advancing it, the teachers responsible for this will at the same time also have to be academic coaches – the application of acquired knowledge in a social context is a central issue in all educational programs, and students are coached to value and embrace this attitude. As the practical reality of life exists outside the university, so should it be on campus.

The Tilburg academic programs will have to move with the times, and move with new generations of students who, like academics, are facing new challenges, and accordingly adapt their expectations and aspirations. For teachers as well as alumni, this means they will have to adopt the habit of life-long learning. The academic teacher teams will have to be able to teach students 'slow thinking', to demonstrate the importance of 'real-life cases,' to raise intercultural awareness, reward creativity, stimulate self-criticism, cultivate curiosity, practice effective communication, and above all to never lose sight of the ethical aspects involved in any issue or case. Teachers will notice students changing in the course of time. The way

<sup>43</sup> Dewey, J. (1897) 'My Pedagogic Creed', in: L.A. Hickman & T.A. Alexander (eds.) (1998) *The Essential Dewey*, Volume 1, Pragmatism, Education, Democracy. Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis; p.230.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/>

students have changed in the past decades has already resulted in teachers increasingly transferring their scientific expertise and academic skills in a more coaching manner. This means they will have to be equipped for this. In this respect as well therefore, it is important to keep the professional knowledge and skills of the scientific teaching staff up to date.

### The importance of job orientation<sup>45</sup>

In their future work or field of activity, Tilburg alumni will be dealing with highly complex problems to which there are no standard solutions and which require ever-changing and innovative answers. The demands of the professional field are changing under the influence of increasing digitalization and globalization. Apart from solid scientific knowledge, future alumni will also have to have the right 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills to be optimally prepared for their future jobs.

More and more attention will have to be paid to problem-solving skills, social- and communication skills, planning and organizing skills, team skills, decision-making skills, creative and innovative thinking, and digital skills. Labor market orientation can take place in the academic programs themselves through personally experienced practical contact with the relevant field of activity in the outside world: acting in and with one's actual future profession and future field of activity, rather than merely talking or hearing about it. Academic shorter or longer research traineeships are therefore important, as is carrying out 'real-life' assignments for businesses or organizations. The university (the *School*, the academic program, study-, alumni-, and student associations) plays an actively mediating role in securing these traineeships and assignments. Also as a result of developments in society, with more and more flexibility, independence, and personal initiative being expected of academically trained employees, and with the currently still growing number of self-employed people, our programs are paying substantially more attention to entrepreneurship – in the broadest possible sense – to offer Tilburg students the kind of training that makes them enterprising thinkers of character.

As soon as possible after the start of their program, students need to become aware of the importance of preparing for and thinking about their future professional careers. They must come to realize that they are themselves responsible for their own development and their future jobs or fields of activity, and that they should avail themselves of the facilities that the programs and the campus have to offer them in this respect. The advice Tilburg alumni can give students on these aspects, the doors they can open for them, and the perspectives they can offer them as important participants in shaping a 'world in perpetual transition,' can hardly be overestimated.



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<sup>45</sup> See Meijdam, L. (2015) *Eindverslag Werkgroep Versterking Arbeidsmarktorientatie* (Tilburg University, 15 December, 2015).

PART III

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**THE TILBURG  
ACADEMIC PROFILE:  
A PROPOSAL**



## 7

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# TiU-shaped Professionals: Thinkers of Character

We have explored the pedagogical tradition that we believe academic education at Tilburg University is part of. The inspiring vision of Martinus Cobbenhagen, which links up with earlier influential visions, of Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century, and John Dewey in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, still lies at the heart of its pedagogical ideas and educational methods. New knowledge in the field of human thought and actions, emerging from the progressive research programs that Daniel Kahneman and others are active in, shows that our academic programs need to take into account the pitfalls caused by unconscious *biases* that can adversely affect our science and our societal decisions.

Tilburg University both shows its students, and actually makes them feel how collective engagement in science makes for a more secure foundation to build on. This foundation can form the basis of which they, as enterprising thinkers, can contribute to much needed social innovation in a constantly changing world. It is innovation which slowly but surely might offer better prospects to more and more people in the world. The way we see it, academic education at Tilburg University is characterized by a special combination of *transfer of knowledge*, *training of skills*, and *weaving of character*, which together shape students into enterprising thinkers – thinkers who act, and act for the benefit of others and society.

## Knowledge

Students at Tilburg University are informed about the state-of-the-art science of social phenomena. In this process, there is a special emphasis on how the various humanities and social sciences (economics, law, psychology, sociology, information and communication, philosophy, culture, and religion) hang together, and how the study of social phenomena necessarily requires an interdisciplinary approach. While there is often already specialization in the Bachelor's phase, extensive specialization is postponed until students get to the Master's phase, where the focus is on theme-based problems surrounding social innovation. Naturally, students acquire the knowledge already available in their field worldwide, but they also increasingly contribute to this knowledge (in teams) as they advance in their studies. Students find out that science presupposes an international learning community. More than anything else, Tilburg students understand that science is a powerful instrument that can be employed (to the extent possible) to gain and exercise control in an unpredictable world. Students not only get the possibility of instrumental employment and deployment pointed out to them; they are made aware time and again that this actually is the goal of their academic training.



**KNOWLEDGE:** *students of Tilburg University have expert knowledge of the relevant humanities and social sciences, and understand that the insights and theories that have emerged from these sciences can be used as instruments to bring about desired or necessary social innovation.*

## Skills

Students at Tilburg University have the scientific research skills needed to acquire the necessary information, to apply it, and to use it toward solving a real-life social problem. Besides this, students have trained their communication skills, in order that they can make themselves heard within the (international) learning community, which both makes them members, and makes them experience themselves as members of that learning community. Tilburg University graduates also have the communication skills that allow them to be effective in bringing about the necessary social innovation by entering into consultations with the relevant companies, organizations, (local) governments, and research institutes. They know how to contact, and maintain contact with, groups in society.

Tilburg students are creative; they feel the urge to act while remaining realistic about what can be achieved, and they have the courage it takes to act, to be active in society. They can force themselves to practice *slow thinking* to arrive at better decisions and to do things a better way, a process in which well-trained moral judgment is indispensable.

On campus, Tilburg students have learned how important it is to be internationally oriented in together looking for solutions to global social issues. Recognizing other cultures, perspectives and ways of life, dealing with these, and fruitfully working together with people holding different views, in the light of the values that the Tilburg academic community holds in high esteem, belong to the repertoire of Tilburg graduates.



**SKILLS:** *Tilburg University students are optimally trained in scientific research skills through real-life cases in the field of social innovation; their focus is on investigating, on human and social behavior and actions, applying slow thinking; they are creative and communicative, aware of the importance of moral judgment.*

## Character

Students at Tilburg University receive what is best described using the German term *Bildung*, in ethical, intellectual, cultural and social terms. Having this ingrained in them, they understand that their own learning process is a life-long endeavor, and that (self-)education is a way of life. They can also give shape to this. They have learned to be critical, not only of others but also of themselves. They understand that life-long learning is possible only by cultivating curiosity.

Tilburg students have cultivated moral sensitivity, which is fed by the ethical principle of aspiring to reduce suffering, in order to bring about a fairer distribution of wealth and sustainable well-being, and to develop their own talents and those of others to realize necessary social innovation. Their call for solidarity, empathy, and a sense of responsibility are the result of the *Bildung* element in their Tilburg academic education. Their lives have become increasingly focused on doing, *a vita activa*, characterized by a constructive (and where possible: optimistic) attitude toward the possibility of solving social problems in an innovative way. This in no ways means that they are academics plunging headlong into the next adventure that presents itself; it means they use their emotional intelligence and prudence to distinguish between blind gambles and well-considered policies.

*Bildung* refers to a kind of self-realization that can only be achieved in freedom, in confrontation with others, and in a community of people. The Tilburg campus creates an environment in which *Bildung* of that kind is possible. This campus is a space that affords a wide range of personal perspectives and mentalities the freedom to look for ways in which society can be shaped and improved; in which solidarity with the less fortunate, empathy with and openness toward those holding different views, a sense of responsibility for our vulnerable (social) world, and development of talent are considered extremely valuable.



**CHARACTER:** *Students of Tilburg University weave their character through constant exposure in their training to an atmosphere of ethical awareness. They build within themselves ever-growing consciousness of the moral imperative of solidarity with the less fortunate, of the need to be empathic and open toward people holding different views, and of the need to feel a sense of responsibility for making our vulnerable social world more sustainable; it is in this light that students weave their talents, recognized as such by us, into a character come to fruition, yielding a well-rounded individual, an enterprising thinker who works for the benefit of society.*

Through the transfer of knowledge, the training of their skills, and the weaving of their character, as outlined above, students of Tilburg University slowly but surely turn into what we would like to call *TiU-shaped professionals*, TiU-shaped economists or lawyers, TiU-shaped psychologists, sociologists or communication experts, TiU-shaped theologians or culture-experts, TiU-shaped professionals managers or philosophers, etc. Once again, *TiU-shaped professionals* are Tilburg T-shaped professionals and academics with in-depth knowledge on the vertical axis, and the necessary academic skills on the horizontal axis but an additional and essential (moral) characteristic within, namely the drive and ability to work together to get the *right things* done. Lying at the foundation of the Tilburg academic programs is the conviction voiced by Martinus Cobbenhagen that our university bears a moral responsibility toward society, that consequently our alumni should make themselves count, make a difference in everyday life in society, inspired by the thought that what you are is more important than what you know.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> We want to thank the Boards of the Schools, the members of the Executive Board, and the members of the Academic Council, and also the members of the student panels, and many others for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay, especially at the first Tilburg University Education Bazar where we presented a stripped down version. Of course, the claim that the vision presented here follows naturally from the way we view the academic position of Tilburg University is one that is entirely ours and that we take full responsibility for. We also thank Riet Bettonviel and Annemeike Tan for providing professional support, Hans Verhulst for providing us with this English translation of the Dutch version, and Andrew Cartwright for checking the text as a native speaker of the *lingua franca* of science.

## COLOPHON

VOLUME 1 OF THE TILBURG SERIES IN ACADEMIC EDUCATION  
KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, CHARACTER

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