

Philosophy of Liberal Education: The Contexts

[V. Kurennoj](#)

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Vitaly Kurennoj

Candidate of Sciences in Philosophy, Professor, Head of the School of Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, National Research University Higher School of Economics. Address: Bld. 1, 21/4 Staraya Basmannaya St, 105066 Moscow, Russian Federation. Email: vkurennoj@hse.ru

Abstract. The first article devoted to philosophy of liberal education (*Voprosy obrazovaniya / Educational Studies Moscow* no 1, 2020) laid out systematically the principles of that philosophy, such as (1) lifelong learning, (2) academic freedom, (3) importance of practice and experience, (4) critical thinking and civil competency, (5) competency development instead of knowledge accumulation, (6) priority of general education over specialized education, (7) the concept of learning to learn, (8) self-directed learning effort, (9) political neutrality, and (10) interaction and Socratic dialogue. In this second part of the article,

the liberal model of education is contextualized under two main perspectives, historical and socio-theoretical. The historical perspective is used to discuss the ancient origins of the liberal model, German classical philosophy as a direct origin of its principles, and the trajectories of liberal education discourse elements penetrating Russia's educational and cultural policy. The socio-theoretical perspective is applied to the context in which the liberal model was conceived (the nascent stage of modernity), the social conditions that led to its crisis (stabilized industrial societies of the modern age), and its relevance in the era of late modernity.

Keywords: liberal education, liberal arts education in the ancient world, classical German philosophy, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Soviet cultural politics discourse, modernity, industrial society, post-industrial society.

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Ancient Origins

Philosophy of liberal education has a long history and constitutes an integral part of European cultural identity. Originating from *paideia*, the Ancient Greek model of rearing and education¹, it was recreated as a liberal arts (*artes liberales*) paradigm by the medieval university. During the Renaissance, interest in the “golden age” of ancient cultures acquired new dimensions, primarily those of arts and literature.

Translated
from Russian by
I. Zhuchkova.

¹ For historical analysis of the shaping of ancient Greek character, see [Zhurakovsky 1940; Jaeger 1997; 2001].

Not only did the age of the Renaissance mark the anthropocentric turn in European culture, but it also added an essential philological component to liberal arts by including knowledge of classical languages, in addition to classical cultures, into the paradigm. Finally, the ancient standard was revisited—this time, in the context of emerging modernity—at the turn of the 19th century by the neo-humanists, Wilhelm von Humboldt being a key representative², and formed the basis for the liberal model of education as we know it. Greek theory and practice of liberal education and rearing served as a guidance not only for Humboldt but also, later, for John Henry Newman, who conceptualized “the idea of a university” in the context of English culture³. We will point out only some of the aspects of the ancient model of liberal education which resonate with one another strongly and can be regarded as direct origins of the principles of modern liberal education.

In ancient interpretation, liberal education is non-utilitarian but intrinsically valuable: a man learns something “for his own sake or for the sake of his friends, or with a view to excellence,” not for the sake of others, Aristotle emphasized⁴. In the social structure of a Greek polis, such education was only accessible to the leisure class of the free-born. It was necessary for participation in political life (life of a polis) and leisure; yet, “there are branches of learning and education which we must study merely with a view to leisure spent in intellectual activity, and these are to be valued for their own sake; whereas those kinds of knowledge which are useful in business are to be deemed necessary, and exist for the sake of other things.”⁵ Leisure continued to be a requisite component of liberal education theory up until the modern era, which brought the idea that happiness could only be achieved by living an active life and striving to make a difference. Paradoxically though, we still remain within the discursive framework of the Greek perception of education as leisure, since the very word *school* derives from Greek σχολή (*scholē*), originally meaning leisure and rest.

Liberal education cannot be forced upon; it is built around student engagement (freedom of learning). Plato pays particular atten-

² The concept of neo-humanism was first applied to Humboldt in the 1870s by Friedrich Paulsen [Konrad 2010:100]. Paulsen describes Humboldt—who, along with Goethe and Schiller, was considered by the German cultural canon of the late 19th century as a foremost representative of the literary circle of Weimar and Jena at the turn of the 19th century—as a “Neo-Hellenist” more than anything else [Paulsen 1921:202]. For the most comprehensive description of Humboldt’s neo-humanistic theory, see [Spranger 1909].

³ In addition to quoting Aristotle’s words concerning liberal education, Newman basically delivers a panegyric on his philosophy: “In many subject-matters, to think correctly, is to think like Aristotle, and we are his disciples whether we will or no, though we may not know it.” [Newman 2006:104]

⁴ See also Plato’s definition of education (Laws, I, 643d—644a).

⁵ Pol., 1337b 17; 1338a 10–14. Quotation is drawn from the translation by Benjamin Jowett.

tion to what we would call gamification of learning today: “a freeman ought not to be a slave in the acquisition of knowledge of any kind <...> Then, my good friend, I said, do not use compulsion, but let early education be a sort of amusement; you will then be better able to find out the natural bent.”⁶

Plato already contemplated on the principle of Socratic dialogue—preserved in the modern liberal model—which he approached as a standard of free communication, unrestricted by any external factors. In the *Theaetetus* dialogue, Socrates asserts that “those who have been trained in philosophy and liberal pursuits are as unlike those who from their youth upwards have been knocking about in the courts and such places, as a freeman is in breeding unlike a slave.” The former, he says, “can always command <leisure>: he has his talk out in peace.” The latter, meanwhile, “is always in a hurry; there is the water of the clepsydra driving him on, and not allowing him to expatiate at will: and there is his adversary standing over him, enforcing his rights; the indictment <...> is recited at the time: and from this he must not deviate.” (*Theaet.*, 172c-173b) Therefore, this is about the difference between two types of spoken interaction, one goal-oriented and the other associated with an ideal situation of free communication in which participants seek understanding and explanation: a freeman “can have his talk out, and wander at will from one subject to another, as the fancy takes him; <...> he may be long or short, as he pleases.” This description already refers, in basic sense, to the difference between the two types of action underpinning the communicative theory of Jürgen Habermas [Habermas 1981]: strategic (goal-oriented) vs. communicative, in which actors coordinate their behaviors to reach mutual understanding and a rational consensus (which is true for all Plato’s dialogues). The formulation also indicates that communication initiated to reach mutual understanding takes place away from the crowd (“in peace”), which may be interpreted as the source of Humboldt’s famous quote: “Since <higher scientific> institutions can thus achieve their purpose only if each one, as much as possible, faces the pure idea of science, solitariness and freedom (*Einsamkeit und Freiheit*) are the predominant principles in their circle.” (*On the Internal and External Organization of the Higher Scientific Institutions in Berlin*)

Under the classical model, liberal education does not prepare specialists but develops the ability to learn as such, thus focusing on generic skills rather than specific ones. The didactic issue of which disciplines may be helpful for developing such generic skills has a long history—gone through multiple reconsiderations, it still remains hotly debated. In pedagogy of the 19th-20th centuries, this problem was

⁶ Plato, *Rep.*, VII, 536e. Quotation is drawn from the translation by Benjamin Jowett. See also: Plato, *Laws*, I, 643b-c.

formulated as the question of “formal disciplines”⁷. Classical substantiation of the role of formal disciplines is provided in the speech of Isocrates *Antidosis*. According to Isocrates, studying such disciplines as geometry, rhetoric, and astronomy is not an end in itself, but people who have exercised and sharpened those disciplines “gain the power <...> of grasping and learning more easily and more quickly those subjects which are of more importance and of greater value.”⁸ Therefore, the study of such subjects is not intended to promote extensive accumulation of knowledge but rather to foster competencies that will later allow acquiring new knowledge. Aristotle warned against excessive specialization and digging into such disciplines: “There are also some liberal arts quite proper for a freeman to acquire, but only in a certain degree, and if he attend to them too closely, in order to attain perfection in them, <...> evil effects will follow.” (Pol., 1337b 16–17)

The classical canon of formal disciplines is represented by the medieval set of seven liberal arts (*Septem Artes Liberales*), which, in its turn, was a reconstruction of the ancient system of higher education in its two major components, Platonic and sophistic [Hadot 2002; Jaeger 2001:367–370]. It borrowed from the Platonic Academy its *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music—four mathematic (*mathēmata*) disciplines designed to develop the ability to think in general terms, thus preparing minds to perceive philosophically not only numbers but ideas/*eidos* as well. The other, “humanities” part of the canon—the *trivium* of dialectic (logic, later on), grammar, and rhetoric—took its final shape in the sophistic school of Isocrates. Thereby, traditional liberal arts education included arts of two types, (i) scientific arts that promote abstract and conceptual thinking and (ii) arts of the humanities that foster the civic competencies of communication, rational thinking, and discussion and the hermeneutic practices of text comprehension and interpretation. The classical gymnasium school, as shaped in 19th-century Europe under the influence of neo-humanism that rested upon the philological culture of the Renaissance, extended the familiar bundles of scientific arts and the humanities by adding the classical languages of Ancient Greek and Latin, which also came to be treated as formal disciplines.

Gymnasium education, while being focused on ancient cultures and classical languages, is not only an instructional tool but also an element of European cultural identity (Europe being understood not as a continent but as a cultural and historical concept that crystallized out of that long-evolving tradition). In Soviet pedagogy, the gymnasium model faced withering criticism, followed by abrogation and obli-

⁷ Lev Vygotsky defines formal disciplines as “certain subjects <instruction in which> develops the mental faculties in general, besides importing knowledge of the subject and special skills.” [Vygotsky 1934:204]

⁸ Isoc. 15: 265.

on⁹. As a result, Russia's education system was deprived of the critical cultural function played in modern society by classical gymnasium education—that of maintaining European historical identity. Yuri Shichalin characterized this situation as follows: “And, since classical gymnasiums as such do not exist in the Russian education system, the latter has remained fundamentally flawed since 1918, lacking the link that cements the best modern schools with the European tradition at its very root and the same time allows maintaining a high level of education quality even in regular secondary schools.” [Shichalin 2012] Therefore, the scandalous Russia-is-no-Europe narrative follows trivially from the very system of modern Russian education, and the “humanistic nature of education” postulated in the Federal Law “On Education” can hardly be achieved, given the lack of strong connection to the ancient culture that was constitutive of both Renaissance humanism and modern neo-humanism. Functionally, Russia's education system with its essential focus on mathematical and linguistic disciplines remains connected to the ancient origins of liberal education, but attitudinally—in terms of cultural identity preservation—the connection was broken over a century ago.

Classical German Philosophy of University

The attribute “Humboldtian”, consistently used to refer to the liberal model of education, is not undeliberate; however, it is not quite adequate either. Wilhelm von Humboldt left no completed work systematizing his theory of education, but his fragmented thoughts on the issue make it possible to outline the main neo-humanistic and liberal principles of that theory, interweaving into a systemic whole. The choice of Humboldt's texts as a starting point of liberal model analysis was determined by a number of circumstances. One of them consists in the fact that Humboldt's philosophy of university education and his idea of the minimal state in general had a strong impact on various strands of liberal thought worldwide in the second half of the 19th century. First of all, this applies to *The Limits of State Action* [Humboldt 2003]¹⁰, which can be defined in today's terminology as a libertarian doctrine of the minimal state¹¹. For example, John Stuart Mill's philosophical essay *On Liberty* (1859) [Mill 2012] draws directly upon *The Limits of State Action*, translated into English in 1854. Mill describes Humboldt's work as an “excellent essay” and lays out

⁹ Lev Vygotsky, for instance, described the system of classical gymnasium education in pre-revolutionary Russia and Germany as “the most reactionary forms of schooling.” [Vygotsky 1934:204]

¹⁰ Written in 1792; first published in 1851, 16 years after the author's death.

¹¹ Present-day researchers openly refer to the “radicalism of Humboldt's ideas” as “libertarian extremum” [Petersen 2016:8]; the key metaphor of liberal theory, defining the state as a “nightwatchman” [Habermas 2016:212], is also dated back to Humboldt (although probably erroneously).

a number of key ideas of his liberal education theory. In German culture, the term “Humboldtian university” pays homage to Humboldt’s organizational activity as the Head of the Department of Spiritual Affairs and Public Education of the Interior Ministry of Prussia during the critical period of Prussia’s liberal education reform in 1809–1810. Not only did his contribution lead to establishing a new university in Berlin to become a prototype for the modern research university, but it also breathed new life into the reformation of the whole system of educational and scientific institutions. In the performance of his duty, Humboldt was also plugged into the fierce debate on the principles of new institutions and conversant with all the relevant literature and theories. As part of his governmental duties, he authored a number of documents and notes concerning all the major aspects of the reform. It was not until the second half of the 19th century that those archival documents began to come off the press, and not until a century later that they started gaining popularity¹², the most famous of them currently being the 1809 treatise *On the Internal and External Organization of the Higher Scientific Institutions in Berlin* [Humboldt 2002]. He also devised school plans for Königsberg and Lithuania and a number of other documents dealing with the whole range of education reform issues. The great value of Humboldt’s education documents, unencumbered with concerns about literary long-windedness, is that they give a most succinct summary of what he drew from the vast literature and his own broad circle of contacts. It is not novelty but consistency, clarity, and conciseness that make those documents so valuable.

The set of ideas that Humboldt proceeded from is a curious intellectual phenomenon of its own, so it appears reasonable to introduce the term “classical German philosophy of university” to describe it¹³. The pivotal texts within the corpus of such philosophy include Immanuel Kant’s *The Contest of Faculties* (1798) [Kant 1994], Friedrich Schiller’s lecture *What Is, and to What End Do We Study, Universal History?* (1789) [Schiller 1956], a series of Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s texts, in particular *Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation* (1794) [Fichte 1995] and *On the Nature of the Scholar and Its Manifestations* (1805) [Fichte 1997], and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling’s *Lectures on the Method of University Studies* (1803) [Schelling 2009]. Friedrich August Wolf—the highest paid professor at the new university in Berlin and an active participant in the education reform—founded a seminar (*Kollegium*) called *Consilia Scholastica* on rearing, school-

¹² An academic collection of Humboldt’s essential texts was prepared by Eduard Spranger [Humboldt 1920:207–319].

¹³ For a chronological list of Humboldt’s major works published in 1798–1809 and dedicated to the university in general as well as those directly related to establishing a university in Berlin, see [Köpke 1860:139–140]. More recent anthologies of those works are selective, their content varying rather widely (cf. [Anrich 1964; Müller 1990]).

ing, and university education, which he led over a period of several years [Wolf 1835]. Two works had a paramount significance at the crucial moment of the university reform in Berlin. One of them, *Deduced Scheme for an Academy to be Established in Berlin* [Fichte 1971], written by Fichte at the direct order of Carl Friedrich von Beyme in 1807, is the most radical project of new university organization, radicalism having been partially prompted by the said Prussian functionary¹⁴. The other work, Schleiermacher's *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense* published in 1808 [Schleiermacher 1964], is a polemical retort to Fichte's *Deduced Scheme*, which follows already from the title that opposes casually dropped "occasional thoughts" to the rigid "deduced scheme". Henrik Steffens's lectures *About the Idea of Universities* (1809) [Steffens 1964] are also usually mentioned among the major works shaping the pool of guiding ideas during the reform period. Friedrich Carl von Savigny, head of the German Historical School of Jurisprudence, and classical philologist August Böckh are also ranked among the authors who were Schleiermacher's associates and played a crucial role in the elaboration of the University of Berlin's regulations (statutes) after Humboldt had retired from education and university affairs. Being the most influential professors of the University of Berlin, Savigny and Böckh kept mainstreaming publicly the university organization principles of Schleiermacher and Humboldt throughout decades¹⁵.

The corpus of classical German philosophy of university demonstrates a kind of integrity, its texts being interconnected by the common range of problems and featuring essential consensus on the major issues, while being profoundly polemical in nature¹⁶. This unity is achieved over and beyond disciplinary differences and regular historical and subject-based classifications, which allows the whole corpus to be treated as an independent historical phenomenon. It shaped its own scope of philosophico-theoretical, sociopolitical, and organizational problems, uniquely coherent beyond the established approaches to studying the theoretical heritage of the relevant authors within the conventional disciplinary frameworks. Classical German philosophy of university, which played a leading role in the development of modern research university and proposed a number of configurations of how the university could be organized and interact with the

¹⁴ Beyme called on Fichte to set his thoughts free: "You are not shackled by conventions or malpractices that earlier institutions used to fight against. Your mind is capable of elaborating ideas in complete freedom from any restraint." [Fichte 1999:305–306]

¹⁵ See [Savigny 1850; Böckh 1859]. Savigny's article was published in 1832, and Beck delivered his speech in 1853.

¹⁶ To put it extremely simplified, one can say that Humboldt had to take a position in the debate between Fichte, with his idea of unitary school, and Schleiermacher, who advocated liberalism and plurality in education and science. Humboldt took the side of the latter.

external institutional environment, is a fundamental source for understanding the relationship between scientific knowledge, education, and academia, on the one hand, and the state, political nation, civic society, and individuals in the modern society, on the other. It was a unique situation in contemporary history where the reformation and establishment of modern institutions was assigned to first-rate thinkers representing such different disciplines as philosophy, jurisprudence, philology, etc.

Negative arguments can also be used to justify separating this group of texts into a specific category. They are outsiders, or disciplinary strays. Most of them, except for Kant's *The Contest of Faculties*, normally do not analyze the heritage of their authors and remain largely unknown today. Moreover, this corpus was a blind spot in the then extremely advanced Russian culture of German philosophy translations. Most of the texts either have never been published in Russian or began to be published not so long ago. This fact, among other things, indicates that Russian culture is extremely insensitive to the fundamental principles of modern educational and scientific institutions, being content with mimicking their external structure¹⁷.

The Relict of Liberal Discourse in Russia's Educational and Cultural Policy Narrative

As mentioned in the first part of this article, a number of basic concepts of the liberal model have lately been commonplace rhetoric in the Russian pedagogical discourse; in addition, they are abundantly dispersed throughout the key regulations and applicable laws of Russia that define the fundamental public policy guidelines in the field¹⁸. The common thing about using those formulations is that they are postulated as self-evident principles, the meaning and pragmatic use of which are not explained anywhere. Such self-evidence, however, developed historically through long-established usage. Let us do a small historico-semantic research into the genesis of one of those formulations, worded—with variations—as “development (formation) of harmoniously (comprehensively/all-round) developed personality (human being)”.

Russia's pedagogical discourse of the 1860s, in particular the pedagogical essays of Nikolay von Vessel¹⁹ и Pamfil Yurkevich [Yurkevich

¹⁷ Such mimicry, or “parasitic” legitimization of universities, is generally typical, however, of all countries with the catch-up model of economy modernization [Kyosev 2002].

¹⁸ For instance, *The Fundamentals of State Cultural Policy* approved by the President of Russia (Decree No. 808 of 12/24/2014), postulate “education of a harmoniously developed personality” as the first and foremost mission of national cultural policy, while Federal Law No. 273-FZ “On Education in the Russian Federation” prescribes “humanistic nature of education”, “free development of personality”, and “free development of human abilities” as the guiding principles of national education policy.

¹⁹ Cf. a quote from his work of 1862 in [Yakhontov 1921:40].

2004:123]²⁰, already defined the end goal of education as “all-round development of human abilities” or “comprehensive development of personality”. However, a totally unheralded and even inconceivable fate awaited the formulation in the late post-Soviet period. Namely, it was used to describe the meta-goal, the paramount mission of the whole Soviet project: “Harmonious and all-round human development is the ultimate goal of the communist society.”²¹ Naturally, the wording was not borrowed by the Bolsheviks from Russian pedagogical discourse²²; its significance rested on a different source of legitimacy. Below, we will investigate into this remarkable story.

The proposition that “the proletarian social revolution” will lead to “planned organization of the social production process so as to satisfy the needs and ensure well-being and all-round development for all the members of society” is contained in the 1903 maximum program of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party and has that very flavor of the paramount mission of the party’s projected reforms. The point was added to the program by Vladimir Lenin himself [1967:232]. However, it was not articulated but simply copied, in a somewhat modified form, from the Erfurt Program adopted by the Social Democratic Party of Germany in 1891, which postulated that the ultimate goal of transforming the capitalist private ownership into social property and developing socialist production was to change the productivity of social labor “into a source of the greatest welfare and universal, harmonious perfection” (*allseitiger harmonischer Vervollkommnung*). Drafted with the direct participation of Friedrich Engels, the Erfurt Program was influenced by Marxist philosophy more than any other policy document. The text was edited multiple times in the process of drafting, but that

²⁰ Published in 1865.

²¹ Quoted after the entry “Personality” by Igor Kon in the 3rd edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia. Provisions classifying “all-round, harmonious development of personality” and “formation of comprehensively developed personality” among the fundamental goals of the Soviet society were part of the 1961 and 1986 Programs of the CPSU, respectively.

²² At the beginning of the 20th century, the formulation was also brought back to light in Russian pedagogy by neo-Kantians deeply engaged in elaborating philosophy of education, Sergiusz Hessen and Moisey Rubinshteyn in the first place. In his policy article of 1913, Rubinshteyn defined the main objective of pedagogy as “to identify the means and ways of raising a human being into a *fully-rounded both physically and spiritually, strong, viable, social, self-regulatory, culturally creative moral power*. All of those characteristics can be brought together in the concept of *well-rounded personality*...” [Rubinshteyn 2008:268] Yet, the influence of that neo-Kantian component on the Soviet pedagogical discourse could have hardly been considerable. Hessen finished his major piece of work on pedagogy [Hessen 1995] in exile (the book was published in Berlin in 1923). Rubinshteyn’s publications had declined in number by the mid-1920s; it was not until 1950 that a large-scale study of his, devoted to reading in school, came off the press [Rubinshteyn 1950].

particular point was not mentioned by Engels in his notes on the final version [Engels 1962]. Therefore, it is quite safe to assume that the concept of “universal, harmonious perfection” had also permeated the program from neo-Kantianism, as revisionist Eduard Bernstein, who worked on the final text with Karl Kautsky, supported the idea of Kantian revision of the ideas of German social democracy²³.

The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in 1919 was followed by adoption of another program, the Program of the R.C.P.(B.), which moved the said meta-goal far into the background. Only the public education section contained a goal defined as “the complete application of the principles of the uniform labor schools <...> in order to train fully educated members of communist society.” The formulation was basically abandoned in the mobilization discourse of the Soviet cultural revolution of the 1920–1930s. It found its way back to the Soviet “authoritative discourse”²⁴—as inherited by the late Soviet period—through Stalin’s works prepared for the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). That was when the “all-round development” formulation was revisited as the paramount meta-goal of cultural policy in the socialist society: “It is necessary <...> to ensure such a cultural advancement of society as will secure for all members of society the all-round development of their physical and mental abilities.” Later on, the formulation was routinely reproduced in the Soviet discourse associated with the party’s cultur-

²³ “Kant wider cant”, says his famous epigraph based on a German-English wordplay [Bernstein 1902:168].

²⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin’s “authoritative discourse” theory modified by Alexei Yurchak to describe the discursive characteristics of the late Soviet period is designed to explain the mechanism ensuring persistence of ideological language inherited from the Stalinist phase throughout that period. According to this theoretical model, Stalin was the last “master” external to authoritative discourse, evaluating public statements as correct or incorrect from the point of view of the “objective” truth under the Marxist-Leninist canon. “Since indisputable knowledge of the objective truth canon was only available to the *master* of authoritative discourse,” Yurchak further explains, “a clear idea of that external canon disappeared as soon as the *master* was gone. The objective, independent, external model of language to look up to while generating texts was no longer available, which resulted in growing uncertainty among those who had to produce documents and reports in the language of authoritative genres on a regular basis about whether their own texts and statements were ideologically correct in their form. The only reliable strategy to make sure that their texts were not stylistically inaccurate was to replicate the fixed structures produced earlier by someone else—from one context to another, over and over again.” [Yurchak 2014:74] (TN: *For the purposes of this article, this fragment was translated from the Russian-language version of ‘Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation,’ even though the book was originally published in English.*) History of the formulation of “all-round” or “harmonious” human development is well within Yurchak’s model of the “authoritative discourse” mechanism, which, as we can see, survived into the post-Soviet period in this regard.

al and ideological objectives until it made it into Russia's present-day core documents on education and cultural policy. However, it has only been used ritually since then, "all-round" or "harmonious development" being declared as a self-evident end without explaining the actual purpose. Contrariwise, the "master" external to the authoritative discourse provides an exhaustive explanation of the pragmatic value of "all-round development of human abilities", which is necessary "so that the members of society may be in a position to receive an education sufficient to enable them to be active agents of social development, and in a position freely to choose their occupations and not be tied all their lives, owing to the existing division of labor, to some one occupation." [Stalin 1952:68–69] In this case, however, Stalin himself establishes an even more authoritative discourse—that of Karl Marx's utopianism. The latter suggested that the communist society would put an end to division of labor: "in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic." [Marx, Engels 1955:31–32] Stalin's argument on freedom of occupational choice in the socialist society, therefore, can be interpreted as an intermediate step toward complete elimination of occupational confinement in the communist utopia.

The end of the 1950s witnessed another discursive shift, which keeps influencing Russia's cultural and educational policy even today. Back then, cultural policy ceased to be understood in the mobilization terms of "formation" of the New Man or new communities (such as "new" *intelligentsia* or Soviet *nationalities*); instead, it was redefined in the terms of routine "satisfaction of cultural requirements" and "raising the cultural level of workers" (CPSU Statute of 1952). The revolutionary and mobilization discourse of the cultural revolution gave way to that of "peaceful cultural education"²⁵. Transition to the next stage of cultural policy was marked by Stalin's "basic economic law of socialism", defined as "the securing of the maximum satisfaction of the constantly rising material and cultural requirements of the whole of society through the continuous expansion and perfection of socialist

²⁵ This formulation, already used by Stalin at the last pre-war Congress, marked the closing stage of the second (final) phase of socialism construction [*18th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks. March 10–21, 1939. Verbatim Report*, Moscow: OGIZ; Politizdat, p. 35]. The "peaceful" phase followed the period of "cultural revolution", the completion of which Stalin also reported during that last pre-war Congress. Discursive transformation of the early 1950s analyzed here could have occurred earlier if it had not been for post-war censorship measures.

production on the basis of higher techniques.” [Stalin 1952:40] Thereby, “revolutionary” political rhetoric in Soviet cultural policy gave way to the “discourse of needs and services” [Rindzevičiūtė 2008:100], which involved, in particular, prioritizing heavy industry over culture— from then on, investments in cultural infrastructure never approached the second five-year plan targets. That discourse of “needs and services” keeps being reproduced in Russia’s national cultural policy today, even though its origin is wrongfully and rather insistently dated back to the post-Soviet era by the critics, who associate it with the rise of marketplace economy in Russia²⁶. One thing, however, that the formulation “formation of harmoniously developed personality” has preserved from the mobilization period of the cultural revolution is the concept of “formation”. Such a modality is clearly a fundamental violation of one of the principles of liberal education, which holds that education is a product of learner’s self-directed effort, not manipulative “formation” from the outside.

Origins of the Liberal Model of Education: The Social Context

Theory of liberal education is centered on the developing personality’s internal effort, seeing education as the ultimate end of human existence—which means that a human being has to learn, i. e. change, throughout their life. This theory is a fairly convincing and consistent response to the stressful new type of sociocultural experience—which is, in Freud’s terminology, sort of the primal scene (*Urszene*) of the liberal theory of education, introducing us to its architectonics and key principles. The theory, then, is an attempt to provide an answer to the new situation in European culture that followed the French revolution, which shattered all the then-existing social and political institutions and threw the society into volatility and uncertainty. That new situation was documented perfectly well by the major representatives of classical German philosophy of university. Henrick Steffens described the new social reality as follows: “... suddenly, a stir swept over everything, making it impossible for us to fumble for any firm belief. All the elements of life have been shaken; the states we belong to have been staggered; the forms of life that seemed unassailable have suddenly started fading away; loyalty to the king and homeland is sinking into doubt; and even the most consistent prudent reason-

²⁶ For example, the project of Federal Law “On Culture” postulates the following: “At the same time, culture has been approached over the past 25 years as part of the so-called social sphere, which allows classifying certain types of cultural activities and national cultural development in general as services rendered to individuals and legal entities.” (Project of Federal Law “On Culture”, designed by the working group on developing the project and draft of Federal Law “On Culture” established by Presidential Decree No. 217 of March 29, 2018. The document is published on the website of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation on March 23, 2019: https://www.mkrf.ru/press/current/kontseptsiya_proekta_federalnogo_zakona_o_kulture/).

ing distrusts itself the very next moment.” [Steffens 1964:317] That experience can be defined as keen stress over the advent of the volatile era of modernity which superseded the stable one of traditional society. A frantic search for ways of finding certainty and firm anchors to hold onto amidst the turmoil, transformation and collapse of the institutions led to the emergence of such phenomena as political romanticism, historicism, and a number of other critical theories of the modern society. Wilhelm von Humboldt—one of the most mobile and informed philosophers of his time, along with his brother Alexander von Humboldt—came up with his theory of education as a response to the situation described. In his manuscript *On the Spirit of Mankind* (1797), he wrote: “When everything outside and around us is wobbling, it is in our inner life alone that we can find an asylum; and when all the relationships have truly gone upside down in the most significant and civilized part of the Earth, doubts arise on how long the existing order will last in the other parts of it.” In an era of inevitably losing the bearings and stability typical of traditional institutions, human self-education becomes the only safe foothold, “the first and the ultimate measure,” or “the vantage point <...> from which anything can be subject to comparison and judgment.” [Humboldt 1960:506; 511–512] “According to Humboldt, man needs education to find his bearings in the world of modernity, which is a broken world that has lost all security,” explains Franz-Michael Konrad [Konrad 2010:42] Therefore, the idea of lifelong learning and all-round development is premised not only on teleology (as Kant puts it) or the doctrine of a utopian future in which occupational self-estrangement should be abolished (as in Marxism), but also on perfectly positive practical grounds. The world has been set in motion, and there is no indication that it will consolidate one day in certain forms of institutional, organizational, or occupational order. In a changing world like that, a human being can only trust oneself and one’s own judgments and should develop an ability to adapt constantly to the changes (“learning to learn”), as none of the specific skills acquired guarantees long-term stability or certainty.

Industrial Society and Criticism of the Liberal Model

In order to explain the contemporary meaning of Humboldt’s classical theory of liberal education, it appears productive to put it into the context of fierce criticism, which investigates the fundamental socio-cultural conditions that could render the liberal model invalid. Contrary to expectations, it is not present-day texts about the “crisis” of the Humboldtian university, as shallow as they are numerous, that provide the most biting and competent criticism of this type. The most devastating blows were inflicted upon the model in the 1960s, during the post-war period of mass industrial society heyday and stabilization.

An exemplary version of deep criticism of the liberal education theory can be found in the works of German sociologist Friedrich Tenbrück. He regards the classical German ideal of education as a reac-

tion to the structural transformation that started at the turn of the 19th century and was associated with the dawn of modernity, focusing primarily on the emancipatory potential of the new society. The liberal model of education set individuals free from the previously established standardized forms of life, introducing them to the opportunities for self-determination through learning: “In so far as new structural relationships offered no standardized individual behavioral model yet, the man entered the realm of public openness (*Offenheit*). Where new, socially unstandardized life opportunities and limits of the mind opened up, human existence (*Dasein*) could only be stabilized through free cultural evolution of such openness.” This reasoning is generally in line with the above logic of regarding the liberal model as a response to the loss of institutional and social role stability which was typical of the traditional class-based society. However, the situation changes dramatically, Tenbruck believes, in a society with stabilized social and institutional structures, which is the case of modern industrial society. That leads to specific “dysfunctionality” of liberal education, including “education through science”, in the present-day world. “Today,” Tenbruck points out, “no mysterious uncertainty is floating in the morning air anymore, luring and even urging individuals into adventures to engage with their own personal existence. On the contrary, we are now offered an endless array of socially standardized forms of meaning, models, and behavioral patterns that are merely outward imitations. As for modern young people, they are connected to the full social reality of adult human existence ever since their childhood, having an unlimited access to the prefabricated (*vorfabrizierten*) ways of filling the free space of their private lives. Relief from social pressure and anticipation of human existence through imagination have been forced out by a firm touch with concrete reality. <...> Thereby, science has ceased to be the medium in which individuality could unfurl, find shelter, and win—as there is no need for it anymore. The whole “spiritual” sphere becomes irrelevant to real life as a result of social solidification of human existence. <...> Apparently, society has gained sufficient stability in the seamless interpenetration of organized spheres of life to think of personal education as of something that can be basically rejected, both objectively and subjectively. In this world of organized personal achievements and professional competence, education finds no responsible audience anymore—and nor does the graduate, pressed into this world, find any self-expression. The epoch of high culture, which automatically assigned a paramount role and status to education, has sunken into the past under the pressure of the new restructuring of society, which not only rendered the type of education obtained by returning to the private sphere invalid but also stifled it.” [Tenbruck 1962:377; 407; 413]. Otherwise speaking, the liberal model of education proceeded from the premise that an individual should find an anchor in the changing world inside oneself, for which purpose it developed an “internal”, subjective dimension of individuality

and fostered specific competences associated with a high level of predicted social uncertainty. However, the world has changed. The stable industrial society of the 1960s, as Tenbruck asserts, ultimately stabilized not only the occupational hierarchies of social roles but also the private sphere of leisure, which appears depleted in its dynamic and diversity—all of that shaping a society with “seamless interpenetration of organized spheres of life.” Those critical speculations of Tenbruck, partially sympathized by Helmut Schelsky, a major German sociologist and reformer of German universities in the post-war Western Germany [Schelsky 2013; Schelsky 1963], are certainly the most compelling arguments against implementability of the liberal model.

The New Uncertainty: Revisiting the Relevance of the Liberal Model of Education

Critical arguments made by social theorists and sociologists during the golden age of industrial society cannot be considered convincing enough today. Prompted by accelerating modernity, developed countries have dismantled their industrial societies, which also found expression in various theories of postindustrial society, knowledge society, etc. The social structures and occupational roles of today do not possess the stability that Tenbruck used as a vantage point for his reflections on social standardization of contemporary society. Instead, there has been an acute volatility of institutions, social and occupational roles—which finds a socio-theoretical manifestation in the popularity of the book named *Liquid Modernity* [Bauman 2008]. Let us now dwell into the dynamics of those transitions within the framework of social theory and propose a new meaningfulness to the triad of traditional, industrial, and postindustrial society from the perspective of educational issues. An essential prefatory remark that should be made here consists in reminding the famous formulation, “modernity is synchronism of the asynchronous” (H. Lübbe, J. Habermas), which means that modern societies do not evolve straightforwardly but diversify, incorporating large segments of earlier epochs that never go away and making traditional society as important a part of today’s reality as the postindustrial stage²⁷.

Traditional society is a society in which basic social and occupa-

²⁷ For instance, the study of Guglielmo Barone and Sauro Mocetti examining intergenerational mobility “in the very long run” (1427–2011) in the city of Florence shows that intergenerational elasticity (the key indicator of social mobility) has seen no revolutionary change over the last nearly six centuries, although it did decrease from 0.8 to 0.4 since the times of Cosimo di Giovanni de’ Medici (the higher the coefficient, the lower social mobility). Meanwhile, Barone and Mocetti find a positive and statistically significant correlation for lawyers, bankers and goldsmiths and a positive but not significant correlation for doctors and pharmacists in the dynastic transmission of profession—which is a strong evidence of the medieval career inheritance model being still reproduced in certain elite professions even in highly developed European countries [Barone, Mocetti 2016:35; 31].

tional roles remain consistent throughout long periods of time. Knowledge and skills are translated, almost unchanged, from one generation to another within traditional extended families and stable guild communities. Senior generations' world knowledge is perceived as the best possible and the most reliable type of knowledge, being associated with growing experience in the fixed, lived-in reality.

Transition to modernity (including both industrial and postindustrial phases) was not only about a fundamental reorganization—specifically, the emergence of differentiated political, economic, cultural, and other institutions. It also *accelerated civilization growth*, which was keenly experienced by the contemporaries as shaking of “all the elements of life,” as we have seen above. The world is growing indefinite; knowledge of the world is not guaranteed by age-earned experience of previous generations anymore; obsolescence of life experience exchanged between generations leads to a generation gap. Since the industrial revolution took off, Hermann Lübbe points out, “civilization growth has reached a level where it became non-encompassable and aggressive as to the benefits and downsides within the life cycle of those three generations that were able to exchange their life experience directly.” [Lübbe 2016:313] The *liberal model of education* is born *at the moment of transition* from traditional to modern society, as oneself and one's ability to adapt to unpredictable changes begin to be regarded as the only trusted anchor amidst the turbulence. In fact, that exactly involves learning constantly, learning to learn, and being ready to face sudden changes in social roles—which precisely requires “harmonious development of all human abilities”, should Humboldt's formulation be translated from the language of neo-humanistic romanticism into that of social pragmatic theory.

The *industrial* civilization of the modern age, having survived a long and dramatic transition from traditional to modern lifestyle, is also stabilized—within the limits of a certain period. In particular, it shapes a system of modern educational institutions to compensate for the nuclear family's inability to socialize their children appropriately and ensure that they learn a trade. The stage of industrial society as such can be defined as a period during which an individual had to go through a system of educational institutions to learn a standardized set of social and occupational roles that allowed them to forecast and fulfill a predictable life trajectory within their generation, i. e. before they died. In other words, industrial society is a model of traditional society within a single generation.

The *postindustrial* society emerges because mass implementation of that predictable trajectory becomes impossible. There is no more set of those “socially standardized forms of meaning, models, and behavioral patterns that are merely outward imitations”, on which Tenbruck premised his critical analysis of the classical liberal model, that would secure a safe behavioral trajectory throughout a human life today. Acceleration pervades deeper and deeper into the whole spec-

trum of social and occupational roles and behavioral patterns. Continuous advancement of technology results in the rapid obsolescence of professions and the emergence of new ones²⁸, which are not expected to live long either. The upcoming, already unfolding fourth (or fifth) industrial revolution, associated with a new wave of automation substituting for labor [Schwab 2017], is fraught with all the standardized, i. e. automatable, professions vanishing completely. Meanwhile, the importance of creativity and soft skills, which are hardly going to be automated soon, is gaining more recognition. Declarations about the increased role of the humanities, coming today from the technological frontiers of the economy [Perrault 2016], are growing in number. And, even if predictions about everything nearing inevitable automation are not trusted implicitly, occupations not requiring consistent retraining are hard to imagine today even in the most stable professions. Hence the ubiquitous popularity of the idea of *lifelong learning* [Field 2006], which massively brings the liberal perception of education as learning to learn back into relevance. Concurrently with the ideas of new liberalization and humanitarization of education, criticism is raised against the institutions of standardized education that emerged during the industrial stage (e. g. [Robinson 2012]). Similar changes have been observed in leisure and lifestyle. The growing individualism and “inward orientation”, manifested in the urge to intensify one’s emotional life in the “experiential society” [Schulze 2005], results not only in searching for a more personalized way of living, individualization, and de-standardization of the consumption and leisure behavioral models but also in the development of inner, personal competences to achieve that emotional intensity. Andreas Reckwitz, one of the most distinguished contemporary cultural sociologists in Europe, considers the personal competences of “cultural valorization” (i. e. the ability to assign cultural value to subjects, objects, and practices) to be the key element of the cultural “society of singularities.” [Reckwitz 2017] Finally, new volatility comes to the standard social roles, first of all those within the family. It has to do with the transformation of gender roles—which manifests itself in that the boundaries and nature of “female” and “male” are being continuously redefined and the new dimension of “third gender” has been added—and family behavior patterns. Diversity of social and occupational roles that an individual is going to learn throughout their life is also boosted by the demographic factor of growing life expectancy. Those are the self-explanatory arguments for the relevance of the liberal model of education.

The past two centuries have seen a variety of modes of reasoning as to why the model of liberal education has outlived its usefulness, blaming it for being outdated, irrelevant to modern reality, ideologi-

²⁸ See, for instance, [Frey, Osborne 2013; Dobbs, Manyika, Woetzel 2015]. See also the Atlas of Emerging Jobs, a project developed by the Skolkovo Innovation Center: <http://atlas100.ru>

cally detrimental, etc. However, all of those speculations are underpinned, this way or another, by the idea that society (at a national or global scale) has moved to a stage of new, ultimate stability. Meanwhile, the skeptical experience surrounding any such assumptions indicates that they will prove unviable or hyperbolic sooner or later. That is why the liberal education model has remained relevant in so far as the current circumstances match the “primal scene” of its inception—the situation of transition from traditional to modern society—associated with unpredictable institutional shifts and a dramatic acceleration of civilization growth which broke the structure of social roles that had been reproduced over long periods of time. Jean-François Lyotard, who diagnosed an end to the era of industrial stability of European societies in his theory of “postmodern”, described the closure between the modern times and the nascent stage of modernity by saying that “postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but a nascent state, and this state is recurrent.” [Lyotard 2008:28]

As an objection to the arguments above, it could be said that increased significance of liberal education is not verified by demand for it, at least in present-day Russia. A response to that objection could be that demand for professions associated with stable positions on the labor market in the future is certainly a measure of the intention to invest one’s human capital (or, more often, the human capital of one’s children) in absolutely risk-free occupational-role assets. However, that very intention is a product of extremely high volatility which objectively dominates the labor market and which our contemporaries are keenly aware of. Therefore, objective delusiveness of such expectations does not cancel the predictable demand for relevant types of professional education.

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