Knowledge as Responsibility: Universities and Society

Irit Keynan

Abstract

This essay proposes three principles that defined genuine social responsibility, and suggests that while universities claimed to be committed to this idea, many adopted social responsibility only superficially. Consequently, universities indirectly exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities and overlooked their obligation to search for truth.

Introduction

Individuals are responsible for society, but society is also responsible for the individuals, lest they live in the world as merely biological or physical creations, lest they translate this world into the language of the elementary levels of their existence. —Nathan Rotenstreich, philosopher (1914–1993)

Pondering the third millennium, Gerhard Casper, Stanford University's president at the time, predicted that universities would have to justify their existence in the face of new alternative trends *(Casper, 1996)*. His statement echoed growing concerns regarding the status and future of universities that were shared by many scholars around the world at the turn of the new millennium, albeit for diverse reasons *(Watson, Hollister, Stroud, & Babcock, 2011)*. The academic communities of the United States and Europe shared a sense of confusion and anxiety in view of new trends that were shifting intellectual centers of gravity beyond the borders of academic institutions *(Lock & Lorenz, 2007)*. In Israel, amid serious cutbacks in resources (government spending per student was slashed by 20% between 2001 and 2007; *Shohat Committee, 2007*) and persistent brain drain *(Ben-David, 2008)*, unease about the declining status of universities prompted Israeli scholars to engage in soul searching regarding the public role of universities (e.g., Forum for Defending Public Education, http://www.publiceducation.org.il) and triggered a public debate over who should bear the responsibility for reducing the growing socioeconomic inequality in Israeli society *(Keynan, 2005)*.

Concerns about universities' status and roles in society have resurfaced since the eruption of the 2008 economic crisis, espe-

cially in the United States. In the analyses of the roots of this crisis, several fingers were pointed at academic economists, who were blamed for their excessive focus on theoretical modeling that masked social and economic reality *(Lawson, 2009)*. Moreover, deep involvement of many academics as consultants to the U.S. financial industry triggered concerns about potential conflicts of interest between these scholars' research and other activities and the extent to which their theories were influenced by their economic interests *(Posner, 2009)*. At the same time, U.S. universities' financial vulnerability was heightened by the postcrisis erosion of funds that caused many states to slash their support for higher education *(Bordwin, 2012)*. These developments added to the sense of crisis, which was shared by universities throughout the Western world despite differences in the nature of the crisis in various countries. Among several strategies to overcome the crisis, universities made efforts to increase their legitimacy in the community and gain greater public support by projecting an image as socially committed institutions that make valuable contributions to society and are also intensively engaged in the community.

Focusing on both Israel and the United States, this paper's main argument is that although universities claim to be engaged and involved with society, committed to diversity and to serving the public, many of them are in fact distanced from these missions and from social responsibility in its broad and comprehensive meaning. In a way, universities exist for society—they educate, they invent new ideas, develop medications, engineer solutions—yet they fail to understand and adopt the full meaning of social responsibility. This essay contends that social responsibility as an all-inclusive concept is an integral part of the universities' public role and of the foundation on which many universities were established. Many universities today, however, are typically isolated and detached from profound social issues; they offer limited accessibility and diversity; and they typically avoid addressing highly controversial issues altogether. In practice, many universities pay lip service to social responsibility to allay growing public concerns about social issues, and they confuse it with community service, which in itself is regarded as a marginal, add-on activity *(Keynan, 2005, 2009)*. At the same time, they circumvent policies that would make social responsibility an integral part of academic life and work. I contend that such conduct by universities leads to academia's denial of the responsibilities of knowledge, and possibly to its neglect of the search for truth, the foremost undertaking on which the entire idea of academic freedom is based *(Rubinstein, 2010)*. Moreover, by

failing to implement a broad view of social responsibility, universities have become indirect contributors to growing socioeconomic inequalities.

In this essay I first propose a definition for valid social responsibility based on three principles that are necessary components of a bona fide socially responsible policy, thus extending the debate about the idea of engaged scholarship and civic engagement. I then describe the public roles of universities and analyze the extent to which universities' behavior conforms to the principles of genuine social responsibility. In what follows, I explore whether universities satisfy these requirements in terms of providing equal access to educational opportunities and faculty participation. The next section questions the view that universities are engaged mainly in the "search for truth" and explores the relationship between those endeavors and social responsibility. Conclusions are presented in the last section.

What Is Social Responsibility?

Despite worldwide growing engagement with social responsibility, an accepted definition of the term has yet to be established *(Schwartz, 2011)*. This is true for social responsibility in general, social responsibility of public organizations, and corporate social responsibility in the private sector. Of the three concepts, the last is the most commonly used and is well accepted in the business sector; nonetheless, ambiguous language and widely varying definitions for corporate social responsibility *(Argandona, 2009)* reflect diverse theoretical approaches *(Garriga & Mele, 2004)* that fail to offer clear definitions or guidelines for socially responsible behavior of business organizations. Most discussions on corporate social responsibility focus on the responsibility of businesses to "give back" to society, which is usually interpreted as philanthropy *(Carroll, 1991; Carroll & Shabana, 2010)*. Other discussions focus on corporate social responsibility as a managerial tool to gain increased legitimacy for businesses and deflect outside criticism *(Karnani, 2010)* or to give the business a competitive advantage *(Porter & Kramer, 2002)*. Ambiguity surrounding the meaning and demands of social responsibility also exists in civil society and social service organizations that embrace the concept either by providing health and welfare services or through advocacy and social change. In theory as well as in practice, social responsibility in public organizations is still in its infancy.

The debate over the definition of social responsibility has sharpened in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008 *(Argandona, 2009; Kemper & Martin, 2010)* as clashes between free market and neoliberal perceptions, on the one hand, and supporters of a more moderate capitalism, on the other hand, have intensified *(Posner, 2009)*. In Israel, this debate has been going on for over a decade, side by side with increasing privatization *(Gotwin, 2000; Hanin, 2000; Keynan, 2006)*, and has been recently rekindled by the massive middle-class protest of summer 2011 *(Spivak & Wolfson, 2011)*.

As for universities, although universities in most Western countries emphasize their commitment to social responsibility and even boast of their diversity, social consciousness, and involvement in the surrounding community, too little attention has been devoted to a genuine discussion of the duties that social responsibility entails; the social responsibility of universities as a subject of academic study has attracted even less attention *(Geary-Schneider, 2000)*. This may explain why universities that are extensively involved in community service confuse this activity with social responsibility and are bewildered about the significance of what they are doing in this area *(Bok, 2001)*.

Based on philosophical writings *(Nussbaum, 2003; Rawls, 1985; Rotenstreich, 1964; Sen, 1980),* as well as on the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*1948*) (which includes social rights), I argue that any vision of social responsibility, for either a single institution or an entire sector of society, should be grounded in the following principles.

- **Principle A. Equal Rights:** A democratic society must be committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all its members; protecting minority rights, human rights, and civil rights (obviously including the right to equal education); and enabling all citizens to participate in social, economic, cultural, and political life, regardless of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, race, or religion.

- **Principle B**. **Capability:** Rights are considered secured to people only when they possess the capabilities to realize them.

- **Principle C**. **Mutual Responsibility:** Individuals are responsible for society, but society is also responsible for the individual. Similar to equal rights, this criterion is also a fundamental principle of all democratic societies, albeit in different levels of commitment.

I have chosen these three criteria for theoretical as well as practical reasons. As will later be discussed in this essay, both in North America and in Israel most universities consider their role in preparing the younger generation for democratic life part of their contribution to the public good and claim this as an important justification for public support for their activities. Therefore, the theoretical framework of social responsibility criteria in this essay is based on fundamental democratic values—equal rights and mutual responsibility between the collective and the individual. The capability principle connects the theoretical reason to the practical one. It is a part of the theoretical framework that also provides a concrete way of examining the other two criteria. Since capability means that rights are considered secured to people only when they possess the abilities to realize them, this criterion allows universities to examine their own social responsibility through various dimensions such as accessibility for students and diversity of faculty—dimensions which will be discussed and examined in further detail.

These principles are amalgamated with the view that the responsibility for the nature of a democratic society rests on all individuals and on all private, public, and governmental organizations and entities in that society. Furthermore, these principles necessitate a combination of avoidance and activity *(Keynan, 2009)*: avoidance of actions that contradict the stated principles and a proactive pursuit to implement them, including action to correct social situations deviating from these principles, even when such actions constitute a challenge to the existing social order. Thus, I suggest defining social responsibility as institutional or individual action to apply the principles of equal rights, capability, and mutual responsibility to all members of society. The requirements of this definition are all the more relevant and should be even stricter for universities, which, as educational institutions that train future leaders, have the greatest formative influence on the future.

Many scholars and universities take part in a variety of activities to generate knowledge and practices that make a difference in communities, addressing a myriad of social problems. Significant efforts to conceptualize these activities have been made over the last decade, but despite these efforts, a "definitional anarchy," as Sandmann *(2008, p. 91)* puts it, still exists. This essay contributes to this debate and to the conceptualization process by extending it to a broader view of engaged scholarship and by posing the question of engaged scholarship for what? Whereas the four punctuations (phases of change) presented by Sandmann *(2008)* mostly reflect

the actual activities and benefits of partnerships between academia and the community and the different ways and tools to exercise them, this essay combines the substance of outreach and engagement with the duties that adopting these concepts imposes on the inner life of universities. This is accomplished by proposing a broader argument that posits engaged scholarship as social responsibility defined by the three criteria of equal rights, capability, and mutual responsibility.

The Public Role of Universities

Before proceeding to assess universities' current commitment to social responsibility as measured by the application of principles of equal rights, capability, and mutual responsibility, it is important to acknowledge that the public role of universities is a subject of disagreement among academicians, policy makers, and educators. Although there is a growing movement to encourage outreach, civic engagement, and social responsibility in higher education *(Hollister et al., 2012; Sandmann, 2008)*, many scholars object to the very notion that universities bear any civic or social responsibility, and insist that the duties of universities and scholars are limited to research, curricular development, and "meeting classes, keeping up in the discipline, assigning and correcting papers, opening up new areas of scholarship and so on" *(Fish, 2004, para. 6)*. Others may hold a broader view, but many faculty members do not consider social responsibility to be part of the university's functions *(Checkoway, 2001; Fish, 2004; Silberscheid, 2004; Stanton & Wagner, 2006; Tsui, 2000; Ziv, 1990)*. They see themselves primarily as researchers who have a second career as teachers, and their commitment to their academic disciplines does not typically translate into a commitment to social responsibility or involvement in community engagement. Such commitment is even considered a potential threat to their professional advancement within an academic organizational culture that typically instructs faculty to focus exclusively on research, publication, and teaching and offers no rewards for social engagement. This same organizational culture prevents most faculty members from fighting for social causes inside the university (such as living wage payments for janitors and guards, diversity in all ranks and categories of university personnel, and greater access for students), either because they are too busy with their own work and publishing race or because they prefer not to be marked as "troublemakers."

Consequently, even in institutions that consider themselves committed to what they see as social responsibility, faculty members are trapped in the publish-or-perish race, graduate students are

expected "to abandon anything not connected to progress toward the degree" *(Salazar, interview,* cited in *Stanton & Wagner, 2006, p. 2),* and social responsibility is channeled mainly to undergraduate students' volunteer work in the community. Indeed, despite ongoing efforts by scholars who are involved in the movement to renew universities' civic responsibility, most faculty members continue to believe that the social mission of their university is solely the responsibility of university administrators, either as part of undergraduates' obligations or as part of community relations *(Stanton & Wagner, 2006).*

This attitude, combined with lack of relevant curricula, clearly conveys to the same students who volunteer in the community that civic engagement is a less important work, limited to undergraduate students: This subtext is communicated when social responsibility is relegated to the status of an elective, extracurricular activity that is excluded from the university's criteria of outstanding performance. Although community service experience occasionally confers an advantage to students who compete for admission to graduate programs, the civic passion that students possess as talented and engaged undergraduates quickly dissipates in graduate school in the absence of institutional nurturing and support *(Stanton & Wagner, 2006).* Consequently, despite the increasing number of students who are active in U.S. university-run community programs, studies report a sharp decline in involvement immediately after graduation *(Thornton & Jaeger, 2006).* These studies associate this phenomenon with the general campus culture which, explicitly and implicitly, conveys a clear list of priorities that students should adopt in the pursuit of their career; social responsibility is not high on this list. It seems then that a genuine acceptance of civic responsibility as part of the university's mission is possible only when organizational structures are established to encourage faculty members to see such work as central to their academic work *(Harkavy & Hartley, 2012).*

Many scholars argue that universities should focus on the search for truth; for example, Harvard University's motto is Veritas, the Latin word for truth *(Harvard University, 2012).* This idea can be interpreted reductively as striving to explain rather than change the world: that is, to focus on research and teaching, disassociated from political, social, and financial concerns and to assign to other institutions the obligation to teach democratic skills, provide experiences in democratic practices, and pursue implementation of democratic principles *(Fish, 2004).* The search for truth can, however, be interpreted expansively and viewed as one of the central anchors of

academia, entailing active involvement in social and even political issues *(Zimmerman, 2005)* through education directed toward the pursuit of meaning, justice, and knowledge *(Gur-Zeev, 1997)*. Such an interpretation seems to align with the idea of genuine academic freedom which is aimed at giving scholars the freedom and security they need to express new, nonconformist views that may challenge the existing social order without fear of losing their job or status *(Rubinstein, 2010)*.

Notwithstanding this debate, within the framework of the nation–state, since its establishment the modern university has been perceived, by both its founders and itself, as having some public role. The essence of this role has changed from place to place and from period to period, but it has existed since von Humboldt, in the wake of the defeat at the hands of Napoleon's army, assigned to the University of Berlin the task of strengthening Prussian national culture *(Guri-Rosenblit, 2005)*. In North America, many research universities were founded as land-grant universities with social-civic aims, to prepare the younger generation for active participation in a democratic society and for the development of knowledge and improvement of the community *(Checkoway, 2001; Vogelgesang, Gilliam, O'Byrne, & Leal-Sotelo, 2006)*. The role of universities in preparing the younger generation for democratic life was declared by a national U.S. commission on higher education in the 1950s *(Bok, 2001)*, and its vital significance was emphasized in 1957 by Judge Earl Warren, 14th Chief Justice of the United States, in a ruling that stressed and reinforced the importance of academic freedom *(Sweezy vs. New Hampshire,* cited in *Rubinstein, 2010)*.

Paradoxically, it is this public/national role that may have planted the seed of universities' current conformity and loyalty to the nation–state, resulting in their avoidance of controversial social issues or challenges to the existing social order. Indeed, American universities gradually assumed an obligation to promote various national interests, especially following the Second World War, with the implementation of the policy proposed by Dr. Vannevar Bush, scientific adviser to President Roosevelt, in a report titled *Science: The Endless Frontier (Bush, 1945)*. American universities were enlisted to serve the needs of the cold war and to maintain U.S. competitive capability in the global economy. By the mid-1950s, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Johns Hopkins were placed on the list of the nation's top 100 federal contractors, and in 1968 more than a third of the $3 billion that American universities spent on research and development came from federal defense-related agencies. Enlistment, however, had its price. State

universities' increasing dependency on these funds strongly influenced institutions' educational mission *(Heineman, 1994)*. As higher education expanded dramatically in the 20th century, increased demands to support technical scholarship and to prepare professional practitioners also diverted attention from the university's civic mission *(for a detailed analysis of the civic mission of universities, see Stanton & Wagner, 2006)*.

The 1960s produced important critical schools of thought, and many students and faculty became deeply involved in a nonconformist wave and in the antiwar movement *(Heineman, 1994)*. However, the post–civil rights era saw a powerful backlash, marked by growing advocacy for market interests over social needs, and universities—like other institutions of public life—came under attack by proponents of neoliberalism and corporate values *(Giroux & Giroux, 2004)*. The effect of the 1960s thus dissipated and have been replaced by policies of the Milton Friedman school.

Several prominent universities, led by the University of Chicago's Department of Economics, played a leading role in the triumph of the free market economy, which somehow fit the American myth of unlimited possibilities and guaranteed success to all, depending exclusively on personal effort. Hence, utilitarian and neoliberal beliefs came to dominate society, overriding the values of the social contract and of sharing the common good among all members of society. This shift of perspective was, however, a Pyrrhic victory that created a social reality in which tens of millions of Americans lack health insurance, and the number of Americans who live in poverty rises steadily. In 2011, 46.2 million Americans (about 14% of the population) lived below official poverty level *(Tabernise, 2011)*, and twice as many Americans lived in families with incomes below the minimum standard of living *(Lin & Bernstein, 2008)*.

The encroachment of corporate values had its impact on universities, too, and especially on their budget allocation decisions. One consequence of the infiltration of a corporate ethos is soaring tuition levels that increasingly distance the American dream of unlimited possibilities from those segments of society who need it most. The 47% increase in tuition at 4-year public colleges and universities since the 1990s *(Giroux, 2005)* had a profound impact on lower income families, whose share of income for tuition rose sky high. In 2000, covering tuition called for 25% of the income of families in the lowest quintile but only 7% and 2.5% of the income of third and first quintile families, respectively. Despite financial aid programs and scholarships, family wealth and income remain

the best predictors, better even than academic preparation, of who will attend a university and of that institution's prestigiousness (*National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2000*). In other words, through this indirect means universities have become an ever larger part of the engines that exacerbate social inequalities.

At the same time and perhaps partially because of the social consequences of their recent neoliberal orientation, universities, including highly renowned research-oriented universities, have increasingly been called to adopt civic engagement activities as an essential part of their mission and to integrate social responsibility and education into academic work and life on campus in ways that do not limit these pursuits to students' service in the community *(Bok, 2001)*. This refreshing yet still modest trend is based on the view that the very survival of democracy depends on increasing citizen participation in democratic processes, and therefore universities should prepare students in all fields of study for lifetimes of active citizenship *(Hollister, Mead, & Wilson, 2006)*. These demands echoed public commentary in numerous communities such as Los Angeles, which began to seriously question its universities' commitment to contributing to the public good *(Vogelgesang et al., 2006)*. Similar appeals were expressed all across the United States, sometimes by university scholars themselves who called for reinstating the civic role of universities and censured universities' disengagement from their civic role and from society's needs. According to Checkoway *(2001)*, "The dilemma is that these universities have increased in resources, diversified their activities, and exceeded their expectations. But they also have become, like Kafka's castle, 'vast, remote, inaccessible'" *(p. 129)*. It would be safe to conclude that American higher education is currently oriented toward a policy that promotes the development of profitable, privatized programs and avoids involvement in controversial social issues. Despite scholarships and financial aid to students in need, resulting tuition and admission standards benefit those with a better socioeconomic starting point. As a result, insufficient attention has been given to critical thinking about the roots of the current social order or discussions of alternatives.

In Israel, similar trends can be traced. During the first decades after independence, the universities considered themselves part of the Israeli establishment, whose role was to lay the foundations of the state and shape national culture *(Ram, 1993)*. Today, Israeli universities continue to perceive themselves as having a public role in diverse areas: universities conduct basic research that supports the development of competitive products, they invest efforts into

preserving national cultural treasures, and they claim to reduce inequalities between social groups and between the center and the periphery *(Shohat Committee, 2007)*. Although most universities in Israel seem to recognize their public social role, similarly to their American counterparts, they unfortunately follow corporate organizations and entities and narrow their interpretation of social responsibility to limited community service which is usually performed by students in return for scholarships or as part of their practicum, disconnected from broader understanding of societal issues.

Objections mentioned above to the very notion that universities bear any civic or social responsibility resemble Milton Friedman's view that the firm's sole social responsibility is to maximize its profits *(Friedman, 1970)* and the claim that corporations are accountable only to their stockholders, arguments that currently seem dated. In effect, regarding universities' community service as a bona fide substitute for a comprehensive ethical policy of social responsibility resembles the typical corporate adoption of the restricted and erroneous interpretation of corporate social responsibility as merely "doing good" or "giving back" to society, activities they interpret as elective, add-on philanthropic projects rather than comprehensive social responsibility principles that should be integrated into all dimensions of corporate life and conduct. Like many businesses, universities are confusing responsibility with community service. Although undergraduate volunteering in the community is important and should not be discounted, it is no substitute for comprehensive social responsibility and civic education and the overall obligations imposed by genuine social responsibility.

The concept of social responsibility as defined above, I argue, should be the anchor of universities' public role. Social responsibility complements the nature and essence of universities and should be cultivated as an integral part of academic life. The principles of social responsibility should be the backbone of universities' ethical behavior. Furthermore, as mentioned above, as social and intellectual elite institutions, universities should assume a greater obligation to promote the notion and principles of social responsibility.

In order to advance the discussion toward an adoption of these ideas by universities, it is necessary first to examine the distance between their current policies and the suggested definition of social responsibility. Below, I show how universities today fail to meet these principles in three important dimensions: accessibility for students, representativeness of faculty, and the search for truth as

the cornerstone of academic endeavor. These essential pillars of higher education, which encompass the educators, the educated, and the most fundamental ethos of academic learning, reflect three main aspects of the responsibilities of knowledge and of the relationship between universities and society.

Access to Higher Education

What role, if any, do universities in the United States and Israel currently play in guaranteeing equal access to educational opportunities? Both in Israel and in the United States, higher education has remained stratified despite increasing enrollment of students from low-income families. In Israel, the expansion of the higher education system, which began in the 1990s, led to significant growth in the number of students, although, as illustrated below, it did not reduce inequality in access to higher education. The establishment of many new public and private colleges reduced cultural filtering to some degree by reducing academic admission barriers yet at the same time created a different type of hierarchical pyramidal system *(Dagan-Buzaglo, 2007)*: At the peak are the research universities, which are the sole institutions certified to award Ph.D. degrees. In the middle are private colleges, which offer undergraduate, MA, and MBA (but not Ph.D.) programs in sought-after disciplines such as business management, psychology, and law. At the bottom are the public colleges, which primarily offer undergraduate programs in less lucrative career options such as humanities and the social sciences, which generate lower incomes for graduates. Because public funding is based on criteria that include research achievements, public colleges receive limited funding compared to the universities. Although 22% of all students were enrolled in public colleges in 2005, these colleges were allocated only 14% of the entire government budget for higher education.

This situation reinforces the link between financial ability and access to higher education. Students who have financial means but do not meet the higher academic standards of the research universities tend to choose private over public colleges. Although tuition is higher (up to four times higher than public university tuition), private colleges offer prestigious specialization programs with good market prospects *(Tamir, 2002)*. Tuition in public colleges is lower and similar to the tuition of research universities (which in Israel are all public), but public colleges offer limited programs. Since students from lower socioeconomic sectors face greater difficulties in meeting research university admission requirements (due to the lower educational standards of elementary and high schools in

low-income neighborhoods), many apply to public colleges. In the 2003–2004 academic year, 55.5% of public college students came from low socioeconomic status localities, as opposed to only 26.5% of private college students *(Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel, 2006)*. The pyramid structure of higher education in Israel thus preserves stratification in higher education even though the overall number of students is on the rise.

Distributive injustice is closely intertwined with cultural injustice (injustice of recognition), and the two types of injustice feed and strengthen each other *(Fraser, 1999)*. This is clearly reflected in Israeli data that show a growing correlation between representation in higher education and stratification by income and ethnicity *(Bolotin, Shavit, & Ayalon, 2002)*. Despite fluctuations over time, enrollment rates of students of Sephardi origin (one of two major Jewish ethnic groups, constituting almost 50% of the Jewish population yet overrepresented in low socioeconomic localities) have not changed significantly since the 1970s, and their representation in universities remains far lower than their proportion in the general population *(Shavit, Cohen, Steier, & Bolotin, 2000; Yogev, 2000)*. In 2010, only one quarter of all Jewish undergraduate students were of Sephardi origin, a low percentage relative to their 50% share of the Jewish population *(Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel, 2011)*. Arabs account for almost 20% of the country's population, yet Arab students are similarly underrepresented. Despite an improvement in their representation (from 7.9% of all undergraduates in 1985 to 12.2% in 2009), underrepresentation is growing with regard to graduate and doctoral students *(Shetol-Trauring, 2011)*. In view of Israel's expanding knowledge economy, which reduces the earning capability of individuals who lack higher education, unequal access to higher education has become a significant cause of the widening socioeconomic gaps over the past three decades *(Ben-David, 2003)*.

In the United States, the statistics are even more striking. According to *Lost Opportunity*, a national report prepared by the Schott Foundation for Public Education *(2009)*, Native American, Black, Hispanic, and Latino students, taken together, have just over half of the probability of studying in the nation's best-supported, best-performing schools compared to the nation's White, non-Latino students. Moreover, a low-income student of any race or ethnicity similarly has just over half the probability of studying in top-tier schools compared to the average White, non-Latino student. Another report indicates that the median income of entering freshmen at the 297 colleges participating in the American

Freshmen Survey rose from 46% in 1971 to 60% above the national average in 2005 *(Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Korn, 2007)*.

Moreover, a recent study found that although low-income U.S. students have made substantial gains in academic achievements since the 1970s, wealthier students made even stronger gains over the same period in both course grades and test scores, ensuring a competitive advantage in the market for selective college admissions. One example of phenomena underlying the continuity of educational gaps is reflected in research on the new digital divide *(Jackson et al., 2008)*. The research shows that parent sociodemographic characteristics predict the intensity and nature of the child's use of information technology, which itself predicts academic performance. Thus, even if low-income students satisfy academic admission requirements of selective, top-tier schools, stratification largely remains unchanged *(Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011)*. Consequently, only around 2% of the students in the 146 most selective colleges and universities in the United States come from the bottom socioeconomic quarter of the American population *(Michaels, 2011)*.

Because of the strong connection between recognition and distributive injustice *(Fraser, 1999)*, Black individuals, for example, have a greater probability of being poor than do White individuals. This is clearly reflected by the lower percentage of Black individuals in high-ranking universities compared with their overall enrollment in higher education. In 2011, Blacks accounted for about 12.6% of the general population *(U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)* and 11% of all enrollees in 4-year colleges but only about 5% of all enrollees in elite universities *(Michaels, 2011)*. In other words, although most universities proudly tout their diversity, the access they offer to different ethnic and income groups is far from equal.

Representativeness Among the Faculty

Disparities in ethnic representativeness are even greater among faculty members of higher education institutions. In Israel, Ashkenazi Jews comprise 90.12% of all faculty in the higher education system. Of these, men have a clear majority, accounting for 72.98% of all faculty members. Sephardi men and women account for only 7.23% and 1.7% of all faculty members, respectively *(Blachman, 2006)*, despite accounting for about half of the Jewish population. As for Arab faculty members, although their numbers increased by over 2 percentage points from 1999 to June 2011 (from 0.5% to 2.7%; *Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 1999*; *Shetol-*

Trauring, 2011), their representation still is extremely low compared with their 20% share of the country's population.

In the United States, ethnic minorities are also seriously under-represented among faculty: 5.5% of faculty members are African Americans, 7.5% are Asian Americans, and only 3.5% are Hispanic or Latino Americans (Latino Americans alone account for 17% of the total population). Non-White groups together make up a mere 17% of all faculty members in American universities and colleges *(Turner, González, & Wood, 2008)*, although they account for 27.6% of the general population *(U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)*. Diversity among faculty is even more limited at select, high-ranking universities. For example, according to UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) statistics of 2011 *(UCLA, n.d.)*, Hispanics and Latinos constitute 38% of California's population and African Americans constitute 6%, yet these groups make up only 6.2% and 3.5% of UCLA faculty, respectively. Non-White ethnic groups in total account for 26.3% of faculty, due mainly to the faculty's makeup of 16% Asian Americans, mostly men.

Adequate diversity of faculty has implications that extend beyond mitigating the risk of academia becoming a kind of "exclusive club." Underrepresentation of minority groups impacts the academic discourse, which consequently remains controlled by the homogeneous elite group. Dominant groups, albeit possibly unconsciously, tend to marginalize and even deny the existence of issues such as inequality, racism, and other outcomes of the power relations between the majority and minority groups. In this manner, minority underrepresentation in academia also perpetuates the unequal relationship outside academia, and preserves the cultural domination of the majority group. The marginalized groups remain mostly research topics, their voices unheard in the knowledge creation process *(e.g., Zaken, n.d.)*. By playing an important role in training elite groups, academia, the gateway to socially prestigious and high-income careers, reproduces these unequal relationships between the dominant and the marginalized groups and re-injects them into society.

Naturally, the perpetuation of these disparities in higher education and their rectification are not the responsibility of universities alone. Since rights are not secured unless people possess the capabilities to realize them (Principle B, above), increasing access to higher education should be addressed through cooperation between the primary and secondary education system and universities and led by the state. Nonetheless, since universities are responsible for higher education and thus for their institutional

policies of accessibility and diversity, it is not enough that universities provide financial aid to the few who, against all odds, meet their selective admission requirements. Socially responsible universities should reach out to underprivileged communities and create programs for increasing access, combined with financial aid and academic support programs to facilitate admission of students who might have achieved a suitable or above average standard had they been educated in a better learning environment. These methods have been proven in pilot programs successfully implemented in several universities in Israel *(Dagan-Buzaglo, 2007)*. The idea is not to lower the standards of university admissions requirements but to enable groups from underprivileged backgrounds to close the gaps and meet both academic and financial requirements.

The Search for Truth

Because they are knowledge-building institutions, universities bear responsibility for linking social responsibility and the search for truth. This responsibility calls for research priorities that focus not only on scientists' personal areas of interest but also on pressing social and humanistic issues, a commitment to the perpetual search for innovative ideas, and the transformation of knowledge into universal principles. Such an orientation toward universal truth is, as von Humboldt implied *(Biesta, 2007)*, the latent "potential of enlightenment" of higher education and should concern the entire human race: the individual, society, and the state. In other words, the search for truth is not meant to create an ivory tower detached from the issues that trouble society or the state because then the universal principles would exist in a vacuum. The search for truth should extend from the circle of faculty and students to the community outside the academic world and promote self-edification and the study of principles that transcend and challenge the reality of a specific (or existing) social order.

The "potential of enlightenment" in research is embodied in scholars' courage and willingness to challenge dominant knowledge structures, myths, and beliefs and to reexamine the axioms of what is conveniently well accepted. Therefore, the responsibility of universities also demands that educating students to social responsibility extend beyond the realm of theory to include teaching students to become politically involved citizens who are willing to participate in correcting what is wrong in society. As former Harvard University president Derek Bok *(2001)* stated, it is not enough to encourage undergraduates to volunteer in soup kitchens; educators must also motivate students to explore the reasons for such

grave poverty and what should be done on the national level to solve this problem. Students should be encouraged to examine different socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and sociophilosophical theories; understand what social responsibility and civic responsibility mean; and acquire the thinking tools that citizens need to form their own judgments about the policies that politicians propose and implement. For faculty members to give students such guidance, they must apply these ideas themselves. Naturally, faculty members come up against serious dilemmas in this context, and they have to decide when and how to share their knowledge and expertise *(Peters, Alter, & Schwartzbach, 2008)*. However, it is important to realize that refraining from involvement in social issues does not lead to objectivity or neutrality. Instead, such avoidance is often a deliberate choice to not involve science in this arena and is equivalent to de facto support of the status quo, which strengthens academic institutions' conformity, supports the ruling powers, and prevents change.

Chief among obstacles to realizing the "potential of enlightenment" is that the evaluation and promotions of academic faculty are not based on their accomplishments in the search for truth or on their successful preparation of students for socially responsible citizenship. Advancement in academic ranking and tenure is based mainly on the number of publications in high-ranking academic journals that target an exclusive community of researchers or on the size of research grants, some of which are awarded by corporate, political, and religious interest groups. Such an evaluation procedure intensifies academia's alienation from the concerns of society at large *(Rice & Sorcinelli, 2002)* and focuses faculty members on learning the shortest, most efficient way to obtain funding for and publish their research. Such evaluation criteria do not inspire exploration of new or controversial ideas or encourage rigorous ethical thinking concerning the interests of the grant givers. On the contrary, these publish-or-perish criteria encourage conformism, idea recycling *(Checkoway, 2001)*, and disregard of conflicts of interests.

Scholars are often aware of the problematic aspects of academic criteria for success. However, only few publicly criticize academia's tendency to prefer mainstream views *(Hopwood, 2007)* and its ivory tower-like isolationism, which create a "careerist rather than curiosity-oriented" approach to "an increasing amount of research" *(Hopwood, 2008, p. 4)*. This observation is true not only for professional areas such as accounting and engineering but also for

disciplines that are more socially critical in their nature *(Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2005; Ram, 2005; Rice & Sorcinelli, 2002)*.

In this context, a reexamination of the 2008 economic crisis is unavoidable. It is essential to revisit the public role played by university scholars, especially economics and finance professors, before and during the crisis and wonder why so many of them failed to reconsider their theories in the face of the growing housing bubble, uncontrolled rise in the volume of mortgage-backed securities, and flood of risky subprime loans to millions of low-income borrowers. These scholars' (mis)conduct is especially glaring since these were the same scholars who allegedly participated in community affairs through their intensive involvement in the "real world" of financial markets *(Posner, 2009)*. Their involvement was not, however, based on a standpoint of critical thinking and social responsibility but was rather motivated by profit making from consulting for such entities as monetary funds and investment banks and therefore was strongly tainted by conflicts of interest. As Posner *(2009)* stated, "If they criticize the industry and suggest tighter regulation, they may become black sheep and lose lucrative consultantships" *(p. 259)*.

Moreover, the involvement of so many university economists in the precrisis economy suggests that so-called scholarly neutrality is an illusion. Universities became captives of corporate values and methods that had been permeating them in recent decades *(Giroux, 2007)*, and scholars were frequently blind to the broader impact of their ideas, especially on the communities from which they became increasingly detached. Such involvement in the finance industry is in total contradiction both to scholarly neutrality and to the search for truth and in fact represents the triumph of corporate values over the potential of enlightenment.

To inspire critical and fruitful thinking in the spirit of the search for truth, a totally different dialogue with the community is required. This dialogue should embrace diverse perspectives that challenge scientific thinking and examine the impact of the issues at hand on all segments of society while recognizing the value of knowledge created through shared learning and incorporating additional voices as "new chairs" at the research table *(Nyden, Figert, Shibely, & Burrows, 1997)*.

Not all researchers would agree with this approach. The debate is related to a dispute between conservative positivistic approaches that separate objective scientific research from its subjective social context versus other, mainly critical, approaches that reject the existence of scientific neutrality. Without delving deeply into the

argument, I concur with Ram's *(2005)* analysis of the interme- diate approach of critical modernism, which concludes that the "internal" and "external" social can no longer be separated by a bubble of objectivity, fundamentally because science is influenced by its writers who are living in and are influenced by the same social exterior. Drawing on Bruno Latour *(1993,* cited in *Ram, 2005)*, Ram suggests an approach that blurs the subject-object dichotomy, so that the empirical is neither disconnected nor derived from the sociocultural existence but is intertwined with it. This approach replaces the epistemological ideal of a single, putatively neutral point of view with a multiviewpoint, nonneutral perspective. Applying this approach to the relationship between academic scholars and the surrounding communities, the research process should assume the form of a constant dialogue between researcher and research "subjects," who are not merely subjects but active par- ticipants in the research process *(Nowotny et al., 2005)*.

Much of the objection to a challenge to the existing order, which is the natural outcome of the search for truth, stems from the common interpretation of such challenges as political action, in the sense of either support for or opposition to the actions and policies of political-party agents. Almost 100 years ago, French essayist Julien Benda *(1927/2009)* censured the growing number of intellectuals who abandoned their attachment to the traditional panoply of philosophical and scholarly ideals, referring to their abandonment of the universal in favor of the various particular- isms in order to support current social and political trends *(Kimball, 1992)*. In other words, Benda condemned scholars for aligning with transient trends and relinquishing their obligation to challenge the existing order and elevate intellectual thought into universal ideals.

The search for truth is essential to overcome mediocre con- formist thinking that cannot support the pursuit of alternative solutions to existing structures. Only the search for truth can encourage bold, honest, and innovative thinking that considers the universal good and the interests and needs of all segments of society in the spirit of the social responsibility principles defined above. Paraphrasing the goals set by the U.S.-Based Center for a Public Anthropology *(2012),* the search for truth must be real- ized through a number of underlying aims: to engage academia in issues and audiences beyond today's self-imposed disciplinary boundaries, to focus on conversations with broad audiences about comprehensive concerns, and to address general critical concerns in ways that can reframe and alleviate—if not necessarily always

resolve—present-day dilemmas, while at the same time reinvigorating academic disciplines.

Conclusion

In this essay, I outline three required principles, derived from the writings of prominent theoreticians and philosophers in the area of democracy and social justice and from the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*, which genuine social responsibility programs should adopt. These principles include the concept of equal rights, the requisite that rights are secured only if they can be exercised (capability), and the notion of mutual responsibility between the collective and the individual. I argue that universities should actively strive to implement these principles in their policies and programs throughout campus life and work as some universities already do *(Harkavy & Hartley, 2012)* and in the spirit of the emerging civic engagement and responsibility movement in American higher education *(Hollister et al., 2012; Peters et al., 2008)*. However, many universities today embrace a narrower notion of social responsibility, one that avoids the more profound commitment to the concept of social responsibility suggested here, confusing it with community service. They pay lip service to the equal rights principle while effectively ignoring the principles of capability and mutual responsibility. By doing so, universities avoid the responsibility that knowledge entails and become further removed from their potential to challenge reality with critical thinking. Consciously or subconsciously, their values are becoming alarmingly close to those of various interest groups such as corporations and political parties (mainly those in power). By failing to adopt a comprehensive view of social responsibility, universities have also become direct and indirect accomplices in the exclusion of large groups from higher education and in the marginalization of issues of socioeconomic significance. This failure is especially disappointing vis-à-vis the proven success of pilot programs for increasing accessibility combined with financial aid and academic support in which the participants closed the achievement gaps and met the required academic standards.

The purpose of this essay is not to chastise universities for the shortcomings in their social responsibility programs but rather to point to some necessary remedies. Those academic institutions that believe they are doing everything necessary in the social responsibility arena must be alerted to the need for a major change in their approach to social responsibility. This essay suggests a new concept that directs attention to the remedies for lack of social responsi-

bility in many universities and for the confusion in others between community service and genuine social responsibility. So far there are only a few universities that choose to adopt this concept, and hopefully they show first signs of the beginning of a new phase *(a punctuation, in [Sandmann's, 2008], terminology)* in the development of the conceptualization of engaged scholarship.

Important buds of change in this direction have emerged over the last decade. The Talloires Network, which was initiated by Tufts University and founded in 2005 by 29 university presidents, vice chancellors, and rectors from 23 countries, had grown by 2012 to over 240 universities in 62 countries *(Hollister et al., 2012)*. The network works to raise the profile of university civic engagement and social responsibility based on its members' belief that universities "do not exist in isolation from society, nor from the communities in which we are located" and that they carry "a unique obligation to listen, understand, and contribute to social transformation and development" *(Bacow, 2011, p. xxi)*. The network is based on a previous model adopted by Tufts University which brings together students, faculty, alumni, and the broader community in pursuing active citizenship to support the democratic ideal *(Hollister et al, 2006)*. As Vuyisa Tanga, vice-chancellor of Cape Peninsula University of Technology, said "we (the member universities) share the belief that we should change the academic paradigm from the notion of ivory tower to an open space for learning and development." *(*cited in *Hollister et al., 2012)*

The member universities of the Talloires Network provide evidence of success in applying the concept of social responsibility. For example, at the University of Haifa in Israel, the president created an advisor for social responsibility position to strengthen and coordinate the university's activities in this realm. For several years, the university expanded and deepened its social responsibility programming in multiple dimensions. The work and successes of the University of Haifa, which has a diverse student body (Arab students account for more than 20% of the student population) and makes conspicuous efforts to keep it that way, are extensively described in Watson et al. *(2011)*. The university adopted a comprehensive concept of social responsibility which included multiple dimensions such as academic work, community involvement, and campus life. Applying this concept led the university to emphasize academic work as the driving force for social responsibility, and to involve faculty members both in outreach and engagement in the community and in internal remedies for injustice (living wage, multiculturalism issues, accessibility, and representativeness).

Faculty members were encouraged to research the most crucial issues on the Israeli social agenda, and their work was presented in national and broadly publicized conferences on social responsibility. Faculty members were also encouraged to extend and apply their research to public decision-making in order to increase the impact of their scholarship *(Watson et al., 2011)*. One unique illustration for the accomplishments of this social responsibility concept is the establishment of Kav-Mashve, an employers' coalition for employment equality for Arab university graduates. The coalition, now independent, was born in 2007 as one of the products of Haifa University's social responsibility annual conference and task forces, initiated and led by the advisor for social responsibility to the university's president at that time. The coalition, a direct product of academic work and social responsibility, has developed into an NGO, one of the most successful in Israel both in practical terms and in terms of changing the public discourse on this issue (see *http://www.kavmashve.org.il/en/home/page/12).*

Another significant sprout of change and strong evidence for the success of the concept has recently emerged in Israel in response to the huge student-led middle-class protest against the neoliberal economy in the summer of 2011. Faculty members from different disciplines undertook the task of rethinking fundamental socioeconomic issues, disseminating the new knowledge inside and outside the universities, and even participating in national-level negotiations on an overall change in the government's socioeconomic policies *(Yonah & Spivak, 2012)*. The impact of these scholars on the Israeli idea for the desired social order has been widely seen during the last election campaign.

Hopefully this essay will attract the attention of universities and inspire academicians to fully embrace their social mission. This requires a profound change in universities' conduct including more active involvement in education and in social and economic systems as well as significant monetary and intellectual investments. Such a transformation will not only benefit society but will also bring with it a new vitality and blossoming of academia itself.

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About the Author

Irit Keynan is affiliated with the College for Academic Studies, Or Yehuda, Israel, where she chairs the graduate program for education, society and culture at the school of education and the Institute for Civic Responsibility. She received her Ph.D. from Tel Aviv University, Israel. Her research interests include social justice, social responsibility, and multiculturalism and higher education.