

Paper Title: Points to establish the epistemological criteria to build a global university

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Abstract:

The constitution of a global university –including the different sciences, philosophy, religions and their theologies- is a very important and critical challenge. All the historical attempts to achieve a universal science since the Modern age have crashed against the two permanent temptations of thinking, i.e., eclecticism and syncretism.

In this paper, I will propose certain essential points to take into account. These are: a. Level of reliability of the disciplines. b. Their control from inside and outside. c. Epistemological institutions to ask for control.

1. Sciences

- a. The level of reliability of every science and theory comes from its coherence with its own methodology and the corroboration of the experience.
- b. The modern sciences have developed an internal control of themselves. Otherwise, philosophy can intervene on sciences, when they get outside of their field. Religion and theology also have the negative control on the conclusions of the sciences, if they affirm things beyond their methodologies (for example: inexistence of God, etc.).
- c. International and national sciences academies, universities, research institutions can be the natural and competent organisms of epistemological control.

2. Philosophy

- a. The plurality of philosophies inhibits a unique way of thinking. Anyway, this does not imply that the philosophical work is irrelevant to the human culture. On the contrary, philosophy is the only intellectual operation that can confer rationality to many fields of knowledge, including science and theology.
- b. The control of philosophy is produced by the practice of the rational discussion.
- c. Philosophical institutions, congresses, etc. can operate as an epistemological frame of dialogue. Perhaps, the ensemble of voices cannot be reached, but the action of a strong rationality is very important for the rest of the areas of knowledge.

3. Religion, Theology

- a. Reliability within religions is a very difficult topic. As their object of belief is a non-apprehensible and sensitive fact, they demand from the believers an act of faith. Anyway, the large and historical religions have developed

during their history a reflection about their object of faith, i.e., theology. It tends to introduce rationality into the exercise of faith. In this way, it adds criteria of reliability to the believers.

- b. The control of the objectivity of each religion comes from three ways: the original sources (holy books, etc.), the theology and the teaching of its leaders.
- c. The leaders and the central schools of theology are the epistemological institutions to ask for the control of objectivity in the religions

Biography:

LUCIO FLORIO is a theologian from La Plata, Argentina. He studied in La Plata, Rome and Buenos Aires, where he obtained the doctoral degree in Systematic Theology. He teaches in the High Seminary of La Plata, at the Catholic University of Argentina and the Santo Tomás de Aquino University, both of them in Buenos Aires. He is the director of the Argentinean edition of the *Communio* magazine. Florio has written many articles about Trinitarian theology and about topics of culture and theology. He also published in Spain the book: “*Mapa trinitario del mundo. Actualización del tema de la percepción del Dios trinitario en la experiencia histórica del creyente*” (*Trinitarian Map of the World. Updating of the Perception of the Trinitarian God in the Believer’s Historic Experience*), Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2000. In the last years, Florio has taken part in different meetings about science and religion. He was a lecturer at the Winter Workshop of the *Science and Religion Course Program: "Ciencia y Religión: Hacia una Nueva Cultura de Colaboración"*, which took place at the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (México), in January-February 2002; also at the meeting “L’Evoluzione. Crocevia di Scienza, Filosofia e Teologia”, Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, Rome, April 2002, with the lecture: “Trinity and Evolution”. Florio was also the President of the Organizing Committee of the International Meeting “Sciences, Philosophy and Theology: At the Search of a Worldview”, La Plata, August 20, 21, and 22, 2003, and the editor of the book with its lectures (*Dirección General de Escuelas*, La Plata, 2004). He was a lecturer in the XX meeting of the “European Society for the Study of Science and Theology”, April 2004, Barcelona, Spain. He also presented a paper on “Science and Religion in Argentina” at the 2004 Metanexus meeting, Science and Religion in Context.

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He also serves the Board of InterFASE, International Faith and Science Exchange, of Boston (USA) and is director of the Local Society of Science and Religion of La Plata, Metanexus Institute, since February 2004.

Dr. Florio is a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, La Plata Archdioceses, Argentina, and he has worked in parishes for some years. Now he is also devoted to the educational and theological work.

Paper Text:

1. The need for global views

The constitution of a global university –including different sciences, philosophies, religions and its theologies- is a particularly significant and critical challenge. Since Modern age, all the historical attempts to achieve a “universalis scientia” have crashed against the two permanent temptations of thinking, i.e., eclecticism and syncretism.

All along the XXth century there were calls to overcome “specialisms” which are an imperative need for the present century. For example, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset used to talk about the “barbarism of the specialism”. Likewise, Pope John Paul II in his encyclical “Fides et Ratio” assumed that the search of a synthesis or integrating views in the knowledge will constitute one of the challenges of the current century.

2. Some words to determine:

Specialisms: Since Middle Age, the specialization of different types of knowledges has become a real phenomenon. On the one hand, the evident advantage of such a complex view of reality as the one given by present time sciences. On the other, the negative isolation of the different fields. In other words, the evolution of knowledge has produced a collateral effect: it is almost impossible to pass through the interdisciplinary boundaries.

Encyclopedisms: It is an attempt to achieve a global view of superficial character, integrating limited knowledges from every discipline and subject.

Interdisciplines: A new way to get out of this epistemological apparently close way is by means of the so called interdisciplinary work. An attempt to integrate the disciplines by a collaboration between specialists, trying to interconnect them so as to achieve an integral view of the subject of study. The bioethics committees, which work at hospitals represent an example, where physicians, psychologists, and religious try to attain common criteria upon issues which are on the edge of ethics and biology. Many efforts are being done in this sense, as the one carried out by Metanexus. Some prefer to talk about “transdiscipline”, trying to discover the “isomorphisms” of the disciplines, i.e., the formal aspects that they share.

Worldview: This expression, which comes from the translation of the German word *Weltanschauung*, indicates the global view of the reality shaped by a man or a society. The worldview involves a certain philosophy and/or theology which organizes the perception of reality. It is often distinguished from “image of the world” (*Weltbild*), which is the picture of nature conformed by current time science. There is obviously a close relationship between them.

Some authors say that, as a consequence of the present situation -generically called postmodernism- it is very difficult to achieve a worldview. Fragmentariness seems to be included as an essential part of present time mentality.

Eclecticism: Anarchic integration of knowledges pertaining to different disciplines, where we often see the temptation not to respect each one’s autonomy and to synthesize them in a simplistic way.

Syncretism: Integration of religious elements without considering the objectivity of each of the religious traditions.

3. Reliability, control and institutions of reference of the different disciplines

In this paper, I will propose certain essential points to be taken into account in the determination of the different disciplines to be integrated in a global university: A.

The level of reliability of the disciplines. B. Their control from the inside and outside. C.

Epistemological institutions to ask for control.

3.1. Sciences

More recently in human history, sciences have taken an increasing density so as to become the hermeneutic horizon that most powerfully influences the understanding and transformation of the world. By means of a combination of experience and mathematization of the reality, the natural sciences offer the individual a perspective of the micro and macroscopic of the universe, absolutely superior to what he/she can sense as an isolated individual. A XXI century person knows there are bacteria and viruses, molecules and atoms, or infinitesimal realities; and he/she also knows that there are stars at thousand of million light years' distance and, consequently, of time; etc. This operates as a prodigious expansion of his/her observation of the landscape where he/she transits. The accumulation of observations, theories, evidences, etc. keeps building a complex of discipline bodies where individuals are apprehending data on the universe that shelters them and which they form part of.

Currently, the sciences have become the common ground for the understanding of reality. To a large degree, they are the "lingua franca" with which human and natural reality is considered. In China, France and Peru, research and communication methodology are the same, so in a sense, sciences do not have boundaries. Moreover, they conceive a world where there exists a certain objectivity and they want to understand it. If in ancient times, and even in modernity, philosophy was a tool for global thinking, today that role is played *overwhelmingly* by science. In his voluminous work *La investigación científica* (2000) the physicist and epistemologist Mario Bunge states: "Science is a style of thinking and acting: precisely, the most recent, the most universal and fruitful one of all the styles" (p. 3).¹

At the search of an integral knowledge – and of a global university-, sciences seem to have a common ground role, they are not a "calm sea of certainties" as the romantic positivists thought, but a restless world of debates, "falsation", and re-elaboration. For this reason, it is necessary to determinate their level of reliability so as to evaluate what can be considered as a true, probable or arguable knowledge.

On that score, I mention some points to be considered so as to think about the position of sciences in a global university:

The level of reliability of every science and theory comes from its coherence with its own methodology and the corroboration of the experience. The modern sciences have developed an internal control of themselves. Even the scientific community itself has been articulating some methodological criteria to guarantee the objectivity of its conclusions.

Otherwise, Philosophy can intervene on sciences, when they get outside their field. Religion and theology also have the negative control on the conclusions of the sciences, if they affirm things beyond their methodologies (for example: inexistence of God, etc.).

¹ "An aspect of objectivity that common sense and science share is *naturalism*, i.e., the reluctance to admit entities which are not natural (e.g. an abstract thought) and ways or sources of knowledge which are not natural (e.g. metaphysical intuition)." (p.4). This is about remarks that clearly show the autonomy of science but likewise look down on other ways of knowledge.

However, sciences themselves cannot *totally* determine the value of their knowledge. They have to appeal to the philosophical, epistemological level so as to evaluate what is dependable on the results of science. In effect, the sheer scientists do not have the last word because they generally apply a method within a certain paradigm (according to Thomas Kuhn's idea). In any case, a scientist who can also consider the scopes of his/her science, or a philosopher of the sciences who may assume them more generally will be able to evaluate its reliability. Likewise, it is necessary to discern carefully the application of a scientific method from what comes from meta-scientific values.

Can theologies take part in the determination of the contents of science? Two things must be mentioned. First, that they have done this all along history, sometimes in a very positive way. Let's take for instance the contribution of Judaism about the distinction of creation and creator which enabled the analysis of nature as an autonomous reality; the opening of universities and research centers in Europe under the influence of Christianity, etc.; and sometimes in a negative way, as in the case of Galileo Galilei, etc. Second, that the religions manage a negative control because they have to sustain certain hermeneutic frames of understanding: the idea of God, for instance, prevents the elaboration of a totally materialistic reality. For the same reason, it impels a more complex view of nature which integrates trans-empirical values.

International and national academies of science, universities, research institutions can be the natural and competent organisms of epistemological control.

A serious university must refer back to the instances of greater reliability. In the case of sciences, the academic and research centers of the highest level control the most valuable scientific advances. In this sense, a global university must be based on those knowledges which were more critically proved. Obviously, we always have to keep the canon that science is permanently developed and that one of its laws is its methodological temporariness.

3.2. Philosophy

A particular way of conscientious interpretation of the universe is philosophy. As a cultural fact, the philosophical thinking works as reference environment for the big questions about reality. It presents a full discursive weave that acts as a questioning frame and as an answering attempt about the mystery of the being. The mere presence of figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Hegel, etc., operates for a man as a strong horizon of confrontation with reality. The contact with the universal philosophical tradition provokes an arousal of lucidity, an interconnection of problems and solutions which have been accepted or rejected by others, a series of practical consequences which have taken shape in the concrete history of peoples.

The plurality of philosophies inhibits a unique way of thinking. Anyway, this does not imply that the philosophical work is irrelevant to the human culture. On the contrary, philosophy is the only intellectual operation that can confer rationality to many fields of knowledge, including science and theology.

The dialogue between science and religion is impossible without the mediation of philosophy. The scientific reason needs to elevate itself from its empirical-mathematical frame towards the abstract reason, so as to enter the scope of a broader understanding. The way from a "Weltbild" (scientific theory) to a "Weltanschauung" (worldview) presumes the intervention of the philosophical reason.

The control of philosophy is produced by the rational discussion. It is true that the philosophical world is highly heterogeneous and that there are certain philosophies which

are barely open to an integration of the scientific products. However, epistemology is where science can overstep its level of understanding. A certain integration of the scientific data with other fields of human knowledge can be achieved by means of the philosophical discussion, which presupposes a meta-scientific language.

Philosophical institutions, congresses, etc. can operate as an epistemological frame of dialogue. Perhaps, the ensemble of voices cannot be reached, but the action of a strong rationality is very important for the rest of the areas of knowledge.

3.3. Religion, Theology

3.3.1. Religions offer a horizon with the tonality of the Absolute: there is someone or something that transcends the relative and ephemeral dimensions of the rest of the landscape where man transits. This may be called “god” or “gods” and its fundamental feature is to appear as absolute. Historical religions have been built on this belief. In general terms, religions admit some kind of revelation or intercourse with divine beings. They may or may not have a personal character, but they all confer the human horizon its definite, “strong”, clear dimension. It is about the “Horizon” with capital letter under which the horizons of other cultural fields link up. In other words, there is something definite in the landscape, something that grants its ultimate tonality and consistency. Without it, the rest of the partial horizons lose its meaningfulness. In fact, the religious experience tends to confer a perspective centred in the absolute alterity of *someone* or *some ones* or *something* that provides a definite sense to the subject and his background. True to say, religion acts as an ultimate structure of configuration of the perception of the human being: there is nothing further; eventually, whatever there may be is a responsibility of the religious horizon.

Reliability within religions is a very difficult topic. As their object of belief is a non-apprehensible and sensitive fact, they demand from the believers an act of faith.

3.3.2. The control of the objectivity of each religion comes from three ways: the original sources (holy books, etc.), the theology and the teaching of its leaders.

The objectivity in the religious experience is essential, since in other way, it is submitted to subjectivity. Now, each religion has its own means to control objectivity. They can be summed up into three: A. The sources. B. The theological reflection. C. The teaching of its leaders.

A. The sources are the basic texts or traditions of each religion.

B. The historical religions have developed during their history a reflection about their object of faith, i.e., theology. It tends to introduce rationality into the exercise of faith. In this way, it adds criteria of reliability to the believers. Theology is the conjunction of the experience of the revealed religion plus the historical use of human rationality (Kern 1990). In a few words, theology is the intelligence of the faith -such as I present it based on my experience of the religious tradition itself. Theology can be considered as an objective frame of symbolic and speculative discourses that acts as a referent, either rational or trans-rational for the believer (Forte 1990). As a cultural fact, theology has had a high orientating efficiency: it has enlightened the formulation of faith confession, of the substrates of the moral life either individual or collective, of the religious art, of the concrete way of living spirituality, etc. Europe, for example, could be unthinkable without the influence of figures such as Saint Augustine, Saint Atanasio, Saint Maximus the Confessor, etc. That is to say, not only religion has a historical efficiency but also theology as a cultural fact. Christian theology in particular has used philosophy as a primary intellectual tool. Disciplines such as philology, literary criticism, etc., were also used but not until deep within Modern Age it had a secondary use as regards philosophy. From the XIX century an overwhelming

incorporation of scientific sciences –human and natural ones- takes place (Florio 2002). Naturally, this integration coincides with the notorious development of the sciences during the last two centuries. Nowadays a theology that excludes philology, history, text criticism, etc. is unthinkable¹. Diverse theological streams use other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, different versions of hermeneutics, etc.

C. The leaders and the central schools of theology are the epistemological institutions to ask for the control of objectivity in the religions.

3.3.3. In a global university which may try to incorporate the fundamental elements of the religious traditions, is it essential to refer back to present theologians and teachers. In the first case, and due to their plurality, we have to take into account mainly to the central schools of theology, those which have been more fruitful in history. Secondly, we have to interrogate the schools of the present time which more seriously articulate theologies for today's man.

In the second case, we have to consider the leaders. We have to determine clearly who represent these religions and how they do it. In some cases it is clearer because there exists a definite representation.

Otherwise, it is important to consider that the most number of religion criticizes every gnostic view that considers that salvation lies only in the accumulation of knowledges about reality. Different religions posit a salvific knowledge, which transcends what is merely cognitive.

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