

THE ASSESSMENT OF HUMANISTIC SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

1. General approach

The aim of this paper is to provide a framework and context for the process of reflexion during the AQU Workshops on research assessment procedures in the field of humanistic social knowledge. As to putting forward a catalogue of plausible evaluation criteria or sets of standards whereby consensus can be reached over the assessment of humanistic social research, the function of this framework should in any case derive from or be a conclusion of the series of papers being presented, together with the discussions that will take place in the workshops. As a framework document, the aim here is therefore to provide the basis for reflexion from which, through all of the other contributions that are made, certain conclusions can be legitimated that either establish or indicate guidelines and principles that in due course can help to enhance the processes whereby research is assessed.

The body of the text therefore focuses on two points: one, the aim of which is to establish awareness of the context for the analysis being made here, so as to better understand the process in which we find ourselves as the producers and transmitters of what is termed humanistic social knowledge, the proposed heading for which is the question: "A crisis of scientific universalism and its epistemological security?" The question is not mere rhetoric in that it points quite sincerely to the recognition of a panorama of real confusion regarding the role of a supposed *universalist science* that dates back to the eighteenth century, but which, especially since the nineteenth century onwards, has served as a legitimating paradigm for the intellectual and political hegemony of so-called Western society. I do this by making use of the terminology and discussing many of the ideas of the Yale University sociologist and historian Immanuel Wallerstein, the author of a short but highly interesting essay – from other points of view, as well as that which concerns us here – published in 2006 titled "European universalism – The rhetoric of power".¹ The other main part of the text, which is obviously articulated with the first part, is a reflexion on the characteristics that give value to humanistic social knowledge, which has yet to earn the recognition of the majority of citizens; this is presented under the heading: "The appraisal of humanistic social knowledge". And the idea of "appraisal" brings me to the concept that is the focus of these Workshops, namely "assessment",¹ the two words of course being synonyms of each other, although the use of each concept is quite different; before going any further, by 'appraisal' I mean the recognition – or lack – of the interest in and social acceptance of humanistic social research, and 'assessment' naturally

¹ Translator's note: The term "research assessment" was chosen over "research evaluation" for the purposes of this article.

being what concerns us here, namely, the technical evaluation of the quality of research work in terms of corresponding legal, administrative and economic purposes. The last part of the paper links the two concepts of 'appraisal' and 'assessment' as a way of presenting, as the heading quite literally says, "Various principles and criteria for assessing humanistic social research".

My aspiration is for the three parts as a whole to serve as a point of reference for discussion and, in the best-case scenario, to lay down the foundation for various broadly acceptable guidelines for research evaluation procedures within the fields of knowledge covered by the workshops.

2. A crisis of scientific universalism and its epistemological security?

Wallerstein correctly places the start of the split in human knowledge – which later turned principally into the topic of 'the separation of two cultures' (Snow, Cambridge, 1959) – humanistic and social, on the one hand, and hard science and technical, on the other – in the nineteenth century, when the empirical methods of what were called the 'natural sciences' had consolidated and began to obtain technically applicable results that were becoming increasingly spectacular. This gave them support and social prestige and, indirectly, recognition and the increasing allocation of resources by governments, which saw all kinds of great potential. Wallerstein says: "What was the epistemological debate underlying this separation? (...) The scientists maintained that it is only through their methods – empirical research based on provable hypotheses and/or what led to these – that 'truth' (a universal truth) could be reached. Experts in the field of the humanities strongly refuted this assumption. They stressed the role of penetration and analytical intuition, hermeneutical sensitivity and the empathy of *Verstehen* (understanding, comprehension) as a path to truth. The humanists claimed that their type of truth was more profound and just as universal as that underlying the scientists' generalisations, which were often seen as being precipitate. However, the most important thing was that experts in the humanities were giving more importance to the central role of values, goodness and beauty in the research of knowledge, whereas the scientists were asserting that science was neutral in relation to values, and that it could never be said that values were true or false. Therefore, they said, values were beyond the field of concern of science". The formal and visible justification, the discussion on the greater or lesser validity of the respective methods, was really concealing a more fundamental and highly important dispute, namely, the characteristic and ultimate object of the respective forms of knowledge; in the case of the natural sciences, the determination of regularities in the form of laws of nature, which constituted the determination of *truth*, whereas in the case of the humanities and social knowledge, it was a case of establishing what was good and beautiful, of the things that have *value* in life. There was a rupture in an old philosophical principle according to which *unum, verum et bonum – et pulchrum – convertuntur*: namely, that being and its transcendental properties – unity, truth, goodness and beauty – are interchangeable; the first being unity, which was of ontological value – being is one –

as well as epistemological – knowledge of the being, logically, is also one. A highly respectable principle of ontological and epistemological scope – dogmatism and scholasticism aside – was put aside and a radical division *naturalised* and *standardised* between truth (scientific and natural) and value (humanistic social), above all in a *de facto* way. The process from here on has been an unstoppable and rapid descent down the slope of division and subdivision into the infinite number of self-constituted fields of knowledge, each one tending towards existential autarchy with the corresponding, and often more supposed than real, epistemological self-sufficiency.

It is not a question of discussing the possibility of knowledge evolving autonomously, even to the point of fragmentation, but if focus is put on its evolutive and transforming capability, account must precisely be taken of the latest transformations it has undergone so far; in the penultimate one, it was envisaged that the *social sciences*, somewhere midway between the former humanities and the more modern empirical sciences, would decide between one or other of the epistemological paradigms. Broadly speaking, it can be asserted that, in the absence of any resounding unanimity, economics, political science and sociology tended towards the empirical sphere whereas history, anthropology and law quite clearly moved closer toward the humanistic model. Wallerstein himself however statesⁱⁱⁱ that, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, the borders between these nevertheless began to become progressively more blurred. The last evolutionary stage, since 1968, has been the institutional crisis of the structures of modern knowledge together with the structural crisis of the *world-system* – in his terminology – that has led to the intense questioning of the division between the two cultures from within both the natural sciences and the humanities.^{iv} As a complementary expression of the questioning of this, the social sciences themselves have been separated into their component parts and fragmented, and the overall picture of doubt and perplexity has but increased.

Universities meanwhile underwent intensive growth in the second half of the twentieth century to accommodate the boom in social demand for education and knowledge and, at the same time, the internal increase in new study programmes and research possibilities being offered; as a consequence of the increasing lack of funding due to the progressive rise in the cost of services, however, they had to begin to deal to a certain degree with market logic, and set up and turn the different economically viable patents and formulae that they create to commercial advantage, which tended towards externalisation of the production and exploitation of new knowledge. Knowledge tends to be measured by its capacity to produce wealth, which in turn produces more and more, although this undoubtedly means the universities began to lose autonomy; at the same time, other corporate and institutional bodies were producing more and more research, and the universities began to stop being what they were supposedly always meant to be, the sole source of knowledge production. Mention must of course be made of the universities because this is where humanistic social research and learning almost exclusively still takes place; these are the fields where the

'commodification' of knowledge production is not so easy and is less intensive, except for one branch of production between what is literary and artistic, namely, the media, which has a life unto itself and increasing power completely outside of academic institutions. Let's not get drawn astray, however, from the main theme under analysis.

The last, or latest, stage in the ongoing development of knowledge appears to be increasingly linked to a crisis that curiously includes a certain challenging of the renowned 'divide between the two cultures'. Studies on complexity in the natural sciences and those that Wallerstein calls 'cultural studies' in the humanities and social sciences show the need for the alleged autonomous epistemological sufficiency of each of these two worlds to be reviewed.

Studies on complexity in the natural sciences point to a rejection of the linear determinism that prevailed from Newton to Einstein;^v quantum physics would be the clearest expression of causalistic and linear simplicity being surmounted. In the humanistic social sphere, so-called 'cultural studies' will tend to destabilise an aged inertia towards universal norms of beauty and the ethical and legal implications of what is good; the eurocentrism of humanistic values is increasingly being recognised as an intolerable form of the domineering universalisation of a value system – of white, Western dominant ethnic groups – that clearly was and is as legitimate as it should have been and, above all and in particular, how it is meant to be understood.

Moreover, studies on both complexity and cultural studies have come to the conclusion that the epistemological distinction between the two cultures does not make any sense, intellectually speaking and that it is detrimental to the research of knowledge that is useful,^{vi} namely, it consistently serves the oneness of human and natural reality. Edgar Morin, amongst many others, has for some time been clamouring for the reestablishment of structures to articulate and reunify the fragmented diversity of knowledge, which only fragments self-understanding and thereby leads to the total incomprehension of phenomena, not just human and social, but even, and in particular, natural ones; above all, given our knowledge that advanced physics has definitively accepted the principle of the modification of natural observation and experimentation by the inescapable influence of the observer, which is none other than the human being. Morin argues reasonably that "disciplines fully justify themselves intellectually speaking provided they ensure a field of vision that recognises and conceives the existence of links and solidarities":^{vii} or can anybody defend the idea of a field of specialised knowledge – in whatever sphere – having any meaning unto only itself? Or that the selection of a fragment of reality is anything more than a functional strategy that is only justified if it can be overcome, i.e. through the recognition that, as a fragment of the whole, it only makes any sense in reference to – and as part of, or linked together, bound to, articulated and ultimately unified with – the whole?

As a way of recognising the immensity of the challenge facing the nature of human knowledge, currently being very effectively imitated by increasingly powerful artificial intelligence machines, it is useful to retrospect on the anecdote, reported by George Steiner, concerning a game of chess:^{viii} "A few months ago, the Deep Blue supercomputer won against the world chess champion, Kasparov. (...) It seems that, from Kasparov's notes on the game, there was one particularly extraordinary moment: the computer waited two minutes before making a move, similar more or less to a hundred thousand years on the scale of its electronic brain! And it made a move never ever seen before, never before understood, and which gave it victory. Kasparov noted: 'I understood it wasn't calculating, it was thinking!' How terrifying. I told one of my colleagues at Cambridge about this and he replied: 'Whoever told you thought is not a calculation?' And if he's right, that would be even more terrifying!" Without wanting to overstate the anecdote, the reflexion contained within it is interesting for what it points to, i.e. the border between neurological processes guided by determination and neurocognitive processes that are non-determined and open – free, in strong terminology – is an increasingly imprecise border. And this brings forward interesting considerations and challenges on three fronts: that all processes are either determined, but we don't control them, with freedom being a vain illusion (everything is a calculation, there is no thought); all processes are free, but we like to find statistical regularities that we precipitately yet erroneously convert into fixed laws (everything is thought and an open physical reality, and there are no insurmountable physical or mathematical determinations); or there exists the dual principle, which seems to be the one most usually assumed, of determination and freedom, although it is necessary to recognise that there is an increasing and substantial overlap or that the distinction unclear. In all three cases the humanistic social challenge is great, at least until a perfectly closed system – that, on the other hand, would clearly seem to be undesirable to us – unequivocally solves the big questions in life: those that affect the education of the free beings who we believe ourselves to be – and, therefore, educable in different ways, responsibility in life, the exercising of rights and even the possible criminal consequences of – and the legitimacy of the penalty or punishment for – our actions, because if there is no freedom there is no responsibility and without any responsibility there is no guilt; and, lastly, if there is no guilt, there is no legitimate penalty or punishment.

These last remarks bring us again more forcefully to the latest stage in the evolution of scientific knowledge, namely, the extreme complexity and indeterminacy, recognised by the positive or natural scientific sector, and the challenge of stable and supposedly universal norms of values, at a time when the very capacity to think about and the freedom to practice them seem more radically questionable.

We were saying that, in the quest for truly useful knowledge – not just utilitarian – in the life of human beings, there is a need in both the sciences and the humanities for cross-disciplinary epistemology and shared methodology in the production and dissemination of all types of

knowledge that incorporate the characteristic factors of the social sciences – in spite of their very disorientation and fragmentation – such as contextualisation, the recognition of the multiplicity of identities, the respect for and adaptation to mentalities and, lastly, the assessment of power vectors. Wallerstein calls this the "social scientisation"^{ix} of all knowledge. It would be a mistake to interpret this as meaning 'reducing' natural science to social science, in the same way that it has been an error to interpret social science as a reduction of natural science. In this endeavour for cross-disciplinary epistemology, the current of exchange could be highly beneficial: from the very search for the *social scientisation* of the scientific and natural world could come a reverse current of influence that would be equally desirable for humanistic social knowledge, for example the rigorous methodology of scientific research processes – not just a ridiculous superficial imitation of terminologies and forms of presentation, which has often occurred when attempts have been made to use non-standard methodologies that are normally well applied.

Wallerstein considers that scientific universalism is no longer unquestionable; it is the latest and most modern universalism of European origin, and as such has served to legitimate power in the contemporary age, although as we have seen it has been overwhelmed from within by both natural science and the humanities and social sciences, all of which has produced a crisis in the deep structures of knowledge production and dissemination. In the words of Wallerstein himself,^x "In short, the structures of knowledge have entered a period of anarchy and bifurcation, just like the modern world-system. The outcome of this crisis and bifurcation is likewise indeterminable. I believe that the evolution of the structures of knowledge is simply one part – and a significant part – of the evolution of the modern world-system. The structural crisis of one is the structural crisis of the other. The battle for the future will be fought on both fronts".

One part of the battle, which is needless to say minimal when considered on the global scale, is directly reflected in the systems for assessing research. They suffer from at least two problems: they seek a kind of certainty and security that have already been lost from the epistemological fundamentals themselves of the respective spheres of knowledge, together with a uniformity that has been missing in knowledge systems for some time now.

The appraisal of humanistic social knowledge

One prior, though obviously not formal, condition for legitimising the academic assessment of humanistic social research is precisely its prior social appraisal: although 'appraisal' and 'assessment' and are synonymous terms in that both essentially mean 'value appreciation', the real use of each one is strongly marked by the intellectual, ethical and social connotation in the case of 'appraisal' and a more quantitative, administrative and economic connotation in the case of

'assessment'². And we have known for some time that the use of language is more important than the actual language itself because language is in life, not in a dictionary (which, on the other hand, is a highly respectable, useful and possibly even enthralling object).

Focus should therefore be put on the extraordinary effectiveness – which we should enjoy and be unreservedly happy about – that the natural sciences have demonstrated in obtaining technical by-products and applications that are useful in thousands of ways in people's lives: this has fully legitimised the impetus of research in the natural sciences and the assessment and evaluation of the results and transfer of knowledge that this research constantly makes to improve economic production and the health and well-being of us all.

The same thing does not occur with knowledge – that we can and should call scientific – of a humanistic social nature, from which there are no useful applications in terms of productivity and people's well-being, and which is often considered purely as ornamental learning that is only given prestige by outdated elitist connotations and is possibly a waste of resources. The value placed on it by society is much lower, very generally speaking, than the value placed by society in its interest for the natural sciences and technology.

Consideration therefore needs to be given to how humanistic social knowledge deserves to be appraised; one problem that will certainly remain pending is how this appraisal, which in academic circles has no need to be defended in any special way, is disseminated and reaches society. Nevertheless, the endeavour to formulate the basis for its appraisal is at least a starting point, which is what we will subsequently be attempting to do in the AQU Workshop on research assessment procedures.

One prior consideration is that the drawbacks as a result of the inevitable simplification implied in one sole concept, that of humanistic social knowledge or of the 'human sciences', must be accepted; the fields of the humanities and social sciences are, in some cases, notably different, although it is also true that, beneath the differences, there is a very strong common body of methodologies, languages and approaches that focus on the human and social phenomenon, which is unique and singularly marked out by the fact that its main defining characteristic is the freedom with which this phenomenon unfolds and develops. Setting things in their place, but without wanting to establish any great thesis to such effect, it could be said that while knowledge from the sciences – with reservations regarding the more recent developments referred to above – is governed by the search for determinations that configure the so-called laws of nature, humanistic social knowledge is governed by the understanding of the indeterminate – or scantily determined – i.e. free nature of both the individual and human society and its evolution. On the one hand, there is

² Translator's note: And more particularly 'evaluation'.

therefore physical nature and its determinations and, on the other, human nature and its indeterminacy. What are the results of the methodological and critical work of scientific research on both sides? The discovery of natural regularities on one side, the comprehension of the complex openness and the plural meanings of individual and social existence on the other. The foreseeable consequences for assessment: an enormous distance between the qualities of one product and the other and, therefore, a necessary distance between the procedures for appreciating – or recognising the value – of one and the other.

What is the most outstanding social value of humanistic social knowledge? As we were saying, it is precisely our *self-understanding* as human beings in our free fundamental dimension: this means the understanding of language and literary production, thought and philosophical production, sensitivity and the arts, changes over time and history, the use of space and geography, regulatory consensus and law, the complex and variable organisation of economic movement and social organisation. One could obviously doubt the value of this *understanding*, which is a higher degree of pure descriptive explanation in that it points to the grasping of meaning; it is people who ask why things have to have a meaning, i.e. they are also concerned – why do they ask otherwise? – about the meaning of things, but they either don't know or they are either distracted by the remote controls of a million and one gadgets.

The Brazilian writer Mario Quintana sententiously established that "Facts are a secondary aspect of reality". The audacity of the comment is worthy of remark yet what it says is a condensed lesson of good metaphysics. What constitutes reality is a very profound humanistic question of special interest, and one that is moreover highly 'realistic'. A very shallow answer – and an unrealistic one at that – is that reality consists of facts, although it would probably be mostly endorsed, and above all endorsed without very much thought; because, if one puts one's mind to it just a little, human life unfolds above all through the symbolic and interpretative projections that we make of facts; in other words, human facts – if we have to give importance to facts – are linguistic, symbolic, aesthetic, ethical and political, and are intended to arrange and fit together the series of subjective and emotional sensations and the no less magmatic series of material or external 'facts' in a network of understanding or meaning whereby we can assimilate them into our lives.

It is humanistic social knowledge that attempts to construct symbolic and hermeneutical networks for this understanding. This knowledge moves principally in the intangible yet essential territory of symbols, words, ideas, values and conventional norms, or hermeneutical skill and capacity, and constitutes what some have said to be a veritable *soft power*, a light power, that has no material weight, but which has a decisive influence in the life of the individual and group.

Some recent opinions are given below, not those of old school humanists – who are praiseworthy in their own right – but contemporary ones committed to current conflicts. One author free of any

suspicion of symbolistic speculativism and concerned above all with hard issues of economics and contemporary society, Timothy Garton Ash, who defines himself as a 'historian of the present', said in a press article:^{xi} "A third fundamental realisation is the one that comes from reviewing the norms that control us. How much more money do we need? How many more things do we need? Is having enough the same as having too much? (...) Can we get by with less? What is it that's really important to you? What contributes most to your personal happiness?" There are three key words in this: 'realisation' – or the understanding of a meaning, 'review the norms that control us' – interpretation of the best possible norm – and 'personal happiness' – the ultimate objective of human life, according to the first line of Aristotle's *Ethics*: or in other words, problems of humanistic knowledge that emerge above all, as the title of his article says, when the world is destroyed.

Christian Salmon,^{xii} a writer who is very watchful of the present-day media, says, "The resurgence of myths in our contemporary society is particularly evident in periods of worldwide insecurity that stimulates our research into the truth, the meaning of life, of both magic and mystery". This he says in a work that, in the title, includes the awful expression – adopted from informatics technologies – "*the formatting of spirits*": his thesis is that the obviously symbolic construction of myths and narrations is a powerful machine that is nothing short of giving format to spirits, or in other words, using them to build the frameworks of intelligibility and to thereby determine and control them. The text goes on to say how it is precisely in times like the present, of great insecurity on all fronts, when 'the spirits' most need 'the research of truth and meaning in life in both magic and mystery': this means that we either 'format the spirit' of research in either truth and meaning or magic and mystery'. This can in part be deduced from the reply given in an interview by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who discovered the *liquidity* of the condition of our civilization:^{xiii} "What makes this longing to know – the future – more pressing is that the awesome instability of each and every one of the aspects of our daily life coincides with the decline in trust in the authorities. The list of unfulfilled promises and frustrated expectations gets longer every day, and few politicians emerge unscathed and impeccable from under the debris of deception. Neither do the scientists define themselves any better, and when a discovery takes place everyone tends to ask who is funding the research and who is behind it all. Taking into account the low level of ideas that the experts come up with', it is not strange that people look to other sources of knowledge that they still haven't tried and haven't been deceived by, namely, gurus, other self-proclaimed prophets and preachers of *alternative knowledge*... And I'm afraid that if people do this they will again end up being highly frustrated". The wise analyst highlights several points that closely connect up with what we are saying: firstly, he underlines an old philosophical and humanistic maxim, 'our nature is to aspire to know', in relation to which he goes on to establish the contemporary deception with both the political authorities – nothing new there – and the scientific authorities, all of which directly calls for explanations, not so much because of the danger of some pharmaceutical laboratory paying off a

humanist with vast sums of money to justify some banal drug, but because humanistic social knowledge of quality, which criticises the 'low level of ideas that the experts come up with' is that which can most singularly, specifically and competently appear – within the context of deception – to prevent people from wandering into the temptation of 'alternative knowledge', or, as Salmon said, magic and mystery.

False formats, vaguely esoteric alternative forms of knowledge, magic, ultimately the *manipulability* of people and societies are only rectifiable by the intensive contribution of humanistic social knowledge, or critical thinking, the basic characteristics of which are the forming of criteria more than the accumulation of information, the ability of self-correction and epistemological modesty, and a high sense of both the context and the evolutionary processes in all realities.

This humanistic social knowledge – or the 'human sciences' if one wants, because as knowledge that is methodical, self-critical and comparable, they are the *science* of improvement – can and must provide society with certain elements that are essential for individual and collective life: firstly, *meaning of freedom, analysis of their condition, limits and possibilities*, because the search comprises the human phenomenon, which is essentially free: to study man is therefore to study his or her condition as a living being; secondly, *keys to meaning and interpretation*: the contemporary era has been defined as the age of greater complexities and, therefore, of greater need for meaning and hermeneutical ability so we don't get lost and to duly manage these; thirdly, the *endowment of criticism and self-criticism*, as a derivation of the previous element, which places us right next to the other sciences, but never in confrontation with them because all scientific knowledge, in the end, is one knowledge, and it is about time that the aberration of the 'two cultures' was overcome; and, lastly, *awareness of the necessarily historical construction of being and society, including science*: Ken Bain, in a study on university teachers and professors,^{xiv} established that the best professors in all areas of knowledge have at least one characteristic in common, namely, the permanent transmission of the historical meaning of the knowledge that they teach and what it consists of. One of the more serious deficiencies of the 'formatting' of contemporary spirits is the presentism or even the "instantaneous-ism" with which we tend to perceive facts, associating the idea of past with that of *out-of-date*, when, as Javier Cercas wrote recently in an article in a Sunday supplement,^{xv} "the past is the present or the material with which the present is made"; this should lead us to change our designation for the periodification of time and substitute the two ideas of past and present – the latter appearing almost as the enemy and exclusive of the past – for just one 'present continuous', so that it is understood that in fact whatever it is that seems 'past' *is passing* and it is ours and present just like the breath we are taking now. It is time for Plato, Galileo and Marx to strictly be contemporaries of ours, part of our 'present continuous', because our present is made up, amongst other things, of their contributions.

Is this the appraisal that society makes of the human sciences? Unfortunately no, at least broadly speaking. This is the appreciation that we should be capable of gaining because we know that it is valid, we can justify it academically, and also because we are capable of perceiving, precisely through historical meaning and context, the situation of 'offside' in which the evolution of society, the economy, the media and even academic structures has placed us, meaning that, with the underestimated appraisal that is made of us, we have difficulties in even assessing ourselves.

Various principles and criteria for assessing humanistic social research

We were saying that 'appraise' and 'assess' are close synonyms; and we need to ensure that, in principle, the appraisal that we believe humanistic social knowledge should be given is not directly contradicted by any submission to an assessment or evaluation in which its characteristics, in addition to being imbalanced, are ignored. Under no circumstance is it a question of resisting or questioning the advisability of assessment and evaluation, the respect for the demands of public service that is our duty, its fairness or even the systemic need for it. It is however a matter of reflecting on and generating processes for dialogue and obtaining procedures that are as widely acceptable as possible so that assessment does not deteriorate into a dogmatic or ideological process – that falsely disguises reality – or quantitativist reductionism that is in nonsensical contradiction with the nature of the knowledge being evaluated.

It was not the objective – and in no way would be it recommendable to invent any such thing at this end stage of the article – to enter into a detailed analysis of the possible ways and means for assessment; we could however at least point out certain minimum generic principles and criteria that, in a more specific way, form part of the debate on procedures for assessing and evaluating humanistic social research. They are meant to be coherent and stem from the theme of the exposition above. The reasoning has therefore already been expressed and I just give a minimal number of simple principles.

The assessment of humanistic social research is not reducible to other respectable and respected ways of assessing research; its singular nature must above all allow for considerable internal variety.

The criteria for quantitative and mechanical measurement should always be subordinate to criteria that are qualitative and based on reasoned arguments.

The appraisal of individual contributions should in particular stand out, given that research practice is essentially individual due to the nature of knowledge, which is reflective, analytical, critical and also creative.

Research – and ultimately its transfer – that is published in journals that are not recognised internationally, especially if the research is linked to specific geographical aspects or cultural singularities, deserves to have its content considered according to the highest rating.

The people responsible for the assessment need to have a high degree of intrinsic or specialised knowledge of the subjects they are assessing, because they are expected to evaluate the qualities, not count the quantities, of the works submitted for assessment.

The need to enter into a certain degree of market logic, as referred to above, does not mean that the assessment of knowledge that is produced – not even that which is more directly associated with market movements – has to be subject to either mercantile criteria or mechanistic measurement procedures. It is one thing to defend and practice the transfer of knowledge from the world of research to the productive world and another quite different one to give maximum value to this transfer which, in reality, is a simple derivative of basic or non-orientated research and fundamental in both the scientific and, it goes without saying, humanistic social spheres. One elemental meaning of the autonomy of knowledge production – of whatever type – should lead to calls for its value to be considered in a far removed way from its productive performance; if not, this would mean postulating the predominance of the market over science, which is very evidently highly ideological and not at all scientific. I have some notes from a speech given by professor Joan Subirats in some workshops on university policy a few years ago in which he argued that the increase in the influence of ‘indicator-based market’ criteria, as occurred in the UK during the Tory governments, results in the diminishing role of university academic staff and their replacement by the *performance-based employee*, unidentified from any university institution. This must be taken into account.

Wallerstein’s work has also helped us understand the latest evolutionary stage in all types of knowledge towards a certain – and also confused – reforming of some kind of unity following the trend to overcome linear causality in the natural sciences and the supposedly universal norms of the humanistic world. The verification of this, which could be read simply as a homogenisation or harmonisation, should be read instead, in my opinion, as confirmation of the ‘pluralism’ inherent to knowledge production in the contemporary world: in fact, as causalistic determinism weakens in the world of natural science, the opening up and diversity of its knowledge become clearly expressed, because causalistic determinism works precisely as a homogenising dogma for the whole field; there is no doubt that today, with for example nanotechnology, microbiology and astrophysics, to name but three fields of research in which enormous progress is being made, forms of knowledge that are increasingly irreconcilable with each other have been released. The same occurs with the breakdown of the norms of humanism and the fragmentation of the social sciences: it is a song to plurality, diversity and difference. In this context, it is natural for assessment procedures to be

established that respect not just the great difference between the sciences and the humanistic social fields, but also the great differences within each of these.

After having remarked that the radical epistemological distinction between the 'two cultures' does not make any sense – everything is science if there is method and a critical spirit – it should be made quite clear that – precisely in honour of the methodical and critical spirit, which above all is what prevents there from being any confusion – uniformity in assessment makes no sense if, as we have seen, the fundamental epistemological value is stated functionally in widely diverse methodologies, vague objectives, heterogeneous research practices and completely different channels and ways of dissemination. Once again in human life the challenge is an encouraging one, namely, to enjoy the fundamental unity through different pathways and approaches in the procedures.

Joan Manuel del Pozo, January 2010

ⁱ Wallerstein, I. *L'universalisme europeu. La retòrica del poder*, Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2008

ⁱⁱ *op.cit.* pp. 89-90

ⁱⁱⁱ *op.cit.* pp. 93

^{iv} *ibid.*

^v *op.cit.* pp. 95

^{vi} *op.cit.* pp. 97

^{vii} Morin, E. *La tête bien faite*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, 1999

^{viii} Steiner, G. *La barbarie de la ignorancia*, Madrid, El Taller de Mario Muchnik, 2000, pp. 9

^{ix} Wallerstein, *op.cit.*, pp. 99

^x *ibid.*

^{xi} Garton Ash, T. "La felicidad en un mundo hecho trizas", *El País*, 4.1.09

^{xii} Salmon, Ch. *Storytelling, la machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits*, Paris, Éd. La Découverte, 2007, pp. 41

^{xiii} Bauman, Z. Interviewed by Carme Vinyoles in *Presència*, no. 1924, 9-15 January 2009

^{xiv} Bain, K. *Lo que hacen los mejores profesores de universidad*, Publ. Universitat de València, 2006

^{xv} Cercas, J. "¡Otra bendita novela sobre la guerra civil", *El País Semanal*, no. 1737, 10.1.2010, pp. 8