



The Importance of Intellectual Curiosity

Keynote to the Opening Ceremony of the Leuphana College Opening Week

Sascha Spoun, President of the Leuphana University

Dear students,

dear colleagues,

dear parents and relatives,

dear spokeswomen of the general students committee Ronja Hesse and Susanna Dedring

dear representative of the Hanseatic City of Lüneburg, Eduard Kolle

dear friends of Leuphana,

as you know, "diversity" is the topic of your Opening Week which starts today. For the following days, for your Leuphana-Semester, for all your studies at our College, I like to ask you for something. Don't just look at diversity as a given interesting phenomenon. Let it touch you in its very sense. Be affected by diversity in a positive way. Let it come to your heart and your core beliefs. What do I mean by this?

Nowadays, you often hear about tolerance. Tolerance is expected from you with respect to other religions, other cultural habits, or other sexual preferences. However, to tolerate something could just mean that it does not affect you. You may say: "This does not bother me. It's none of my business." If you just tolerate diversity, you are far away from what I have in mind. I will tell you why.

Biodiversity and homodiversity

What is the opposite of diversity? In biology and agriculture, it is monoculture. As all of you know, monoculture is bad for the soil and for growth. The plants' resistance against diseases and vermins diminishes. In contrast, biodiversity is a symbiotic balance that keeps soil and plants healthy. So diversity is good. But I go a step further and speak of



homodiversity instead of biodiversity. What is specific about homodiversity? In one word, it is curiosity.

When human beings are faced with human diversity, they can learn from the differences. In biodiversity, plants and microorganisms profit from what other plants and microorganisms do. Homodiversity can go further. Curiosity enables us to analyze, to reflect, and to transform beliefs and practices of human beings from other cultures or social environments. Differences can be huge. In Western academic contexts, you can always ask for an argument if you disagree. But you should also be curious about cultures where the practise of giving account is of little importance.

Granted, in contrast to plants, we can close our border and try to stay on our own culture. However, global challenges do not stop at any border. They are that much pressing and complex, that we need every good idea and every approach to find feasible solutions. A diversity of ideas, habits, and beliefs will be very helpful. Hence, homodiversity promises to help us finding solutions for the global challenges of the 21st Century.

The universities' tradition of curiosity

Learning through diversity is not a fresh idea. It has a long tradition in the history of university. And this is why I ask you to be affected by diversity, to be ready to learn through diversity. You came here to continue the great and unique history of university.

I will give you some examples of the tradition you are entering today. In the 13th Century, at the recently founded University of Paris, scholars studied texts from everywhere to deepen their understanding of human nature. In his famous works, Thomas Aquinas implemented ideas of the Muslim scholars Ibn Sina and Ibn Ruschd and ideas of the Jewish theologian Moses Maimonides. Origin and religion were not at issue for Aquinas, as long as he could learn from others. Another example: at the same time, the physicians at the University of Salerno studied all medical texts of the Arab writing Persian Ibn Sina. They knew that his knowledge of anatomy and medicine surpasses all Western knowledge.



What do we learn by these examples? I dare to say that the impressive success of the universities in Western history can be explained by the scholars' readiness to learn from everyone who has different, but fascinating ideas.

Such curiosity has always been in danger. During the fourth crusade, in 1204, Constantinople was sieged, beaten, and plundered. Scientific books in Arab, Syrian, Greek, and Hebrew were burned, Oriental and Byzantine works of art destroyed. At the same time when scholars in Salerno, Naples, Cordoba, and Paris grabbed every snippet of Arab and Jewish wisdom, the crusaders eliminated cultural goods of immeasurable worth. History is repeating itself. Today, scholars from all over the world try to decrypt old cultures. At the same time, ISIS has destroyed more than 100 cultural treasures: temples, libraries, graves and, most fatal, the Assyrian city Nimrud.

Diversity in our College curriculum

This is why I ask you to continue the tradition of university: it is in your responsibility. You are responsible for continuing homodiversity, that means, learning through diversity by curiosity. Be affected from diversity as scholars have ever been! Be ready to learn from different cultures! Your study at the Leuphana College will improve this readiness step by step. In the Leuphana-Semester, you will not only learn how science and research work. You will learn that there are many different approaches in many different disciplines. But they are all unified by the pursuit of truth. Scholars share a general concession which the philosopher of science Sir Karl Raimund Popper has formulated thus: "I may be wrong and you may be right."

In the Complementary Studies, you will learn to take different perspectives and to walk different roads towards truth and success. You will meet the fascination of intellectual diversity. But you will only do so, if you are affected by different approaches and methods. An easy but effective step to profit from diversity is learning another language. It will



enrich your understanding and widen your perspective. So I encourage you to deepen your first and second foreign language, and to learn another one.

You will meet many sorts of diversity in your studies at the Leuphana College, cultural, methodological, and intellectual. In any case, tolerance of otherness is not what I ask you for. Nor do I ask you just to add a "like" or a "dislike" to the content of your studies. I ask you for curiosity. Be intellectually curious about everything and everyone. You will see then, I promise, the enrichment and strength diversity is giving to you.

Finally, look around you. You see the diversity of 1500 students. Mentally, you differ much from each other, but you all enter the tradition of curiosity, scholars have founded in the past. Look left and right: your neighbours are not competitors. As you do, they seek for knowledge. You all do so with different presuppositions, interests, and purposes. These differences enable you to learn from each other and to teach each other. And this is why you begin your studies together in the Leuphana-Semester: to inspire each other.

I wish you all the best for your studies at the Leuphana-College!