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"Universities for All": George Zygmunt Fijałkowski-Bereday and His Idea of Higher Education

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to present the views of George Zygmunt Fijałkowski-Bereday on the role of higher education in modern society, and of access to education and the universal nature of educational institutions at every stage of education. The choice of such topics results from the fact that Bereday is mainly known for his contribution to the development of educational comparative studies. His considerations regarding educational policy and its potential benefits for society have not been the subject of scientific inquiry. Selected Bereday publications, both academic and journalistic—as well as archival materials, including speeches, lectures, and correspondence—were analyzed in the research on the issue. The analysis leads to the conclusion that Bereday advocated the widest possible dissemination of access to education, at the academic level as well, and that this need was not only justified by practical arguments—he referred primarily to the sphere of ethics and human values. His views seem worthy of consideration particularly nowadays, when the discussion about shaping education policy focuses on utilitarian aspects, which may lead to diminishing the importance of the fact that access to education is a fundamental human right and, in consequence, may perpetuate inequalities in education.

KEYWORDS
university, access to education, modern society, human rights, democracy

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Introduction: George Zygmunt Fijałkowski-Bereday and Comparative Research in Pedagogy

George Bereday (born Jerzy Adam Rotblit) was born in 1920 in Warsaw. He changed his surname to Bereday in the 1950s after settling in the United States. It is a slightly modified version of his stepfather's surname, Zygmunt Bereda, with whom he had a very close emotional bond. From his stepfather's mother, he also adopted the surname Fijałkowski, which he used in the initials Z. F. (Galbraith, 2015).

Bereday was born and grew up in independent Poland, and the development of Polish statehood, the shaping of state institutions, and the problems and tensions that build up in the process were not without influence on the life choices of the future scholar. One of the most formative and certainly most traumatic experiences in his life was World War II. He started military service in September 1939 in the cavalry. Then he was sent to the British Isles, where he underwent military training, after which he joined the British Parachute Regiment (Bereday, 1978). As commander of a parachute battalion, Bereday was involved in Operation Market Garden near Arnhem, Holland in 1944 (Bereday, 1946). For his service, he received the highest Polish distinction: the Virtuti Militari (Cremin, 1984, p. 5).

Even during World War II, Bereday had started studying economics and sociology at the London School of Economics, thanks to a British government scholarship. He graduated in 1944 as a Bachelor of Science. He continued his studies at the University of Oxford, where in 1950 he obtained a BA in history and political science, and three years later a Master's degree (Cornelia Krystyna Bereday-Burnham, personal communication, September 2018). Richard Henry Tawney, one of his teachers at the London School of Economics—an outstanding economic historian and co-creator of the concept of reforms in the English educational system—encouraged Bereday to deepen his studies and focus his interests on the theory of education. Bereday was persuaded by him to go to the United States and continue his studies there (Nichol, 1979). Upon arriving in New York City in January 1950, he took different odd jobs. In order to support himself, he did not shun physical work (Cornelia Krystyna Bereday-Burnham, personal communication,

September 2018). Despite these difficult beginnings, he completed the Extracurricular Course in College Teaching at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts; then he joined the Cambridge Center for Adult Education and Curry College in Boston, where he taught sociology. He also worked as an assistant professor at the Russian Research Center at Harvard University (Bereday, 1978) while preparing his doctoral dissertation. He obtained his PhD from Harvard University in 1953 based on his dissertation, *The Role of Wealth and Education in English Class Structure* (Bereday, 1952).

Starting in 1955, Bereday developed his scientific career at the Teachers College at Columbia University, with which he was affiliated throughout his professional life. His research and teaching were mainly connected with comparative pedagogy—primarily in the context of consolidating the scientific status of the discipline. The debate on this topic was very lively in the second half of the 20th century, and one of its main centers was the Teachers College at Columbia University (Noah & Eckstein, 1969, p. 117).

Bereday entered this debate with his numerous publications, particularly his dissertation entitled *Comparative Method in Education*, which was published in 1964 and is thought by many to be his flagship work (Wojniak, 2019, pp. 152–154). Referring to the approach spearheaded by such scholars as Michael Sadler (1861–1943) and Isaac Kandel (1881–1965), Bereday emphasized the significance of the social and even political dimension of comparative research in pedagogy. This belief was reflected in the methodology that Bereday had proposed. He made a clear point that students' social environment is of key importance; in his opinion, educational facts are deeply embroiled in the structure of social circumstances (Bereday, 1964, p. IX). Without taking due account of the latter, it is impossible to understand, let alone explain, the educational phenomena that we can observe. In stressing the social determinants of educational facts and their close alignment with the realities of social life, Bereday was making a direct reference to Sadler, who stated that when studying foreign educational systems, we should recognize that the phenomena taking place outside of school are even more meaningful for the management and understanding of education than what happens inside the school (Sadler, 1964, p. 310).

Bereday's view of the task of a comparative scholar is also interesting. It is to analyze the differences and similarities between educational systems and to draw conclusions from educational practice in different countries. Thus, countries can learn from and copy foreign models, and the conclusions drawn from failures and successes can become an instrument for improving their own educational practices. Understanding the mechanisms that govern the educational system of a given country is also a source of knowledge about the social and political conditions that shape them. This knowledge, in turn, can become a tool for learning about each other and for building understanding and peaceful relations between the nations. At the same time, such a perspective fosters a deeper comprehension of the legacy and cultural heritage of one's own country, which becomes possible when we adopt a transnational perspective. Bereday uses the metaphor of education as a mirror reflecting a nation's history and cultural heritage. Such a perspective helps one to reject ethnocentrism and to look at educational phenomena from a global point of view, making people aware of how diversified the approaches to these issues can be. Comparison with different educational systems and their sociocultural backgrounds leads to a better understanding of others and ourselves (Wojniak, 2018).

Social Structure and Access to Education

However, before Bereday undertook research into educational systems and became involved in creating the methodological foundations for comparative analysis in education, in the early stages of his academic career the main subject of his scholarly interests were social inequalities and the resulting restrictions in access to universal education. His doctoral dissertation was devoted to this subject, as revealed by its title: *The Role of Wealth and Education in English Class Structure*. His research was inspired by the works of Richard Henry Tawney and Robert Ulich, whom Bereday had already met at Harvard University and with whom he shared the fate of an immigrant (Bereday, 1952, V).

Tawney, as mentioned, was a historian of economics, but also a social activist whose philosophical views were based on three pillars: functionality, freedom, and the equality of all members of society,

which allows us to classify him as a representative of ethical socialism (Steele & Taylor, 2008, p. 2). An ideal society should, in his opinion, be a community of cooperating individuals, forming a functional society composed of free people, for whom freedom, equality, and fraternity are common practice in everyday life. Tawney is also a proponent of equal educational opportunities to enable the development of every child, regardless of their social background. Realizing that this postulate was necessary to provide citizens with a dignified life and access to culture—and Tawney considered these conditions necessary to build mutual trust in society and to mitigate potential conflicts between different social strata, thus creating social cohesion and solidarity—Tawney tried to put his ideals into practice by engaging in political activity. In collaboration with the Labour Party, for example, he developed a plan for education reform. Tawney's concept was included in the Education Act adopted in 1944, which was a step towards the democratization of British education (Wojniak, 2019, pp. 89–90).

Tawney also addressed the issue of the system of higher education, advocating that it be structured as a national university system. In such a system, access to knowledge in the humanities or to practical professional skills would not be determined by social class or limited to a narrow group of representatives of the privileged classes. Tawney applied this firstly to the working class and insisted that their children should also be able to educate themselves throughout their lives—if they wish to do so, of course, and as long as they are able to meet university standards. He claimed that the most valuable asset at the disposal of the state is its individuals (Tawney, 1922, p. 145).

University courses organized by the Workers' Educational Association, which was chaired by Tawney—who also personally acted as a lecturer there—were to help achieve the educational aspirations of the working class: according to Tawney, university courses held in places where the university does not exist are the essence of the university (Tawney, 1914). The courses consisted of engaging classes and discussions instead of traditional university lectures. Another important aspect was that the students and lecturers mingled: after classes, they often talked over tea, read poetry, or sang together. It is also worth mentioning here the promotion of a policy of equality, as women participated in the courses. They were perceived as equal

participants, and more and more of them attended over time. Many classes were also conducted by female academic teachers, which the founder of this institution made sure of himself (Wojniak, 2018, p. 91).

Regarding the concept of adult education and the idea of lifelong learning, we must mention the second mentor that Bereday cites in the introduction to his doctoral dissertation: Robert Ulich. Like Tawney, he was an advocate for the education and intellectual development of working-class citizens. Importantly, Ulich's beliefs were grounded in personal experience, as for some time he had worked in a metal factory in Berlin, which gave him the opportunity to get a first-hand sense of the everyday problems of manual laborers (Ulich, 1971, p. 421).

This was the basis for his idea of an alternative method of adult education—folk education (*Volksbildung*), which aspires to shape the value system and spiritual development of the students and strives towards their overall personal development. The aim of learning in groups was to foster a sense of belonging to a community. In turn, employing members of the bourgeoisie as lecturers (this job was also done by the originator of the institution himself) was meant as a step towards breaking down class divisions and integrating society as a unified whole established on the foundation of common spiritual and cultural values (Wojniak, 2019, p. 108).

According to Ulich, only by changing how the role of education is perceived can societal changes be steered in the right direction. In a modern society geared towards improving the citizens' living conditions, the school's task was to prepare a young person for a future career. Thus, the institution of the school was treated as an instrument for achieving specific goals, and not as a platform for building a set system of values or engaging an individual in humanistic learning. In effect, it was conducive to building an atmosphere of confrontation rather than cooperation, and remained subservient to the authorities, rather than to humanity at large. Moreover, by emphasizing the wrong definition of individualism, the modern school nurtured egoism and hedonism and formed an attitude of egocentrism, leading the students to believe that from the society's point of view it is an appropriate or even desirable trait. The modern school system also favored the building of a society that adhered only to

pragmatism and concentrated on satisfying material needs and pursuing only short-term gains. Prioritizing efficiency and productivity, on the other hand, brought about both intellectual and moral sterility and deprived social life of the ethical dimension, without which the fabric of society could be endangered in the long run.

In his deliberations on education, Ulich went one step further, treating it as an instrument for the development and improvement of the human race. Referring to this theory, Ulich formulated the concept of international education (Ulich, 1970, p. 343). His point of departure was the didactic practices aimed at molding an attitude of respect for national and cultural diversity in relation to political and religious systems and all other manifestations of human activity. This instills a sense of universal unity in the students, commonly referred to as the union between nations. Education understood in this way was supposed to encourage students to accept and appreciate cultural differences (Wojniak, 2019, pp. 116–117). This, in turn, opened a path to mutual understanding and cooperation between nations and societies. Clear echoes of this concept can be found in Bereday's interpretation of the role of educational comparative studies.

Bereday addressed the problem of social and educational inequalities in his doctoral dissertation, as already noted, where he described 19th-century English society, in which the class hierarchy was not only still firmly entrenched, but almost universally accepted. The educational system was not able to eliminate distinctions of social status, because education was treated as a race whose reward was social status and a career, not intellectual development. These observations led Bereday to postulate the creation of a new middle class, recruited based on the criteria of knowledge and competence (Bereday, 1952, p. 192). He also proposed to establish the institution of a national school, which would be a step towards eradicating the utilitarian vision of education in favor of strengthening its culture-forming role (Bereday, 1947, p. 89). Thus, Bereday viewed education as a space where concrete skills and esthetic and ethical sensitivity are acquired, as well as a hub of critical thinking. The latter element, in turn, is indispensable for a society to fully benefit from democracy. A school that nurtures an attitude of acceptance towards diversity, without rigidly assigning individuals to classes or categories, would, in his

opinion, be the most effective instrument for building an open and egalitarian social community (Wojniak, 2019, p. 103).

Crisis of Academia in Modern Society

In Bereday's theory, the issue of equal access to education was not constrained to primary or secondary education. The author also analyzed the way academic education is delivered to university students, looking at higher education not only from the perspective of the quality of teaching, but above all from the perspective of the university's role in reducing existing social inequalities. It should be pointed out that in the second half of the twentieth century, the university began to open its doors more and more to students from less privileged backgrounds, which made it possible to gather young people from various social classes within its walls. A characteristic phenomenon that occurred at that time, however, was that young people from the lower social classes were quickly absorbed into the existing system and thus contributed to the perpetuation of societal divisions at that time (Bereday, 1979, p. 9).

The mechanism where candidates were selected based on substantive criteria did not become an impulse for change, although the supporters of this solution were counting on a meritocratic elite rising to the top of the social hierarchy: people who would owe their position solely to their work and talents, and who would come from diverse social strata, including from the working class. However, as it turned out, despite doubling or even tripling the enrollment rates in a short time, the actual proportions between the number of students from privileged families and from other backgrounds did not change significantly. This regularity was also visible in the job market, where the power structure anchored in class divisions still dominated. The disappointment with this policy was especially felt by young people, who the intended beneficiaries of the change. Their dissatisfaction was expressed in various types of protests or even riots that swept through different regions of the world at the beginning of the 1960s. The origin of these movements was obviously much more complex, but the leitmotif that can be seen was the contestation of the rules upon which modern society was built. An intergenerational conflict was clearly evident, the center of which became the different value

systems professed by the older and younger generations. The most characteristic thing, however, was that the higher a country's development and industrialization was, the more the societal frustration with the dominant model of elite co-option grew (Bereday, 1973a, pp. 131–133).

In such circumstances, researchers of social life searched for tools that, at least in part, could lead to a change in the existing power structure. Bereday was one of them, basing his concept of change first and foremost on the notion of the special role that the university was to play in 20th-century society. It was by no means believed to be merely a gateway to the careers of its graduates, irrespective of their social background, although it would, of course, be naïve to believe that this element was irrelevant. What deserves special attention is that the university was also a bastion of cultural stability and tradition. This institution has performed this function throughout its existence, regardless of the evolution it has undergone over the centuries:

> how the curricula and teaching methods had changed, the didactic offer had expanded, how the traditional Latin had been replaced by national languages as the language of instruction, how the university management method had evolved, and eventually women also sat on the university benches. The university has always been a center around which intellectual life has revolved and which has produced cultural standards. These functions were obviously carried out in parallel with the fundamental mission of universities, that is, research and teaching. Combining these diverse areas has become more and more complicated in modern society, both from an organizational point of view and owing to the mounting social pressure on the university that was rising with the progressing democratization of access to it. (Wojniak 2018a)

On account of the ambitions and needs of modern society, which were arising from the modernization of different realms of social life, industrialization, and economic development, the 20th-century university faced challenges that made it difficult for it to fulfill its complex mandate. Those expectations, dictated by the changing social and economic realities, led to the importance of one of the university's functions being accentuated, namely, training competent professionals in various fields. As a consequence, the research mission of the academy began to fade into the background, as did scholarly exploration of those subject areas that do not have the appeal of

applied knowledge. Researchers gradually became teachers and instructors whose principal task was to deliver knowledge. Research work, the quest for the truth, and analyzing and explaining reality have lost their importance. The expectations flowing from the university's social, political, and economic environment gradually approximated this institution to a regular school (Bereday, 1973b, p. 14).

However, Bereday argues that the fear of the university's degradation, although justified in many respects, could become an impulse for its reorganization so that it could adequately respond to social needs. First of all, access to higher education was meant to be a step towards building the foundations of social egalitarianism. However, in order to avoid the trap of superficial implementation of this goal, the modern university should become an institution that cultivates "a union merging intellectual elitism and educational opportunities for the masses." Bereday referred to this as a hybrid model and pointed out its growing popularity in European countries (Bereday, 1973b, p. 15).

Of course, the researcher was aware that such a solution was not perfect and he saw some of its weaknesses. One of them, quite obviously, was the risk that a division would start emerging into university and non-university institutions, which would result in the segregation of graduates into first- or second-class minds (Bereday, 1973b, p. 10). This could lead to the demise of the institution of the university as such. On the other hand, Bereday asks whether the causes of the downfall should not be sought within the university itself, as there are threats to its prestige and development. One of them is the decline of the academic tradition, and in particular the compromising of the university's autonomy, which is caused by the entanglement of university institutions in politics, unhealthy personal relationships and intrigues between the management and teaching staff, and alliances by age, due to which older professors block the opportunities for promotion and development of younger employees with lower degrees (Bereday, 1973b, p. 11).

All of these problems and challenges faced by the university in the changing social conditions made the discussion on a profound reform of universities a necessity. Bereday pointed out what he believed to be the desired direction for such a reform. Namely, in a modern society, we should renounce the traditional perception of the university

as an "ivory tower," or an institution that is isolated from society with its prosaic problems and expectations. The key, in Bereday's opinion, was to open up the university to society, not only in terms of extending the availability of studies to the widest possible group of interested parties, but also in terms of conducting research in areas that are important from the point of view of society.

In this context, Bereday, like Tawney and Ulich, also recommended that higher education should not be perceived as an area intended only for young people, i.e., mainly graduates of upper secondary schools. The author argued unequivocally for a model of lifelong education, "from the cradle to the grave" (Bereday, 1979, p. 14). In order to design instruments to realize this idea, we need a slightly more flexible approach to the organization of higher education. Hence, Bereday proposed such solutions as establishing institutions of higher education outside of urban centers and in rural areas. He also suggested developing student infrastructure, mainly by building dormitories accessible to less affluent students. He pointed to the need to expand the scholarship system and to organize courses for students in such a way that would make it possible to combine education with work and—all of this was to create a framework for the real democratization of higher education. At the same time, Bereday emphasized that we must expand access to studies for women and minorities, thus offsetting differences in the socioeconomic status of social groups and dismantling prejudices and stereotypes related to their perception (Bereday, 1979, pp. 15–16).

University for All?

In his deliberations, Bereday did not hesitate to ask a rather provocative question: Should there be departments in universities for educating plumbers, alongside departments for educating engineers, where in addition to knowledge in a given field students would be offered a "healthy dose of Plato" (Bereday, 1973b, p. 1). At the same time, he wondered whether we should pursue a model in which each individual would have a chance to complete a tertiary education without any exclusion criteria.

In response to these concerns, Bereday attempted to formulate his own concept of mass higher education. It was rooted in his conviction

that we must properly use human intellectual potential for the good of society as a whole. Bereday was aware that his vision of liberalized admission into institutions of higher education could be interpreted as a step towards lowering educational standards. In order to avoid this kind of simplification, he argued that the perception of academia should be changed, by moving away from pedantic rigidity towards greater flexibility, which was an indispensable measure once the previously mentioned social needs and expectations were taken into account. Thanks to this, we would be able to target the ambitions of individual members of society more effectively and on a much larger scale than before (Wojniak, 2019, p. 141).

For Bereday, the mass nature of higher education and the consequent openness of university institutions to all meant that higher education could benefit groups that had previously been stripped of access to it, and therefore disenfranchised. However, the aim was not to propel these individuals into the elite and thus strengthen the existing division into the privileged and the "bottom layers of society" or to overturn this order by replacing the existing elites with a newly formed meritocracy. In the case of the lower social classes, the basic role that higher education was to fulfill was to equip them with the knowledge and tools necessary to understand the world in which they lived. Of course, high standards in education are most desirable, but educational excellence should not be limited to this one aspect alone. In a broader perspective, mass schooling—in higher education as well—is chiefly a dynamic institution that changes and adapts to its environment. By becoming available to "ordinary" people, who are often far from perfection and brilliance, it can bring something good and worthwhile into their lives (Bereday, 1969, p. 110).

According to Bereday, wide access to higher education had another aspect that should be mentioned. It was crucial for improving the quality of life of the working class, whose members would thus be justified in their wage claims, and they could also be more effective in defending their rights. This solution would also bring benefits in the standards to which different professions are performed: a higher level of knowledge and skills means a higher quality of services (Bereday, 1971).

Mass higher education was also criticized for fear that the demands for making access to university as wide as possible could

awaken unwarranted social aspirations. This, in turn, could give rise to the belief that all those who acquire an education will become part of the social elite. The inability to meet these expectations could, on the one hand, lead to a sense of failure and frustration in individuals, and on the other hand, create fertile ground for radicalizing social moods, or even attempts to violently overthrow the existing social order. It is therefore easy to imagine the emergence of various revolutionary movements seeking to usher in a new system, the nature of which would be difficult to predict. Paradoxically, endeavors to democratize higher education by reinforcing social justice and cohesion could shatter the foundations of democracy (Wojniak, 2019, p. 143).

However, as can be inferred from Bereday's analysis, the gradual democratization of higher education will not necessarily cause a violent blow to the deeply-entrenched relationships between different social groups. Such revolutionary changes have always been more complex, and the dynamics of changes in the social structure and political relationships depend on many interrelated and mutually conditioning factors. Simple cause-and-effect mechanisms based on the logic that society's awakened aspirations lead to social revolution do not apply here. As the example of the Weimar Republic shows, even if the element of unsatisfied aspirations catalyzes social discontent, the evolution of the state's system towards totalitarianism is not just a simple consequence of this state of affairs.

Moreover, creating opportunities for everyone to receive a higher education does not mean that all or the overwhelming majority would take advantage of the policy. This is confirmed, for example, by the example of the socialist programs of Poland cited by Bereday, where the authorities opened up ample opportunities for individuals from the social backgrounds preferred by this system to get a university education (Bereday, 1966, p. 195). Certainly, some of the children of working-class or peasant families did use these chances and were assured greater social mobility for themselves. A large group of them, however, did not exhibit fitting intellectual predispositions; moreover, their living situation, previous lifestyle, or family or professional obligations meant that they were simply not interested in the offer. Therefore, creating conditions for equal opportunities does not mean that they will automatically be taken on a mass scale.

Universal access to higher education is also clearly justified in ethics according to Bereday. It results from his conviction of the value of every human being (Bereday, 1958, p. 208). As the author insists, we must avoid applying the criteria of social origin, wealth, or, finally, giftedness, because they can easily become an instrument for excluding those who do not meet them. As a consequence, a category of undesirable people may be created, which—especially in the context of the experiences of World War II—raises a disturbing question as to whether some groups will be affected in the future by marginalization or even elimination from society. Above all, however, Bereday believed that the values most important to humankind—Good, Truth, and Beauty, which give meaning to our existence and build the foundation of our dignity and self-esteem—spring from education (Bereday, 1958, p. 208). Therefore, access to this good should be guaranteed to every individual and treated as their inalienable right.

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be said that Bereday's arguments in favor of widespread access to higher education remain valid to a large extent today. While open access to education, at the tertiary level as well, is quite common in the Western world, in many parts of the world far-reaching limitations in this respect can still be found. Eliminating these barriers is not only a prerequisite tied to one of the fundamental universal human rights, but it is also important for the development of civilization as a whole. As Bereday wrote, to be educated means to be led out of darkness (Bereday, 1976).

Nowadays, we should especially stress one of the justifications for the proposal of a "university for all," which Bereday used, referring to the social and cultural dimension of the mission of universities. The university as a hub of public debate and a space where problems of significant social importance are discussed impacts the formation of beliefs and the formation of positions within public opinion: Broader study opportunities are a chance to create an enlightened, critical, and active population. Higher education is rightly seen as a necessary condition for a healthy democracy (Bereday, 1979, p. 6).

This position is worth recalling in the context of the current condition of universities. Today, much attention is paid to the quality of

higher education, and the role of the university is widely being discussed. The focus of this discussion, however, has shifted somewhat—today, the debate on the role of the university revolves around such conceptual categories as transfer, product, or commercialization, and this institution is becoming a kind of "factory," producing graduates who are expected to meet certain "quality standards" in line with market requirements. Because of the monetization of science and the commercialization of research, science is becoming largely dependent on external actors who may seek to influence the directions and outcomes of research, and in extreme cases, to force the manipulation of data. Corporate culture clashes with academic culture, and in these circumstances it becomes extremely difficult to pursue the truth, seek knowledge as a superior value, or build a master–student relationship (Majorek & Wojniak, 2019). In consequence, the cultural role of the university and its function of focalizing public debate around socially relevant issues seems to be losing importance. Therefore, it is worth asking the question of whether citizens still need a university that would fulfill such a role. Perhaps the emphasis is shifting due to changes in the university environment, forced by the realities of postmodern society. The observed changes, often assessed critically, are consistent with Bereday's reflections on the ethical and humanistic dimensions of university education. The role of the university as an institution that enriches our existence and "enlightens" us, as well as bolstering our critical thinking about the surrounding reality and about the circulating information and opinions, is still relevant. This is of vital importance in today's globalized information society.

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