



AKADEMIA
AD FUTURUM PER FONTES

Foundations

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1. *Introductory remarks*

What is the true nature and character of Akademia? What are the points of departure and objectives, the points of view and aims of the higher education institution? Formulated in the language of the classical school of thought: What is the eidos (essence) and the telos (purpose) of Akademia?

In this document, these questions will be briefly considered. Although comprehensive answers will not be presented here, a few important guidelines will nevertheless be provided. For the sake of understanding the nature and purpose of Akademia, in the first two sections some thought will be given to a number of important tendencies and challenges globally experienced by present-day universities.

Albeit that an Afrikaans higher education institution such as Akademia faces unique challenges (such as inter alia the pressure on Afrikaans as an academic language at universities; an unsympathetic political climate, et cetera), the university cannot be understood in isolation from these global tendencies and challenges. Akademia is in many respects an answer to these challenges.

Against the background of this discussion, a few essential characteristics of Akademia will be taken into consideration in the last section. Although these properties give Akademia a unique voice within the South African scenario of universities, they are at the same time also properties that Akademia has in common with some of the leading universities of the Western World. In this respect reference can especially be made to the example of the so-called classical training universities, inter alia in the USA. Akademia joins the ranks of these higher education institutions as regards its educational ideal.

2. *The global view of present-day universities*

As an introduction to a discussion of the global view of present-day universities, a few remarks must be made regarding the classical academic and Medieval concepts of universities. The origin of the university can be traced back to the Academy that Plato established in the fourth century B.C. in the Athens. Although through the centuries the concept of a university has undergone various changes, an important characteristic of the ancient Academy was preserved in the modern scenario of universities. Present-day universities that join the ranks of the classical ideal of education, today still bear the same quality.

The Athenian Academy of Plato (and the Lyceum later established by his student Aristoteles) gave an important place to education (paideia) and specifically the ideal of the "educated person". But what is an educated person?

According to the ancient Academy, an educated person was not just someone who displayed insight in and knowledge of the various shared aspects of reality (inter alia the material, living, rational and spiritual aspects of reality), but also insight in the entirety of things (mutual relatedness).

In terms of the classical way of thinking, someone who had insight in the greater totality of things, was a wise person. Such a person was characterised by wisdom (sophia). Essentially, the purpose of schooling at the Academy was to promote wisdom (and not just knowledge of the various shared aspects of reality).

Likewise, the Medieval universities that arose from the Christian church were characterised by the classical ideal of education and wisdom. Thomas Aquinas, the well-known thirteenth-century theologian and philosopher, briefly summarised this when he wrote that the educated person is open to the whole of reality (and the wonder of it). An educated person has insight in the communality of things, the *convenire cum omni ente*.

During the era of modern universities in Europe, the universities allocated an important place to education (formation or *Bildung*). In conjunction with the classical educational ideal of *paideia*, an educated (well-formed or *gebildete*) person was considered by the Von Humboldt University in Berlin as someone who had not only received specialised training within a specific field of study (chemistry, physics, economy, politics, history, et cetera). An educated person was also seen as someone who showed insight in the interdisciplinary relatedness among fields of study.

In short, the classical and Medieval ideal of education and wisdom was also maintained at the modern universities; thus, the modern universities made sure that this long-standing legacy was entrusted to the youth, despite great historical changes. Although various universities are still today committed to this ideal of education, there have been dramatic changes at many universities throughout the world during the past decades. Today we are still in the midst of these changes.

In accordance with their objectives, various global universities are today characterised by a one-sided emphasis on specialised training. This is concomitant with the loss of the ideal of classical education, and specifically the loss of the ideal of insight in the interrelatedness of the various disciplines. Instead of the ancient ideal of wisdom, rather only specialised expertise is now in the forefront..

In conjunction with various commentators around the globe, it can be said that the classical question as to the "what" of things ("What is matter?"; "What is life?"; "What is the human being?", et cetera) is increasingly giving way to the question as to the "how" of things ("How does the economy function?"; "How can the bureaucratic order be optimised?"; "How can power be obtained? , et cetera).

The implication of this is all-encompassing: While the “what?” question leads the interrogator to gain insight in the greater totality of things (such as the totality of material, living and spiritual reality), the one-sided emphasis on the “how?” question results in only that which is functional being emphasised.

As the downside of the emphasis on that which is functional, the global scene regarding universities today is characterised by a hyperpolitical prescriptiveness (“wokeness”). Points of view that are not in agreement with specific political and moralistic beliefs are increasingly being censured. The politically correct tendency at universities around the globe does, however, not result in restoration of the ideal of education, but rather represents the opposite of the same tendency, leading to attenuation and specialisation.

As a result of this shifting focus at many prominent universities of the world, incisive questions are being asked regarding the future of universities. References to the “end of the university” regularly arise with the management of universities, academic staff and students. “Is there still any justification at all for the existence of universities if these institutions are not characterised by the classical ideal of education?” This is the question being asked. “Is there any justification for the existence of a university if it relinquishes the ideal of wisdom and the emphasis is placed exclusively on that which is functional and politically correct?”

Amidst this uncertainty about the future of universities, the so-called classical education universities (today also known as “community universities”) are intent on seeking anew association with the classical, Medieval and Modern educational universities. Without denying the great historical changes since earlier times, these universities maintain that the ideal of education today should – perhaps even more than in the past – hold an important place at a university.

Amidst the one-sided emphasis on matters such as bureaucratic functionality and politically correct morality (and the cultural disintegration arising from this), it has become imperative for universities to return to their origins in terms of the ideal of education. Above all, this must be appropriated in creative ways within a new historical context. It is maintained by community universities that only by once again cultivating a sense for the greater whole, the cultural disintegration can be overcome and the conditions for real human existence be laid down.

At the heart of the appeal from the ranks of the classical education universities, there is an endeavour to strike a balance between excellence in training and education respectively. Excellence in training is of the utmost importance to prepare students for the world of employment. Likewise, a sound education is essential. The latter is not opposed to training. On the contrary, students who received a good foundation in the ideals of education, are so much better prepared for the world of employment.

Evidently this appeal for balance is not merely based on pretence, seeing that various classical education universities can be described as hugely successful today as regards lecturing, research and management. Akademia follows the example of these universities. Before hereunder considering the answer represented by Akademia, the challenges of present-day universities should be referred to in greater detail. The nature and essence of Akademia must be understood against this background. Fundamentally, Akademia is an answer to these challenges.

3. *Specific challenges to universities*

3.1 *The centralistic state*

Throughout the Western world universities are characterised by the influence of and subordination to the directives of centralistic states. Universities have become instruments in the hands of governments and the imperatives of governmental bureaucracies. In South Africa this is evident inter alia from the fact that the government, and in particular the governing elite, have shown very little intent as to the desire of the Afrikaans language and cultural community to have the command in a relatively independent way (inter alia based on the principle of subsidiarity) over their own institutions in the community such as universities and schools.

Afrikaans universities that were initially established by and for the community, are appropriated by the state and harnessed for purposes such as “transformation”, “inclusivity” and “decolonisation”. In the process, academic staff are appointed by those in authority, the objectives of research are one-sidedly prescribed, and the content of courses are brought in line with the ideological preferences of the governing elite.

The fact that the meaning of ideologically loaded concepts such as “transformation”, “inclusivity” and “decolonisation” is not open to internal scrutiny and gradation, underlines the one-sided nature of the project in question.

3.2 *The place of Afrikaans at universities*

As a result of the prescriptiveness of the governmental order, a valuable cultural treasure such as Afrikaans is being dislodged from existing universities and is being marginalised – all in the name of an undifferentiated way of thinking about inclusivity. As a consequence, existing universities are becoming unilingual (rather than multilingual, as was promised to the Afrikaans-speaking world at the great transition of 1994).

A differentiated line of thought about inclusivity is theoretically based on the idea that the governmental order can be understood as a "community of communities", that is, as a community that creates a space for the multiplicity of language and cultural communities to enable them to participate as much as possible in defining and managing education. In terms of the prevailing undifferentiated concept of inclusivity, all authority is, however, being wielded from the centre and at the cost of the multiplicity of communities.

3.3 Ideological points of view

Various ideological points of view are characteristic of present-day universities. Due to lack of space, we will be limited to the following matters only:

3.3.1 A progressive concept of time

A linear-progressive view of history is accepted as the norm at many universities. In terms of this view of history, the past is identified with evil, while the future is presented as good, without further ado. More closely formulated, in terms of the linear view of the concept of time at universities, the Western cultural heritage is in no uncertain terms understood as violent, racist and colonialist, while a future without these evil phenomena is upheld as worth striving for.

John Gray, a prominent liberal intellectual, confirmed the importance today attached to the progressive line of thought about history, when he wrote in *The New Statesman*: "In a pervasive modern view, which seems to most people so obviously true that they can think in no other way, the past is a burden that must be shed in order that a new kind of life can come into being" (16 October 2017).

An important result of the progressive "departure from the archaic sources" (the tradition) is that an important objective of universities, namely that they will conciliate between the past and the future, is lost. Instead of conciliating between then, and what can be, universities rather place the emphasis on the training need of the moment. Even more closely formulated, an important consequence of the progressive concept of time is that the educational ideal at universities is underplayed and even negated.

Education at community universities takes place in, and by means of the reference to, and association with the "examples of wisdom" from the past (such as the great literary works of the canon of the Western world).

If, however, the past in its entirety is criminalised, these examples are lost to universities. The eventual consequences are that the historic perspective of present-day universities will be curtailed to the present moment and the emphasis will be mainly on training.

3.3.2 Relativism, constructivism and instrumentalism

In terms of the prevalent ideological beliefs at universities across the world, there is no such thing as everlasting, firmly based, or unchangeable truth. The future reality will more probably be known by its changeability, flexibility and randomness. If by any means something like such as reality still comes into question, this will merely be the result of an artificial construct that humanity contrived or created on the basis of instrumental considerations and for the sake of the satisfaction of their endless needs.

To explain this in even more detail – in the past, reality itself was known by the so-called three transcendentals, namely by truth, goodness and beauty. Against the background of the above-mentioned ideological tendencies, the long-standing properties of reality are rather reduced to a mere function of a person's scientific self. Truth, goodness and beauty become a mere function of his or her subjective judgement. Or, as formulated in everyday language, "beauty exists [only] in the eye of the beholder". Beauty (but also truth and goodness) can from now on in no way be entitled to an own, objective existence.

In the actual sense of the word, the reason for the absence of the ideal of wisdom at present-day universities must be found in the ideological points of departure as stated. In the past, wisdom was related to the striving for insight into the truth, goodness and beauty of reality. If the latter properties of reality are, however, only a function of the subject itself, the quest for wisdom is eliminated and replaced by the need of power over a now vacant reality.

Against this background it is also no wonder that present-day universities place so much emphasis on training (reduced to a matter of control of and management of a vacant reality). Education in the classical sense of the word can take place only if the objectivity of reality is recognised and celebrated. As a consequence of the absence of reality, everything at universities is as a matter of fact narrowed down to a matter of bureaucratic success, instrumental functionality and control.

3.3.3 The hyper individualistic view of humanity

As the foundation of all present-day universities, an explicit conception of who and what a human being is, can be found. This is an approach that arises from the idea that the human being is just an individual who pursues only his or her own interests. In terms of this conception of an individual, he or she per definition stands apart from any communal relationship (family, culture, language, religion, et cetera.) previously granted to that individual. If the individual by any means belongs to any community, such community is merely the result of the freedom of choice that the individual exercises themselves.

In terms of such a conception of the human being, any claim that the multiplicity of communities makes on that individual, is experienced as an obstacle that limits the freedom of choice of that individual. Against this background it is no wonder either that numerous present-day universities in the global world are rather intent on serving the interests of the unattached and consumerist individual either than conferring a communal culture and language on coming generations in a critical and constantly reforming way.

In short, because of the excessive emphasis on the individual, the present-day university does not focus on the individual in his or her inseparable interrelatedness with a multiplicity of communities. As a consequence, an essential focus of universities is lost; that is, to serve specific communities in a critical and introspective way. More so, as a result of this, universities forfeit the privilege of actively taking possession of the ideal of education – fostered from the sources of communal traditions – and positioning this at the heart of being a university. It is merely training in view of meeting the needs of individuals that becomes prominent.

3.3.4 Training and disintegration

Reference has already been made above to the present-day emphasis on training at universities at the cost of the classical educational ideal. What was not referred to above, is the fact that the one-sided emphasis on training goes hand in hand with the disintegration of the old disciplines (within as well as among the multiplicity of disciplines). In earlier days, universities embraced the universal ideal, or the totality of that which is. Cultivating a sense for that which is universal, was the trademark of universities – once again with the ideal of wisdom as a foundation.

Present-day universities are inclined to see themselves rather as multiversities; that is, universities where the idea of the whole is relinquished and replaced by an isolated and self-fragmented multiplicity of disciplines. It is significant that the multiversity environment is often not in itself reconciled with the condition of fragmentation.

This has during the past decades become evident from the endeavour to overcome this fragmentation by an interdisciplinary approach. Owing to the lack of an idea that would give direction regarding a cohesive whole, lying at the foundation of the multiplicity, many of the efforts to create cohesion by means of interdisciplinarity are set up for failure. Instead of overcoming the fragmentation, it is rather confirmed.

3.3.5 The bureaucratisation of universities

No university can exist without good management. Nevertheless, the need of and necessity of good management is not the predominant characteristic of universities. Such management must still serve the ideals of the university, rather than in itself being the purpose of the university.

Owing to a profusion of historical reasons, the management at universities had, however, over the past decades become isolated from the traditional objectives and became an objective in itself. The latter is not expressed only in the ever-increasing bureaucracy at universities, but also in the practical knowledge-based or “praxis theory” foundations of universities: knowledge itself is confused with instrumental, functional and bureaucratic processes.

In conjunction with and in support of the centralistic state, the growing bureaucracies increasingly adopt a prescriptive relationship towards academics and academic life in general. Along with the above factors the bureaucratisation of the present-day university also leads to much more emphasis on training and the mere instrumental value of lecturing and research (at the cost of education, or an ethos of critical dialogue and the necessity of cultural transfer between the past and the future).

3.3.6 Radical secularism

Historically speaking, universities in Europe were brought into being by the Christian church. Universities in Europe had through the ages based their understanding and were founded in the truths of the Christian faith. Associated with this, some of the most prominent universities saw God as the starting point of university life. As a result of this, old-world universities did not observe an unbridgeable chasm between faith and reason. Faith and reason were rather seen as mutually dependent. In fact, according to the old-world concept of universities, the Christian idea of reality, reality as creation, indeed gave rise to the development of rational thought.

This was due to the view that creation was not seen as a sinister and unfathomable abyss, but rather as something at the heart of which lay goodness, truth and beauty – attributes of reality that are, in a certain sense, conducive to interrogation as to the true nature of creation.

Present-day universities are on the other hand characterised by efforts to do away with the religious foundations of the old-world universities and to place universities on a purely secular grounding. It is characteristic of secular universities that an unbridgeable chasm is upheld between faith and reason, which goes hand in hand with a radical attenuation not only of reason, but also of faith.

Underlying the chasm between faith and reason, is the belief that creation itself is not characterised by concepts such as goodness, truth and beauty. In terms of the secular point of view, reality is rather marked by blind coincidence, irrationality and the unrestricted endeavour for power. An important consequence of this is that the thought process, and particularly knowledge, is impoverished to be just an instrument by means of which power can be wielded over the coincidental and irrational reality. As such, it stands in sharp contrast with the classical Western tradition, where the mind is directed towards, and open to, the amazingly truthful and beautiful creation.

The above remarks at last bring us to the nature and true being of Akademia. We will, throughout, be upholding the view that Akademia, in terms of its concept of itself (its character and purpose) endeavours to be an answer to the above challenges.

4. Akademia

Akademia's motto is *ad futurum per fontes*. This concisely expresses the true being and purpose of Akademia. In and through its association with the sources of the classical university, Akademia is at the same time a future-directed university.

At the foundation of this vision, expressed in Latin wording, lies the idea that the past and the future do not, as in the rectilinear view of history, stand in opposition to each other. On the contrary, Akademia's point of departure is that association with the ancient sources is the exact prerequisite for a meaningful directedness on the future. The sources with which Akademia is associated (and that enable the university to be a future-directed university), are brought forward in the following paragraphs.

4.1 *in Christian higher education institution*

Akademia is a Christian higher education institution that plays a directional role within the present-day world of universities in an open, unrestricted and critical way. As a Christian institution, Akademia's point of view is based in the centrality of "creation", "redemption" and "providence" in the general totality of things:

- i. Akademia accepts that all of existence was created by God and that creation is at its core also known by its truth, goodness and beauty;
- ii. Akademia accepts that the greatest purpose of creation is revealed in Christ, the living Word; and
- iii. that all creation is sustained by the providence of God (amongst other things upheld by the good creational order).

From the Christian point of view Akademia accepts that creation itself is not an irrational and inaccessible reality, but that it is in principle accessible to the mind, even though the mind cannot fully grasp it. At the same time Akademia accepts that the mind in terms of its own depth of motion extends itself towards an understanding of the reality of creation. Reality and thought in other words do not stand on a footing of exclusivity and opposition in relation to each other. On the contrary, reality and thought are mutually dependent.

In line with this, Akademia accepts that there is no unbridgeable chasm between faith and reason. Faith and reason are rather mutually dependent on each other. If faith and reason are separated (as happens in the secular university), both are at a disadvantage in their own integrity. Without faith, reason is impoverished to a mere instrument of bureaucratic control and the exercise power. Without reason, faith will in its turn be reduced to an irrational leap into darkness.

Both these probabilities – the instrumentalist approach of reason as a fideistic view of faith – present dilutions enabled by secular thinking. As a consequence of its emphasis on the cohesion of faith and reason, Akademia on the other hand actually presents an answer to the spiritual, cultural and social challenges of the secular world.

4.2 Classical universities: that which is true, good and beautiful

Akademia is committed to the ideals of the classical university as it came into being in classical Greece and the Middle Ages and found its place in the modern Western university. At the core of the classical university the idea is encapsulated that the mind reaches its full potential when it is open and perceptive to the wonder of the whole of reality and it interrogates as to the nature and true being reality by means of critical dialogue.

Akademia is specifically characterised, in its association with the classical university, by its directedness on the so-called three transcendentals, the properties of wondrous reality, namely its truth, goodness and beauty. At its core, Akademia is guided in its lectures as well as its research, by the inquiry or quest for the truth, goodness and beauty of reality. As such, Akademia presents present-day universities with an alternative for these tendencies, in terms of which the stated properties of reality are done away with and everything (in terms of the relativist, instrumentalist and constructivist points of view) is reduced to a mere effect, invention or construct of the subject.

4.3 Afrikaans

Akademia is an Afrikaans higher education institution. Akademia in other words offers its lectures as well as its research in one of the most developed university languages of the modern era.

The emphasis that Akademia places on Afrikaans does not mean that it is blind to the importance of other languages. On the contrary, Akademia is aware of the necessity also to prepare students for the multilingual workplace.

Akademia's point of departure is the idea, expressed in words, that a preference for one's mother tongue should not cause constraint with other languages. On the contrary, in and through the own mother tongue, students are eventually enabled to master and to excel in other languages as well.

The academic and other achievements on the international stage that have been attained by many speakers of the Afrikaans language, and who had their training at an Afrikaans institution, are ample proof of this. As such, Akademia represents a hope-inspiring alternative for Afrikaans speakers within the South African scenario of universities.

4.4 Community university

Akademia is a community university following the example of prominent community universities elsewhere in the world, with the mission to serve the academic ideals of a specific language and cultural community. As an institution of the community, Akademia does, however, not deny the importance of the creative, imaginative and thinking individual.

Akademia rather embraces the view that the individual and community are interdependent. Just as individuals need a sound community university to enable them to thrive as individuals, a community likewise needs solid individuals in order to remain an open, dynamic and future-directed force as a community.

As a community institution, Akademia strives to maintain good relations and mutual cooperation with universities in South Africa and elsewhere in the world of universities. Akademia accepts that the concepts "community" and "global" (just like community and individual) are not in opposition. On the contrary, the own community universities and the global universities should rather be seen in an interdependent context.

Without good interaction with universities in the global world, community universities are at risk of being locked in, but without community universities that are intent on serving specific communities, academic life is at risk of becoming bogged down in an abstract and lifeless generality.

4.5 Private higher education institution

Akademia is a private higher education institution. As such, it is not dependent on government and its multitude of affiliations and current political tendencies regarding the centrality of power. As a private institution it is rather dependent on the support of the Afrikaans-speaking community itself. In many respects the own language and cultural community are the life-giving source without which a community institution such as Akademia cannot exist.

As such, Akademia maintains the tradition of the former Afrikaans universities that were almost without exception founded in favour of their own community. Akademia is managed with the aid of the best possible free-market practices – and without measuring the academic ethos which is characteristic of Akademia exclusively on the basis of market demands. Although a private community institution such as Akademia cannot exist outside the discipline of market mechanisms, the nature and purpose of Akademia cannot be reduced to serviceability to the market.

4.6 Excellent professional and career-directed training

Akademia is committed towards excellence in providing in the need of professional training. Akademia sees to it that Afrikaans students successfully enter the labour market in its multiplicity of variety. Underlying Akademia's commitment to excellence in training, is its calling – and especially the ideal that students should in and through their careers also be called to be a light to the world.

4.7 The classical ideal of education

Akademia is likewise committed to the classical ideal of training as it emerged in traditional universities. At the heart of the classical educational ideal lies the thought that students should not only be specialists within a specific discipline, but that they should at the same time have insight in the totality of things. In terms of the classical educational ideal, this insight is identified with the quest for wisdom.

Akademia also investigates the ways in which the so-called tradition of the great books of the Western World, including literature, history, theology, philosophy, economy, mathematics, physics and chemistry, should take their place in its task as an educational university. The latter is underpinned by the expectation that training and education will take place as from the ground phase, concomitant with increasing emphasis on specialisation and career-directedness

4.8 Research and lecturing

Universities over the world are characterised by tension between research (the theoretical work of universities) and lecturing (the practical work of universities). Research is increasingly gaining an independent role, with the result that less value is accredited to lecturing, at the cost of the students. In so doing, theory and practice become detached from each other in an extrinsic manner.

Akademia is not only committed to excellent research and lecturing, but also realises the necessity of establishing and developing both these functions in their intrinsic connectedness. At Akademia the important work of research supports the equally important work of lecturing.

4.9 Culture of openness and the role of questioning

Despite the claims of existing universities that they are forums of openness, tolerance and critical dialogue, they are, ironically, controlled by politically correct prescriptions and ideology-driven programmes. Akademia sees itself as a forum that facilitates and enables unrestricted and critical dialogue. At the heart of this objective is the central role that Akademia and lecturers allocate to questioning in their lectures.

In the same way as community universities in the USA, such as Baylor University and Hillsdale College, Akademia embraces the thought that the central place of questioning during lecturing is an important reason why the latter is characterised by academic vibrance, a sense of experimentation and the adventurous quest for the truth. In short, in and through the central place that questioning holds, and owing to the dialogue elicited by this, the lecturing at Akademia exercises magnetic power on students.

4.10 Institutional architecture

Akademia embraces the point of view that the way in which it embodied in its architecture as a university, is not merely a secondary phenomenon that can be seen as a mere appendix to the being of the institution. On the contrary, just as there is an inseverable tie between theory (research) and practice (lecturing), there is likewise an inseverable tie between the inner being (the true nature of the university) and the external being (inter alia symbolised in the architecture of being a university). Akademia strives to embody its true being and purpose in the best possible architecture as a university in the future.