

# IIDE Proceedings 2014 - A Transcendental Inquiry Into 'Academic Capitalism In The New Economy'



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The aim of this essay **[i]** is to investigate and evaluate the ideas transcendental to the notion of 'academic capitalism in the new economy'. Ideas that will get attention are firstly structure and direction, which broadly indicate the nature that the analysis and evaluation of 'academic capitalism in the new economy' will take. A second and narrower focus on 'academic capitalism in the new economy' is to label this phenomenon as an idea-framework that moulds the universities of our times. A third distinction is to identify in the core of this framework the constitutive goods that particularly give structure and direction to the idea of the university. In the case of 'academic capitalism in the new economy', the concepts of 'profit' and 'economic growth' are identified as constitutive goods. It will be argued that this idea-anatomy prepares the arena for the deformation that sets in when the constitutive good of an entity like a university is not internal to that entity but instead a totalitarian constitutive good is imposed from outside.

## 1. *Introduction*

Lynch (2006:4-5) takes note of the phenomenon of 'academic capitalism in the

new economy' [ii] when she observes that "there is an ongoing movement to define education as a tradable service", an undertaking which is very much part of the "ideology of the World Trade Organisation". The reason for this, she says, is "quite simple": It is estimated that in the year 2000 already, "education was a \$2 trillion global industry" with the perspective that it has the potential for profitable returns among those who can afford to pay for it. More than six hundred "for-profit" higher education institutions were operating at that time, which should give a clear indication that for-profit trading in higher education is making huge strides forward. Rhoades and Slaughter (2004:37-38) report about the American situation that the profit motive is not only part of private 'for-profit' universities but that "the ascendance of neo-liberal and neo-conservative politics and policies" caused a shift in "government investment in higher education to emphasize education's economic role and cost efficiency". This leads to what they call "academic capitalism in the new economy", which is the tendency where non-profit public universities also "develop, market and sell a wide range of products commercially in the private sector as a *basic source of income*".

The justifiers of the neoliberal academic capitalism are disposed to link with the anti-ivory tower sentiment about universities. Charles Taylor points out that already in early modernism, Francis Bacon argued that science which is not in the service of bettering the plight of humanity, is without value. Bacon's argument can be seen as the cradle of a "model of science whose criterion of truth would be instrumental efficacy" in the service of "the production of life in ever-greater abundance and the relief of suffering on an ever-wider scale" (Taylor 2003:104-105). According to this anti-ivory tower sentiment universities should link with the main concerns of society and not withdraw in practicing science for its own sake. A foremost issue of this nature for current society is the neoliberal emphasis on economic growth and profit and the application of the latter obsession, justified by the good-sounding notion of innovation in universities.

Some, however, object to this emphasis inherent to 'academic capitalism'. By also referring to the instrumentalist revolution that Bacon initiated, Goosen (2011:491,496), for example, emphasises that modernity and eventually postmodernism reduced life to a purely instrumentalist, utilitarian and pragmatic affair. For universities it means emphasis on practical issues such as profitability with a simultaneously marginalisation of the old *telos* of the academic world, namely the cultivation of a theoretical life. In this process, knowledge became

exclusively a human means to yield power and thus to subject reality to human control.

The encroachment of academic capitalism put us before a dilemma: It seems, on the one hand, that this new emphasis is here to stay because it gives the instrumental promise of financial security and even wealth to universities. On the other hand, it can be asked whether this development is acceptable if it means that the historically developed academic identity, which emphasises education and scholarship, will be the casualty when the university becomes yet another manifestation of the market. The first dubious horn of this dilemma will be explored in more detail as the economic motive that conditions the academic capitalist identity and practice. The last section of the essay will nevertheless give some attention to a truly academic motive for universities as well.

The two fundamental questions of this chapter/paper are the following: What is the anatomy or structure suggested by the transcendental ideas underlying the notion of 'academic capitalism in the new economy'? A closely related question will concern the direction of the ideas underlying 'academic capitalism in the new economy, and thus the way that these ideas should be evaluated.

The three main objectives of this paper will therefore be to firstly develop the conceptual tools, which include the concepts 'strong evaluation', 'frameworks', 'structure', 'direction' and 'constitutive goods' (sections 2 and 4), which secondly, can be used to analyse and criticise the structure inherent to 'academic capitalism in the new economy' (sections 3 & 5), with the third objective to briefly suggest an alternative to the latter notion (section 6).

This inquiry will elaborate on concepts developed by Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. It will be argued that Taylor's 'tools' make a transcendental inquiry[iii] possible of the ideas behind academic capitalism (i.e. an inquiry into the anatomy of the ideas of academic capitalism). Taylor develops a vocabulary whereby questions are posed about the historically developed ideas that condition our being human. In this paper these concepts and questions will be applied to the search for identity by the university in the context of the 'new economy'. It is nevertheless important to point out that Taylor's concepts will be used insofar as it fits the non-reductionist approach that will ultimately be the paradigm of the inquiry below[iv].

## 2. 'Strong Evaluation' and Frameworks'

As is indicated above, the first investigative step is to develop the conceptual tools

that can be used to analyse the foundational ideas behind academic capitalism. Since the concept 'structure and direction' will take a pivotal position in the investigation below, it needs to be explained briefly. Firstly, the concept 'structure and direction' represents the broad ontological distinction we need to analyse and evaluate what happens to the universities of our age.

The sense that will be attached to the concept is widely used in the non-reductionist approach of Reformational Philosophy. Wolters (1988:49) explains that 'structure' indicates "the constant creational constitution of any thing, what makes it the thing or entity that it is". He adds that 'structure' is an alternative attempt to give a name to the "reality that the philosophical tradition of the West has often referred to by such words as substance, essence, and nature". 'Direction', on the other hand, indicates the "distortion or perversion" as well as the "restoration" of this 'structure'. When entities live up to and are transformed in the direction of their normative structures, a positive direction is realised. It is nevertheless also possible to indicate and criticise a "misdirected, abnormal, distorted" direction that an entity like the university can take. Therefore, to articulate the 'structure' of the entity called the university, represents an attempt to indicate what is constant, unifying, normative as well as identity- and function-conferring to this institution. This structural dimension has a direct influence on the direction of universities: The structure sets the aim for the direction that universities should strive for in their functioning. As will be argued below, a proper direction will only ensue when the structure relied upon is truly that of being a university. If the structure is projected from another identity and thus external to the university, it will probably lead universities on the road to deformation.

A link can be made between the concept 'structure and direction' and Charles Taylor's notion of morality. Taylor (1989:3-4) firstly distinguishes what he calls the "narrow focus" of morality. This narrow focus is about "our obligations to other people" and includes issues like "justice and the respect of other people's life". This narrow focus is for Taylor only one of "three axes" of "moral thinking". The other two axes are about "our sense of what underlies our own dignity", and "questions about what make our lives meaningful or fulfilling", that is about "the nature of the good life". It is especially the latter idea that indicates for Taylor the broad understanding of moral ontology and which he (Taylor 1989:92) uses in "a highly general sense, designating anything considered valuable, worthy, admirable, of whatever kind or category". Taylor's 'narrow' concept of morality

coincides with the juridical and ethical aspects of reality, while his broader concept could be expressed with more comprehensive concepts that attribute a structure and direction to reality. For the purposes of this study the potential of this ontology to describe and evaluate the structure and direction of the idea of academic capitalism will be explored.

With these distinctions as a background, a concept that Taylor (1989:4) sees as central to both his narrow and broad senses of morality, namely “strong evaluation”, can be considered. Strong evaluations involve human “discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower”, with the understanding that these discriminations are to some degree independent of subjective evaluations (desires, inclinations or choices) and in fact give standards by which subjective evaluations can be judged. Taylor seems to be sensitive to the idea of a given structural and normative dimension of reality because he sees these evaluations as not being subjective, which suggests they set given standards. What is abundantly clear is that strong evaluations have for Taylor a directional function because they help us to discriminate between right or wrong, etc. In fact, it can be argued that the concept of strong evaluation harbours within itself the relationship between the concepts of structure and direction because a strong evaluation can be seen as the structural standard that human beings articulate (positivise) and employ to distinguish between a good direction and deformation of an entity like the university. Taylor’s identification of standards can, however, not be seen as overtly confessing a divine structure - it also leaves the door open for a human constructionist project. He nevertheless suggests that interpretations about the structure of an entity like the university will follow a pattern that is not the result of pure fiat.

In light of these distinctions it can be noted that universities are increasingly under pressure to function according to a set of strong evaluations prescribed by current culture that gives a particular structure and direction to the university as an institution. It has already been mentioned that Goosen (2013:491) observes that the classical *telos* (strong evaluation) for universities, namely a ‘theoretical life’, is marginalised in favour of so-called practical values. With regard to the latter he mentions ‘access’, ‘international reputation’, ‘public image’, ‘the establishment of networks’, ‘outcomes’, ‘strategic management’, ‘competitiveness’, and ‘profitability’. It will indeed be argued below that among these values, ‘competitiveness’ and ‘profitability’ in particular set the tone in a culture dominated by an economic framework.

The concept 'framework' that was mentioned in the previous sentence, suggests that dominating strong evaluations do not operate in isolation. Strong evaluations that portray a kinship to each other in many instances become a seemingly internally coherent idea-framework which is difficult to resist. It is therefore significant that Taylor (1989:27-29,30) points to the embeddedness of strong evaluations in such a framework. He reiterates the function- and identity-conferring (structure) but also the very strong directional nature of such a framework. Frameworks, like the strong evaluations that populate these frameworks, are not fully inventions of ours but our "answers to questions which inescapably pre-exist for us, independent of our answer or inability to answer". Human beings, and one can add universities, give their "framework-definitions" as answers to these questions and thus structure life and reality with these idea-frameworks. The emphasis on the question-character underlines for Taylor the directional nature of frameworks. One can say that humans are challenged by these questions to give direction to their lives because a framework is "the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand" on questions about "what is good or bad, worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance ... and what is trivial and secondary". Negatively formulated: If people or universities lose this horizon "they would be at sea". They would experience an "identity crisis, an acute form of disorientation".

The saliency of the values of competition and profitability is mentioned above. Indeed, Jochen Röpke gives a horizon or framework of strong evaluations seemingly valid for the so-called entrepreneurial university that links with this set of evaluations. Röpke (1998:1-2) claims that the "future of high-wage economies ... depends critically on ... freedom to innovate: to create new markets". With this he indicates two strong evaluations of proponents of academic capitalism, namely 'free markets' (i.e. the 'competition' dictum) and 'innovation'. He emphasises the relevance of these evaluations for universities by saying that the "new quality of international competition changes the role and function of universities and research systems dramatically" and that "innovation itself depends on the creation ... of new knowledge". In addition to these two evaluations, he argues that "the practical application of this new knowledge ... is the foundation of growth in mature economies". 'Economic growth' and the creation of 'applicable knowledge' at universities are furthermore combined with the former two strong evaluations in the following quote from Röpke: "Since a technologically advanced and open economy can only compete by creating new product and technology cycles, the creation and diffusion of the knowledge on which these

recombinations are based, has become a factor of utmost importance.”

To summarise: Röpke gives ‘strong’ value to the concepts ‘free markets’ (or ‘competition’), ‘innovation’, ‘practical and applicable knowledge’, as well as ‘economic growth’. Set in a framework or horizon of strong evaluations they are nothing less than the content of his vision of the structure and direction for the university demanded by the framework of ‘academic capitalism in the new economy’.

### 3. A ‘Framework’ for Academic Capitalists

One of the aims identified in the introduction of this essay, is to get clarity about the for-profit identity (structure) and orientation (direction) that our culture prescribes by means of the framework of ‘academic capitalism in the new economy’ to universities. It is therefore necessary to briefly describe the neoliberal framework (i.e. the idea of the ‘new economy’) in which universities most likely find themselves.

Steger and Roy summarise the history of this framework as follows: Neoliberals accused Keynesian egalitarian liberalism or controlled capitalism which reigned globally from 1945 to the middle 1970s of “crippling government regulation, exorbitant public spending, and high tariff barriers to international trade” and that these conditions “led to high inflation and poor economic growth”. The neoliberal accusations and proposed reforms gained dominance in the 1990s. This dominance drew an amount of criticism since the global economic crisis of 2008-9 (Steger and Roy, 2010: location 490,497-499).

Steger and Roy (2010: location 506-510) describe neoliberalism as an ideological system (i.e. structure- and direction-giving framework) of “widely shared ideas and patterned beliefs” that function as a conceptual map which guides people by offering them “a more or less coherent picture of the world as it is, but also as it ought to be”. This kind of framework especially has a strong directional role since it “encourage[s] people to act in certain ways”, “legitimize[s] certain political interests” and “defend[s] or challenge[s] dominant power structures”. In the case of neoliberalism the directional power entities are primarily “executives of large transnational corporations” which “saturate the public discourse with idealized images of a consumerist free-market world”, which supposedly will bring about “a better world”.

What are the strong evaluations that populate this neoliberal framework? A foremost evaluation is the kind of human being that is desired. According to

Steger and Roy, Adam Smith set the tone for not only classical *laissez-faire* economics but also for neoliberalism, by operating with the “image of *homo economicus* - the outlook that people are isolated individuals whose actions reflect mostly their material self-interests”, as well as the “economic model” of “the self-regulating market” (Steger and Roy 2010: location 403-406,501-504). Steger and Roy (2010: location 530-535) describe this human being, when active as a state official, as “the transformation of bureaucratic mentalities into entrepreneurial identities where government workers see themselves no longer as public servants and guardians of a qualitatively defined ‘public good’ but as self-interested actors responsible to the market and contributing to the monetary success of slimmed-down state ‘enterprises’”. Goosen (2011:491) quotes a senior South African professor who prescribes a similar transformation for academics: “The old goal of the academic world, namely to cultivate a theoretical life, should be substituted for the need to develop networks aimed at the self-centred interests of the now fully privatised academic”.

In order to achieve this aim, a specific mode of governance is needed for all social institutions. According to Steger and Roy (2010: location 522-530) the entrepreneurial mode of governance valid for the state, for instance, subscribes to the values of “competitiveness, self-interest and decentralization” which should manifest in practices of “individual empowerment and the devolution of central state power to smaller localized units”. Embracing neoliberal management values for the state entails that the public good should not necessarily be pursued by “enhancing civil society and social justice”. The strategy emphasis is rather on the employment of “governmental technologies that are taken from the world of business” such as “strategic plans”, “risk-management schemes” that will create “surpluses” as well as “cost-benefit analyses and other efficiency calculations”. This way of governance emphasises “the shrinking of political governance” (Steger and Roy 2010: location 522-530).

For Rhoades and Slaughter (2004:53) the new economy prescribes something similar for universities, namely decentralisation that should lead to “a model of reduced complexity of academic work”. This implies “breaking down the interconnected activities of professors and the discretion that they exercise in enacting their craft into discrete, delimited parts”. This model of governance demands from universities to “prioritize budgetary, economic and strategic issues in the processes that surround building, investing in, restructuring and de-investing in academic programs”. This implies, Rhoades and Slaughter (2004:38) say, an “increasingly corporatized, top-down style of decision making and



management”, which means that “managers exercising greater strategic control over the direction of colleges and universities” and that staff members “increasingly become ‘managed professionals’”. This corporate way of managing, they conclude (2004:53), means that “to simply play by the well-established capitalistic rules of the game is to cede academic control over the curricula”.

In summary, it can be said that the strongly evaluated neoliberal idea of the self-interested individual prescribes for universities an entrepreneurial mode that manifests itself especially in the way that these institutions are governed. In this new mode of governance, competitiveness and decentralisation (fragmentation?) are employed to probably enhance economic growth and profitability, which implies nevertheless the breaking down of the collegial way of interaction between academics and putting the authority for academic matters in the hands of managers who govern academia increasingly according to economic targets.

#### *4. Structure and Direction and ‘Constitutive Goods’*

The framework or ideology of neoliberalism ostensibly leads to a practice in universities where management have a determining directional role and increasingly relies on the self-centred behaviour of ordinary academics. Management justifies this approach with the notion of an entrepreneurial ethos/direction aimed at values like competitiveness and profitability. The impression is that this ethos results in less control by academics over academic affairs[v]. In order to get clarity about this direction, the influence of the strong evaluations (competitiveness, profitability etc.) behind this direction needs to be explored.

The strong evaluations that structure and direct an entity like a university are usually hierarchised in the framework in which they are embedded. According to Taylor (1989:62,92-93) people tend to be moved by a variety of “life goods” (strong evaluations) but usually identify one of them as “the most important and serious one”. This supreme good can be any “action, or motive, or style of life”, or “feeling” or “mode of life”, which can be described as “qualitatively superior”. People strongly evaluate, for instance, “the value of self-expression, of justice, of family life, or the worship of God, of ordinary decency, of sensitivity” and so on; “but they consider one of these - perhaps their relation to God, or justice - as of overriding importance”.

Such a supreme good clearly plays a directional role. Taylor (1989:42) therefore describes his notion of a supreme good with the image of spatial orientation. The

“need to be connected” with what we “see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value”, is “one of the most basic aspirations of human beings”. Taylor (1989:45) argues that this need to be in contact with the good can be more or less satisfied in our lives. However, the orientation metaphor makes it especially an issue of yes or no; not how near or far we are from what we see as the good, but rather the direction of our lives, towards or away from it. Taylor (1989:63) explains that although all the goods a person subscribes to, give direction to one’s life, it is the “yes/no” commitment to some highest good that is “utterly decisive for what I am as a person”. This kind of supreme good clearly plays a strong directional role in the lives of people and the existence of entities like the university. It is nevertheless also important that Taylor foresees that this supreme good also has a structural function. Taylor (1989:93) uses the role that Plato gives to rationality to explain the structural function he has in mind: For Plato to “be rational is to have a vision of rational order”. This is to refer to “a cosmic reality, the order of things” and “the key to this order is the Idea of the Good itself”. Taylor calls this supreme good a “constitutive good” or a “moral source” because it “constitutes the goodness of some action or motive”. In other words, lower-ranked life goods depend on “some feature of the way things are, in virtue of which these life goods are goods”.

It is important to point to and underline the close connection between the two functions of supreme sources here: A constitutive good will not command directional authority if it is not also seen as thoroughly conferring identity (structure) to the entities under its influence. Taylor’s concept of “constitutive good” therefore has both directional and identity-giving functions[**vi**]. It is nevertheless very important to make a distinction between structuring and directing functions, as Wolters (1988:50-51) and Hart (1984:312-313) do. This distinction is important to avoid the trap of labelling some aspect, dimension or good of reality as the source of evil. It should be noted that a hierarchical dualism usually originates when evil is projected on some aspect of life (i.e. the lower part of a dualism) and the other part is deified. When this happens, evil and goodness are reified and not seen as the direction that some entity or structure is taking. This is, of course, to deny the fundamental goodness and thus equal value of all aspects of life or goods as well as the equal potential of all aspects to be corrupted or deformed.

Taylor (1989:218,516) points to naturalism which argues that in rejecting religion it gives nature its due and thus subscribes to the idea of the equal goodness of all

aspects of reality. However, according to Taylor, this affirmation of nature is historically dependent on the notion of a primordial divine affirmation of creation, which is given in the repeated phrase in Genesis 1: “and God saw that it was good”. Taylor (1989:13-14) even argues that this affirmation of creation and an eventual affirmation of ordinary life “has become one of the most powerful ideas in modern civilization”. Taylor (1989:13-14,23,81,83,211-213,215,218,235) points out that a hierarchical distinction (dualism) was made in antiquity between ordinary life (i.e. especially the life of production and reproduction, of work and the family) and the elitist, aristocratic values of contemplation and citizenship. The dualism between ordinary life and the aristocratic ethos was vindicated in antiquity by a hierarchical ontology. The Reformation changed this by sanctifying ordinary life, by asking whether a person’s life before God is “worshipfully and in the fear of God or not”. This implied a rejection of the elitist morality that excluded ordinary life from a higher moral position. Although Taylor agrees that this was a step forward, he also points out that the “affirmation of ordinary life” gradually became secularised and that the fully naturalist version “denounce all qualitative distinctions” for being “blind to the dignity and worth of ordinary human desire and fulfilment”. Life “according to nature” meant that the satisfaction of biological needs became a moral obligation in itself. The ironical implication was that especially Christianity, which was the originator of the “affirmation of ordinary life”, is attacked by naturalism for having moral ideals that lay “a crushing burden on those in whom it inculcates a sense of sin”.

The implication of Taylor’s observation is that naturalism is in danger of subscribing again to the hierarchical dualism of antiquity, but now turned upside down: Ordinary life becomes a moral project of a much higher order than activities associated with the aristocratic ethos or Christian morality. Once again some part of life is seen as higher and more important than the rest, with the rest even suspected of being the source of wickedness. The important point we have to take note of is that a constitutive good has very strong directional and identity-conferring functions. If this is combined with the deformational notion of locating the good only in some parts of reality, a constitutive good has the potential to be a good that creates a fixed hierarchical ontology and insists to be the totalitarian source for reality – with the implication that all of reality has to be reduced to this single good. This should not be the role of a constitutive good. Taylor (1989:62) significantly remarks that not all persons give some constitutive good “unflinching priority in their deliberations and decisions”. The implication of his remark is that

other goods should also be recognised as deserving their proper place. Taylor nevertheless thinks that constitutive goods still have “an incomparable place in their lives” because it “above all other provides the landmarks for what they judge to be the direction of their lives” – landmarks are then that which give structure to life.

How can we reconcile this seemingly paradoxical expectation that all goods are equal and that they all should be strongly valued, with the idea of a constitutive good that has a leading role?

A promising way to articulate this double condition (while indicating an application for our topic) is embedded in Maarten Verkerk’s interpretation of the concept of ‘social entrepreneurship’ that is valid for organisations where ‘profit’ seems to be the totalitarian constitutive good. Verkerk (2013:9) concludes his argument for ‘social entrepreneurship’ by explaining that social entrepreneurs regard “profit” merely as “a ‘tool’ to realize the mission of an organization”. With this he implies that the constitutive good of even business organisations cannot be a totalitarian profit motive. Social entrepreneurs are therefore prepared to “accept a below market rate when social or environmental goals have to be met”. How does Verkerk get to this conclusion? In his review of the recent financial crisis, Verkerk (2013:3-4) identifies motives like “the absence of rules and supervision”, “power and ... greed” as causes for the crisis. He therefore remarks “that better rules and supervision are required to prevent next crises and new scandals”, but adds that this emphasis “easily can lead away the conversation from another problem - maybe the problem”. Verkerk (2013:3) diagnoses the important cause of recent crises as the fact that business enterprises abandoned their “origins”. In the terms used thus far, one can say business people deserted the constitutive good for financial businesses of “serving society with good financial services”, for example.

Verkerk (2013:4), using a concept which he claims to get from Alasdair MacIntyre (although one suspects the Reformational notion of sphere sovereignty in the background), remarks that “practices are about ‘internal goods’”. These ‘internal goods’ refer to the values that are realized specifically by that practice. With this, Verkerk identifies a characteristic that seems critical to the nature of constitutive goods, namely that these goods should be *internal* if they want to evade an absolutising and reductionist deformation. Being ‘external’ is deformative because a good that is appropriate for some other practice, ‘y’, becomes the

constitutive good to which entity or practice 'x' is being reduced. If the constitutive good, on the other hand, is internal to entity or practice 'x', it will be intent on realising what the identity of 'x' is all about. The latter is the core of the idea of sphere sovereignty. Verkerk (2013:4) gives two telling examples of appropriate internal goods, namely that the "internal goods of health care are cure and care for patients and the internal goods of banking are financial services for citizens and enterprises". Reductionist/absolutised constitutive goods in these instances would be "goods that are external to the values realized by the practice, e.g. prestige, status, and money". It is at this point "where business institutions failed", and which led to financial crises, because the "focus was shifted from 'internal goods' to 'external goods', from excellent services to profits, and from virtues to targets".

##### *5. Academic Capitalists as Absolutisers and Reductionists*

Is a non-absolutising and non-reductionist approach possible in the neoliberal framework?

The assessment of this issue by culture critics is not positive: Bartholomew (2009:93,105) identifies "an overemphasis on the economic dimension of life" in current culture and refers to consumerism and globalism as examples, which he describes as a culture in which "everything becomes a product that can be bought and sold". Bartholomew (2009:92,103-104) therefore labels economics a modernist grand narrative, which postmodernism tries to decrease into "disconnected fragments and icebergs". This effort, however, does not mean that "modernity has vanished". The economic grand narrative, as it manifests in "consumerist individualism and free-market globalization" moved to the centre of current culture. Steger and Roy (2010: location 519) also indicate this totalitarian role of the neoliberal framework: "... it makes sense to think of neoliberalism as a rather economistic ideology, which, not unlike its archrival Marxism, puts the production and exchange of material goods at the heart of the human experience." Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel (2012:10-11) more recently made a very similar observation, that "we drifted from having a market economy to being a market society". This distinction implies that a market economy is a "valuable and effective tool" to effectuate "productive activity", whereas a "market society is a way of life in which market values seep into every aspect of human endeavor".

Is this absolutising and reductionism also applicable to academic capitalism? In

his description of the situation in which universities find themselves, Vale (2011:31) remarks about this context that money is “the only goal in global society”. This implies that “economics, not state politics nor the morality that the church had preached in earlier ages, would chart the course of human events”. Vale’s remark implies that an economic view of the university is not the first instance of deformation of the university. Indeed, statism was also practiced in an earlier dispensation by the state, and is still part of the agenda of the South African state[vii].

Proponents of academic capitalism also confirm the ‘seeping of market values’ into universities:

Etzkowitz (2004:65), for instance, is convinced that the “capitalization of knowledge” will be “the heart of a new mission for the university, linking universities more tightly to users of knowledge and establishing the university as an economic actor in its own right”. To realise this, Etzkowitz (2004:65,76) sees the so-called entrepreneurial university as “the latest step in an academic progression”. In his interpretation of the history of the university he identifies a first revolution, namely the adding of research as academic task. This, he says, “disturbed the taken for granted assumption of the university as a single purpose educational institution”. Research-oriented innovators reacted to traditionalists’ objection in the late nineteenth century that the main task of the university is teaching, by saying that with new knowledge we can “raise the training of the students to a higher level”. This higher level is explained by Etzkowitz as a higher level of productivity in which students also do research in the learning process. He anticipates that the second revolution (that is, the adoption of a “mission of economic and social development”) will be objected to because it implies that researchers should be involved in “translating the research into a technology and product”. Etzkowitz’s counterargument is that it is more productive for universities to do the commercialisation themselves than to leave it to independent business enterprises. Already during the 1960s Kerr (2001:xii) predicted that economic redefinitions will change the nature and functioning of universities: “Old concepts of faculty-student relations, of research, of faculty-administration roles are being changed at a rate without parallel.” In fact, Kerr (2001:68) claimed that the “university and segments of industry are becoming more alike” where, for instance, the “professor – at least in the natural and some of the social sciences – takes on the characteristics of an entrepreneur”[viii].

What would the strong evaluation be of overriding importance (i.e. constitutive good) for current universities?

With the broader framework in mind, it can be said that the profit and economic growth motives are probably constitutive goods with a major absolutising and reductionist push in our culture. Almost two decades ago, Hungarian-American capitalist George Soros (1998) formulated it as follows: “So the hallmark of the current form of global capitalism, the feature that sets it apart from earlier versions, is its pervasive success: the intensification of the profit motive.” He furthermore refers to the “penetration [of the profit motive] into areas ... previously governed by other considerations”.

There are indications that this constitutive good assumes even more layers of aspiring constitutive goods beyond itself. Middleton and Walsh (1995:22) point to the modern belief that “a rising standard of living (defined largely in economic terms) is the ultimate goal in human life and the only route to personal happiness and social harmony”. More recently but in more or less the same terms and critical mood, Nussbaum (2010:10, 2011:ix) says that the goal of nations has become economic growth. The objective of many a nation is to “increase its gross national product per capita” as if this measure is “a good stand-in for a nation’s overall quality of life”. It would be possible to probe into a layer of meaning even beyond that of economic growth. The obsession with economic growth and profit is a manifestation of a general modernist preoccupation with progress. And then it is possible to argue, like Goudzwaard et al. (2007:90-91) do, that the belief in “endless progress” is the result of a “dynamistic worldview” which elevated especially economic growth to the status of the “measure of everyone and everything”. However, for the purpose of understanding the strong evaluations of the neoliberal idea of academic capitalism, it will suffice for now to concentrate on our civilisation’s obsession with profit and economic growth.

With some idea of the constitutive good of current culture as a background, we can now turn our attention to the constitutive good(s) that academic capitalism specifically singles out. Some exponents of the entrepreneurial university do have ‘economic growth’ in mind as its supreme source: Clark Kerr (2001:xi-xii) already sensed a crucial link between knowledge and economic growth in the 1960s, when he observed that the “basic reality for the university, is the widespread recognition that new knowledge is the most important factor in economic and social growth”. Kerr explains that this growth is important because if the ideal of

economic growth is not pursued, we are heading for the “fall of professions and even of social classes, of regions and even of nations”. More recently, Michael Crow (2008), president of Arizona State University and protagonist of the entrepreneurial university, agrees that “continued economic growth must remain an overarching objective because if we stop growing economically the social outcomes will be dire ... our collective standard of living will decline, our way of life will be threatened”. Yusuf (2007:21) explains and emphasises the relevance of this sentiment when he argues that if making a profit and innovation are the main drivers of economic growth, “universities could emerge as the most dynamic transnational entities and a commercial force in their own right”. Yusuf (2007:4-6) argues that the lifecycle of consumer products “from introduction to maturity, obsolescence, and withdrawal” is getting shorter and shorter and that therefore “ceaseless innovation” is needed because only then will companies be able to renew their products. But these companies will not attain this innovation on their own. Universities will have to be conscripted to help.

As can be discerned from these remarks, according to the neoliberal framework the constitutive good for universities can be found amongst the related ideas of ‘profit’, ‘economic growth’, and ‘innovation’. This is also the observation of critics. With reference to the priority in higher education, Rhoades and Slaughter (2004:38) for instance point to the instrumentalist implication of ‘profit’ when they claim that “revenue generation comes to be prioritized over the core educational activities of the academy”. Nussbaum (2010:10) describes the current ideal for universities as “education for economic growth”, implying that economic growth should outrank the academic goals of universities. The underlying motivation for this good to be supreme, she argues, is the instrumentalist argument that universities have a fundamental and public responsibility in the general attempt of nations to attain the blissful state of salvation by economics. The effect of this instrumentalism is that the core ingredient of universities has become the view that making a profit from innovative applied science should inescapably become the major rationale for their teaching and research tasks[**ix**]. Indeed, propagators of academic capitalism see economic growth not only as a good that universities should in general contribute to the economy but also as an ultimate ideal to which universities themselves should conform. Such an interpretation of history and a prescription for the road ahead is for instance given by Crow (2008:3-6), who argues that the “ancient Greek academies developed the capacity to understand nature and society ... but they were tiny in



scale and exclusively 'conservative' ". The "medieval European universities were slightly larger in scale" and it was only with industrialisation in Europe that the transformation of the "socioeconomic and cultural landscape" in the direction of "industrial competition and the emergence of the notion of efficient technology-driven competitiveness" started. He nevertheless thinks that at this stage "entrepreneurship was still little in evidence" at universities. He therefore thinks the "societal mission of colleges and universities" should "make more of an effort to ... educate greater numbers of individuals" to service the "economic dimension". This is because "higher education is the means by which a skilled workforce is produced and the source of new *knowledge capital* and thus *economic growth*".

The constitutive good for the framework that can be labelled 'academic capitalism' will be found amongst or will be a combination of the closely related concepts of 'progress', 'innovation', 'economic growth', and 'profit'. The prediction by proponents of academic capitalism is that an increasing pursuance of these goods will unavoidably change the nature and role of universities. They predict and even prescribe the appearance of mass production universities, which primarily prepare a quantitatively large and growing labour force for a growing industry.

#### *6. Intimations of a non-absolutising and non-reductionist constitutive good for universities*

It should be noted that the drift of my argument is not to simply discredit 'profit', 'economic growth' and 'innovation'. In fact, a good case could probably be made for the responsible use of these goods in modern culture. However, if these goods become the *constitutive* goods for our civilization and more particularly for twenty first century universities, we are dealing with an obsession that might deform life and social institutions like universities in many ways. Critics agree that academic capitalism is the direction that universities are taking but remind us that we should look critically at this development.

Rhoades and Slaughter (2004:55-56), for instance, argue that ordinary academics sense that the totalitarian and reductionist penetration of the profit and growth motives in academic affairs will bring about a deformative change that could lead to an identity crisis for universities. They quote an anonymous academic on the increasing commercialisation of education: "Our first priority is our students, not to compete in markets ... The minute you get into making a profit, to competing in the market, then you almost change yourself into something you are not." For

Rhoades and Slaughter an alternative to 'academic capitalism' is therefore "to simply say that we will not commercialize the curriculum - period". They express a dual focus in "commitment to both educational interests and to the broad public interest". The idea of the "broad public interest" can be dubious: If it is simply seen as the interest of the state, a step backwards is given to a constitutive good prescribed by statism and thus a good outside the university as institution. However, if the "broad public interest" is the interest society has in good education, a step in the direction of an internal constitutive good is given.

Collini (2012: location 61&177) agrees with Rhoades and Slaughter that the appropriate internal constitutive good for universities is in the first place "intellectual, educational, scientific". He elaborates on the description "educational" and adds that it "signals something more than professional training"; and furthermore he says of "scientific" that it "is not wholly dictated by the [instrumentalist anti-ivory tower] need to solve immediate practical problems". Collini (2012: location 51-53, 58-61) observes that "any discussion of the place of universities in contemporary society will inevitably be driven to articulate, in however rudimentary terms, some sense of human purposes beyond that of accumulating wealth". He agrees that one should not "underestimate the expense of these institutions or presume that there is some God-given right for them to be lavishly funded". He nevertheless emphasises that if one tries to make the case for the value and importance of universities, it should be made in terms that "are not chiefly, and certainly not exclusively economic". Strauss expresses the same intuition about the relationship between the constitutive good for universities and the economy of these institutions: It can be the case that universities embark on "entrepreneurial activities" but this should merely be "geared towards the ideal of making the university financially independent - such that the typical task of the university as an academic institution may flourish". However, if the entrepreneurial activities, which are a-typical, are "mistakenly understood to be a typifying characteristic, it would be impossible to identify the difference between the university and a firm" (Strauss 2009:595). According to the first part of Strauss's remark, entrepreneurial activities should be seen as an external good that can nevertheless add something to the proper functioning of universities. In other words, the profit and growth idea can be normal and important if it is in a supportive role to the internal constitutive good of the university. The second part of Strauss's remark therefore suggests that if the entrepreneurial good assumes the position of an internal constitutive good, it will

disfigure the identity and functioning of the university. It is therefore significant that Rhoades and Slaughter (2004:41) claim that even “policymakers and businesspersons” think that the “academy does not necessarily best serve its purpose by taking on a short-term, profit-maximizing mentality” but rather that they demand from “higher education to produce well-rounded graduates who have learned how to think and have sharpened a wide range of communication and writing abilities”.

Elaborating on the notion of the typifying task (constitutive good) for universities, Strauss (1998:113-114,117) remarks that “the modern university has emerged as an institution in which structural continuity exists with the origin of the first university of the Middle Ages around the year 1200”. This structural continuity indicates for Strauss “a common and underlying constant structural principle”. For Strauss the full constitutive ‘principle’ comprises “the simultaneous presence of two particular facts”: The first is the “organization of the university into a specific societal institution”, which can be described as the “bringing together of teachers and students”. Secondly, the aim of this union is to transfer from teacher to student “scientific knowledge by way of scientific teaching”. The combination of these two activities was initially expressed with the term “universitas” but later substituted with the word “academia”. Academic activities therefore harbour the constitutive good for the university, which “determines the unique way in which the university as life form functions”.

According to Strauss (1998:117-118), it is important for the constitutive good for universities that this “qualifying theoretical-analytical function of the university”[x] is as an internal good, and interweaved with aspects external to the university. It is important to identify the existence but also to underline the secondary status of this interweavement with external goods. Interweavement with the faith aspect can, for instance, be seen in the “academic mission (task and credo formulation) of the university”. This “peculiar academic confession of faith” should, however, not transform the university into a church.

What then should the result be of an academic mission statement? Strauss’s response to this question is that it should clearly be stated that the “theoretical-logical qualification” demands that a university “should express itself in its typical teaching and research activities”. Negatively, this entails that “inherent ... limits of competence ... exist for the academic activities of the university”. For instance, “the university cannot act as an economic institution, political action or religious grouping”.

How do universities live up to this ideal? An overview[xi] of the vision (in most cases primary) and mission (in most cases secondary) statements of some South African universities do not yield a very optimistic result: None of these universities put the union between students and teachers or the transfer of science and scholarship from lecturers to students in a very prominent constitutive position. In most cases education is valued in a secondary position, and some universities do not even recognise this identity-function on a secondary level. The second activity that identifies a university - namely science, scholarship and research - is recognised by most of these universities in their primary vision, but mostly in vague references to "knowledge" or with a very strong emphasis only on research. It is disheartening that the foremost academic capitalist strong evaluations, 'excellence' and 'innovation', have some popularity for a position in the constitutive good of universities. Other constitutive goods with an academic capitalist background that also make appearances are 'progress' and 'globalisation'. In some cases, social engagement also receives a prominent place in the constitutive good of their universities - with the implication that the anti-ivory tower argument should get primary attention, which leaves these constitutive goods open for academic capitalism or statist interference with academia.

## *7. Conclusion*

The argument in this essay can be summarised as follows:

'Academic capitalism in the new economy' (which manifests inter alia in the ideas of for-profit universities and the so-called entrepreneurial university) is becoming very prominent. Proponents of this construct link it with the anti-ivory tower argument about the university. However, the objection by critics is that this argument leads to an instrumentalism that marginalises the historically developed identity of the university as an institution where science and scholarship should be cultivated and educated. The aim of the paper was to map and evaluate the transcendental anatomy of the idea of academic capitalism in the new economy.

This was done firstly by developing the conceptual tool 'structure and direction'. 'Structure' can be seen as that which prescribes the relatively constant identity of an entity like the university. 'Direction' is the realisation or lack of realisation of this structure in actual universities. A second step was to point out that Charles Taylor's concept of 'strong evaluation' especially captures the close interplay between structure and direction: A strong evaluation can be seen as the relatively constant standard that humans employ to distinguish between a good direction

and the deformation of some entity like the university. A third conceptual tool that was developed, is that the strong evaluations that give direction to some entity tend to form (coherently populate) a framework or horizon.

In the terms of these concepts, it can be said that our civilization increasingly operates with a neoliberal framework for universities that is dominated by the strong evaluations of 'economic growth' and 'profitability' and increasingly marginalises the ideas of 'education', 'theory', 'science' and 'scholarship'. It is possible to give even more transcendental steps backward and point out that neoliberalism strongly evaluates the idea of *homo economicus*, which aims to transform all social roles (including that of being an academic) according to the pattern of a self-interested individual who is responsible primarily to the market. This prescribes for institutions an entrepreneurial mode of operation and governance, where competitiveness and decentralisation (fragmentation) are employed, ostensibly to create a less complex environment that will enhance profitability. In the academic world this implies nevertheless the breaking down of the collegial way of interaction between academics and putting the authority over academic matters in the hands of managers who increasingly govern academia according to economic values.

A fourth conceptual tool that is borrowed from the work of Charles Taylor suggests that the neoliberal framework has a core of ostensibly preferred strong evaluations. In fact, Taylor suggests that usually one strong evaluation, which can be called a constitutive good, with a prominent structural and directional function, is usually in the centre of a framework.

Although this constitutive good harbours in itself both the functions of structure and direction, it is also necessary to emphasise that in non-reductionist framework the two functions should not be confused with each other. This distinction is important because the directional act of valuing strongly some good should not develop into a totalitarian good valid for all of reality. If the latter directional move is made, it usually leads to all kinds of deformations of reality. A hierarchised dualism is usually the first result: this is where one good forms the higher and more strongly valued part for all of reality. All other goods are then seen as being of a lesser value or even as the source of evil. In other words: The result of dualisms is usually the deification of and thus totalitarian role of one good, which immediately implies that all other goods should be reduced to this absolutised good.

How then can the idea of the equality of all goods be reconciled with the notion of

a constitutive good? The idea of sphere sovereignty, developed by Reformational Philosophy, suggests that a constitutive good is that which gives a very distinctive structure and direction to some entity, but that this does not mean that this good is valid for all of reality. Another way of expressing the same idea is that a first test for a constitutive good is that it should be inherent to and valid for only the nature of a particular entity and not a good from outside that tries to give structure and direction not only to that entity, but to all of reality.

In light of this consideration the neoliberal concept of academic capitalism, with its overemphasis of economic matters, cannot be seen as a non-absolutising and non-reductionist approach in the spirit of sphere sovereignty. Furthermore, profit and economic growth seem to be the totalitarian constitutive goods for our civilization and indeed also for universities. It is expected from universities not only that their research should in the first place produce innovations that could lead to economic growth, but also that they should contribute a large labour force that can yield economic growth. Universities should therefore constantly aspire to become quantitatively bigger in order to produce this labour force and technological innovations.

This paper therefore concurs with critics who reject the notion that the constitutive good for universities should be that of 'profit' and 'economic growth'. As an alternative, a constitutive good that focuses on 'education', 'science' and 'scholarship' should be promoted. It can be conceded that concern with external goods like that of the economy will play a role in the functioning of universities. This role, however, cannot and should not be that of the primary structuring and directional constitutive good.

## NOTES

**i.** *Michael Heyns* - School of Philosophy, North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus), Potchefstroom, South Africa, Michael.Heyns@nwu.ac.za

**ii.** 'Academic capitalism in the new economy' is a phrase borrowed from Rhoades and Slaughter (2004). It captures the common denominator, namely an obsession with the motives of 'profit' and 'economic growth', of a number of related recent models for the university ('for-profit universities', 'mode 2 universities' and the so-called 'entrepreneurial university' - the latter is referred to and briefly defined in the last paragraphs of section 2). This obsession is also the hallmark of the cultural motive (the economism of neoliberalism) from which these models originate.

**iii.** 'Transcendental inquiry' implies here an investigation into the historically

developed ideas behind a university, and which conditions current notions and practices of being a university.

**iv.** This non-reductionist approach is something that I first encountered in Reformational Philosophy. Reformational Philosophy is still the benchmark for my use of the concepts and ideas of Taylor.

**v.** A thorough inquiry into these impressions will have to stand over until another paper.

**vi.** According to the Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary "constitutive" can be defined as that which makes "a thing what it is"; what is "essential" to an entity; but to be constitutive is also to have the "power to institute, establish, or enact" - that is, to give direction to this entity.

**vii.** Strauss (1989:118) describes a longstanding practice in South Africa of viewing the university as a "legal entity which is a complete state creation". The demand to universities to see themselves as constituted by some other societal institution with constitutive goods foreign to the university is thus not unknown in the history of the idea of the university.

**viii.** The instrumentalist logic behind this transformation into entrepreneurs and clients/customers seems simple enough: "If private enterprises must nurture innovation and enhance productivity in order to survive in the competitive marketplace, why shouldn't government workers [or academics] embrace neoliberal ideals to improve the public [or university] sector?" (Steger and Roy 2010: location 537).

**ix.** This is also the conclusion (and critical remark) of the Consensus study on state of the Humanities in South Africa: Status, prospects and strategies (2011:38-42,56). Lynch (2006:6) reports that the same thing happens in policy documents in Ireland, where "the development of society is equated with economic development and the latter is focused primarily on science and technology".

**x.** Since the concept 'scientific' plays a crucial role in the description of 'academia', Strauss (1998:115) elaborates on the distinction between "science/theory formation" and "non-scientific (non-theoretical) activities". He describes science/theory formation with the concept "abstraction" but then specifically "aspect abstraction" or "modal abstraction". The latter distinction will take much more space to explain than what is possible here. It is nevertheless important to distinguish scientific abstraction from 'everyday' abstraction where "certain universal characteristics" are also elevated and combined to form concepts like "human being, tree, horse, motorcar, etc.". The characteristic of

“theoretical thought”, in distinction is when certain aspects of reality are focused on, for instance its spatial, kinematic and physical way of being.

**xi.** The following is an overview of the content of the vision (in most cases primary) and mission (in most cases secondary) statements of various South African universities, as they appear on the websites of the respective universities (information about websites can be found in the section on ‘References’): The North-West University emphasises the pursuit of excellence, innovation and knowledge in its vision, while a balance between teaching and research, sound management, transformation, local engagement, and being internationally recognised gets secondary attention in a mission statement. The University of the Witwatersrand identifies as its foremost objective that it wants to be a research-intensive university. The university intends to achieve this goal (on a secondary level) by pursuing intellectual excellence, international competitiveness and local relevance. This secondary level also creates room for competitive education and high academic standards, public engagement and global partnerships. Stellenbosch University gives pre-eminence to inclusivity of all individuals, with innovation being future-focussed. Issues like social justice, the development of Africa, learning and teaching, innovation and creativity, diversity, and synergistic networks get secondary place in its mission statement. Pretoria University wants to be a leading research-intensive university in Africa that is recognised internationally for its quality, relevance and impact, and also for developing people, creating knowledge and making a difference locally and globally. In its secondary mission statement it gives attention to what the university sees as their core functions of research, namely teaching and learning. On this secondary level the university also states that it wants to engage with society and communities. The University of Kwazulu-Natal pursues a vision of being the “premier University of African Scholarship”. The secondary mission statement emphasises excellence and innovation in research, as well as societal engagement and transformation. In its mission statement the University of Cape Town gives priority to having global networks and connections. With these connections as vantage point the university wants to give attention to research and scholarship in key issues of the natural and social worlds, delivering internationally recognised and locally relevant qualifications and pursuing social issues like engaged citizenship, social justice, diversity and transformation.

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