

H. B. Thom.

191. T. 7 (94)

DIE DILEMMA VAN DIE AKADEMIKUS

(ENGLISH pp.7-11)

DEUR PROF. H.B. THOM,
VOORSITTER, ADVISERENDE RAAD OP UNIVERSITEITE

(REDE BY GELEENTHEID VAN DIE GRADEDAGPLEGTIGHEID
VAN DIE UNIVERSITEIT VAN SUID-AFRIKA,
STADSAAL, PRETORIA, 14 MEI 1977, OM 08h45)

Meneer die Kanselier

Meneer die Rektor

Dames en here dosente

Dames en here studente

Dames en here besoekers

*In 'n sekere sin
bring by my univ.
— lid v. Raad.*

Namens die Adviserende Raad op Universiteite bring ek by hierdie geleentheid ~~ons~~ groete oor aan die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika.

Dit is 'n groot dag veral vir die studente wat grade ontvang; ek wens hulle geluk met die sukses wat hulle behaal het, en met die onderskeiding wat hulle nou te beurt val. Saam met hulle vriende en familiebetrekkings deel ons in hulle vreugde.

Ek wens die Rektor en die dosente geluk met die afhandeling van akademiese werk waarvan ons die resultate hier sien; en ek wens die Rektor en die administratiewe personeel geluk met die werk wat hulle gedoen het, veral die reëling van hierdie treffende funksie.

Wat ons vandag hier sien, verteenwoordig weer eens 'n positiewe bydrae van die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika tot die vooruitgang

en geluk van ons land. Want sonder voldoende goed opgeleide, geestelik toegeruste manne en vroue sal ons ware, sinvolle vooruitgang en geluk nie ondervind nie. Daarom rig ek, saam met my gelukwensing, aan die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika ook 'n woord van hartlike dank.

Dit is nie onvanpas nie dat ons op 'n dag soos hierdie kortliks stilstaan by 'n probleem wat universiteite en akademici al meermale ernstig besig gehou het. Ek formuleer dit kort en saaklik: Die Dilemma van die Akademikus.

Ons het al gehoor dat mense wat op die politieke terrein beweeg, van die een of ander argument of stelling sê: "Dit is van akademiese betekenis." Daarmee bedoel hulle dan gewoon dat dit van geen betekenis is nie! Hiermee spreek hulle blykbaar egter nie minagting vir die akademikus uit nie, want ons sien dikwels dat wanneer 'n akademikus ná studie en navorsing tot konklusies kom, wat nie met sekere politieke beskouinge strook nie, dit soms juis hierdie politici is wat die eerste is om daarvan notisie te neem en die akademikus die les te lees.

Dit is die een kant van die munt; daar is ook die ander kant. Ons het al gehoor dat akademici onder mekaar of in 'n simposium sê: "Dit is 'n blote politieke siening", of "politieke argument". Daarmee bedoel hulle dan gewoon dat dit opportunisties van aard is, nie konsekwent steekhou en dus nie onder wetenskaplikes reg van bestaan het nie. Hiermee spreek hulle blykbaar egter nie minagting vir die politikus uit nie, want ons sien dikwels dat wanneer 'n politikus ná oorlegpleging en onderhandeling tot resultate kom wat nie met sekere akademiese beskouinge strook

nie, dit soms juis hierdie akademici is wat die eerste is om daarvan kennis te neem en die politikus tereg te wys.

Ek wil my by die akademikus bepaal; hy - of sommige akademici altans - het 'n wesenlike probleem.

Wanneer 'n universiteit 'n dosent aanstel, dan sê hy daarmee dat hy volle vertroue in die betrokke persoon het om sy werk op bekwame wyse te doen. En die Staat aanvaar dit ook só, want by wet en statuut het hy die reg van aanstelling deur die universiteit, erken en gewaarborg. Dit is deel van die outonomie, die selfstandigheid in eie kring, van die universiteit, 'n leerstelling wat in ons Westerse beskawing deur Staat en Universiteit baie hoog gewaardeer word.

Die werk wat die universiteit van sy dosent verwag en waarvoor die universiteit volle vertroue in hom stel, is hoofsaaklik tweërlei: die dosent moet doseer, en hy moet navors. Ons onderskei wel tussen die twee sye van die taak, maar ons kan hulle in werklikheid nie van mekaar skei nie, want hulle is in wese met mekaar ineengewewe: die dosent se navorsingswerk voed sy geesdrif, dit bied hom die geleentheid om iets oorspronklik te lewer, en hy gee daardeur besieling aan jongmense wat deur hom intellektueel gevorm word; die dosent se doseerwerk gee weer aan hom die geleentheid om die vreugde van sy vak-dissipline aan ander oor te dra, dit bied hom die kans om vrugbare bespreking te voer, en hy word in die geleentheid gestel om resultate van sy navorsingswerk deur regstreekse menslike kontak verder voort te dra. Altwee sye van sy werk moet die dosent op toegewyde, eerlike wyse behartig.

a

Nou is dit duidelik dat 'n dosent se eerlike navorsingswerk resultate mag oplewer wat in stryd is met aanvaarde opvattinge op die een of ander gebied, bv. op maatskaplike gebied, of op ekonomiese, of politieke, of selfs godsdienstige gebied, en die gevaar bestaan dan dat die dosent as wederstrewige, as opstandige of selfs as ondermyner gebrandmerk mag word. Dit kan veral gebeur in die vakdissiplines wat na aan ons alledaagse lewe lê, dié wat regstreeks of onregstreeks met dringende praktiese vraagstukke van ons land en ons mense te make het, soos staatsreg, sake-administrasie, ekonomie, konstitusionele geskiedenis, sielkunde, staatsleer, volkekunde, ontwikkeling van inheemse volke, en sosiologie en maatskaplike werk. Dit val 'n mens op dat die meeste van hierdie dissiplines ressorteer onder die universiteit se Fakulteit van Lettere en Wysbegeerte, dus juis dié fakulteit waarvan die graduandi nou hier byeen is.

Laat ons maar eerlik wees: hierdie gevaar is vandag in ons land die grootste op die politieke terrein. Dit is op die politieke terrein waar die vraagstukke lê wat vir ons van aktuele belang geword het, die vraagstukke wat tal van raakpunte met die werk van die akademikus toon, die vraagstukke wat dikwels swaar emosie-belaai is. Dit Regering is geroepe om in 'n tyd van groot binnelandse en buitelandse pressie, hoogs kontensieuse kwessies te hanteer, en ofskoon hy self 'n koele hoof behou, is dit in ruimer kring van regeringsondersteuners en -teenstanders, nie oral só nie. Dit is dus nie vreemd nie dat ons gevalle ~~gekry het~~ waar akademici en politici met mekaar in botsing ~~gek~~kom, ~~het~~, bv. in verband met kwessies rakende groepsgebiede, werkreservering, gemengde huwelike, aparte universiteite vir ver-

skillende bevolkingsgroepe, verteenwoordiging van nie-blankes in die Parlement en ander besonderhede van ons bestuurlike bestel.

Ons sal egter dadelik moet toegee dat dit lank nie só is dat in al sodanige gevalle die objektiewe navorser-akademikus en die kalme oorlegpleger-politikus teenoor mekaar te staan ~~gek~~ ~~het~~ nie. In baie gevalle is dit eerder só dat 'n lieflingsdenkbeeld van die een teenoor dié van die ander geplaas word, en dat elkeen in eie oë dan 'n defensor fidei is, met die gevolg dat die een vir die ander weldra 'n advocatus diaboli word! Maar dit is ook wel só dat die egte akademikus se eerlike resultate soms met gevestigde opvattinge - met name politieke opvattinge - in botsing kom, en dis hier waar ons die dilemma van die akademikus sien.

^{Kortliks}
Laat ons [^]duidelikheid kry oor die vereistes waaraan die akademikus moet voldoen. Dit is noodsaaklik dat hy kalm, objektief en eerlik sal wees. Hy moet onder geen omstandighede advocatus word nie. Die moment dat hy in hierdie rol tree, verdwyn sy onbevangenheid. Geen ondersoeker kan 'n vaste, vooropgesette siening daarop na hou, en dan nog waarlik onpartydig, objektief na die waarheid soek nie. Ek herinner my hoe verbaas ek jare gelede was toe, gedurende 'n tee-onderbreking in die Public Record Office in Londen, 'n mede-navorser, 'n jong lektor in die Geskiedenis, aan my sê: "It has been a struggle but I have found quite a number of instances to support my view!" - As 'n bepaalde beskouing voorop gestel word, en bewustelik bewyse daarvoor gesoek word, dan is objektiwiteit nie meer bestaanbaar nie.

Die akademikus sal ook na die beste van sy vermoë moet toesien dat die resultate van sy werk nie die onderwerp van sensasie-beriggewing word nie. Daarom is dit noodsaaklik dat hy die plek, die tyd en die kanaal van bekendmaking van sy resultate verstandig sal kies. Die ideaal is dat hy dit openbaar sal maak deur middel van 'n vak-wetenskaplike publikasie - 'n boek of artikel - en by voorkeur in die midde van sy vakgenote, bv. op 'n wetenskaplike kongres, in 'n simposium of in 'n vak-wetenskaplike debat. Die gewone dagblad-pers, met andersoortige uitgangspunte en aksente, is uit die aard van die saak nie altyd 'n geskikte kanaal nie, maar ek moet byvoeg dat die akademikus, in 'n klein land met 'n erg beperkte kring van wetenskaplike belangstellendes, en by ontstentenis van geskikte wetenskaplike publikasie-kanale, soms maar dankbaar is om in die dagblad-pers ruimte te kry. Die ideaal bly egter dat oorspronklike wetenskaplike werk in die kring van onderlegdes openbaar gemaak moet word, waar kalme bespreking en indringende evaluering kan plaasvind.

Verder is dit noodsaaklik dat die akademikus nie konfrontasie sal soek nie, want konfrontasie-soek is 'n negatiewe optrede en 'n negatiewe optrede bied kwalik 'n geskikte basis vir positiewe bouwerk en eerlike soeke na waarheid. Ons dink vanselfsprekend hier nie aan die wetenskaplike polemieke nie: die wetenskaplike polemieke vloei voort uit bona fide verskille van wetenskaplike mening; dit kan verhelderend wees en 'n mens juis help om te vorder in jou soeke na waarheid.

Maar daar is nog een vereiste.

We now come to the most important desideratum. As a man of the university the academic shares not only the privileges derived from the autonomy of the university, but also the privilege of academic freedom, i.e. the freedom of his university as an institution, and his own individual freedom as a teacher at the university. It is of compelling importance to him to realise that this privilege constitutes a most valuable possession which has to be cherished and safeguarded.

Academic freedom - like the autonomy of the university a fundamental tenet of our university life - has at times been selfishly interpreted and even badly abused. It is sometimes assumed that ^{academic} ~~university~~ freedom implies also freedoms outside the province of the academic as a member of the university staff. That this is a serious error has been clearly shown by the well-known Committee on Higher Education in England, under the able chairmanship of Lord Robbins. After a thorough investigation the Committee came to the conclusion that the professor or lecturer can derive his academic freedom only from the university, and that the university cannot grant freedoms which it does not itself possess. Proceeding from this finding, the Committee logically discussed under the concept of ^{academic} ~~university~~ freedom only those freedoms which pertain to the activities of the academic as a worker of the university.

The Van Wyk de Vries Commission, which made a painstaking study of university affairs in South Africa and subsequently reported very extensively, came to the conclusion that academic freedom is a freedom of the professor or lecturer qua professor or

lecturer, and that it consists in the spiritual freedom of the university teacher to exercise his respective functions at the university. The Commission further states: "The teacher is free to perform his teaching function according to his own conception of fact and truth; to express and publish his views; to study, to investigate and to do research of his own choice and to be free from discriminatory treatment on the grounds of convictions or any other impermissible grounds".

I think this states the position very clearly.

The academic enjoys the freedom to discharge his academic duties in accordance with the dictates of his scientific conscience, and in this he is limited only by the decisions, rules and regulations of his own university authorities, Council and Senate, and by the views of his colleagues in committees. However, he may not use his class-room for publicity or propaganda in connection with contentious matters falling beyond the bounds of his academic work; and he may not, on the strength of the doctrine of academic freedom, lay claim to freedoms ^{*- other than academic freedom -*} which his fellow-citizen does not possess.

It must, on the other hand, be clearly understood and fully accepted that the academic quality of the university teacher - or his academic freedom for that matter - does not in any way impose a limitation on his freedoms as an ordinary citizen of the country: he remains an ordinary citizen, and as such enjoys all the privileges and freedoms which, within the law of the land, are proper to the ordinary citizen; his academic freedom is an additional freedom, which is specifically related to the university.

The academic may, therefore, freely, if he so wishes, take part in political activities; he may do research also on matters outside his scientific discipline; and he may freely promote the results of his researches, even if they are at variance with the policy of the Government or the accepted views of any recognised or statutory authority. - Whether this is wise or desirable is, of course, another matter, and something for the university authorities to consider, but in the meantime the university man may not, so long as he respects the law, be deprived of any freedom which the ordinary citizen enjoys.

If the university teacher satisfies these requirements - viz. to remain honest and objective, to choose wisely the time and place and medium of publication, to avoid unnecessary confrontation, and to act in accordance with the real meaning of academic freedom - then he can proceed and apply himself freely to the job for which he was appointed. Were he then nevertheless to find himself confronted by the aforementioned dilemma, he need have no qualms of mind and can candidly state his findings. I would go even further; I believe it is then his duty to present the truth as ~~it has been~~ established by him. His conclusions will then generate incisive, critical thinking; and are then most likely to produce well-directed, fruitful action.

In this way the academic will, in the long run, render his finest service: to his own community, to society generally, and to the State and the country as a whole. He may be criticised, perhaps severely criticised, but he will know that History abounds with the names of men and women who at one stage or another suffered

criticism, even abuse, but were later understood and held in high esteem.

It is desirable that the State, and especially political people in authority, should not be touchy and irritable as far as differences of opinion with, or criticism by, honest academics are concerned. It is not in the interest of any state or any government to estrange its intellectuals, notably its academics. No state and no government has ever in the long term derived any positive gain from a confrontation with its academics; on the contrary, we have many examples where, due to such confrontation, the relevant countries and nations spiritually - especially intellectually - were the poorer. We can, therefore, appreciate most sincerely the assurance given by our Prime Minister, viz. that he and his Ministers, as the responsible men in the government of a democratic country, have no objection to constructive criticism and that they, in fact, welcome it.

We believe that politicians generally are aware of the dilemma of the academic; academics would like to be sure that they also understand and appreciate the problem. We would like to see them imbued with the spirit which was so strikingly evinced by one of our former prime ministers, the late Mr. J.G. Strydom.

Let me relate a personal experience
As Chairman of Sabra, and accompanied by a few other delegates, I approached him to discuss certain aspects of the Government's policy regarding non-whites. We had doubts; we knew that, to a certain extent, we were going to differ with him. And this is exactly what happened.

I presented the main issues, and my colleagues followed, filling in the essential details. Mr. Strydom listened calmly and patiently, while we took our time elaborating on what we regarded as the salient points. When we had finished he reacted, in the characteristic Strydom way, by giving his views in a forthright, perfectly honest manner: ^{- he said -} What we say is perhaps - and at best - valid in the long run, but will not do under the existing circumstances; he has a mandate from the electors; he has to heed the wishes of the electors and has to carry out his mandate; and the responsibility towards them rests squarely on his shoulders - not on ours. Everything went off in a fine spirit, without the slightest sign of excitement. In the end he said these words: "Ek neem julle nie kwalik dat julle gekom het nie; kom maar gerus weer. Maar julle sal verstaan dat julle professore 'n hele ent voor die volk uit kan wees, dit is julle taak; maar onthou, ek kan nie altyd so ver vooruit loop soos julle nie".

Here we have, in literally merely a few words, an exceptionally sound view of the situation. The academic can, if all concerned subscribe to this view, accept his dilemma with confidence; it will then prove to him no impediment, but in actual fact a healthy challenge.

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Rector, ladies and gentlemen of the University staff - I assure you of the good wishes of my Council on your task in the future.