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The university as a community of selves : Johan Vilhelm Snellman's "On Academic Studies"

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Abstract

Nowadays we tend to regard the idea of a university as an outdated subject. The world of universities is today so complex and diverse that no general doctrine of the university seems possible. In a recent article Alasdair MacIntyre challenges this view and points out that by giving up the question "What is university?" we also give up the question "What is an educated mind?" In this article I will return to the old discussion on the idea of a university. I will go all the way back to Plato, but my main theme is J. V. Snellman's essay On Academic Studies (1840). There Snellman, a young university lecturer at the time, defends his view that the university is a community of selves. The essay strongly emphasises that students should not only learn to know but also to act in a responsible way as selves. However, the text also reflects on Snellman's own activity before the publication. He had defended academic freedom against the rector of the Imperial Alexander University of Finland. As a result, Snellman was in the end sentenced in an open court and forced to leave the university. Snellman's view is certainly not the final definition of the university, but as it, besides presenting a theoretical view on the essence of the university, also reflects on activity in a university community, it gives us

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elements for reflecting on the idea of a university and an educated mind. (HRK / Abstract
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