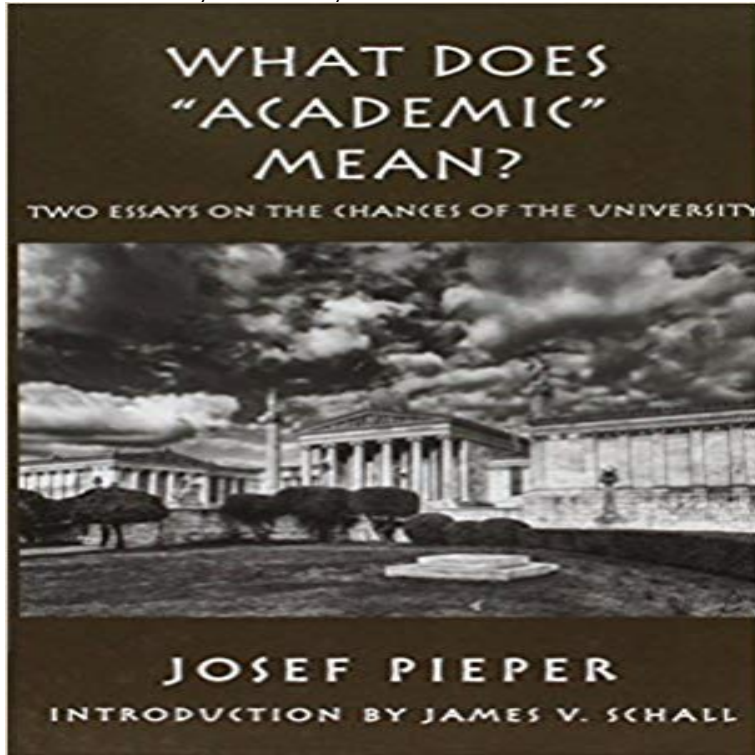


What Does Academic Mean?: Two Essays on the Chances of the University Today



What Does Academic Mean? focuses, in two essays, on the prospects of contemporary universities. The term academic is traced back to Platos Academy in a grove in Athens. The Academy is isolated, far away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Western universities founded in the Middle Ages show continuity, via Byzantium, with Platos Academy. Not surprisingly, the Oxford Dictionary quoted by Pieper defines academic as Not leading to a decision; unpractical. The preoccupation of the academic as academic is seen by Pieper to be fundamentally theoretical, not practical. Pure theory is that which cannot at all be pressed into service. Clearly, many university disciplines that are richly funded by industry and business concerns tend to be favored by university administrations, which, intent on financial survival, frown on unproductive disciplines such as pure philosophy: metaphysics being a case in point, since it is the discipline least capable of practical application. Pure philosophy, unlike any other discipline, has as its subject the totality of being. Every other discipline deals with a particular aspect of being for example, the physical, the psychological, the technical but not the totality. For Pieper, spirit is that which makes us open to truth all truth without any need to exploit it in the concrete world. The sciences open up more and more access to reality, more and more for us to contemplate. They show us more of the totality, but none of the sciences is interested in the totality as such. The philosophy which deals with the totality and asks, with Alfred North Whitehead, What is it all about? is seen by Pieper as central to the university. Essentially, it contemplates the wonder of being.

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