

# ***MODERN LIBERAL ARTS***

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Paul Ramsden (Chief Executive of the Higher Education Academy) said in his report last year on ‘Teaching and the Student Experience,’ that ‘one curriculum example that deserves close attention is the transdisciplinary and generalist undergraduate honours degree.’ Somewhat earlier, Aristotle said in *On The Heavens* and elsewhere that the same ideas ‘recur in men’s minds not once or twice but again and again.’ We see, perhaps, the wheel of educational ideas turning as the debate between generalist and subject specific degrees once again opens up.

The wheel is also being turned by Rowan Williams. In a recent speech in China he pointed out the blurring in European universities of the boundaries between pure research and processes of training. ‘The most difficult challenge in the Western university world today,’ he said, ‘is how the university avoids being completely dominated by this external pressure to produce and to offer functional training.’ He went on to affirm that ‘the university is a place where “liberal studies” can be pursued,’ applying this term to the whole climate of the university as a place where liberal means ‘the common culture of a learning humanity’ aimed at producing graduates and citizens who are free from certain sorts of prejudice and fear, and a university which expresses philosophical commitment ‘to civil discourse, to liberty of expression, to careful and honest self-questioning and to the possibility of creating trust through the process of fair argument and exploration of evidence.’

Also turning the wheel, though perhaps in a more ambiguous sense, is Lyotard and his notion of performativity. In arguing that knowledge in modern society is fragmented and divided neatly into bite-size gobbets for the convenience of communication, and that the grand narratives which have served to unify knowledge have fallen into disrepute as myopic world-views, he exposes the crisis of meaning in higher education that exists in

the tensions between general and local knowledge. The generalist and the disciplinary approaches are thus both implicated here.

Many educators currently lament that a combination of factors seem to make meaningful curriculum reform impossible. These factors include the technicist aims and measurements embedded in the primary and secondary National Curriculum in England; the ‘managerialism’ of outcome led policy and practice in the university; and not least the instrumentalism of the RAE where performance becomes its own end, including the performance that criticizes the RAE. However, there can be opposition to this culture in the designing and running of educational programmes of study that embody alternative visions of and values in education. Waiting for things to improve before introducing such programmes is only an apology for assimilation. Why, then, we might ask, is the philosophy of education not a hotbed of such curriculum development?

Turning this wheel of educational ideas I now intend an intervention in the culture of performativity with a new undergraduate programme in 2010 called *Modern Liberal Arts*. The list of issues raised in thinking about a Liberal Arts programme is long and well-rehearsed. It includes familiar dualistic oppositions: generalist or disciplinary education; the canon of Great Books or the different and the other; breadth or depth; principle or detail; *telos* or the undecideable; elitism or democracy; intellect or vocational relevance and skills?

An imprecise summary of these disputes might boil down to this: the disciplines approach to higher education – favouring depth of study in a carefully delineated area of expertise and transferable skills – accuses generalist degrees of being woolly and lacking structure, depth and coherence. Against this, generalists – favouring a breadth of knowledge across the range of human scientific interests and allowing the greatest possible freedom to the intellectual work of the student – accuse disciplinary study of ignoring first principles, of eschewing the idea that some studies are more important to human life than others, of inappropriate specialization, and of failing to teach their students to think of their place within the bigger picture of human existence.

I want now to focus on just one issue that is central to our introduction of a *Modern Liberal Arts* programme. This concerns the meaning of freedom, from Aristotle in particular, that is carried in the term *liberal arts*.<sup>1</sup>

## Leisure

To comprehend the concept of freedom that underpins liberal education we must explore what, for Aristotle, constituted a free man and a slave, and consider these meanings in relation to ‘leisure’ and ‘end’. In Aristotle a liberal education is enjoyed by the leisured class of gentlemen-amateurs, distinct from the class of slaves or merchants who work for the ends of others and not of themselves. Mastery over a slave is *despotike*, or, that which is the nature of a master. This distinction is the root of freedom and non-freedom in Aristotle, and is carried within the free education of the free man from ancient to modern liberal arts.

In I iv of *The Politics* Aristotle notes that the good life requires the necessities of life to be provided.<sup>2</sup> This already distinguishes leisure (*scole*) and *diagoge* (the civilized pursuits of the gentleman) from the useful skills needed to provide for these necessities of life. As such, leisure is distinguished from skill, life from production, ends from means, and masters from slaves. As with Aristotle’s philosophy in general, these distinctions are grounded in the distinction between what is itself and what is other than itself. A slave belongs to his master *tout court* because the slave has his end completely in the master. Thus, ‘any human being that *by nature* belongs not to himself but to another is *by nature* a slave; and a human being belongs to another whenever, in spite of being a *man*, he is a piece of property, i.e. a tool having a separate existence and meant for action’ (I iv. 1254a 15-18). Thus nature designs ‘some to rule, some to be ruled’ (I v. 1254a 23-4). It is

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<sup>1</sup> William Cronon (1998) points out that *liberalis* has its root in *liber* (free), but is related also to the Sanskrit word *rodhati* meaning ‘one climbs’ or ‘one grows.’

<sup>2</sup> My central heating packed up whilst I was writing this, during a cold snap where the temperature was minus 5C.

‘nature’s purpose to make the bodies of free men to differ from those of slaves’ (I v. 1254b 25-6).<sup>3</sup>

Aristotle also detests something technical and made only for use that tries to turn itself into its own end. His example here (which I note as I renegotiate my mortgage) is the charging of interest, ‘for the gain arises out of currency itself, not as a product of that for which currency was provided’ (I x. 1258b 3-4). Currency was intended only as a means of exchange, not as something that should reproduce itself, and therefore of all the ways that exist for accruing wealth, usury ‘is the most unnatural’ (I x. 1258b 7) in that it makes the means an end in itself. This is to reduce an end to something vulgar and ignoble.

Alongside the view that slaves are born naturally suited to their role, Aristotle also argues in *The Politics* that all men, slaves and free men, have a share of excellence or virtue within them. It is nature that distributes virtue differently in the different souls of ruler and ruled, explicitly between the rational and irrational parts of the soul. This distribution determines the character of ruler and ruled which in turn determines their proper and appropriate station in life. Since all men have a share of excellence, it must be possible to distinguish between the character of a master’s courage or virtue and that of a slave. A slave requires only so much excellence as is required for him to perform his tasks. ‘It is clear then that all men aim at happiness and the good life, but some men have an opportunity to get it, others have not’ (VII xiii. 1331b 39). The question Aristotle asks at the end of *The Politics* is how a society should be ordered such that the possibilities of leisure, of the free man, are greatest? In sum, and this is crucial for understanding liberal arts, the free liberal master is the man of leisure who is his own end. The slave is the mechanic whose technical skills make him proficient in the use of a tool or instrument.

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<sup>3</sup> Aristotle also distinguishes between forced slavery and natural slavery. With forced slavery a man can become a slave who is undeserving of slavery. To avoid this, and in line with the ambiguity of a ‘natural’ slave, the term slave is often reserved for foreigners or non-Greeks. The crucial distinction here between the natural slave and the forced slave is character. A slave can have knowledge that he rightfully teaches to other slaves, for example, in regard to their duties, but this concerns technical knowledge (*techne*) only and not character. Knowledge of how to use a slave is not appropriate to the character of the free man for it is not leisure or an end in itself. It is a skill appropriate to slaves and hence to pedagogues. This is the root of the hierarchy of research over teaching.

But since he is a means to an end, say of enjoyment or amusement, he is not a free man, but only the slave to an end other than himself.

The highest virtue that Aristotelian masterfulness or *despotike* can attain is self-mastery or leisure, the rule of free men over other free men in pursuit of this principle, and the rule of free men over slaves in conformity with nature.<sup>4</sup> The key to the education of the free man lies in the distinction between leisure or *scholē*, and skill or *technē*. Leisure must avoid any *useful* tasks that have an end beyond themselves, for such skill is servile in its nature. Nothing should be concentrated on in so much detail that one becomes skilled in the mechanics of a task, for this will detract from activities that have their principle in leisure. To be asking constantly what is the use of a particular subject of education 'is unbecoming to those of broad vision and unworthy of free men (*megalopsuchos*)' (VIII iii. 1338b 2).

Music is the example that Aristotle rehearses here. Music can be for enjoyment, a stimulus to virtue, or a contribution to *diagoge*. The free man, the man of leisure, will need to avoid becoming skilled in the playing of instruments for that would involve him becoming merely a mechanic. Rather, he must learn only enough about playing to be able to judge a good performance from a poor one. He should learn only 'up to the point at which the pupil becomes capable of enjoying fine melodies and rhythms' (VIII vi. 1341a 13-14). It is the performer who therein becomes merely a mechanic (*banausos*) for he performs not for his own virtue but merely to bring pleasure and amusement to others. The paid performer (professional – *technikos*) is merely a hireling whose performance can be made more vulgar by the audience that seeks only diversion and amusement. Indeed, Aristotle suggests that vulgar performers and audiences deserve each other and that concerts of different character should be available for the different natures and characters of man.

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<sup>4</sup> Despotism here in the modern sense would refer to Aristotle's fear that power be used to enslave men who are by nature free and undeserving of slavery.

The notion of freedom in Aristotle, and in the arts and the life of the free man, is thus grounded in dualism – in the distinctions, for example, between leisure and skill, end and means, and master and slave. But Aristotle does not make dualism the principle of freedom. Rather he assigns freedom to only one side of the dualism, to leisure, to end and to master. Service and the role of worker and slave are necessary conditions for such freedom, but they are neither part of nor characteristic of that freedom. This distinction grounds liberal education for the next 2,000 years and, as we will see in a moment, in many ways continues to do so. It is not that Aristotle eschews dualism *per se*, only that he refuses its fluidity and instability as the possible basis for a principle. He does not see such instability as educational to the extent that this instability or education could itself be the principle of freedom.

This can be illustrated in the way Aristotle deals with the ambiguity that the education of the future rulers requires that they be ruled, in turn, by those who must teach them. Thus, the ‘one who is to become a good ruler must first himself be ruled’ (VII xiv. 1333a 2-3). This means that the education of the ruler involves both masterful and servile action. Rule is masterful when its end is itself, and so is rule over free men – especially the young – when the end in mind is future rule.<sup>5</sup> One can see here the part played by servility in the nurturing of the freedom of the future master. But Aristotle does not make enough of the fact that in the education of the free man the master-teacher must be servile to the potential ruler, and that the student’s servility, having his end in something other than himself as a student, is part of the education he must learn in order to become his own end.

When Aristotle notes that the ruler must first be ruled, this can be expressed as a dialectic wherein the ruler is already slave to the master-teacher, and the master-teacher, in turn, is slave to the education of the ruler. It is also a dialectic of freedom, wherein freedom is slave to its own mastery and master of its slavery. This dialectic of freedom has its own principle in the dialectic of enlightenment wherein thought is already rational and reason

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<sup>5</sup> Thus, the question whether an action or a job is noble and excellent or not ‘is to be decided less with reference to the actions themselves than in the light of their end and purpose’ (VII xiv. 1333a 5).

returns to thought. This principle, as we will see again in a moment, is learning. But for Aristotle, for whom ‘there can be no learning of learning’ (*Metaphysics*, XI, 12. 1068b 14), there can also be no universal notion of freedom. Aristotle distinguishes master from slave, end from means, leisure from skill, and freedom from service by positing the principle that separates what must be itself from what can be other. This is, in effect, only an apology for the appearance of nature, and takes against reason and its dialectic. Freedom in Aristotle is not its own principle and thus not universal. Aristotle can observe that rule ‘is of two kinds’ (VII xiv. 1333a 3) but he cannot find the principle of freedom itself in this dialectic and as such does not extend the principle of freedom to include slavery or work or service within it. It will take Kant and Hegel to comprehend freedom as inclusive of these in the truth of their unavoidable dialectical relationship. As such, Aristotelian conceptions of freedom, and with it of leisure and end, cannot be the ground for any retrieval of the concept of liberal education in modern social relations.

### **Revolutionary education**

If the Aristotelian understanding of freedom that underpinned Ancient and Mediaeval liberal arts education is no longer appropriate for grounding the modern conception of freedom, to where should liberal arts now turn? On the face of it, it seems obvious that Aristotelian deduction was overturned by evidence-based induction (for example, Bacon) and speculation was overturned by that which could be seen with the eyes of one’s own reason (for example, Descartes). From this, the Enlightenment is that which sees reason seeing itself in its own light. But this is not the most significant revolution in the history of Western philosophy. Indeed, enlightenment here does not overturn Aristotelian principles at all. It simply repeats the Aristotelian natural understanding that what an object is ‘is its explanation, and that it is not possible for it to be otherwise’ (*Posterior Analytics*, I 2. 71b 11). Even where Aristotle sometimes does work with a less strictly defined separation between what is and what is not,<sup>6</sup> he bequeaths to the history of

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<sup>6</sup> I refer here to the idea that Aristotle was all his life working with and against Plato at one and the same time. See Jaeger, 1962.

Western philosophy the natural understanding of a principle as that which can only be itself. This is why the circle is the principle of all principles for Aristotle, for the circle is where what is is its own cause, life, and end. This principle of principles has its three most characteristic manifestations as the logic of non-contradiction, the necessity of a first cause, and the absurdity of infinite regression. The principle of enlightenment, grounded in reason *seeing* itself as what is, still works with this Aristotelian logic.

It took Kant and Hegel to offer a truly revolutionary philosophical education that would overturn two thousand years of neo-Platonic mastery (*despotike*). It is still widely unrecognized that the modern mind is grounded in the insufficiencies of neo-Platonic logic and freedom. Kant and Hegel together thought this logic freely against itself. Kant showed how all objects conformed to thought, and Hegel then showed how thought conformed to itself. Kant's (Copernican) revolution showed how the object conformed to its being known, which meant that all objects were known otherwise than as themselves, and Hegel's revolution showed that this lack of truth has its truth in the logic of the Notion. This is the modern mind, working with first principles in the aporias of freedom experienced in self-consciousness and spirit, and with the social relations that both hide and express this difficult truth. We must note, too, that the persistence of neo-Platonic logic in modernity lies in what Adorno called identity thinking. This refers to the idea that concepts describe their objects totally and without any untidy remainders, or without any experiential remnant. But the modern mind is precisely characterized by experiential remnants. The modern philosophical mind is that in which everything is otherwise than itself. This, then, must be our principle and our grounding for a modern liberal arts education. It is revolutionary in three ways: it overturns simple Aristotelian logic; it returns the Aristotelian circle of freedom to include slavery; and it reveals itself in doing so as the wheel that is human and especially philosophical Western education.

It might be said that such revolutionary education is just another Aristotelian identity. After all, one might say, just because the principle of the modern mind is contradictory, does not mean that it is not still an identity. An Aristotelian form of expression for this principle would be that what an object is and is not, is its explanation, and that it is not

possible for this (contradiction) to be otherwise. It does not matter, one might add, that this is a negative expression of the Aristotelian principle because it is still a principle grounded in the identity that what is is its own explanation.. This, of course, is Adorno's argument against Hegel. For Adorno, contradiction must have no identity in spirit, no nature of its own, and no principle as its own end, for all these are just further abstract identities. Adorno is right here. But how do we express *how* he is right without repeating another reduction to an identity? The answer is, we *can't* avoid it. What, then, is the principle that speaks this unavoidable contradiction that is its own truth? In Hegel it is spirit and absolute knowing, and is the science of logic. But what is called for here is *education* in Hegel. What is this principle that can negate itself in order to be itself? It is *learning*. Learning is the truth of the contradiction of Aristotle's definition of a principle *and* it is the truth of the contradiction of Adorno's refusal of its identity. Indeed, it is the pre-condition of any arguments for or against identity because, to take a position either way on this question, means that one has already posited another principle: that of learning. The principle of learning is the universality of the impossibility of deciding upon identity or non-identity. The principle of learning is the impossibility of the choice. It is, therefore, our re-education about master and slave, freedom and necessity, God and man, self and other, and life and death. It is the principle that now commends itself as the ground for a modern liberal arts education. Should we even call it a principle? Yes, and no, for it is our re-education about principles. It would not be accurate here to say in any unqualified sense that this is a new modern principle of enlightenment. It would be more accurate to say that the modern principle of enlightenment lies in fact in the qualification. The most important thing that the principle of learning teaches us is that even truth is otherwise than itself. This unstable principle of enlightenment is called by Adorno and Horkheimer the dialectic of enlightenment, and the truth of this instability *as instability* is known in the modern Kantian and Hegelian mind.

### **The closing of the educational mind**

Even so, one of the most significant ways in which neo-Platonic logic persists in modernity is as the *identity* of enlightenment in particular, and of education in general. Neo-Platonic logic resolves questions and issues and dilemmas by applying the principle of non-contradiction. When a contradiction is overcome, and when one leaves behind a former mistake in one's reasoning, one is travelling the path of enlightenment. Enlightenment in the Western tradition of neo-Platonic logic has always been practised as the overcoming of contradictory reasoning (or error) and 'overcoming' here is the key term, because it is the movement from what is not true – meaning, otherwise than itself – to that which is true – that which cannot be otherwise than itself. One sees this version of education all the time in the life of the Academy and at conferences. One gives a paper, and then in the questions that follow the audience tries to tease out contradictions in the logic of the argument, with a view to proving it inconsistent and therefore wrong. The more contradictions are exposed, the weaker the case becomes. In essence, the presenter is being exposed as offering an argument that cannot stand on its own, is not self-sufficient, and is not its own principle. It is accused of not being at one with itself and therefore of not being true. It is curious, is it not, how popular the power of contradiction is in academic life when it serves the cause and clarity of the principle of non-contradiction as a means to self-advancement, yet remains bereft of those willing to claim the power of contradiction as an education in its own right, as its own educational principle.

Allan Bloom's work, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987)—one of the most controversial books about liberal education in the US over the last twenty years—is a case in point here. As an enlightenment thinker he applies the principle of non-contradiction in his critique of cultural and social studies, humanities and science, and their teachers. He asks, for example, how can someone be a teacher and not believe that they have something important to teach their students, something, that is, *more* important than the knowledge their students currently have? Who can call themselves a teacher and yet deny that their choice of what to teach is implicitly a hierarchical judgement? Similarly, which administrator can support positive discrimination or lower grades for certain underachieving sections of the community yet still maintain a belief in equality?

Bloom points out many such contradictions in his book, but for him they all boil down to one crucial observation. Enlightenment has become scared of itself, and of the rational and epistemological hierarchy of higher ideas and principles that it aims for, in a world where any hierarchy at all seems an imperialist grand narrative over and against the democratic.

Not surprisingly, the opposition to Bloom's book was staged as a battle between elitism and democracy, master versus subservient cultures, and privilege against equal opportunity. Martha Nussbaum led the opposition in *The New York Review of Books* (November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1987), arguing that it was Bloom's conception of philosophy as 'contemplative and quasi-religious' that led it to ignore practical and ethical concerns, and to remain 'the preserve of a narrow elite.' However, Nussbaum does not attack Bloom's dislike for the nihilism of cultural relativism, and admits that, like Bloom, she is no supporter of relativism or historicism. Thus, when she critiques Bloom's use of 'unqualified universals' it is not in order to oppose universality *per se*, for she believes that practical reason is a 'common and universal possession of all human beings.' Rather, her disagreement is over the distribution of philosophy, not over the dominance of the logic of non-contradiction within it. Thus, Nussbaum shows how elitism contradicts modern conceptions of equality, and Bloom shows how equality contradicts higher education. Even in their differences, then, they share something much more profound.

But, wherever there is the logic of non-contradiction, there is a dialectic of enlightenment wherein the logic contradicts itself. In Bloom, for example, there is a dialectic of enlightenment in his dual conception of openness. He supports openness when it characterizes the quest for truth, but not when it refers to an openness to other cultures that does not take *their* quest for truth seriously. The first is openness to truth, while the second is a pseudo-openness and is really an indifference to truth. Bloom employs the logic of non-contradiction here. A hierarchical openness to truth in itself must contradict the democratic openness to the truths of all cultures. But, and 'equally,' a non-indifferent openness to others' truths must contradict the hierarchical openness to truth in itself.

Bloom's concept of openness, because it is grounded in the logic of non-contradiction, can only repeat a dialectic of enlightenment.

But what Bloom is not open to is truth in the aporetic logic of non-contradiction, or to the dialectic that pertains to enlightenment, where contradiction is its own principle, its own purpose, and has meaning as its own end. Expressed in the way that Adorno and Horkheimer set out the dialectic of enlightenment, that is, wherein myth is already enlightenment and enlightenment returns to myth, we can say of Bloom's two conceptions of openness that they are unavoidably related to each other such that openness is already closure and closure returns to openness.

What, then, is changed by the principle of revolutionary learning in the dialectic of enlightenment? Primarily it is our comprehension of how we learn and what we learn. We learn, for example, that enlightenment cannot resolve issues without a remainder, a reflux, that truth makes itself known as contradiction, or blowback! Bloom provides many examples of this kind but one of the most telling is when he notes the aporetic experience accompanying US foreign policy. It is criticized when it intervenes in the world in pursuance of human rights by those who see this as the imperialism of the American way of life. It is criticized also, if it doesn't intervene, for then it is ignoring human rights around the world. This is the aporia of the model that believes that issues surrounding human rights can be solved by an enlightened stance. The point is that the enlightened non-contradictory stance *is* contradictory. Bloom says that America must no longer look to European philosophy, yet the aporia of human rights that he describes here is exactly that which Derrida was working on towards the end of his life, and which he termed 'autoimmunity'.

### **Modern Liberal Arts**

How, then, can one draw together the modern principle of learning with a return to generalist degrees, or to Liberal Arts degrees in particular? One way is to re-read current

struggles in the Academy between truth and cultural relativism in the terms laid out above under revolutionary modern philosophical education. The whole issue of generalist (grand narrative) teaching of eternal truths over against particular (disciplinary and relative) modes of enquiry is replayed daily in schools and universities in many Western liberal democracies. Wherever there is a crisis in education, be it the attack by Plato on the Sophists, or by Bloom on American intellectual life, there is usually a crisis of abstraction, specifically of the formative import of thought from its objective content. A crisis of education occurs when learning fails to recognize its *own* truth. This has perhaps never been truer in the Western tradition than it is at the moment.

In the West, the teacher in higher education and elsewhere who teaches the Western tradition is daily faced by many for whom this tradition is not their own. Education here becomes that of master over slave. Equally, the teacher who teaches against the Western tradition cannot avoid complicity with its mastery. Finally, a teacher who teaches a different tradition or traditions altogether is granted this privilege by the tolerance of the host tradition. I have shaped here the difficult relationship between modernity, postmodernity and globalization in this way in order to emphasize a point. No one here has a position that is not compromised by or is complicit within some kind of master and slave relationship.<sup>7</sup> Modern abstract reason fails to eradicate the slave. Postmodern abstract reason reproduces the master. And globalized reason offers universal mastery only through a marketplace that maintains masters and slaves within it.

The teacher is often left in despair with the following dilemma. ‘I have many different peoples of the world in my lectures and seminars, and I want to respect their differences, and even to do justice to them, but whatever approach I attempt always seems to operate in opposition to my intentions. If I teach the Great Books or natural human rights as laid down in the Constitution then I am accused of practising cultural imperialism. If I don’t teach the Great Books or America’s version of natural human rights then I am accused of having low expectations of my students, of discriminating against them by excluding

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<sup>7</sup> I take master and slave now from Hegel’s famous section in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where it serves as his template for the different appearances that freedom takes.

them from opportunities for full participation in the master culture. And if I teach of the many cultures in the room I am accused of a kind of pseudo-neutrality and indifference with regard to what is 'other,' of a kind that patronizes what is different by tolerating it and teaching it without seeking any common truth between them. What, then, am I to do? How can I teach? How can I respect difference and hold to a notion of a higher education, or of higher forms of knowledge, without the one offending the other?

How indeed? In seeking to retrieve liberal arts education now in a British university how should we address the question of modern freedom? How should we re-define *liberalis* in modern liberal arts education? In short, we intend to do justice to the insufficiencies of neo-Platonic logic in and for the modern mind. The liberal free man in Aristotle never included the slave. Modern freedom has done better by bringing the slave into freedom. What it has not yet done very comprehensively, however, is to learn how the inclusion of the slave affects and re-forms the notion of the formal, abstract, free, liberal, bourgeois master. This is the vocation of modern liberal arts, to find the other and the slave and the worker in freedom so that freedom might re-educate itself about itself. The scholar, the leisured man who is his own end, is no longer the model for a liberal arts education. Rather, its logic will be that of the modern dialectic of enlightenment, its spirit will be aporetic learning, and its difficulty will be its soul. Its content will be the educational principle exposed in the tension between universal and particular in some of their most characteristic modes. Indeed, we intend to ground our new programme of studies at Winchester in three of the great tensions that have moved and continue to move the Western mind to question itself and its place in the universe. These are the tensions between self and other, God and man, and life and death. In these themes the liberal arts will be critical of themselves, of their neo-Platonic principles, and we will call our programme *Modern Liberal Arts* to register this critical turn. Indeed, what it signals is that the notion of freedom carried within Western democracies and within the term 'liberal arts' cannot and should not be taken for granted. 'Liberal' is the key presupposition that liberal arts education must examine.

And, in response to the teacher's despair outlined above, modern liberal arts education offers itself in the following way. This despair has its substance in the dialectic of enlightenment. Respect this despair enough to be open to its truth, its (re-formed form of) principle. When you face your culturally diverse students remember that cultures are representations of explanations of the world and of the universe. This is both pluralistic, in that they differ, *and* hierarchical in that they claim truth for themselves. What much modern intellectual thought has yet to learn is that difference does not trump hierarchy, nor does hierarchy trump difference. Enlightenment suggests that we take our students to each of these in order to resolve differences between them and arrive at higher truths. Pluralism suggests we should let our students respect differences but not try to resolve them. The dialectic of enlightenment commends that we understand *this* opposition between pluralism and hierarchy *as* a re-education about siding with one or the other. They co-exist in their opposition, and in their contradicting each other. *This* is our philosophical education about theaporetic structure of enlightenment. This is modern freedom.

## **Conclusion**

Liberal arts education has always stayed loyal to the big questions surrounding life and its meaning for us. It begins, and returns again, as Aristotle noted, with a sense of incompleteness felt by the soul. In the *Metaphysics* he says that 'it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, for example, about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and the stars, and about the genesis of the universe' (*Meta*, I 2. 982b 25-28). It is for universities to ensure that they offer programmes that hear and respond to the incomplete soul within the universe. As the wheel of educational ideas turns, once again the Academy is charged with ignoring the most fundamental of questions, the widest perspectives, and the deepest of mysteries. And, perhaps the time has arrived, again, for

the tension between general education and disciplinary education to revitalize a university sector that has become a very neglectful guardian of freedom's enquiry into itself.

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