ensayo

# *The nature and purpose of liberal education.*

**Walter Nicgorski**
University of Notre Dame
Walter.J.Nicgorski.1@nd.edu

* This is the first of three lectures on the theme of Liberal Education and Human Freedom presented late in 2017 as a master class in Catedra Carlos Llano. The lectures were given at Universidad Panamericana's campuses at Aguascalientes and Mexico City on successive weeks.

**Conocimiento y Acción**, Año 1 Núm. I, julio- diciembre (2021) ISSN: 2683-2798, Doi: https://doi.org/10.21555/cya.i1.2021.2218

# *The nature and purpose of liberal education.*

Author: **Walter Nicgorski**
Professor Emeritus
University of Notre Dame

This invitation has spurred me to draw together my thinking and experiences of a lifetime related to our topic. I am planning to consider this topic in three steps, first and today, addressing the question of what I mean by liberal education, what is the nature and purpose of such an education; second and tomorrow, what are the modes and means open to us for such education; here we will break new ground and attempt to open our minds to new possibilities for how we might attain, in this our time and at least partially, the goals of liberal education. On the third day, I propose to consider how human freedom's realization through education is impeded or advanced through political community; this third inquiry will draw us into exploring the various kinds of freedom and their interrelationships. Even as I consider in this first lecture Greek and Roman thinkers who have given us a certain tradition of liberal education, the terms to represent their thinking, terms such as human development and empowerment will be contemporary and will become ever more so as we proceed in these days. I hope that fact will assist us in making these ideas applicable to our time and situation. Lectures 2 and 3 will deal quite directly and primarily with our situation today.

On this day I want to ground our thinking in Aristotle and then to show how Cicero, Rome's best Aristotelian in Dante's words[1], elaborated the Aristotelian tradition in his Roman context, and then I will turn some to the modern thinking of the great Christian writer on liberal education, namely, St. John Henry Cardinal Newman, and finally to Leo Strauss whose work on liberal education in connection with the revival of political philosophy has stirred thinking people across the globe in the last half century. Though their terminology differs some, one from the other, they are all deeply indebted to Aristotle. What I attempt here, to use a musical analogy, is a sonata in three movements, all variations on an Aristotelian theme.

One other preliminary but very important observation, I believe that philosophical thinking must answer at the bar of common sense and common experience. Thus the

1. This was Dante's judgement according to A. E. Douglas and P. Renucci. Douglas, "Cicero the Philosopher," in T. A. Dorey ed., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 162. Renucci, *Dante Disciple et Juge du Monde Gréco-Latin* (Clermont-Ferrand: G. De Bussac, 1954), 331.

terms and concepts I utilize and any conclusions I offer must simply make sense, not just to philosophers, but to all thoughtful human beings of some experience. Though I will soon turn to the classical Western tradition for direction in understanding what a liberal education is, the sources to which I turn, as Aristotle and Cicero, as well as Socrates himself, are not speaking primarily to philosophers but to ordinary citizens, though perhaps some notably politically ambitious ones, and one or two potential philosophers are among those citizens. The arguments they use appeal to common experience; how often it is that Aristotle begins a portion of his explanation or argument by saying in some form, "Now observation shows us."

Of course, my experience with education, including higher education, comes out of the context of having been educated and having taught for over a half-century in the United States; so I am noticeably short on Mexican experience, and though I suspect our experiences, especially with higher education are not so different, I will count on you alerting me in the Q and A portion of each evening and in conversation, to tendencies of Mexican higher education, even as they might impact, on this very special and distinctive University, and also on how public opinion, societal trends and political institutions in Mexico relate to the prospects for genuine liberal education in Mexico. We do strongly share — and here too especially in this University — the classical tradition with which we begin. I hope and earnestly pray that what we do here can assist you in your various responsibilities, that you might reaffirm goals by understanding them better, be more protective of what you do well, make improvements that yield better educational results and better governments and better societies.

So let me cast the thematic of our three lectures, namely Liberal Education and Human Freedom, against a background that highlights what I find ordinary people across the world and cultures saying about human freedom. However freedom was attained, people on a wide scale seem to be misusing it, using it in destructive ways for themselves and for their families and wider communities. Even those educated to a high degree are not exceptions to the culture of moral depravity and corruption so extensively present in contemporary human affairs. In fact, their greater powers and opportunities often give them enhanced skills in a culture of corruption. A few years ago while teaching in Vienna and studying with my students comparative constitutions and political cultures, I asked the students, from a variety of Central and Latin American as well as European nations, what was the greatest problem they perceived in their nation's constitution or political culture (understand political culture to be a kind of informal constitution, meaning the

way things are done), none of them said anything like our executive is too weak, our parties too fractured, our people, the electorate, too uneducated. Rather their unanimous answer was "corruption" of leaders and administrators. They found evidence in each of their situations that the rule of law guided by a moral compass was not effectual. It seems we pay deeply for our failures in education. **But is it liberal education that is failing us? Or has it already been widely abandoned?**

Let us take a brief closer look at what is happening in our educational institutions. For some time now students seem to be running away from courses and programs in the humanities and liberal arts. They are often encouraged if not pressured by parents and behind them the job market and governments concerned for useful skills —or at least for background in the studies that are said to really count, those called STEM in our educational lingo these days, STEM standing for **S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering and **M**athematics - all, I may say, mightily important to the security and prosperity of our modern way of life. In the United States there are programs and even more proposed for college debt forgiveness or tuition reduction if you study in the right fields, the fields represented in STEM. High school and even grammar school preparation is geared ever more to be able to study in those fields. It is hard for the general public to see the relevance of any education that is not practical in the way STEM is, and since most nations, if not corrupt, are poorly led by individuals disposed to flatter the ordinary public and not disposed to think deeply about our problems, there is no leadership in the direction of asking what would a sound education look like, what would, I suggest, a true liberal education look like. Our problems in higher education are not just then an erosion of support for education in the liberal arts and humanities, but poor understanding of what such an education truly is and thus can be. So what students are running from is often a very pale and inadequate conception of a liberal education. The word "education" is a panacea, a cure-all, for most problems in most modern and developing societies, but we have lost the ability to think past the surface of degrees, credits and courses to what the experience of liberal education should be. This liberal education is **not** breadth of knowledge or awareness, it is rather a properly equipped and guided thinking, a thinking through matters of great importance.

Furthermore, when students stay the course in whatever programs they are enrolled, in the end, there is not a confident, measured sense that their analytical skills, critical thinking and moral and value development are positively shaped by their college years; in fact, often quite the opposite. Again, your University here is likely doing much better

than the norm, but it is well for all of us to understand the economic and cultural threats to the only kind of education that has the potential to make our communities truly better, true liberal education for citizens and **above all** for leaders.

So let us turn to that foundational and poly-math teacher who St. Thomas Aquinas calls, "the philosopher," let us turn to Aristotle. From metaphysics to political theory, from psychology to ethics, all these are facets of the learning of that Master. Let me postulate that he is the greatest educational thinker ever, though he does not give us a direct definition of liberal education[2]. We must draw from his larger work a conception of who we are by nature and what kind of education can play a key role in our development. So I offer for working purposes, an Aristotelian inspired definition and then show some of the remarkable and beautiful analysis at work in that definition.

Inspired by Aristotle then, let us stipulate a definition that we might see at work through all three lectures, and then seek to get inside the definition more and to utilize the powerful metaphors that Aristotle uses to help us do so. So let us stipulate (set down) that liberal education (*e-ducere*) is not passive, not merely information-getting. It is truly *educere.* Liberal education is a process that draws out of us the potential we have to be truly human and thus the potential to be free. The teacher in this process draws out; the whole experience of liberal learning in a communal and institutional setting is to lead out from us significant truths and the actions that tend to follow from them. Liberal as the adjective here already means an education that frees. Liberal education properly understood then is the means to a truly human freedom, and genuine human freedom is the condition of personal and public collective freedom being well exercised and giving us good political communities. The purpose of liberal education is then to live well in human freedom, and its nature is this process toward that goal.

As said a moment or two ago, to dig more into this understanding is to see how liberal education is in fact an empowering by means of the basic liberal arts, meaning the arts of reason and speech, our *logos* potential, to use the Greek word that captures the close tie between reason and speech. Let speech stand for all forms of communication based on it, notably all of our languages. Speech stands then for the capacity to communicate through the symbols of language. Aristotle calls these two basic arts of reason and speech,

2. The following use of Aristotle as a foundational educational thinker was first explored by the author in "The Morality of the Liberal Arts: An Aristotelian Perspective," in J. Gueguen, M. Henry and J. Rhodes (eds.), *The Good Man in Society: Active Contemplation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 149-67.

the arms or armament which nature has granted human beings. So liberal education is not tied to goals or ends other than human development, a good in itself, but insofar as it is the basis of freedom, it has an end that is the human good; there is a kind of high utility, not utilitarian in an ordinary sense -- but high utility, useful for living a human life, for the flourishing of self and of one's communities. This is in fact a way of describing what it means to be an end in itself.

To be involved with the liberal arts, the core liberal arts, reason and speech, is to be working with dangerous potential. Aristotle graphically faces up to this: empowerment in any form is dangerous, and man's greatest powers are those two core arts. Here are Aristotle's words from early in his *Politics*:

> *Man, when perfected, is the best of animals; but if he be isolated from law and justice he is the worst of all. Injustice is all the graver when it is armed injustice; and man is furnished from birth with arms which are intended to serve the purposes of moral prudence and virtue, but which may be used in preference for opposite ends. That is why, if he be without virtue, he is a most unholy and savage being, and worse than all others in the indulgence of lust and gluttony*[3].

Man is the most dangerous animal in the forest; the potentially best is the potentially worst. In the words of St. Irenaeus, man fully human is God's greatest glory. Now consider fallen angels. Aristotle can be seen to know in essence all forms of abuse of the powers the human person has; he knows it because the fundamental powers of speech and reason represent the core liberal arts. So one could be a communications' specialist and a razor-shop lawyer and still be a sophist in derogatory sense of that word, a sophist as a betrayer of truth.

Consider how Aristotle's metaphor of arms or armament as our fundamental human qualities gives us a special insight into what the most thorough-going disarmament would be; to disarm of reason and speech is to de-humanize, to brainwash and to silence; to do one or the other in even some degree is a setback to humanity. This is enslavement

3. Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a 32-38, E. Barker, trans., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). Plato has the Athenian Stranger speak similarly when he observes, "Now man we call a gentle creature, but in truth, though he is wont to prove more godlike and gentle than any if he have but the right native endowments and the right schooling, let him be trained insufficiently or amiss, and he will show himself more savage than anything on the face of the earth." *Laws* vi, 766a, A.E. Taylor, trans., in E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961).

of the deepest kind conceivable, while empowering reason and speech is the most fundamental kind of freedom.

On the other hand, the free pressing forward of reason to make sense of things, of the whole in which man is located, seems a liberation of reason in the assertion and defense of its very mastery. That progress of reason leads to disdain for learning as window dressing or pretense and to claim for its field of inquiry all that is important for human life.

Just a little earlier in the *Politics*, the text of Aristotle from which we have been chiefly drawing, he makes a basic statement on the human's difference from animals.

> *The mere making of sounds serves to indicate pleasure and pain and i thus a faculty that belongs to animals in general: their nature enable them to attain the point at which they have perceptions of pleasure and pain and can signify those perceptions to one another. But language serves t declare what is advantageous and what is the reverse, and it therefor serves to declare what is just and what is unjust*[4].

Thus for Aristotle the human alone possesses logos, again the Greek term that refers to reason or language and can in some contexts refer to both. The Powers of reason and language are"the arms"of humankind. They are the primal or basic Powers from which all human Powers derive. Human development, then, is the development of the potential for logos; it is the development of the arts of humanity or the liberal arts. Especially when the liberal arts are considered in their extended form (that is, both the quadrivium and trivium, thus including the language of mathematics), it becomes clear how these fundamental arts are the basis of the impressive and growing repertoire of Powers that characterize and yet threaten modern man. This truth is indicated in the simple etymology of the word," technology", *techne logos*, literally the logos of art or craft. We have abundant and ever progressing technologies.

In those first two chapters of his Politics, Aristotle has pointed both to the human's potential for the arts of logos, reason and speech, and to the human's perception of good and justice as distinguishing features of humankind. Our problem of abuse of potential is still very much with us. Is there some kind of mutual dependence between these features? Is it really possible to cultivate one while neglecting the other? The significance

4. Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a 11-16, also Barker translation.

of this tension or uncertain relationship is important because some thinkers, Thomas Jefferson for instance, have held the moral sense to be largely independent of reason[5] , and some educators insist that the task of intellectual culture or development is entirely distinct from moral education.

Drawing on another text of Aristotle, his *Art of Rhetoric*, we can see both his awareness of the problem that concerns us and then, what we have been yearning for, his basis for resolving it. At the point of the following statement Aristotle is speaking to people concerned that rhetoric is capable of abuse. Aristotle observes:

> *If it is argued that one who makes an unfair use of such faculty of speech (logos) may do a great deal of harm, this objection applies equally to all good things except virtue, and above all to those things which are the most useful, such as strength, health, wealth, generalship; for as these,rightly used, may be of the greatest benefit, so, wrongly used, they may do an equal amount of harm[6].*

Things "most useful" for excellence, then, are also capable of the greatest harm. What is said of rhetoric here is further illuminated and extended by Aristotle to all the liberal arts, those "arms" of humans. Again, back in his work, the *Politics*, Aristotle observed that all the branches of liberal learning [such as logic and rhetoric] can be studied with such simple-minded concentration and commitment to perfection that they produce illiberality, what he regards as the slavishness which makes a person unfit for the pursuit and practice of virtue. Aristotle specifically wrote, "A good deal depends on the purpose for which acts are done or subjects are studied.[7]" So learning to act well — let us say virtuously — calls for a wider horizon in which to apply human reason and discourse.

Various human powers are good, then, only if joined to the power of powers. In fact, the usual human powers, notably those which belong to wealth and political position, are more often than not obstacles to the power of powers. So too are the liberal arts when they are pursued for the sake of wealth or control or otherwise pursued so as to constrict the soul. Such powers are obstacles because they often indulge the passions and form or reinforce habits that constitute a certain kind of character. Recall St. Augustine in his

---

5. See Jefferson's letter to Thomas Law, June 13, 1814, in A. Koch and W. Peden (eds.), *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Random House, 1944, 636-39. This distinction along with its apparent implications for education is discussed in W. Nicgorski, "The Significance of the Non-Lockean Heritage of the Declaration of Independence," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 21 (1976), 170.
6. Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* 1355b 1-7, J. H. Freese trans., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).
7. Aristotle, *Politics* 1337b 15-22, Barker as translator.

*Confessions* coming to the discovery that the liberal arts and classic texts like the Aeneid had been functioning as obstacles to his moral and philosophical development. For Aristotle, those persons who live "according to passion" are not readily amenable to a life "according to true *logos*," which is a life attuned and regulated by the power of powers.

However dangerous the *logos*, the arms of language and reason, it remains man's way to reach the power of powers. Whatever moral inclinations the human has by nature, they are nourished and developed and ultimately defended by the arts of reason and language. It seems that education, specifically higher education, should center on the effort to extend logos (reason with speech) to life itself, to inform this *logos* with an understanding of human life and especially its plausible ends. It is by grasping the understanding of the human being in the universal, his essence, and thus his context in the world of being, that the human's potential for reason (logos-potential) is turned to true reason, an essential part of moral excellence or virtue. Aristotle at least implied a close relationship between (1) the logos-potential that distinguishes man, (2) the extension of this logos-inquiry to life itself, and (3) the illumination of *logos* by understanding which results in true *logos*, the basis for that much needed power of powers.

In order to draw out the significance of this broad conclusion of Aristotle, it is helpful to notice that the basic skills or arms, the liberal arts, are not themselves simply "value-free" powers, to use contemporary terms. To educate in the liberal arts or to seek an education in the liberal arts is already to have chosen or affirmed a good, in other words, to have made a certain "value-commitment". The devotee of the liberal arts can resemble (in fact, can be identical to) the scientist, especially the social scientist, whose frequent enthusiasm for the alleged "value-free" objectivity of his science leads him at times to overlook his fundamental commitment to science as a good. In fact, the commitment to the liberal arts, or to science, frequently entails an understanding that these powers are second-order or instrumental goods and also entails an attitude of neutrality or worse regarding their uses.

The liberal arts ought not and often cannot be confined to a field of instrumentality. By a kind of dynamic inner logic they press toward a whole and consistent application to life, apressing deeply and holistically by reason to make sense of things, things being the whole in which man finds himself, the external as well as internal realms of his experience. What occurs is reason's discovery of its own instrumentality and a recognition of how impoverished and dangerous mere instrumentality is. This process

of extension and discovery usually requires or benefits from guides or teachers. To be Socratic and properly Aristotelian is to force the issue of the larger *logos*, or the true *logos*, by insisting upon the inadequacy of instrumental *logos* or reason, or an explanatory *logos* that does not touch human direction, that does not yield the power of powers, full human empowerment.

A way to appreciate this expansive potential and inclination of education in the liberal arts toward the power of powers is to see the good of instrumental reason as analogous to such goods as a good dinner, a good feat in athletics, or a good painting. These goods do, in fact, involve *logos* insofar as all human rational activity is built upon it. But at the same time, it is clear that each of those goods is only really good if it fits into a larger context of meaning where goodness is properly anchored. Here's the point illustrated in one such sphere, that of a good athletic feat. A fine and even an elegant jump shot in basketball cannot decisively be called good if it was shot in the wrong direction and counted for the opposing team or if it came as the result of a costly foul of pushing-off. Likewise, consistently fine play on the court when it diverts a player's attention from personal responsibilities off the court and undermines relationships with others casts doubt on the goodness of those athletic feats. What distinguishes liberal education from education or training in the art of cookery, the arts of basketball or high jump, and the art of painting, is liberal education's primary concern with the development of *logos*, which means that it seeks to bestow the very art that permits one to approach and to deal with the question of the overall good. The crucial matter, not just for liberal education but for all human activity, is whether the *logos* that is developed in each sphere of competence takes sufficient cognizance of questions relevant to the larger context of meaning.

Now it is possible to appreciate more fully the relationship of the liberal arts to the humanities or Great Books. Not too long ago and it seems quite rightly, the humanities have been described anew as "the best that has been said, thought, written and otherwise expressed" about "life's enduring, fundamental questions. What is justice? What should be loved? What deserves to be defended? What is true courage? What is the noble? What is truly basic? Why do civilizations flourish? Why do they decline?[8]". Clearly the Great Books provide materials of human significance — issues, dilemmas, resolutions, visions — for consideration and appropriation by the developing *logos*. These books so understood are to be studied in earnest care with the greatest human powers. They are

8. W. J. Bennett, *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education* (Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1984), 3.

debased if they become occasions for blind veneration of the past or window-dressing or a status symbol. They offer vital resources to reason's encounter with the human situation. The liberal arts, then, are the source not only of man's great and varied powers but also, insofar as they act upon the Great Books, the source of whatever moral direction man can bring to bear upon those powers.

If this understanding of education seems excessively rationalistic and suggestive of an exclusively deductive and simplistic approach to morality, let it be noted that grounding morality in reason is not necessarily to assert that moral problems easily yield to rational analysis and direction. In fact, no formidable thinker in the tradition which Aristotle represents ever thought that to be the case. The ancient virtue of prudence is a reminder of how much this tradition respects the ambiguities and variables present to specific moral decisions.

So much of moral education (even clear-sighted intellectual inquiry into moral matters) is dependent on the learner's proper disposition, and that in turn upon a supportive environment and inspiring examples. Some have said that moral education is much more a matter of the will than of the intellect. Others have emphasized that the power of powers or human virtue is possessed only when right habituation is added to reason and understanding. The same classic authors who insisted that virtue cannot be taught, in the ordinary sense of teaching, leave us a complex picture of the way human excellence,the power of powers is possessed. **Virtue seems to be the outcome of a complex but blessed process involving a gifted or receptive nature, a proper nurture or training, and the extension or application of our logos-potential to the human condition itself, to the question of the ultimate good and the moral consequences that flow from one or another answer.** So liberal education properly pursued should end in a state of virtue that marks true human freedom. For Aristotle then, liberal education is the development of the arts of reason and speech to the point of the ultimate power to direct all our powers well, that would be the state of human virtue.

So enter Cicero, Rome's great orator and philosopher-statesman. Cicero gives us essentially a commentary, in the context of Roman history and his own life, of how Aristotle has understood liberal education. Cicero provides several reports of how humans emerged from a more primitive and isolated existence into political life and republics where freedom was protected[9]. It was the leadership of individuals gifted with

9. Cicero, *Rep.* 3.3 with Augustine, *Contra Julianum,* IV, xii, 60; *Inv.* 1. 2-3; *Off.* 1. 12.

exceptional powers of understanding and foresight and the eloquence to be persuasive that accounts for humans being gathered together in political communities. It was the power of speech and the power of reason that were expressed early on in the art of law. ThThese were joined with humans' needs for others and desire to communicate with their same human kind. So speech and reason were the arts that enabled political foundations and ultimately Rome's greatness.

Yet in his earliest piece of substantial writing, a rhetorical treatise called, *De Inventione*, a treatise with a strong philosophical dimension, Cicero, only 20 years old but rich through his education in the experiences of a contentious Roman history and battling orators, famously offers the observation that wisdom without eloquence had done too little good for states. Cicero shows even then his impatience with philosophers spinning fanciful thoughts in their corners[10]. His full statement, however, reveals he would be little inclined to urge to the front lines of politics those who are morally unprepared. Wisdom without eloquence has done too little good in states, but eloquence without wisdom has proved disastrous to states. In other words we humans need the empowerment that the rhetorical art can bring, but we need most of all the life-directing wisdom that moral, Socratic philosophy can yield. So Cicero launches a life-long concern and endeavor to keep together the art of arts, philosophy, with the arts of rhetoric and political leadership. Our parallel responsibility in this modern day must be to keep that art of arts together with all the technologies that are ever emerging.

Years afterward through the voice of his model statesman, Scipio Africanus Minor, in his great dialogue, *De Re Publica*, Cicero would say, "ThThough others are called human,
only those truly are who have developed the arts appropriate to humanity....[11]". Later in the same work, Scipio will describe a tyrant as one only human in form, for he lacks community with others in law, right and *humanitas*[12]. With his concept of humanitas, Cicero represents the completeness of reason in a virtuous life. ThThe Aristotelian resonance is clear, though Cicero's own virtue leads him more to the active life of political leadership rather than to metaphysical and other abstract inquiries.

Enter now, John Henry Cardinal Newman, a powerful 19th century English intellectual gifted with eloquence of tongue and pen. He made his special mark as a theologian and

10. *Inv.* 1. 1; *Rep.* 1.2
11. *Rep.* 1. 28.
12. *Rep.* 2. 48.

philosopher. His lectures and essays composing his classic, *The Idea of a University*, were primarily intended to defend theology's place in any university that would respect the full circle of learning. As he pursued that purpose he gave the bishops of Ireland and all posterity a little classic on the idea of liberal education. What was liberal education in Newman's mind? It seems to play a part in his larger conception of the end of the university. Liberal education is the development of and practice in the philosophical habit of mind; it is then essentially thinking, but the more significant the objects on which it thinks, the better it is for the end of the university. That end is to foster understanding of how all learning, all disciplines, relate to one another and might contribute to understanding the whole in which we find ourselves. In Newman's words, all knowledge forms one whole "because its subject-matter is one; for the universe in its length and breadth is so intimately knit together that we cannot separate off portion from portion, and operation from operation, except by mental abstraction[13]". Newman's point, in the mouth of the man of earthy common sense, is simply that everything is connected to everything else.

This is the capstone or finish line that we find the dynamic of liberal education pushing toward. This is the logos-potential pushing out – for Newman, not simply for some end to shape morality but toward an understanding grasp of the whole. Liberal education appears to be a starting of this process by a gaining of the philosophical habit of mind, which is the drive and ability to make sense of things. As a habit, it is to be retained and utilized as new objects of knowledge enter its purview. Gaining the habit is the end of liberal education as such.

Newman seems convinced that effective teaching of undergraduates is threatened by the research university. He would prefer to have the functions of teaching and research in separate institutions, yet, of course, for him and for us, research represents the cutting edge in the effort to see where disciplines lead and how their relations with other disciplines might stand as knowledge is gained. One imagines that the founders and leaders of universities – and faculties insofar as they have power — would be expected to apply the philosophical habit of mind to the various things the university does and to keep the university on target while protecting this instrument of differentiation and integration, namely, the philosophical habit of mind that must be there from generation to generation.

13. J. H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 38.

Another way Newman catches our attention is in his emphasis on human development in the form of the philosophical habit as an end in itself. It does not directly seek a moral or good end; however, the process of pursuing that habit of mind especially as exercised on significant objects yields, says Newman, "freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation and wisdom [14]". These are the qualities of Newman's liberally educated gentleman; they seem morally tinged and one wonders what this wisdom entails. But Newman is insistent that it does not yield the moral man in the sense of the Christian gentleman. It may produce the gentleman but by no means the Christian gentleman; that would be another kind of endeavor in which theology and God's grace play key roles.

And finally for today's work, enter Leo Strauss, a Jewish thinker and political philosopher who died in 1973, who left Nazi Germany in the 1930s for very productive years in the United States as a teacher and scholar. Formidable as his scholarly writings are, he drew attention to the importance of liberal education and sought to express his understanding of its nature and end. His formulations are striking and thus memorable ones. On one occasion he wrote that "liberal education is education in culture or toward culture[15] ".

Strauss did not use the word "culture" in a relativistic sense like the culture of sport or teenage culture; he meant true human culture and thus a cultured person possessed true freedom. Culture was for him "the cultivation of the mind in accordance with the nature of the mind[16]". There was, in other words, a true understanding, and there were faculties of the mind to be attended to as the mind was cultivated in a genuine development. It seemed to be a fitting of the mind to nature, this liberal education, but it was, for Strauss, not quite philosophical education, rather on a path toward such an education and at a point from which the liberally educated person could offer responsible leadership. Liberal education can elevate people on a developmental track, according to Strauss, for he says "liberal education is the ladder by which we try to ascend from mass democracy to democracy as originally meant[17]". That statement and its context requires more of our attention which it will get in the third lecture on Liberal Education, Personal Freedom and Republican Government. For now, let us mention Strauss's third formulation of what liberal education is, and it seems to represent a surprising turn: liberal education, writes Strauss, is liberation from vulgarity and initiation into experiences in things

14. Newman, 76-77.
15. Leo Strauss, "What is Liberal Education?," *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 3.
16. Strauss, 3.
17. Strauss, "Liberal Education and Responsibility,", 10.

beautiful[18]. However, these latter two formulations when read carefully -namely, liberal education as a ladder for ascent and liberal education as an initiation into things beautiful — are not alternative definitions of liberal education but metaphorical descriptions of the effects of liberal education; the first is political and to be explored, and the second, an initiation into beauty, is a statement of what the developed mind can see ever better, namely, its own beauty and that of the ordered world around that mind pressing outward for comprehension. A liberally educated person sees more in the world and in every experience in it.

We must conclude what will be our longest session by recalling that liberal education's purpose, in Aristotle's view, is true human development, the development of our logos-potential, the arts of reason and speech, into the many arts and technologies that characterize our world — all of these calling out for the art of arts or a proper and philosophical completion. Cicero saw that the core arts developed fully would yield a genuine *humanitas*, overall virtue or excellence that entailed true human freedom. Newman described the development of reason as gaining the philosophical habit of mind pushing us to as much knowledge of the whole as is humanly possible. Strauss also saw liberal education on a trajectory to philosophy where the goal was the completion of understanding the whole including the very mind itself, where approaching that goal but ever falling short left one with the legacy of liberal education delighting in beauty everywhere and prepared for serving our troubled political communities with moral responsibility. All four thinkers are describing a liberal education that will ennoble as well as empower.

All four of these thinkers who have assisted our inquiry into what is liberal education also faced serious setbacks in their roles as educators. All had reason to be discouraged. It appears that not only the philosophical life but even that of the liberally educated person appealed to very few, and the effects of this failure could be seen everywhere in our world then and now. Yet one must hold out in our time the flame of truth to enlighten those who will be disposed to notice. One must do better than curse the darkness, and one place to start is with those practices and spaces in our modern ways and institutions that might protect or even facilitate liberal learning. When and how liberal education might occur is the topic of tomorrow's lecture; it is titled the "ways and means of liberal education".

18. Strauss, "What is Liberal Education,", 8.