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The ways and means of liberal education.

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In American English, I might say at this point, today we get down "to the nitty-gritty." I suspect there is a Spanish equivalent for this, just as if I was to say, "the devil is in the details," a saying that reminds us how difficult it is to know just what to do in the realities of our day with big, broad ideas, such as we have of liberal education.

You no doubt have heard of malpractice suits, (namely legal action) in medicine and dentistry, but recently we have seen raised in the United States malpractice suits in education: in some cases when schools promised to deliver basic skills like reading and writing and mathematical ability, there is an effort to hold them legally accountable if they fail. They are, to be sure, ever more politically accountable. What about liberal education in particular and at the college level? While there have been suits against colleges and universities especially by athletes who have come a little later in life to feel cheated of an education promised them with their athletic scholarship, I do not know of any suits specifically focused on the failure of liberal education. Maybe there should be, given how important, in yesterday's lecture, a genuinely liberal education seemed to be for human and communal well-being. But imagine with me a plaintiff standing before a court and saying "You have promised to unleash all my human powers and keep them responsible, and look what has happened to me!" Adept lawyers would probably tell us that liberal education is too loose and elusive a concept to go to litigation over it.

Yesterday's lecture sought to make the idea of liberal education as clear as possible by utilizing the Aristotelian understanding in which it is rooted and then by introducing three variations, as with different tones and harmonies in music, so here with somewhat different language, are three variations on the Aristotelian understanding[1]. These variations were the voices of Cicero with his emphasis on the arts of humanity and the notion of *humanitas*, John Henry Cardinal Newman with his emphasis on the philosophical habit of mind and a pushing with it toward a complete understanding of all things known and to be known, and finally the voice of Leo Strauss, also seeing liberal education as an initiation into philosophy on the path toward a knowledge of the whole and yet productive where it stands of good effects on citizens and leaders and of an appreciation of the beautiful in every aspect of our lives. These variations represent a tradition of thought about liberal education that we saw rooted in Aristotle's philosophical anthropology and metaphysics. The core notion is that the distinctive human powers of reason and speech are to be developed, thus empowering a human being to be fully human. The human's "arms," (to recall Aristotle's metaphor and the suggestion on how dangerous they are) reach full development when they help forge for a person the power of powers.

1. The mentioned previous lecture was published in the first issue of our journal, available at: https://revistas.up.edu.mx/cya/issue/view/165 –ed.

This is true and complete human empowerment. It is the fruit of a properly serious and focused inquiry through the liberal arts. It is something much more important than the veneer of culture and learning often associated with a liberal or humanistic education and the manners of a gentleman. However – and again, the liberation of our greatest powers is capable of great good even while so very dangerous.

Not to lose sight of that good requires a further reflection on yesterday's presentation lest you think I miss the good in our world and am simply a prophet of gloom and doom when it comes to human powers. Remember, to turn the phrase around, the potentially worst is also the potentially best; fallen man also has angelic potencies. My emphasis on the abuse of our powers yesterday and my introduction of the idea of malpractice in education moments ago could make negativity stand out too much. However as reason has worked its way into our modern world and communications (the development from speech-logos) and has been extended for a deeper and wider global awareness, much positive advance can be seen in changes of individual and collective awareness and in practices including laws respecting the treatment of women, the reduction of racial and ethnic discrimination and the treasuring and protection of all human life at every stage including the environment that supports all life. We must notice and be appreciative of the many, many goods that have flowed from God's original goodness through the human being's powers – such as the many, many goods from all the technologies developed in the last century and a half and from the advances in understanding, the seeds of which often go back to Aristotle. Properly understood, you can see that Aristotle yearned for and pushed for such developments as our eventual liberation from human slavery, a more just relationship between men and women and ever more responsibility in the stewardship that goes with property rights. So how will the journey of our powers' development now proceed? how will the instrument of liberal education fare in this age of mass democracy? It is likely that progress is **not** inevitable. Again a fuller examination of the political situation follows in the final lecture, but here we must turn to the practices of higher education that we know and that Strauss knew to a great degree, and we must realistically examine what can be done for liberal education, being prepared to compromise with the forces in the context in which we find ourselves and of course with the colleagues of differing convictions with whom we work.

In the many polarizations in our world, often very deep ones, we have seemingly lost the understanding of and knack for compromise. But to compromise intelligently and while holding to fundamental principles requires an understanding of what would be the best, in this case what would be the best practices we could imagine for developing the core human powers and topping them off with the power of powers, the power to use them well. With such best practices in mind, we then turn to the practices we have and try to see how those might be utilized to move them toward the best. So we need a view of the best, utopic (meaning existing no where), in order to guide our critique and our direction for the institutions entrusted with liberal education today.

It is important to state in summary our model of best practices now, and it can be but a summary because we have laid the basis for it in the exploration we have done of the Aristotelian tradition in liberal education. So in summary form, what is best is an education focused on and emphasizing the development of reason and speech or language inclusive of the power of powers to give them moral control and direction. The conditions for such work, beyond the elementary development of language and discourse, are having a size of community and classes (much to be said for the one-on-one tutorial system), where a teacher and possibly peers can directly engage and challenge the thinking of each student, and do this with materials that raise the most significant human questions and that represent the best thinking and writing in Western tradition. In this process the reflective capacities and the integrating and distinguishing possibilities of the mind are exercised and nourished. There must be a strong institutional commitment to this which entails a valuing highly of teachers and tutors who do that sort of Socratic midwifery. In a nutshell, Great Books programs in a small college setting seem closest to the institutional ideal for this kind of elevation to human freedom. This is not the context for education which any of us probably has available, and the range of institutions where liberal education does occur, perhaps to some degree, goes from great multiversities like Berkeley in California through mid-sized but specialized often technical universities and institutes to small colleges with or without a religious dimension to be integrated with their work. So we must talk about practices that vary greatly, but let us see if we can engage wider more universal concerns by turning to some of the tensions, issues and topics that we find almost everywhere discussed in higher education. Where might liberal education fit in the various contexts we have and how might it be fostered?

I have used the term "multiversity." It was coined by Clark Kerr, that chancellor at Berkeley who wanted to describe what his university had become. His point was it has many or multi tasks with no single and primary end. All of education tends to be shaped and affected by what the leaders do, and in our Western societies the leaders have been the larger universities, the multiversities that play critical roles in complex modern societies. So as various training programs as well as those for professional technical preparation have become more university responsibilities, liberal education which might once have been central becomes ever more incidental to what are considered more important forms of service to society. So it happens that smaller universities and colleges want and often need the dollars that go with such services and want the prestige and dollars that go with making the research agenda ever a larger part of what they do. Education in the liberal arts will ever be a weak sister in this environment of the high-powered modern university and the model it sets; perhaps this is a place to say to a Mexican audience — beware the American models, especially of this sort. These models provide a setting where institutional commitment to liberal education is going to be weak and one where it will definitely be difficult to find people as faculty to make a commitment to liberal education in which they might grow ever more effective.

This leads us to the teaching/research tension that had caught Newman's eye already in the 19th century and thus early in the emergence of the modern university developed then after the model of the German research university. Newman thought the teaching functions of higher education should be institutionally separated from the research functions which any society needs to have well handled. Above all, Newman thought there were different gifts requisite for each of these spheres, and that it would be rare that a given person would excel in both; he anticipated that if both were domiciled in one institution, one of the functions would come to be subordinated to the other[2]. And so it has happened at a rapid pace since the mid-19th century. Newman foresaw this, even while he appeared to understand teaching more as presentation of material, more fact and discipline oriented than as a committed engagement to dialectical inquiry on books and issues that took you outside your specialized field. When you consider what is the most appropriate form of teaching for liberal education and that it is not conveyance of information through the lecture, the dichotomy and tension between teaching and research becomes even greater.

Now for an example from the recent past, one that supports Newman's inclination to say, "different talents for different functions," most of the fifty-six years I served as a faculty member, editor and administrator at Notre Dame came during years when the University was led by its greatest president, Father Theodore Hesburgh and at times I was an elected member of the Academic Council of the University over which he presided. On one occasion when there was in that body a spirited debate over the teaching strength of researchers being brought into the University, Father Hesburgh recalled that Dr. Jonas Salk, the discoverer of the polio vaccine, was not just known as an inadequate teacher but indeed as a poor one, and yet his active sheltering in a university's laboratory brought great benefit to mankind. It should be noted that not all research encouraged by the research-emphasis of the modern university is so signficant and successful as that of Dr. Salk. There likely are few Dr. Salks, and much research and publication can be a going through motions without much to say or notable discoveries; so the experience of Dr. Salk should not set the norm for how universities and college strike a balance between teaching and research. Academic publications, now adding on-line journals, are great in number, but clearly wisdom is rare and most journals in the humanities seem to average only 2 and a half readers. It is by no means all bad if there are expectations of faculty that they publish to show competence in a field and demonstrate an active and strong mind –that's not all bad unless it leads to people not being tenured for lack of publications, people who would be stellar

2. Newman expressed such views in the "Preface" to his influential book, *The Idea of a University* (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame IN), XXXIX - XLI. Later Newman was not only clearly supportive of the importance of research among university faculty but much more optimistic about the prospects for individuals and institutions to combine fine teaching with significant research. See the work of my colleague, Mary Katherine Tillman. "Introduction" "Editor's Notes," Rise and Progress of Universities and Benedictine Essays by John Henry Newman. Birmingham Oratory Millennium Edition, vol. 3. Series Editor: James Tolhurst DD. London: Gracewing Publishers, and Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001: LXX-LXXIV, 489-513.

teachers. Newman might of course comment — could we not have the significant research being even better and be spared the poor service to and interaction with students by getting institutional separation of the two main functions of the university. Could truly effective liberal educators be as protected as they should be ---- perhaps only by going to an institution that is not so strongly committed to research, and then it might be they are going to an institution that is financially weak and that pushes the faculty person to do so much teaching that he is burned out and falters in participating in the exciting and demanding engagement that is liberal education. Thus, the burn-out of a truly effective teacher hurts the entire teaching endeavor of higher education.

There are many current defenders of the developing situation that Newman objects to; they are defenders of keeping the teaching and research functions together in the same institution. In fact, often at the root of their stance is that they are defenders of keeping both functions active in each faculty member's mind and heart. Their argument always goes something like this: research makes for a better informed, sharper and more satisfied teacher.

There seems to be a general truth in this claim. I give you a negative example coming out of my experience while able to cite numbers of positive examples on how this harmony of research and teaching can work well. I have known and much admired a teacher, beloved of many students for his passionate love of teaching and for warm wit and wisdom. Only in co-examining with him did I discover what some others had indicated to me, that he had grown very rusty in understanding the texts and issues that were to be discussed with students, and this happened, it seems, at least partly because he drew away from professional meetings and publication where his own thinking and analysis would have been tested by professional peers. One should want to nourish and keep the respect of good students as one engages them on common texts and issues toward the development of their minds. To nourish and respect the very good students we can never forget the highest standards and that we are not just educating good people and citizens, but that we also are educating the scholars and academic leaders of the next generation; they will need to be specialists to be among the best; we must respect the powers of their minds. So one who appreciates a dedication to teaching that best advances liberal education must be wary of those who would simply retreat into teaching. Because of the many individual examples Newman must have known in his lifetime, I doubt whether he would be an absolutist in separating the research and teaching functions. He would have been capable of imagining their working together; how often I have heard people who have been successful at research and publication report the stimulation their research received from teaching students at their early and most formative stages. Yet, Newman is right in the general description he gives of the tension between functions, and in a person or institution the much-rewarded research-function is likely to predominate and the activity of liberal education weaken.

What can be done? Where those functions are combined as in most of our institutions, programs for faculty renewal and development can, for example, assist powerful researchers like Dr. Salk to get interested in the kind of liberal inquiry and teaching that would help citizens and leaders understand the very work he does so well. Such programs could give him assistance and space in life to attain this self-development, and at the same time for the master teachers, such programs should give them the support and encouragement to do research and writing that would allow them to test their ideas and competence in texts and become yet more formidable teachers — teachers and researchers together - beware a divided house, bring the faculties together by bending them toward each and encouraging conversation and collaboration. Don't let separation grow deep and distant. Programs encouraging faculty interaction, development and renewal might be called islands of survival and refounding for liberal education in the modern university. These, where they exist, have sometimes been undercut just to provide money for research leaves. Often such budgetary actions represent a clear confusion of priorities in pursuing a healthy university.

As disciplines become ever more specialized in order to advance research more readily and as the competition for research funds and rewards becomes ever more intense, it will grow more difficult to draw faculty (and increasingly humanities faculty as well) away from their specialized research and to programs and activities contributing more directly to their participation in the liberal education efforts of their universities. Newman might say, I told you so and leave us with this difficult tension. Faculty themselves resist any pull away from their research and thus become obstacles to islands of liberal activity in the research multiversity and to policies that would lead them into more interaction with colleagues and students in the service of liberal education. The galloping pace at which the research function has come to dominate in all education since the 19th century has made it ever more difficult to defend such islands of liberal activity where they exist in the university. Richard McKeon, the noted Aristotle scholar from the University of Chicago and editor of the massive and influential edition of *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, once came to Notre Dame and was in my care for longer than expected when his car was being repaired in nearby South Bend. I then had occasion to ask him about efforts at Chicago similar to Notre Dame's effort at that time to examine and renew its core liberal education programs. He complained about young faculty coming out of leading graduate schools as specialists in, say, 17th century French poetry, or the usage of the Attic dialect in the classical Greek language. Such faculty, he said, saw work on core education and liberal education as a distraction from the great reward of publication in their specialties.

Once Father Hesbugh was asked about the British system, especially at the Oxbridge leading universities, and how they reconciled such a strong commitment to individual research with what was thought to be great success at liberal education among faculty as well as students. He pointed at life in the Oxbridge colleges like St. Edmund's at Cambridge and the talking together or conversation

at meals and in common rooms, physicist with philosopher for example. He saw this as productive of a culture of understanding and critiquing research, and he suggested that this fed into the one-on-one teaching experiences with students in those colleges, tutorials where student work is directly engaged and discussed. As to eating together in college, I am told by one current high-powered administrator in an American university that the days of faculty clubs and faculty dining rooms are over — that now there is too much pressure and too little time for those relaxed conversations; now the mid-day working meal is a sandwich brought from home or purchased from a machine, taken to your office to be consumed as you read the latest lab results on your project. There you are to be alone in your office or cubicle in a departmental cluster likely situated in a building well removed from those of the more liberal disciplines. This makes it hard, to say the least, to conceive of the university, as Newman did, where the different disciplines brush up against one another and have a life true to the very name of the university — *versus unum* — turning knowledge to a unified whole. Our multiversity does many things and has no single overarching function as Newman had for the university of his dreams.

Let us consider now for a few moments the students and graduates of the multiversities and other universities as this one. If they were deprived within the university of opportunities for liberal education, if space was not provided and if opportunities were not encouraged – what then might be done as they, their families and their societies become aware of the need for the development of the liberal arts for good and powerful men and women and for good citizens and leaders. Cicero sought to follow his much admired model statesman, Scipio Aemelianus Minor, so that even while life was busy with his duties in law and politics, opportunities were seized to step back and reflect and engage philosophical studies[3]. We do have contemporary models,sometimes supported and encouraged by universities, models for giving experiences in liberal education in short-breaks or longer summer breaks to busy young professionals, technical people and others. These allow not only the planting of new seeds of breadth and humane vigor in lives often narrowed by specialization and a hectic pace of life, but they also allow major questions of direction and of the nature of happiness to surface for attention. One such effort with a strong Mexican print on its founding and development is the Phoenix Institute which has met at Notre Dame for many years and recently also in Vienna. Another program internal to Notre Dame is the Summer Symposium a week-long intensive experience of courses and seminars shaped by the University's Great Books program. Graduates of that program and others at all stages of their careers as well as retirees come back to campus for this long-standing summer educational experience. These are not by any means the only such efforts one can find these days; reading groups abound in the U.S., and I suppose this very "Cátedra Carlos Llano" sponsoring such master classes as this one, represents such an effort

3 The attachment to philosophy, self-examination and reflection runs through the texts of Cicero along with his primary devotion to political and legal activities as public service. Off. 2. 2-6; 3. 1-4; Rep. 1. 26-28; Leg. 1. 9-10; Tusc. 1. 1; 2. 1-2.

internal to the university. History study groups can lead to vigorous and well-informed discussions of the important topics that should always be central to liberal education. Some continuing education seminars have long targeted media people such as journalists, for their role in our culture's quality is so crucial. I have even heard of a bipartisan reading group on Cicero's writings which has grown up on U.S Capitol Hill among members of our national legislature and their staffs ---- for all of these kinds of activities, let us be grateful, and let me be clear I am not talking about professional seminars and training for jobs already held, seminars and training such as a company might hold to refine the skills of its employees, what would generally be called in-service training. Rather I am speaking of opportunities to practice and develop the arts of reason and speech and especially on questions of great human importance; I am speaking of opportunities for thinking through our tradition and examining its classics as a great human resource for a person and for a society's development, in other words, critically appropriating the best of our past and asking together with others how does it fit with our lives today.

There have been and are strong programs in liberal learning for retirees and senior citizens. Their existence and attractiveness are a reminder of a truth emphasized by Newman, namely, liberal education aims at a good in itself without any consideration of the favorable impact on society or the gaining of skills that might be useful. These older folks often delight in a growth of wisdom from encountering the best of Western literature and being challenged as they discuss. There is in this case a glimmer of the joy that goes with wisdom. Notre Dame has in recent years followed Stanford in developing a program, chiefly in liberal learning, for business, educational and civic leaders who rise fast to success, at the top of their firms and organizations, only to find that they want something more, that they want to return to universities and while there, not be bound by the narrow curricular restraints that paradoxically brought them success but not a satisfying happiness.At Notre Dame this program is called the Inspired Leadership Initiative. There probably are not too many individuals seeking such a program; Alex de Tocqueville the wise and acute observer of early democracy in the U.S., upon seeing how little culture and education American leaders had, especially those in the frontier states, noted that these leaders were too busy to stop for an education when as young men they found an America rich with opportunities for land and for getting wealthy; then, when they were older, they had lost the taste for serious study and anything like liberal learning.[4] There have been so many reports since then on how we are shaped by what we are led to do for a living; so few see any need to break out of the routine, especially if we are comfortably prosperous in it. But there are some that these Stanford and Notre Dame plans seek to serve.

4. Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America. Edited and translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 51 and passim.,

Now as we are looking at educational practices and potential practices to provide islands of liberal learning in our busy world, let me emphasize a point strongly suggested in both this and the previous lecture. It concerns the content, the what that is studied, studied in the manner of having the arts of reason and speech practiced upon it. A senior distinguished scholar once was assigned to break me into leading a Great Books seminar; so we co-directed such a seminar. He was no fuzzy lightweight, rather he was a Rhodes scholar, a learned theologian and historian who had come to strong and experienced views about liberal learning. He surprised me and the student group we were with when he argued that anything could be studied in a liberal fashion. To illustrate this, he brought into the next seminar an old-fashioned food mixer, one that you cranked by hand, let us say, to make mashed potatoes. His point was, that we could study and discuss just how this mixer was put together and worked; we would be seeking to grasp that reason in its way of being and we might converse with others as we sought that reason. I later found that his lesson was an expression of Newman's wisdom in emphasizing that liberal education is an end in itself and learning for development of the self was the end, not for marketing the mixer, not for using it for its apparent purpose — but simply to understand it, knowledge an end in itself. A similar point once was made to me by a student who experienced the high-powered seminars in the Harvard Business School. He reported on a seminar discussion of a problem of proper geographical distribution of warehouses for a large national firm, and he pointed out that the seminar did not present a problem to be solved but a business issue to be discussed in the arts of reasoned analysis, exploratory speech and persuasive speech. So why not go to business seminars right from the start of education, rather than to seminars on the great classics of our tradition? The answer has, of course, to do with content. In the Great Books seminar, the arts of reason and speech are practiced on the works of outstanding thinkers and writers and the topics are justice, courage, true moderation and the nature of happiness; in that context, we would be developing the liberal arts on materials that draw us into overarching wisdom and moral direction, what we have earlier called the power of powers. In the last couple of years, my college at Notre Dame has put a slogan on its website; this is the College of Arts and Letters and the slogan is: "Study anything, do everything." The intent behind this is clearly to emphasize that a liberal education can prepare you for anything you might make your job in the world; so it is good public relations but it contains only a partial truth, namely, anything can be studied liberally, that is with a focus on developing powers and not focusing on any particular job. It is but a partial truth, the relativistic implication as to what you might study is potentially harmful.

There is something analogous or similar to be said about experiential education, an increasingly important facet of higher education. It can provide an island of liberal learning in the busy task-oriented world, but there is reason for proper direction and development of it. Pressures for it sometimes take an extreme form of wanting to give university credit just for time spent in the business world or industrial world, the world of non-profits or social services. Experience should be the ground of all learning; that is not just a modern view but one that Aristotle would emphatically endorse; it is,

after all, in Great Books seminars, the digested or filtered experience of others which is submitted to scrutiny and discussion. Homer's *Odyssey* in its opening bars sings of a man who has experienced the ways of different peoples. The broadening of our experiences often described as the expansion of our horizon is important in giving material upon which to nourish and practice the liberal arts. Reflection on experience and guided reflection on experience are critical to making service experiences, like foreign travel experiences, fruitful for liberal learning. At Notre Dame we have had a program called "Urban Plunge" in which a group of undergraduates join for an intense inner city experience, usually at some Catholic service agency, such as a woman's center or equivalents of soup kitchens such as are supported by the Catholic Worker movement. The students are prepared for these days by efforts to raise questions for them to consider in what they will be witnessing, and then most important, after their experience, they write a short paper reflecting on it, a paper to be discussed with other Urban plungers and faculty mentors. The papers provide the occasion for a discussion that raises deep questions about human nature, justice and ways of responding to it. This kind of program is a model of an island for liberal education in the modern university.

I now conclude. We have looked today at some of the key issues and problems that face higher education at this time, and we have been attentive to how there are obstacles as well as opportunities for protecting and nourishing islands of liberal education in this world. How can those concerned for the state of liberal education be more effective at serving and strengthening those islands? The political context for our human educational efforts is every bit as complex and ambivalent as that of our educational institutions. We must turn to how liberal education is embedded in our surrounding societies and their politics. Tomorrow we consider how man's political nature may help us understand what can and cannot be done for the strengthening of liberal education and ultimately for genuine human freedom.

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