"Expanding Core Texts Across Borders: A *Paideia* for a World Encounter"

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I am honored to address you for the third time from my office as president of ACTC. It is remarkable to see how this organization has grown in a decade, and the fact that we are assembled here in this great western seaport of Canada across the border and a continent away from the first meeting in Philadelphia in 1995 illustrates how we have developed not only in size but also in scope. I must, of course, thank Scott Lee for the great work he has done in bringing another national conference to birth, and to Rosa Grundig, the new administrative assistant to the Institute for the Liberal Arts, who I know from phone calls has also been burning the midnight oil with Scott it getting this program together. I also give a special thanks from my office to the local organizers who have made it possible to bring the meeting to Vancouver. Ann Leavitt of Malaspina university, a member of our Board, has been particularly important in developing the idea of the Vancouver meeting. Thanks also go to Samir Gandesha, David Mihady, and Len Berggen of the Department of Humanities at Simon Fraser, and Paul Burns of the University of British Columbia for their collaboration with Malaspina in making this conference possible. And another thanks is due to the caller network that Scott is able to organize each time—this year amounting to over 800 calls—made by several of the people already named and assisted by Matthew Needham, Russell

McNeil, Lias McLean, Rob Jeacock, and Blake Hobby that was able to "get out our base" at a crucial moment.

Our location on the Pacific Rim with all the evidence of how East meets West also makes us all aware of the trans-cultural setting in which we are meeting, offering an appropriate occasion for reflecting on ACTC's ambitions to develop its international extension. Through the work of Margaret Downes and Steve Zelnick, we have seen our international network expand to include institutions in Africa, South America, United Arab Emirates, Central Asia, and Western Europe institutions. This international extension suggests the theme of my talk this morning

Several years ago, when I was Chair of the Program of Liberal Studies at Notre Dame, we hosted Mortimer Adler, I am sure known to most here, as a guest speaker. When I picked him up at the airport, he was not feeling well and he was a bit out-of-sorts. I had sent prior to arrival a brochure giving the reading list from our program that included in the Senior Seminar a series of approximately six weeks of reading from classics from the eastern traditions---Confucius, Lao Tzu, Budda, the Bhagavad Gita. Without any other greeting at the airport but a handshake, he simply pointed at me and said "the problem with your program is those oriental books!"

I do not want this to be taken as disrespectful of a man I grew over the next two days to admire greatly. This first personal encounter initiated, in spite of these opening asperities, a discussion that resonated back and forth over Adler's two-day visit to our program. It forced me then to think more deeply about a problem those of us committed to the reading and discussion of the primary works of the western tradition who wish to engage other traditions in this conversation. Adler's comments were not, I soon learned, to be taken as

the criticisms of an old conservative suspicious of American multiculturalism as it was currently then in vogue, an intellectual fad that was too often used to criticize core text programs and even dismantle many. It was more principled than that. It reflected his concern that we could not, being outside the inner dialogue of these traditions, intelligently handle the questions that these texts posed. As Adler defended this argument against some strong faculty criticism over the next days, he had to meet a challenge from the domain of expert scholars who responded that if these arguments are valid, not only can we not deal with the oriental texts for reasons Adler had given. We also could not responsibly claim to penetrate the texts of Homer or Plato without deep knowledge of the general intellectual context, the original languages, and the social and political settings in which there texts were written. The very problems that seem to face us in reading the *Tao Te Ching* were not different in kind, it was suggested, to those we faced in our reading of Western texts, particularly those from Antiquity.

This claim from the domain of scholarly expertise certainly threatens certain assumptions behind general liberal education and core texts programs like my own that since the days of the John Erskine seminars at Columbia in the 1920s have assumed the validity of reading and discussing classic texts in translation without the guidance of specialized experts, and without substantial attention to the issues of context and historicity. An assumption of such general liberal education has been that such expertise is not required for the first reading of a student of these texts, and in fact it may get in the way of that crucial existential engagement with the timeless issues of classic works that seem to transcend the specificities of time and place.

This presents us with an issue in pedagogy and also as an issue that faces us in ACTC as we try to think substantially about making this institution truly international in scope. As

one whose training has been exclusively in western science, philosophy, history, and literature, nothing in the curriculum I teach makes me more uneasy and more in fear of the charge of amateurism than the reading of the eastern texts. Some of these are sacred texts, such as the *Koran* and the *Gita*. Are they being mishandled in discussions in a way that I would not wish to see sacred texts from the western tradition dealt with? Do we simply miss the point of these texts by being unfamiliar with the original cultures and the primary languages? Is even translation into the linguistic structure of western languages deeply falsifying? I typically begin these sessions on the Eastern texts by passing out and reading the passage that opens Michel Foucault's *Order of Things* on the strange classification system of the Chinese encyclopedia, as a way of awakening the students from their dogmatic slumbers that may lead them to think they will immediately be able to understand what is going on in these texts. Although this may not immediately hit them with the Confucian readings with which we begin, they realize what I mean when they encounter the Taoist texts.

The problems of translation are severe even with the Confucian readings with which we begin. Let me illustrate this with an example. In the *Analects of Confucius*, likely the most widely used non-western text in core programs, one reads the following passage in the popular Arthur Whaley translation:

> The Master said, There may well be those who can do without knowledge; but I for my part am certainly not one of them. To hear much, pick out what is good and follow it, to see much and take due note of it, is the lower of the two kinds of knowledge.

But to read this same passage translated by Wing-Tsit Chan, gives this same aphorism a very different meaning:

> Confucius said, "There are those who act without knowing [what is right]. But I am not one of them. To hear much and select what is good and follow it, to see much and remember it, is the second type of knowledge (next to innate knowledge.)" (VII.27, pp. 32-33)

This simple example highlights important issues. Is Confucius saying that to act on what we *perceive* to be good is another, valid form of knowledge, or is it an inferior form of knowledge? To students who have been reading primarily the Western canon, this could lead in one direction to discussions that may hearken back to Plato and the subordination of knowledge and opinion of the famous divided line, or it could mean that this knowledge from experience is an equally-valid knowledge to that translated here as "innate," suggesting the importance of sensory experience. Or it might suggest something different than either of these options. This and many other passages that differ between these two translations, if we take time to compare editions, can easily lead both instructor and students to feel that we may be missing the central issues in our discussions, and missing them badly.

So to tie this to the thematic of this conference: "Contemplation, Crisis, Construct: Appropriating Core Texts in the Curriculum," I ask: what does it mean to think about the notion of appropriating core texts in a wider world context? What are the criteria by which these are to be selected—historical impact on the west? for their specific importance for understanding the thought of individuals like Hegel, Schopenhauer or Thoreau? for literary elegance? for their formative role in another world tradition? for contemporary relevance to geopolitical interactions? Can we incorporate texts from other traditions as part of general liberal education, or are they best reserved for specialized courses and advanced graduate seminars where expert guidance can be given?

I have decided to address this by employing the Greek concept of *paideia*, translated generally as "education" in the Oxford edition of Aristotle. I begin with a text crucial to the tradition of general liberal education, the opening paragraph of Aristotle's *Parts of Animals*. This passage reads as follows in the Loeb translation:

> There are, as it seems, two ways in which a person may be competent in respect of any study or investigation, whether it be a noble one or a humble: he may have either what can rightly be called scientific knowledge [*episteme*] of the subject; or he may have what is roughly described as an educated person's competence, and therefore be able to judge correctly which parts of an exposition are satisfactory and which are not. That, in fact is the sort of person we take the "man of general education" [*paideia*] to be. (639a 1-10).

In this contrast of two forms of knowing, two ways of understanding— *episteme*, translated here as"scientific" knowledge, knowledge by demonstration from first principles and —*paideia*, here rendered as a generally "educated" person's competence, we have a distinction that seems even today one that separates the goals of general liberal education from specialization. Institutionally it may separate to some degree the aims of the undergraduate college in the American sense, at least the traditional first two years, from the concerns of the graduate school. As Aristotle goes on to comment, we can possess *episteme* "for a limited field only" (639a12). We can be specialists in only limited domains. But *paideia* is seeking something more, the needs of an educated citizen in a *polis*. As Aristotle tells us in *Politica*, children are to be given *paideia* "with an eye to the constitution."(Pol. I.13.1260b15, McK. 1145); the state is "united and made into a community" by *paideia* (ibid. II.5.1263b.37 McK 1152). Or in the *Metaphysics*, we see that one acquires through *paideia*

knowledge "of what things one should demand demonstration, and of what one should not" (Meta. IV.3.1006a7. McK. 737).

It should be evident from such passages that Aristotle does not denigrate *paideia* as below the line in the Platonic sense, intrinsically inferior to *episteme*. Instead these two forms of knowing have different goals, one of specialized focus, and one of assessment and judgement.

I would like to apply this set of distinctions as a framework on which to develop a way for expanding the ideals of ACTC beyond a North American and Anglophone context. This is to argue that what we are seeking here is a concept of *paideia* as used above, and my argument is that this can give us some framework for dealing with Adler's criticisms.

First some deeper exegesis of the concept of *paideia* beyond the brief quotes I have given above is useful. For this I have turned to Werner Jaeger's magisterial work by that name, published in 1933. I do this both to accept, and also to critique, some of the arguments of his text. In Jaeger's analysis, *paideia* came to imply for Greek culture not only an "educated person's" acquaintance in Aristotle's sense, but also an ideal of culture, similar to in some respects to the German concept of education as *Bildung*. This is not education for information or a trade, but for character formation. It seeks ideal standards. It is to search for the universal in education. It is to use "the natural principles governing human life, and the immanent laws by which man exercises his physical and intellectual powers …[and] to use that knowledge as a formative force in education, and by it to shape the living [person] as the potter moulds clay and the sculptor carves stone into preconceived form."[1]

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[1] Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* , trans. Gilbert Highet, Vol. I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p . xxii.

As Jaeger analyzes the historical tradition of *paideia*, such education clearly implies a positive content and some settled notions of the answers to the primary questions of philosophical anthropology and about the relation of education to this anthropology.

As Jaeger presents this conceptual history, however, there is something exclusively Eurocentric— and more specifically Hellenocentric—in his understanding of *paideia* to the degree that I suspect it would make most contemporary auditors of this lecture uneasy. It specifically excludes consideration of other civilizations or traditions as participants in this formative tradition of *paideia*, not only because they are outside the inner dialogue of a tradition derived from Greek roots, but also through the claim that these traditions do not have anything similar to this. *Paideia*, translated by Jaeger commonly in his text by the German term *Kultur* rather than simple "education" has a specific sense that is not shared by other civilizations.[2]For this reason it would indeed be a mistake to introduce into this internal western discussion texts from outside that tradition.

But this seems inadequate. I have a strong sense that I have gained from my admittedly limited and imperfect encounters with the literature and classic works of other traditions, that the conception of inner formative educational ideals, in which one seeks to educate the individual both for character and for life in the polis may even be more manifest in these traditions than they are in the West at present. I simply cannot answer in any adequate way what is the inner shape of these other traditions and how their own *paideia* is realized.

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[2] "The word [cuture] has sunk to a simple anthropological concept, not a concept of value, a consciously pursued *ideal*. In this vague analogical sense it is permissible to talk of Chinese, Indian, Babylonian, Jewish or Egyptian culture, although none of these nations has a word or an ideal which corresponds to real culture." Ibid., p. xvii.

But the strong obligation we have as educators to penetrate more deeply the character of these other inner cultural dialogues seems more imperative now than at any other time in history. How is this to be done, and particularly how is it to be done with sensitivity, and within the goals of general liberal education, rather than through specialized study within a graduate school?

Here I find Aristotle's specific meaning of *paideia*, as employed in the passage above from *Parts of Animals* I, the most useful one to emphasize here. Aristotle's concept of *paideia* has two important features of relevance. The first is that it is devoted to the needs of a student who may not intend to attain expertise in a subject, but who nonetheless would like to possess an educated acquaintance sufficient to make a judgement, to know when further knowledge is needed, and who sees the connection between education and the demands of political life and ethical action. This situation seems to apply to most of the students I educate. Only a few of these go on to become experts in humanistic disciplines. (One of my former students, for example, is a leading young American Islamicist.) Most will become lawyers, business professionals, journalists, physicians, artists, politicians, non-university level school teachers, members of religious communities, homemakers, and public servants. They will fulfill practical lives in the world. The period of time they spend reading and discussing great texts as undergraduates may be the only formal opportunity they ever have to do so.

The safe option is to confine our discussions within the tradition that I as teacher can claim to know and that they as students will be most comfortable with—European and American traditions, both ancient and modern. Cultural pluralism, at least in some forms, can still be addressed within this envelope. But the world my students will then inhabit is much broader than this. It is one of sometimes overwhelming interconnection, exemplified

by Web, globalized economies, and intercontinental travel. It will be a world with incessant information overload, and sometimes it will be lethal in its cultural as well as political interactions. How can we, as liberal educators, prepare them for this world, while providing them with a deep awareness of their own cultural and intellectual heritage? These are not easy questions and I am struggling myself with ways to deal with them.

For some assistance I shall draw upon an interesting essay by Ravi Ravindra, a theoretical physicist and comparative religionist at the University of Dalhousie in Nova Scotia. This paper was delivered at a conference on science and religion in Pune, India in 2001, and has since been published in a book of his essays entitled *Pilgrim Without Boundaries*. It was a contribution to a conference intended to interface western and eastern thought around the issues of science and its interactions with diverse world religious and cultural traditions. Present at this conference were scholars from Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, secular scholars from east and west, and representatives from western religious traditions. Ravindra's paper, entitled "Science and the Sacred," carried the intriguing sub-title "wandering, one gathers honey," a phrase from the Aitareya Brahmana of the Rigveda of the *Upanishads*, which was also the motto of the Youth Hostel Association of India, of which Ravindra was a member as a young man.[3] This paper opens with an important reflection:

> One of the outstanding features of our age since the Second World War is that now a juxtaposition of two major cultures or worldviews does not necessarily mean that one of them has to be the victor and the other the vanquished.

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[3] Subsequently published in his book *Pilgrim Without Boundaries* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2003) ISBN 0974091626. Aitareya Brahmana 7.15.5.

This new kind of cultural encounter involves juxtaposition rather than domination and conquest. Ravindra's analysis of the consequences of this new relationship highlights two issues. First, he acknowledges that there are competing truth claims within these traditions. These are most readily seen as conflicts over ultimate meaning and purpose. Second, Ravindra suggests that the solution is not to be found by seeking some common ground through anthropology or comparativism. In the context of this conference, he rejected what he called "inter-faith dialogue," characterized in his words by "scholarly cross-cultural and comparative studies of many kinds as well as literature, films, theatre, [and] music which is not bound by one geographical or national boundary or influence." The rejection of this option was not because it failed to produce some interesting results, but rather because it is "too much bound by the past, and do[es] not appreciate the dynamic nature of cultures and religions. . . .[it is] at best a preliminary to human dialogue and can even be an impediment to a deeper understanding." His point seems to be a concern with the prospects of an encounter of essentialized traditions that lack sufficient openness to the demands of the future.

In its place he proposes the notion of an "interpilgrim" dialogue that he explores through an interesting metaphor, that of a pilgrimage of different groups ascending a holy mountain. Such groups can encounter one another on the way, and even stop for a period to share food and information with one another.

> Inter-pilgrim exchanges are different [from inter-faith exchanges] by nature. Much can be exchanged on the mountain slope when one pauses with pilgrims from different directions for refreshment and for learning the dangers which lie on the journey ahead. (8)

Such encounters are also dynamic. The various groups are going someplace in their journey.

This metaphor of the meal shared together on a common human journey, even if it be given a purely secular interpretation, seems to be of significant value in thinking about our educational task. First, it does not imply that we need to resolve the value conflicts between traditions. Core values and principles form the integrating principles that give traditions their coherence and meaning. They define in some important way the inner dialogue, the genuine *paideia*—if I can transport this concept to this context — of these traditions. To this extent Jaeger's notion of a coherent educational tradition within the West seems valid. But it cannot be isolated to our tradition. As a westerner it is not likely that I can enter into these inner traditions authentically, even with detailed study, without long experience with the inner life of these cultures, and even then I must realize that I will always be a foreigner. To understand these other traditions must therefore remain a matter of translation into my own categories.

But the values of my own tradition, the product of a long and stony path of history, a history that has involved atomic bombings, slavery, and Auschwitz along with Plato, Augustine, Dante, Mozart, Newton and Martin Luther King, need not be forsaken. We have learned with deep pain from this often bitter and terrifying historical journey about the depths of human evil and the temptations of power, as well as the value of human rights and of democratic constitutionalism.

The metaphor of the meal shared on a pilgrimage also implies a two-way sharing, in this case a sharing of great texts from across traditions. Much in the texts I receive as a westerner I cannot fully understand, or I may understand only imperfectly. But I recall nonetheless how it was a very important experience for me to have read the *Bhagavad Gita* in the early years of my education in the little Mentor paperback I still possess, translated

by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, even though I now can understand this more deeply as a text lifted out of an enormous corpus, possessing multiple levels of meaning, and subject to extensive interpretation. A similar experience seems possible for our students when they read great works from Africa, Latin America, Central Asia or other places where ACTC is now beginning to extend its contacts.

Similarly, the texts we share from *our* own cultural traditions with other world civilizations in the format of discussion and dialogue of books and ideas that core programs foster as educational models, have a similar danger of being misunderstood. Many peoples of the non-Western world have bitter memories of colonialism that necessarily color their understanding of the West. But it seems important for other civilizations to realize in this new era where we must juxtapose rather than conquer, to appreciate the inner disagreements within the Western tradition that, instead of putting forth a monochromatic set of solutions to life's great questions, present us with what can be an overwhelming cacophony of competing voices—Plato vs Lucretius, Luther against Erasmus, Hume vs. Kant, Freud against James, Max Weber as a critic of Karl Marx, Virginia Woolf and Thomas Mann, Ralph Ellison and Nietzsche. I find as a result of this education on many of my students not some hard and settled set of views, but if anything, a tendency to pyrrhonism that they deal with through a more careful understanding of these texts and the role of first principles in defining arguments. They indeed need to inculcate a *paideia* in Aristotle's sense as used in the *Metaphysics*—the ability at least to judge good and bad arguments and to know when more learning is required.

How important it then seems for the non-Western world to know us through our great texts and their conflicts with one another, and not only through our MacDonalds, popular clothing styles, and the images of the West purveyed by mass media. The dangers of

misinterpretation from both directions in this sharing of a meal together are many. We can wish we had the time but the consequences of not engaging in this discussion seem unacceptable. The metaphor of the interpilgrim sharing seems to be the one we need to encounter one another in this new world of cultural and civilizational interface.

I will close with the full passage from the *Upanishads* used by Prof. Ravindra as his subtitle. This is in the context of advice given by a Brahman to Rohita, Harischandra's Son, as he begins his journey in the forest:

> The wanderer finds honey and the sweet Udumbara fruit; behold the beauty of the sun, who is not wearied by his wanderings. Therefore, wander, wander!"[4]

To link the various themes of this talk together, we hear a call for us to do some wandering away from familiar roots and learn more fully the world of these other texts, exploring them at least as students who want to know, and who approach them with respect and humility.

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[4] *Upanishads*, Book VII, chp. 3, section 15 in translation by ??