**Enriching Liberal Education’s Defense in Universities and Colleges: Liberal Arts, Innovation, and *Techne***

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For a number of years, it has struck me that people who write about a “liberal arts education” rarely write directly about the arts. They write about political, religious, and moral dispositions; they write about the rise of the sciences; they write about cultures, and, recently, the conditions of education. Sometimes, they write pro (and contra) about books, core texts, within the tradition of the liberal arts, but these books and their associated arts are written about as exemplars or purveyors of politics, morals, science and culture – rarely as exemplars of arts.

A recent spate of defenses of the humanities and humanism, the college, and the purpose of education -- by Martha Nussbaum, Tony Kronman, Andrew Delbanco, and Patrick Deneen -- all mention liberal arts education; they defend the fine or liberal arts, but none of these authors ground their defenses of liberal arts education in art per se.[[1]](#endnote-1) All these writers sense a destruction of liberal education correlated to the economic, scientific, and technological conditions under which we live. Nearly all find that the present responses of our institutions to these conditions impede rather than aid the robust maintenance or development of something like a liberal education. Most of these arguments rely on research, though their positions on whether research -- scientific, bibliographic or otherwise -- within a university favors or harms undergraduate liberal education tends to arrange Nussbaum on one side and Delbanco, Kronman, and Deneen on the other. In contrast, each author attempts to revive traditions of the liberal arts by linking them to current conditions of democracy, spiritual needs of cultures, or ethical understandings of faith. All find the soul of our students and our citizens is at stake, though, of course, the constitution of that soul and the education designed to nurture it are at issue amongst them.

A common concern among our authors is whether our cultural assumption that we can transform almost anything, particularly through the technology of science, is good for our souls and good for liberal education. For Nussbaum, technology appears as the competing, attractive image of students in the lab, instead of pictures of students “thinking,” that administrators use to lure students to universities.[[2]](#endnote-2) Delbanco notes that the advantage that sciences have over the humanities in public evaluations is landmarks which technological advances provide, though an occasional historical or philosophic “breakthrough” be acknowledged.[[3]](#endnote-3) For Kronman and Deneen, technology is the differential gear which imparts varying force to science, culture, and education. Further, Kronman and Deneen come very close to each other in noting the meretricious effects upon our character, upon our sense of limits, which technological achievement unleashes in the form of *pleonexia*. The humanities currently fail to address it (Kronman), or education encourages it through a philosophy of transformation, of creating original knowledge and innovations through research (Deneen).[[4]](#endnote-4)

Finally, while all seem to be convinced that the products of arts are essential to any revival and while they are skilled fashioners of argument in areas where no single discipline can claim precedence, the discussion of fine or liberal arts and their products is not in terms of art, but in the terms of the political, cultural, or religious end sought. For example, Nussbaum devotes large portions of her book exploring arts and a whole chapter to “Cultivating the Imagination: Literature and the Arts.” In the latter, we learn that “in order to be stably linked to democratic values [the artistic cultivation of ‘capacities for play and empathy in a general way, and (the) address (of) particular cultural blind spots’] requires a normative view of how human beings ought to relate to one another… and, therefore, requires selectivity regarding the artworks used.”[[5]](#endnote-5) A catalog follows of the failures of artworks, of “defective forms of ‘literature,” to cultivate the sympathy that Nussbaum desires. Undoubtedly, Kronman’s understanding of the search for meaning and his discussion of civilizational “conversation” depends on art; Delbanco’s distinction between research and reading instances canonical works from ancient to modern times; and Deneen’s argument is concerned with a residium of teachings that earlier great books leave us. Yet, in these social-moral defenses, an entire line of argument concerning the arts is, for the most part, relegated to an instrumental, supporting, or ancillary role in a discussion that might be titled: “social conditions, educational institutions, and individual capacities: wither liberal education?”

I wish to suggest that the ecology, the variety, of liberal education defense could be enriched by also focusing on the arts of liberal arts education. Thereafter, we can see liberal education’s relation to research, democracy, or culture might be when looked at through the lens of the arts. Please note that my preceding remarks do not mean that we do not find artistic works in programs or, even, that the arts do not structure some divisions of those programs. For example Yale’s Directed Studies program has courses explicitly divided into three groups: Literature, Philosophy, and Historical and Political Thought. Clearly literature is art. Columbia’s Core’s program has the Literature/Humanities and the Contemporary Civilization sequences, not to mention the Music offerings. Again, no one doubts that this education involves art. What I am interested in are the rationales and justifications for programs using core texts which can be grounded in the liberal arts.

Why is it important to develop a line of argument about arts to the point where we might see them in the guise of an end, not just a means, to liberal arts education? Do you remember that about 40 or 50 years ago, if you aspired to a bachelor degree, you chose either a bachelor of science or a bachelor of arts? No one today questions whether a student possesses a science if she or he earns a B.S. What art or arts, however, do our students possess if they have earned a B.A.? So, if we claim to offer a liberal *arts* education in undergraduate bachelor programs, it might not be amiss to ask what arts are our students learning and are we teaching. And asking such a question can enrich our view of liberal arts education using core texts – whether of the Western tradition or not.

When educators of any stripe are seeking renewal, they often resort to an examination of the past, so I thought the best place to begin a search for a renewal of liberal arts education might be in a book by Bruce Kimball, A Board Member of ACTC, who originally published in 1986 a work entitled, *Orators & Philosophers*, *A History of the Idea of Liberal Education.[[6]](#endnote-6)* The book’s scholarship and judicious consideration of a vast numbers of core texts, curricular materials, and the scholarly production surrounding liberal education make this work a seminal contribution to the history of liberal education. Kimball has paid much more explicit attention to the liberal arts and *artes liberales* educational ideal, particularly in relation to the research or, as he styles it, the liberal-free ideal, than any current author we have examined. For our purposes he also reaches more thoroughly into the past. With the important exception of an unstable accommodation in a very few universities and colleges between these two ideals – Chicago, Columbia, St. John’s being the primary examples – his extended history gives little comfort to the conviction that liberal arts education, particularly in relation to democracy, has much of a chance of revival in most of today’s universities or colleges, precisely because of the success of the ideal of research throughout academe, and its allied notion of freedom.

Kimball’s history, which extends from ancient Greece to late 20th Century America, reflects a two-fold tradition in education. A rhetorical liberal tradition complains about disarray and divisions of undergraduate education, while an epistemic, research quarrel among the fields of science, social science, and the humanities over “definitions of knowledge and culture” influences undergraduate education.[[7]](#endnote-7) These two educational traditions – that of the *artes liberales* for citizenship and the liberal-free for specialization -- compete in public, graduate, and undergraduate contexts. To bring this competition down to earth at the undergraduate level: Kimball finds “it is supremely difficult for an undergraduate major…to coexist with a thorough [curricular] commitment to citizenship, virtues, the republic, and the appropriation of the textual tradition of a community.”[[8]](#endnote-8) The reason is that these two polarities, or ideals, are systematic: they entail different ends, characteristic qualities, and, ultimately, curricular expressions. Syntheses, accommodations, blends have limited appeal and, perhaps, short lives. The *liberal artes* accommodation is unstable because it cannot readily convince academics that classics are necessary to a critical intellect, and, conversely, the ideal’s insistence upon exploring ancient texts “conflicts with the liberal-free mind” in its desire to range where it will.[[9]](#endnote-9)

To varying degrees, Kimball, then, anticipates the ambivalence that Kronman and Delbanco feel about reading great texts at the undergraduate level with modern research in mind. Kimball also anticipates Kronman and Deneen’s concern with the way in which the rise of science has shaped our educational institutions toward a research ideal and away from a reflective, character-building liberal arts education. And, in one of those strange twists which education can provide, Kimball also recognizes through the liberal-free ideal, the parallel development of harnessing science and research to the democratic and market national project of the United States, and in this sense he anticipates Nussbaum’s and Delbanco’s attempts to have our educational institutions serve the national or international life of democracies, formerly, a political preserve of the *liberal artes* ideal. Ultimately, in his deep sympathies for a core text education within our institutions, he anticipates our ACTC conference on “The Research University and the Liberal Arts College.”

In sum, historically and philosophically, with research and disciplines bonded by the rise of science in the modern university, all of these authors find themselves in a very difficult position: they sense a pervasive cultural, ethical emptiness related to the very institution of education to which their lives are committed. They resist this emptiness by offering an alternative end to liberal education -- variously named democracy, humanity, or faith -- other than research. But to a large degree, all supporters of liberal education are faced with an institutional history that is well documented and that gives little hope – not none – of successfully wooing the disciplines and departments that mark universities and colleges toward the ends of liberal education.

Since all of these authors are interested in liberal education and in renewing its institutional life, it is not a fault that they should closely examine institutional histories of liberal education. But the origins of liberal arts education were not only found in institutions. As will be argued below, before and even after the innovative congregating of lecturers into medieval universities, education in the liberal arts was often done outside an institutional context. This “outside” development matters because in one way or another almost all of our authors acknowledge institutional atrophying at various points of history of liberal education. And if, today, liberal arts education is institutionally “strangled” rather than atrophied, that is all the more reason to examine sources outside academe or sources within academe that are not currently predominant in models of education for renewal of liberal arts education into the 21st Century. In particular, the transition from Aquinas to Bacon has as its backdrop the rise of universities. But the actual stage was filled with liberal artists who weren’t in a university, but who were actively developing new educations, arts and sciences. Such work by liberal artists suggests generative, indeed, transformative models, no less grounded in the classics, that can appreciably add to institutional revival of the liberal arts.

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Through tracing the specific use of the words “liberal education” and “liberal arts,” Kimball concludes that as a historical fact, liberal education based in a normative curriculum of the seven liberal arts simply didn’t exist until the late Roman Empire.[[10]](#endnote-10) Thus, the seven liberal arts, what was to become the trivium and quadrivium, circumscribe what Kimball takes historically to be the instantiation of a liberal arts curriculum, and, under Roman development, the general “*artes liberales*” educational ideal becomes firmly tied to “the goal of training the good citizen to lead society,” as well as to the “prescription of values and standards for character and conduct,” through this normative curriculum.[[11]](#endnote-11) To cut a very complicated story short: this ideal and its *primus inter pares* art were rhetorical and remained so until the rise of the medieval university.[[12]](#endnote-12) That rise is accompanied by the rise of philosophy as the organizing discipline of university education. Put differently, Kimball finds that when medieval universities began to concentrate on theoretical matters or systematic matters of philosophy, a “philosophic” curriculum replaced an oratorical one.

This “revolution” and “transformation” is traced to “the rediscovery and translation of the lost philosophical learning of Greek antiquity, especially the corpus of Aristotle…[as well as] Arabic, Jewish and other Greek writings on mathematics and natural science.”[[13]](#endnote-13) But in Kimball’s analysis, the philosophic takeover of the liberal arts curriculum does not give rise to a philosophic ideal associated with it that can be described as a systematic ideal for liberal education. Part of the reason would appear to be that despite the new relative importance of logic, the rise of “technical and schematized *artes,*” the development of “a curriculum of liberal education, dedicated to *scientiae speculativae”* within medieval universities, and the innovation of the *grammatica speculativae* as an investigation of universal grammar “underl[ying] the different grammars of all languages,” an Aquinas dictum that “the seven liberal arts do not sufficiently divide theoretical philosophy,” as well as new studies in graduate programs tended to a diminishing of the *septem artes*, particularly rhetoric and the use of literary texts within the curriculum.[[14]](#endnote-14) Or, these developments led to a distinct separation of the seven arts from philosophy within the curriculum of new, medieval universities. Instead of philosophy forming a new ideal for the arts, these developments seem to lead Kimball to an unstated conclusion: the liberal arts were not really being led by philosophy; they were slowly being trivialized or supplanted by it. To push the unstated conclusion a step further: despite the many innovations in logic and grammar, as well as mathematics, the *scientiae speculativae* that supplanted the liberal arts really weren’t sciences in our modern sense. So, to read backwards from Kimball’s Enlightenment identification of the liberal-free ideal’s characteristics, the philosophical rediscovery of the ancients seems not to have been an exercise in “freedom from a-priori strictures and standards” nor “a critical skepticism” linked to “scientific method.”[[15]](#endnote-15)

Conversely, oratorical leadership allowed the liberal arts to flourish, but apparently not successfully within universities during the 12th and 13th centuries. And, indeed, Kimball’s next two chapters on the Renaissance and beginnings of the Enlightenment tend to confirm this conclusion. Kimball finds, perfectly rightly, that beginning with Petrarch’s interests in Cicero and Quintilian, the *artes liberales* ideal leads to a revival and spread of interest in literature, but a widespread revival of reading of literary classics in the curricula of universities did not take hold until the middle of the 15th Century.[[16]](#endnote-16) In the Enlightenment chapter on “Emergence of the Liberal-Free Ideal,” notwithstanding Newton’s appointment at Cambridge, the pursuit of philosophy in the name of the New Science of Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza leads to a blockade of natural philosophy from the curricula of universities. The philosophically based Liberal-Free ideal emerges outside of curricula and universities, and depends on the Enlightenment allegiance to freedom and rationality. The ideal does not shape curricula until it combines with the re-organization of German universities under the research program in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. That re-organization, in turn, leads to the destruction, in the U.S., of the more or less uniform liberal arts curricula by the 19th Century’s end.[[17]](#endnote-17) Thus, historically, within Kimball’s history there have developed two ideals which lay claim to the title of liberal education. Thereafter, Kimball argues that the attempts at accommodations of these two ideals, infrequent and unstable, while having precedents in the 19th Century, only happened in the 20th.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Since the rhetorical ideal and its foundational art, rhetoric, is excluded from universities in the 12th & 13th Centuries, while the philosophical, liberal-free ideal and its new sciences are excluded from the 16th to nearly the end of the 18th Centuries, a reader concludes that the faculties organized around curricula have excluded one or another version, or, at least, significant portions of what could be termed “liberal education” for long periods in the West. So, we might ask, in such periods where did liberal arts and liberal education, then, go?

Kimball recognizes that humanists outside the universities were concerned, beyond politics, with the “development of personality.”[[19]](#endnote-19) In Bruni’s 14th Century Renaissance letter to Lady Battista Malatesta of Montefeltro on “the Study of Literature,” this shift has importance to the ideal, the curriculum, and the goal of education. Bruni is addressing a woman, and she, per force, must “leave the rough-and-tumble of the forum entirely to men.” What, then, is she studying for? This turns out to be “human excellence” which transcends historical circumstances of political life: “There is, indeed, no lack of examples of women re-knowned for literary study and eloquence that I could mention to exhort you to excellence;” here, Bruni cites Cornelia, Sappho and Aspasia.[[20]](#endnote-20)

The point of Bruni’s urging is to form a liberal education outside the university and the common expectations of men.[[21]](#endnote-21) In consequence, Bruni does not recommend a technical study of rhetoric, but, rather, a grammatical and a wide-spread “knowledge of sacred letters” (54), philosophy, and poetry. What Bruni is doing is *explicitly* substituting the Ciceronian, highly developed technical elaboration of rhetorical distinctions and art -- no “practice of the commonplaces” nor study of “knotty *quaestiones* to be untied”– with the broader literatures of history, philosophy, and poetry, which is exercised in writing.[[22]](#endnote-22) While his treatise’s intellectual roots lie in grammatical considerations of such authors as Augustine and Isadore, Bruni is accomplishing a re-ordering of liberal education that is innovative, new. It is neither directed toward philosophy in the medieval sense, nor directed toward salvation in the Christian sense, nor statecraft or recognized citizenship in the Roman sense. The character one achieves is that of a fine artist.

Invention is the principle organizing part of Ciceronian and, indeed, Roman rhetoric. Invention is the discovery or devising of things, arguments or signs, to render a case probable or true. (*De Inventione*, I, vi, 9) As such, Invention is embedded in the *artes liberales* ideal. Commonplaces or topoi are central to invention and (*De Topica*, I, ii 7; *De Partitione Oratoria* I, ii, 9; xx, 68) one of principle technical features which dialectic shares with rhetoric is the use of commonplaces or topoi.

These features of invention, discovery, and commonplaces, ultimately, suggest ground of accommodation between Kimball’s two ideals. Three works beyond Bruni may serve as examples. Machiavelli’s *Prince* in its operational concerns, its focus on the problem of new states, and its topical organization of how to analyze a state or ruler’s situation falls well within the traditions of expedience and invention characteristic of the rhetorical tradition. Galileo’s *Starry Messenger* is the application of dialectical commonplaces derived from observation of nature. The moon is examined first as whole, which is light, and, then, a whole which is dark; its parts are, then, divided into light and dark, and its boundaries into continuous and discrete.[[23]](#endnote-23) The entire treatise continues in similar fashion as it produces its four major discoveries. Finally, Bacon, readily acknowledging in the *New Organon* that current philosophy and arts are “use[ful] for supplying matters for disputations or ornaments for discourse,” distinguishes between “methods [of] cultivation” of those matters and “*invention* of knowledge” which he is engaged in developing.[[24]](#endnote-24) The sciences should be “methods for invention or directions for new works.”[[25]](#endnote-25) Yet, much of his analysis is directed less toward the experimental manipulation of phenomena, than the re-ordering of the mind, or “intellectual operations” by frameworks properly adapted to nature.[[26]](#endnote-26) The analysis of the blocks to scientific progress, occupying the first book of the *New Organon*, is broken into “aphorisms,” a dialectical term indicating definitions or important distinctions. These aphorisms either move toward properly orienting the mind or showing that current systems of disputation, philosophy, and experience distract the mind. Indeed, Bacon sounds something like Bruni, for he says that, “my purpose [is not to ‘found a new sect of philosophy’ but] to try whether I cannot …extend more widely the limits, of the power and greatness of man.”[[27]](#endnote-27)

By shifting the principle part of rhetoric, invention, to its *end*, the aphorisms take on the character, not of persuasion or eloquence, but discovery. The “Interpretation of Nature” in Book II, which is either to increase man’s powers over natures or to discover the form of a nature, is carried on in aphorisms. And, in illustrating discovery which is subsumed under the invention of knowledge, Bacon outlines a procedure of collecting physical instances, instead of opinions, forming tables of instances (of the presence or absence of the nature in question), and, then, applying “induction” – that is, separation, inclusions, and exclusions of the sought for nature from other natures -- based on the table of instances.[[28]](#endnote-28)

Bacon criticized the arts and philosophies of his day as useless in the production of knowledge. Galileo tired of “long and windy debates.” Machiavelli pitted imaginary constructions of polities and ideal descriptions of human behavior against the usefulness of his treatise based in ‘realities.’ Bruni not only found scholastic subjects to be useless but clearly was trying to educate liberally a woman while the standard rhetorical arts of men left Bruni wondering if they were educated at all. First, I want to stress, here, that the liberal arts were, in the hands of these authors, essentially involved in the challenge and criticism of the learning that came before. Yet, however much all these authors argued their separation from the past or their differences with current versions of education, none of these protests should obscure the continuity of art that tied the past to the present. So, the transition from Aquinas to Bacon was actually a roadway paved by innovation as individuals attempted to extend the liberal arts into many different arenas, apparently including areas universities simply wouldn’t touch.

Second, Kimball acknowledges that the *liberal-artes* ideal incorporates a critical-skepticism, yet in the end, he finds such incorporation “misses the point of the scientific method: any conclusions inferred become new hypotheses and are always subject to challenge and criticism.”[[29]](#endnote-29) So, let us ask: while the hypothesis may well be essential to the science of a liberal-free ideal, is the hypothesis or, rather, the continuous growth of knowledge essential to the liberal free ideal as a whole? Kimball is not the first to conclude, unavoidably, that the German research university changed American institutions toward something like the liberal-free ideal. And research, not hypotheses or laboratories per se, is what changed higher education from within:

“Visiting American graduate students and professors returned from German universities enamored of the specialized scholarship, the commitment to speculative research, and, above all, the atmosphere of freedom they had seen in their host institutions. Particularly this latter aspect – Lehrfreiheit (freedom to teach what one wishes) and Lernfreiheit (freedom to study what one wishes) -- impressed the Americans. [The atmosphere of freedom] was seen ‘to follow from the searching function, the presumption that knowledge was not fixed or final,’ a presumption underlying all aspects of the idealized German university that the Americans took to be ‘dedicated to a search to widen the bounds of knowledge rather than merely to preserve the store of knowledge undiminished.’” (Kimball quoting Deihl, *Americans and German Scholarship: 1770-1870*.)[[30]](#endnote-30)

Thus, the question of whether hypotheses or the growth of knowledge is essential to the liberal-free ideal is not without significance. The former, representing science, tends to draw an impenetrable distinction between the humanities and the sciences; the latter, representing the humanities, tends to admit instances of significant mutual influence shape education. The former tends to restrict criticism to specialists. The latter tends to make criticism and critical thought dependent on broad views of knowledge.

If in their artistic inventions Bruni, Machiavelli, Galileo, Bacon were using the liberal arts, then, they were “proving opposites.” But, they were not simply constructing arguments opposed to works of the past. They were constructing extensions of the arts they knew, the liberal arts. They thought that they were breaking with a past of instruction and knowledge in the liberal arts, yet, because *arts* proceed by invention, not hypothesis, these artists took liberal arts ends, principle parts, techniques, devices, and fashioned them anew into new pursuits of knowledge, action, production, and character that constituted new searches for widening bounds of knowledge. Invention is what liberal arts tend to do in extending the continuity of knowledge. In other words, I want to suggest strongly that invention provided a bridge between old and new knowledge, while simultaneously constructing the distinction not only between the past and the future, but between the sciences and the humanities. Thus, as a matter of the transition between Aquinas and Bacon, liberal arts invention is as much a continuity as it was a break, and the foundation for an accommodation between the liberal free ideal and the *liberal artes* ideal appears, therefore, to be inherent in the development of the New Philosophy or New Science, and, more deeply, the liberal arts, themselves. [[31]](#endnote-31)

The complex liberal-arted interrelations of Bruni, Machiavelli, Galileo, and Bacon suggest that the places to look for liberal education not only include institutional curricula, but individual instances that evidence liberal learning or education. Put differently, all of these authors were learning via the liberal arts; only one of them was doing it in a university and he found few who embraced his extension of dialectical methods. Just as no curriculum for women existed until Bruni devised one for Lady Battista, nor any widespread method of science existed until Bacon articulated it, so we can also look at an individual’s acquisition of liberal education outside of an academic institution that was, truly, critical to gain an initial understanding of why a “*liberal artes* accommodation” – a synthesis of the *liberal artes* and liberal-free ideals of education -- might have not only earlier, but more coherent and recurrent educational force through history than seems apparent.

All of our authors demonstrate an acute awareness of the work of predecessors. Galileo is, of course, the patron saint of scientists, and though Bacon may or may not capture the essence of science, no one doubts he was advocating for what is recognized as modern science by first reviewing works and knowledge from the past. Thus, through the liberal arts we actually reach early research in its most nascent form, before it reached universities. Is there, then, an illustration of humanities research requiring liberal education by an individual after research reaches universities? The case can be exemplified by Henry Adams and his book, *The Education of Henry Adams*.[[32]](#endnote-32) Adams was a man groomed through lineage and a stale ante-bellum, Harvard liberal arts education to become, later, one of America’s foremost, specialized historians of the 19th Century at his alma mater, during the very time that Harvard made the transition from a college to a research university.[[33]](#endnote-33) Yet, the book’s first person narrative shows that in the opening of his *specialized* historical study to any source of knowledge or human achievement, an opening which begins in the 1890’s well after his undergraduate education and his life as a professor had ended, Adams exhibits some of the finer uses of liberal arts, core text study. To be too brief, his service in Great Britain during the American Civil War, followed by comic revelations 30 years later by principals of the British government of their real motives in considering entering the war on behalf of the South in 1862, convinced Adams that private experience or, even, a research career devoted to historical analysis of American Presidencies, was too small a scale for adequate judgment of the motives of men or what was the same, “a chart of history.”[[34]](#endnote-34) This conviction was augmented, in part, by his friendship with John Hay, the Secretary of State, who quickened Adams’ interest in the international scale of human relations that, ultimately, Adams found determines the motives of human beings. Only as Adams moved from the local to the remote, only as he took an interest in symbols, only as he began to study seriously not only politics, but science, art, and religious thought, and their core monuments – at Chartres, in the theology of Aquinas, in the dynamo and the discoveries of Curie, in the art of LaFarge -- and added these to his store of diplomatic and governmental knowledge, only then did he discover the Education of Henry Adams.[[35]](#endnote-35)

The education Adams garnered at the end of his life was a preparation for a new theory, a new art, a new science – in this case a theory of history. But let us make a quick induction using all of the authors we have discussed. The use of education, particularly liberal arts study, is to render its students capable of making available to themselves the world’s cultural resources for construction of a future. Adams’ employment of cultural history as a re-education suggests, as do the works of our other authors, that no one should presuppose that education begins with firm, well-grounded assumptions of a discipline and, then, proceeds to the mastery of its tools. Actually, Adams story, as do our other authors, suggests the opposite: if we are actually to offer education, then we are obligated to our students to abandon the presumptions of given disciplines and to construct for them a curriculum wherein students may explore and conceive the foundations of disciplines for themselves.[[36]](#endnote-36)

The need for liberal arts education to incorporate and justify core texts of the West or other major civilizations does bring me round to the arguments that the ancient, medieval, and early modern West’s moral teaching can be reduced to restraint, or to arguments that a proper selection of texts can promote the correct democratic values and skills, or a concern that the limitlessness of technology is destroying our culture and character. Each of these serious arguments might be true, but, they simply don’t come close to expressing the fullness that a liberal arts education can offer. We need to recognize that from the beginning, liberal arts have been inventive and transformative. I remember that Aeschylus really doesn’t think that the ending of the blood-bath in the *Odyssey* was very satisfactory so he devised a tragic trilogy that enacted the rise of the rhetorical institution of the trial. I recall Plato’s struggle to replace Homer with philosophy, and rhetoric with dialectic as the basis of education and, perhaps, society. I remember Aristotle writing, in a society that knew nothing of human rights, particularly of expression, a treatise on art which defended its own governing principles. I recall that the *Aeneid* not only seems to incorporate the two Homeric epics, but from the moment that Aeneas gazes at the wall of Carthage, through the moment he receives the shield from his mother and Vulcan, to his final gaze upon the belt of Turnus, that epic incorporates art into an education of a hero of a vast enterprise *beyond his ken* in a way that Homer or most of the Biblical writers barely fathom. I recall the importance of books – scripture -- to ancient Jews and Christians, not only to the canon that became the Bible, but the amazing synthesis of texts and writers that it seems Ezra read to the people of Jerusalem as he united them after their second exile. I remember that from the opening line of Thucydides’ “archaeology,” the kind of works one reads matters. And I recall the sharp contrast between the Athenian virtues of Pericles’ “Funeral Oration” and the Judeo-Christian virtues of Christ’s “Sermon on the Mount,” the importance of the soul in each, and the enormous differences of those souls and their respective purposes. And, I remember Augustine’s struggle with the use of the liberal arts and the wealth of pagan works his society possessed as he came to be not only one of the greatest expositors of the Bible, but one of the chief agents by which Athens and Jerusalem were synthesized into one, educated culture.

And, so, I think we arrive at a justification for the inclusion of great books or core texts which is, perhaps, essential if our moral, cultural, political or religious perceptions of the resources of the past are to be made available to us in any way that is replete and promising. Oftentimes, we read core texts from many disciplines to explore ideas as a way to enlarge student experience. This is laudable, but in exploring great ideas, it seems to me that we don’t want to lose track, the thread, of our own story. I’m talking about the story of making books. This is the story about writing books, about reading and thinking about their differences, and about building educations around those. As I have suggested above, the production of books is part of the larger story of made things, that is, art, *techne.* *Techne* has been a chief source of change in civilizations almost since their inception, and if you want to learn both how and why cultures, religion, literature, philosophy, morals, and science change, you must read books of magnitude, of invention, across genres, disciplines, cultures, and eras.[[37]](#endnote-37) When we do present the story of making books and, more broadly, developing arts, and when we build an education around these, not only our students gain the sense of a powerful resource for building the future, we -- the educators -- do, as well.

Specific liberal arts are the instantiation of *techne*, that intellectual virtue concerned with making something out of the variable, bringing something into existence that might otherwise not be. And, what a liberal arts education is is a development of artistry in relation to making – *techne* in relation to *poeisis*. Here we approach, at first, what are collectively known as the fine arts. In a discussion of liberal education, literature (including poetry, drama, epics and other forms or genres) has something of a pride of place in any list of fine arts because of the early development of the education fashioned by Isocrates and Cicero. Yet neither Isocrates nor Cicero best capture what freedom of artistry is about. Aristotle, in the end chapters of the *Poetics* did. Throughout the *Poetics* an argument builds that poetry is something more philosophic than history, more general or universal in its actions and enunciations, and that, indeed, its function is not to narrate or dramatize what “has happened, but a kind of thing that *might* happen, i.e., *what is possible*...” [my italics] (1451a 36). The argument continues to the end with a defense of poets and poetry against the challenges of philosophers, politicians, and technical disciplinarians who in their systems and educational plans always tied art to the truth. Aristotle reminds us that the standard of correctness “is not the same … in poetry (*poietikes*) as in politics or, indeed, in any other art (*techne*).” Indeed, if, an “error” in any art object was useful, if the poet meant to “describe [a thing] in some incorrect way…[so that] it serves the end of poetry itself,” then objections by other disciplines about the product or the artistry are really to no avail. This is even the case in moral questions, for in the *Poetics* Aristotle’s interest in poetry is not whether an action or character conforms to a specific ethical or political system, or models or cultivates a specific character in the audience, but what the “consider[ations]” are in answering whether “something said or done in a poem is morally right or not,” – i.e., “intrinsic qualities of the actual word or deed,” and the agent, the purpose, the patient, the means, the time, and the relation of these actions to greater or lesser goods or evils. More generally, then, Aristotle’s *Poetics* is far less concerned with constructions that use rhythm, language, and harmony as matters of truth, than as matters of what might be: “If the poet’s description be criticized as not true. . . one may urge perhaps that the object ought to be as described—an answer like that of Sophocles, who said that he drew men as they ought to be . . .” (33-35)

Aristotle is, in the *Poetics*, taking poetry’s side by constructing a dialectical defense. The defense depends on a criticism which investigates poetry in its own terms, that is, in the internal functioning of its products. In this sense, when we come to consider the construction of curricula of books, the *Poetics*, notwithstanding Aristotle’s statements about liberal education in his *Politics*, structures a liberal arts education and the free character that it produces, for such an education is less a study of the truth, than of the possibilities humans have invented and made for themselves.

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The point is extendable to all books, to literature and artistry from any discipline. Thus, a similar point about the object of a liberal education is suggested by Aristotle for ‘literary’ constructions such as Bruni’s, Machiavelli’s Galileo’s and Bacon’s. Aristotle makes a distinction in his *Parts of Animals* between “two distinct kinds of proficiency”: “scientific knowledge” and “educational acquaintance” with any subject. Indeed, the mark of a “universal [or ‘general’] education” is for the holder of such an education to “to be able to form a fair … judgment as to the goodness or badness of the method used by a professor in his exposition.” And this acquired ability applies to “all or nearly all branches of knowledge.” Aristotle, subsequently, dialectically constructs both a set of questions pertaining to characteristics of animals and the processes which lead to those formations, as well as a review of how earlier authors had treated both characteristics and processes. And, indeed, he analogizes this treatment arising out of general education to analyses of art (540a 25-33). In sum, tracing the invention of fine arts or sciences or the characteristics and foundations of such arts and sciences relies on a process of “criticism” (kritikon) “quite independent of the question whether the statements [in a work] be true or false” (639a1-15). What is at stake, educationally, is knowledge of the available, the variable, means of construction for any given art or science. This is what freedom in artistry is. What is needed, educationally, are institutions and curricula wherein students can acquire the arts which make such constructions available.

I have used Bruce Kimball’s distinctions between the *liberales artes* and liberal-free ideals and traditions of education to suggest that the accommodations of the late 19th and 20th centuries that may have stronger, longer, more continuous historical foundations than seem apparent from 19th and 20th century educational documents or curricular formations. I’ve suggested this by returning to the principal parts of liberal arts, rhetorical invention and dialectical discovery, to indicate that the liberal arts played a significant, artistic role in developing the new philosophy or new science ideal. I’ve indicated that the long tradition of the liberal arts is concerned with transformative arts, ideas, and culture. And, I have argued that the free character of a liberal artist not only is a propaedeutic for research but a source of invention and imagination for the future.

Each of these arguments seems to me to have implications for the future of the liberal arts in research universities or in colleges. If it is plausible that the liberal arts accommodation -- that is, recognizable liberal arts curricula, innovation, and a productive but not stifling link to research -- has stronger, systematic ties to education than we might give credit, then we should see these ties in histories of institutions, as well as in analyses of the place of liberal arts education up to the current time.[[38]](#endnote-38) I want, therefore, to turn to a complex of related universities and colleges – Columbia, Chicago, and St. John’s -- which Kimball analyzes, often quite sympathetically and sensitively, as unsuccessful accommodations. They are unsuccessful not because they have not had persistent programs, but because their models have not spread over most institutions, and when they have spread, they have tended not to last.

Leaving others at this conference to speak about Columbia and St. John’s, I want, briefly, to mention two key figures in the complex history of Chicago’s relation to core texts and liberal arts: Richard McKeon and Leo Strauss.

Strauss first. To cut his very complex analysis of liberal education very short short: the history of Western culture is the history of solving the problems of governance in a democracy, ultimately by creating a democratic aristocracy of citizens educated in their country’s and culture’s intellectual traditions of political science and freedom. The current problems of governance involve providing a wisdom to guide the technological and dehumanizing influences of both modern science and systematic tyranny. The great books stand as a bulwark for discussion by citizens of what they should value. For researchers like Strauss, the historical investigation he outlines is the same as his saying, “education is in a sense the subject matter of my teaching and research.” Political science is the science of liberal education.[[39]](#endnote-39)

For McKeon the lynchpin of the whole Chicago – that is, university -- general education enterprise is disciplines and how they are related through broadening, widening arts, methods, ideas, and, even, sciences. The innovation at Chicago was not that one was to survey ever wider swaths of subjects or that a professor was to offer, in a course, a highly developed specialized method and apply it in areas heretofore unrecognized as applicable. Rather, faculty discussions surrounding the “humanities” conscientiously used “methods employed and developed [that] were the liberal arts” to accomplish widening. Those discussions, using different liberal arts, were necessarily interdisciplinary, i.e., relating one liberal art to another, or one formulation of a discipline to another via the liberal arts. For McKeon, general education implied some attempt at finding what purpose-oriented investigations of the fractured humanistic subjects and departments might broadly, interdisciplinarily, unify them through methodical, that is artful, inquiry – even when disciplines disagreed about what was said about their subjects.[[40]](#endnote-40) The point of McKeon’s discussion of the Chicago new college was that the design of the college, implied by Hutchins’ stated design of the general education he outlined in the *Higher Education in America*, was to transform graduate schools and the organization of their disciplines, even their research, through general education.[[41]](#endnote-41) In these ways, McKeon’s education orders a free character, but the ordering is to knowledge, not wisdom, not prudence nor, even, citizenship. In both cases, the liberal free ideal was accommodated to the *liberal artes* ideal in the sense that it was the liberal arts invigorating research and curricula, not the other way around.

The varieties of Chicago curricula and programs, the conceptions of liberal education that arose out of the different divisions, and the faculty who met there and migrated from there represent a pluralism of conceptions of liberal arts education as it is found in great books or core texts. These different visions have led or been involved in a pluralism of liberal arts developments in institutions around the world. To point to a few of these connections: Shimer College, Saint Mary’s College of California, the University of Notre Dame’s Program of Liberal Studies, Thomas Aquinas College, the University of Dallas, the Erasmus Institute, the Liberal Arts College of Concordia University in Montreal, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Boya College of Sun-Yatsen University are all of them in some way closely or distantly intellectually, educationally, and personally related to the three institutions mentioned above. All of these institutions have had self-consciously reflecting faculty who have published materials on some aspect of liberal arts education at their and other institutions. One of them, Dallas, developed a great books program in literature unrelated to Chicago/Columbia/St. John’s before welcoming Straussians to teach in their core. All of them have different configurations of curricula, have different internal organizations, as well as purposes of a baccalaureate and relations to research. [[42]](#endnote-42) It would be very accurate to say that the accommodationist ideal has, in fact, stimulated inventions of institutions and innovations of programs that are enormously different. Rhodes College’s Search (formerly Man) courses and Yale University’s Directed Studies Program illustrate innovations not depending on personal contact with the complex of institutions above, but rather an awareness of problems and solutions in general education.[[43]](#endnote-43)

To a large extent, ACTC is a result of these accommodations and innovations.[[44]](#endnote-44) There have been two chief vehicles for ACTC’s growth, both related to the liberal arts. The annual Conference is the first vehicle, the Liberal Arts Institute, the second. As a pluralist, my goal in ACTC has, partially, been to maintain the cross-field and cross-disciplinary – the general education -- discussions in spite of higher education habits of narrow disciplinarity. Part of what’s at stake is fairly obvious: faculty become exposed to ways of thought about their own disciplines that they rarely will find at disciplinary conferences. What else is at stake is a little more subtle, though it can be found in almost all the works I have discussed. Fundamentally, many core texts serve a dual role in intellectual history: they help to found or articulate a discipline, and their ideas, deep-seated actions or techniques migrate across disciplines. Parallel arguments can be made about the texts of East and West that are now making impacts upon their own and other cultures. Thus, it happens that the texts that are discussed at ACTC take on an enormous importance in keeping ACTC a liberal arts organization.

ACTC does not have a list of canonical texts that it insists must be used in papers, though the “usual suspects” of authors ancient and modern frequently appear in panels. ACTC insists that in every paper there is a use of a core text for, at least, ¾ of a page in a five-page paper.[[45]](#endnote-45) How a conferee uses the text is simply up to her or him. But what I look for is whether a given text within a proposal or a set of texts within a collection of proposals will spark an exchange of ideas about the ideas themselves, the programs, the texts, the teaching and other matters of liberal arts concern. This is a matter of perception, not doctrine, not established argument, and not disciplinary governance. It is frankly remarkable how many panels actually cohere quite well using texts as a starting point for potential inquiry and discussion – whether disciplinary or interdisciplinary in focus.

ACTC is filled with accomplished scholars and teachers, but to promote exchanges -- conversations -- among faculty across institutions, texts, programs and disciplines is why ACTC exists. And, here, we enter a very fertile field which deeply involves distinction Bruce Kimball employs at the beginning of his book: the distinction between *ratio* and *oratio*. If disciplinary conferences exist to offer extended versions of the *ratio* of a discipline – long papers and sessions with highly specialized arguments, offering little actual time for discussion or debate – ACTC deliberately centers itself quite differently. The first sentence of Aristotle’s Rhetoric is, “Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectic.” The actual Greek word for counterpart is “antistrophe” as in the return dance of the chorus that leads to their exit from the stage. This, of course, makes Dialectic into the strophe, and it implies some important things about the relation of these two verbal arts. First, one needs to know which direction one is headed and, given the nature of language and the closeness of the two arts, in a panel session filled with discussion because the papers are short and everyone is sitting around a seminar table, it is not always immediately apparent what the direction of a conversation is. Second, it is likely that even if one frames one’s discourse in terms of either of these arts, one will, at the very least, have cause to reflect what one’s arguments would look like in the other. Since we don’t have a list of canonical works nor a standard set of disciplinary arguments on which to base conversations, we ask presenters to think, at least, about a defense for why their text should be considered a “world classic or text of major cultural significance.” If this defense were simply confined to a disciplinary audience, it might not be appropriate to think of it in terms of rhetorical persuasion, but at ACTC that defense moves in the direction of rhetorical persuasion in so far as it induces someone outside a discipline to consider a text for inclusion in a liberal arts program. I might add that it becomes dialectical if the defense is part of way to see what the liberal arts, a discipline, a text, or an idea contributes to our understanding of education.

A closing point of Kimball’s book perceptively notes that in the academy “there is rarely a recognition that the means to accomplish the resuscitation of the community of learning lie in elevating and emphasizing the study of expression, rhetoric, and the textual tradition of the community. Yet the means are self-evident. A community is, after all, a group of people who talk to each other and do it well. This view of community was dear to Socrates, no less than to Cicero.” That is what ACTC promotes: the ability, through the liberal arts and its traditions across all disciplines, of faculty to discuss and cooperate in the formation of curricula common to all, many, or even some students and faculty. ACTC is very much concerned with the oratorio, the expressed thought communicated to others concerned with the invention of programs and the available resources of intellectual traditions across disciplines and cultures. Hopefully, this conference, co-sponsored by the ACTC Liberal Arts Institute and Notre Dame, will have made possible the invention, enrichment and development of more core text, liberal arts programs in our universities and colleges of the future.

1. Andrew Delbanco hardily approves of Tony Kronman’s great books curriculum for the ideas it raises, and he cites the *artes liberales*  ideal of education that Bruce Kimball has extensively documented as a tradition of aristocratic European liberal learning that opens the mind, but America’s “attempt to democratize” that through its collegiate educations is what interests him (*College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*. Princeton University Press, 2012, 33.) “Working to keep the ideal of democratic education alive,” Delbanco, in an extensive analysis of the past and present social conditions of colleges as institutions, ultimately locates the “universal value of a liberal education” in the belief, derived from the 19th Century religious college, that “no outward mark – wealth or poverty, high or low social position, credentials or lack thereof – tells anything about the inward condition of the soul” (171). He transmutes this belief, today, into a liberal education which in its “saving power… ignites in one another a sense of the possibilities of democratic community” through “the intellectual and imaginative enlargement [college] makes possible” (172). He concludes, “we owe it to posterity to preserve and protect this institution. Democracy depends on it.” Martha Nussbaum begins her “manifesto” in defense of the humanities and arts with a crisis in which “the humanities and the arts are being cut away in both primary/secondary and college/university education, in virtually every nation in the world.” This entails “discarding of skills that are needed to keep democracies alive.” In the survival of the humanities and arts within educational institutions “the future of the world’s democracies” is said to “hang in the balance” (*Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Hunamanities.*  Princeton University Press, 2010, 1-2).

   Notwithstanding a very serious concern with “ideals of freedom,” Tony Kronman is less focused on the links between democracy and liberal education, than on the links between the humanities and our culture (Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life. Caravan, copyright Anthony Kronman, 2007.) He focuses particularly on the humanities’ abandonment, within colleges and universities, of a search for meaning in our individual lives and our scientific culture’s way of aggrandizing our technical powers without placing them within human limits, human finitude. The combination, he believes, yields a kind of spiritual desiccation. Oddly similar to Kronman notwithstanding published differences with him, Patrick Deneen indicates that since the Enlightenment, greatness seems to rest in transformation, whereas before the rise of the New Sciences, whose advocates wrote “modern” books battling ancient books, greatness rested in a “predominant understanding” of cultivated endurance, an acceptance of natural or created limits to human powers, knowledge, and ambitions. The modern great book program contains many scientific, political and economic works which support the idea of transformation. So Deneen asks, might there be an alternative way to think about the core texts of the ancient to medieval Western tradition, ultimately as a way of restraining our scientifically-released *pleonexia* in mastering, in transforming our world? He suggests great books might be justified by recovering this earlier understanding’s humility (In *First Things,* “Against Great Books,” January 2013, 35.) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *Not for Profit,* 133. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Op cit. (95). Apparently, literature does not rise to “breakthroughs.” [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. At one point, Kronman and Deneen come very close to saying, and meaning, the same thing. Kronman’s case for the humanities in large part rests on controlling technology through a recognition of human limits: “We have a desire for control that can never be satisfied by any degree of control we actually achieve. We always want more…. This is the human condition, which is characterized by our subjection to fateful limits that we can neither tolerate nor do without…. The most important thing about technology is not *what* it does but what it *aspires* to do. … Technology encourages us to believe that the abolition of fate should be our goal… Technology discourages the thought that our finitude is a condition of the meaningfulness of our lives… It makes the effort to recall our limits and to reflect upon them seem less valuable and important.” (230-233) For Kronman, the research ideal is, of course, partly justified in the sciences by the “fruit” – both in discovery and in technology – that it produces: “The research ideal is today the organizing principle of work in every academic discipline…In the natural sciences, the research ideal has proved remarkably fruitful. The new discoveries that pour from our college and university laboratories every and the clear sense of progressive movement toward an objective understanding of the structure and mechanisms of the natural world testify to the productive fit between the natural sciences and the modern research ideal…” Whereas in the humanities “understanding,” not discovery or production, but *not a* *productive technology* characterizes research results: “In the humanities…the benefits of research are less uniform or certain” (130-133). “…research in the humanities has produced results of lasting value. It has added importantly to our understanding of the historical, literary, artistic, and philosophical subjects with which the humanities deal…” The demands for specialization and for teaching to that specialization ought to be less insistently felt in the humanities: “What must be resisted is the imperial sprawl of the research ideal, its expansive tendency to fill every corner of each discipline in which it takes hold and to color the expectations and judgments of teachers in these disciplines regarding what they do. Admittedly this is asking a lot…But…it is merely asking for a somewhat greater degree of humility on the part of those in the humanities who first allegiance is to this ideal…” (248-249).

   For Deneen, the (current) point of a philosophy of education is not to admire the world, or suffer its limits, but to change it, to transform it. That is, since the Enlightenment, greatness seems to rest in transformation. So Deneen asks, might there be an alternative way to think about and assign terms to the core texts of the Western tradition, ultimately as a way of restraining our excesses in transforming our world? Deneen begins by accepting a stasis in the political, moral, religious, and poetic inheritance of books that extends from the ancients through the first stirrings of modernity: “Great books such as *Paradise Lost* sought to inculcate a sense of limits,… we could look at a dominant understanding of a long succession of great books from antiquity to the Middle Ages…to conform human behavior and aspirations to the natural or created order” (35). By way of Baconian, Cartesian and Hobbesian repudiation of books, Deneen elaborates the argument which he finds undermines the “human limits” understanding by turning to discriminate two kinds of liberty. The first, associated with great books, is a “liberty …of hard-won self-control through the discipline of virtue” which, often, folds into defenses of great books as matters of preparation for citizenship. The second is a liberty with “the stress …upon the research, creative activity, scholarly inquiry and the development of new knowledge” (37). The former constrains our desires, the latter endlessly satisfies them through “the human project of mastery.” The latter pursuits were justified by the arguments of Bacon, Descartes, and Hobbes, reinforced by Dewey, which depended on the idea “’that a larger number of natural forces and objects [could be or] have been transformed into instrumentalities of action’” in the West than in cultures which did not exploit the natural resources available through scientific technology (36). Deneen concludes that we do need to teach these two competing notions of liberty through the great books, but defenders should exchange the notion of “greatness” for a notion of “humility” derived from the earlier works of the intellectual tradition represented in the West (38). Humility might, then, restrain our excesses of transformation. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Op. cit. 109. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Expanded Edition. College Entrance Examination Board, (rev. 1995). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 286. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 223, 225, 226. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 3, 25, 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., 31-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 58, and 61. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 66 and 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 120-121. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 80. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., 146. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., 151, 153, 186, 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Leonardo Bruni. “The Student of Litearture To Lady Battista Malatesta of Montefeltro,” in Humanist Educational Treatises. Trans. Craig W. Kallendorf. Harvard University Press, 2008, 47, esp., also 47-63. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 47-48. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 53, 55 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Galileo Galilei. “The Starry Messenger,” in Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo. Trans. and ed. by Stillman Drake. Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1957, esp. 31, 21-58. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Francis Bacon, “New Organon,” in *Selected Philosophical Works*, Hackett Publishing Co., 1999, 63-206, (88, aphorism 8, 90.) [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., (90, aphorism 8). [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., (92, aphorism 18). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., (138, aphorism 118). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., (178, aphorism 21). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Op. cit., 121. This same objection is reformulated in Kimball’s characterization of the mutual misunderstanding of each other’s position over the phrase “criticism of life” that Huxley and Arnold both employed. (172) See also 225-226. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid. 161. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. In 2003, ACTC won an NEH, three-year grant, “Bridging the Gap Between the Humanities and Sciences.” The grant had three summer syllabi on “Motion and Natural Law in the Physical and Political World,” “Life, Origins, Purposesiveness, and Transformations,” and “Technology, Art, Values, and the Problems of Technoscience.” All three syllabi began with ancient Greek texts, with the first ending in texts of the 17th Century, and the others ending with texts from (post-)modernity. Teams from 10 institutions -- composed of one humanist, one scientist, and one administrator drawn from any discipline each -- attended the sessions and returned home to campus to devise curricula and, often, teaching teams which “bridged the gap.” The whole effort was inconceivable without a liberal arts orientation: http://www.coretexts.org/projects-and-grants/neh-grant-bridging-the-gap-between-the-humanities-and-sciences/. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Henry Adams, in *Novels, Mont Saint Michele, The Education*. The Library of America, 1983, 715-1181. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., 777 and 993-997. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid, 1105. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., 1066ff and 1109ff. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. I’ve suggested that by continuously returning to the principal parts of liberal *arts* --poetic and rhetorical invention*,* and dialectical discovery -- the liberal arts and their associated core texts played a significant, artistic role in developing the new philosophy or new science and that they may continue to develop human innovation, today. This argument can be extended backward in time, across civilizational traditions, and toward the present day sciences, particularly in their use of the humanities and liberal arts to explain themselves. To simply illustrate: Darwin’s *Origin of Species*; portions of Einstein’s *The Meaning of Relativity*; Skinner’s *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*; Feynman’s *QED*, Wilson’s *Consilience*. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. By a book, I mean to include any written work, separable from its author or authors, which has come down to us and which, of course, may prior and posterior to our day may be found in many different media – scrolls, velum, hypertext and, someday, I suspect, something like holographic-imaging ipods. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Certainly, Kimball’s analysis that a *liberal artes* accommodation had real intellectual and some institutional steam by the end of the 19th Century is right. Indeed, I think Adams is an individual instance. But just as faculties excluded one or the other curricula of the ideals that Kimble identifies, so we should not expect to see many instantiations of institutional *liberal artes* accommodations until sufficient “steam” develops. Put differently, I’m suggesting that there was some inherent, intellectual “inertia” for an accommodation much further back in history than the 19th Century and, that while not a major driver, the accommodation is significant for institutions even in the beginning of the 21st century. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. This admittedly truncated summary is derived from “Liberal Education and Responsibility,” (321) http://www.archive.org/stream/LeoStraussOnLiberalEducation/Strauss-LiberalEducationResponsibility\_djvu.txt and “What Is Liberal Education?,” http://www.ditext.com/strauss/liberal.html. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Richard McKeon, “Criticism and the Liberal Arts: The Chicago School of Criticism” in *Profession 82* ed. Phyllis P. Franklin and Richard I. Brod, Modern Language Association, 1982, p. 2-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. I have argued this more thoroughly in both a speech given at Marroquin University (see below), and a speech delivered in the Public Lecture Series at Shimer College: “Re-thinking Universities and Hutchins: Faculty and Student Resistance to Core Text Curricula,” which can be found on the web at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\_\_0uaql6DvM. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Prior to arriving at Chicago, McKeon and Mortimer Adler were at Columbia and involved with the professors who developed the Contemporary Civilization and, later, the Literature-Humanities core sequences of courses, there. Ultimately, each of these sequences replaced the specific, departmental offering of general education courses that had preceded, in the early 20th Century, the requirements for graduation from Columbia. To this day, Columbia offers a bachelor’s degree without a major. Scott Buchannan was involved in adult education spin-offs of Columbia in New York City and he and Hutchins came to Chicago to develop liberal education programs. Saint John’s College developed, partly, out of this complex of institutions and persons. St. John’s curriculum entirely eschewed the departmental-disciplinary basis of the Chicago program, while it retained the liberal arts, and explicitly identifies its program with great books and authors of the Western world. In 1953, Notre Dame, in large part through the work of Otto Byrd, who had Adler, McKeon and Etienne Gilson as teachers (My Life as A Great Bookie, 46 ff and 66ff), organized a three-year major called the Program of Liberal Studies on the basis of disciplinary courses that stretch across all the fields found at Chicago, but Notre Dame retained the idea of interdisciplinary reading seminars which characterized St. John’s program. A 1941 article by Adler, delivered to the American Catholic Philosophical Association’s Western Division, on “The Order of Learning,” sparked a short-lived attempt (1943-44) and subsequently an enduring construction of classics based liberal arts education programs at Saint Mary’s College of California that ultimately resulted in a St. John’s like program for a major and a four semester great books programs taken by those who majored in other disciplines (What Is It To Educate Liberally? (1-28)). Though modified, both are still running. Shimer College adopted one version of the Chicago Hutchins or “new college” curriculum, but it has no departments and only four general concentrations, including one in science, for the baccalaureate; it has carefully staged integrative courses and requirements in every year of its curriculum.

    Straussians graduated from Chicago and went, in particular, to the University of Dallas. There, in conjunction with literary disciplinarians who formed a core sequence of genre studies conceived by Louise and Donald Cowan (who were influenced by southern critics at Vanderbilt), teleologically unrelated to political science, the university faculty formed a disciplinary core leading to majors, which had no interdisciplinary courses but was founded on great books. This new curriculum transformed the education at that institution. The University of Dallas founded the only graduate program explicitly using the Western Great Books which, in turn, produces three Ph.D.’s in political science, philosophy, and literature. These graduates have not only staffed institutions across America, but helped to re-organize the New England Political Association so that there is a “core text/political philosophy” section of the Association’s annual meeting which contributes more than a third of the papers at the meeting.

    Meanwhile, at Columbia, Wm. Theodore deBary eschewed the formulation, particularly of Adler and Hutchins, that either liberal or core education had to consist of books only of the Western civilizational tradition. For over fifty years and continuing to this day, deBary has translated or collaborated in the translation of Chinese civilizational texts and has argued for the inclusion in the Columbia core of these works in a limited number of core courses. DeBary’s work took place during the period when China not only became another foe of the U.S., but entered the cultural destruction of, first, the Great Leap Forward and, then, the Cultural Revolution, but his work has no explicit foundation in Greek education or Enlightenment political problems as does Strauss’. In so far as he is concerned with the Core of Columbia, deBary wishes to “liberate the powers of the individual by disciplining them.” (Kimball quote) His work is part of a larger effort by the University Committee on Asia and the Middle East to incorporate texts of Chinese, Indian, and Islam into the core, as well as to develop sophisticated research programs. St. John’s, motivated by its own experience in teaching great works, has also moved at its Santa Fe campus to develop a masters degree in reading works of Indian and Chinese civilization. In 1978, Frederick Kranz, a graduate of Columbia, along with Harvey Shulman and Geoff Fidler, establish a three-year liberal arts baccalaureate college underpinned by great books of the Western tradition at Concordia University in Montreal. At one of its furthest extensions, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, under the development of Cheung Chan Fai and Mei Yee Leung, developed within the last four years a two-course sequence in the humanities and sciences of great texts of the West and East, which it is acknowledged owes part of its development to both Chicago and Columbia (citation), and which forms the basis on which a menu selection of general education courses will fulfill the mandate by China that higher education institutions convert from the European, specialist, three-year baccalaureate to the American mixed, four-year baccalaureate. One traces in this web of institutions almost all the related forms and affiliations, as well as cultural interactions, of modern North American, indeed, the world’s education as it is affected by an accommodated liberal arts ideal. Yet, my narration hardly exhausts the web of core text programs found worldwide, nor, especially, the function of the liberal arts in actually shaping that network. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. *Celebrating the Humanities: A Half-Century of the Search Course at Rhodes College,* ed. Michael Nelson, Vanderbilt University Press, 1996, begins with a post-World War I narrative of Charles Diehl’s attempts to bring a liberal education to Southwestern (Rhodes) College during the 20’s to 50’s based in Christian traditions, but with an awareness of Columbia, Chicago, and Vanderbilt educational efforts, 3-31. Justin Zaremby’s *Directed Studies and the Evolution of American General Education,* Whitney Humanities Center, Yale University, 2006 discusses that Maynard Mack, educated totally at Yale, helped to found and devise the program with Dean William Clyde DeVane. Mack was seeking to solve the problems of “choice” that had arisen in the literature and curricula of general education, and were expressed by the differences between Hutchins and Dewey, 32-34ff. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. A precursor to this paper was delivered as a speech, “Accommodating the Core Texts Tradition of Liberal Arts in Today’s Universities: History, ACTC, and Marroquín – an international phenomenon,” to the faculty of Marroquín University in Guatemala, in September of 2012. At this point, the speech noted that, “the Association for Core Texts and Courses was co-founded by Stephen Zelnick and myself in 1995 in order to bring together programs that used common readings, taught in common courses, by shared faculty. The idea was originally Zelnick’s, who was Director of Temple University’s Intellectual Heritage Program – a two course sequence of texts from the sciences, social sciences, and humanities stretching from ancient to modern times required of every Temple undergraduate. He had discovered that the wide variety of professional associations at the time did not really address educational issues of these kinds of programs. As the organization grew, it encouraged faculty and institutions to develop and use their own core text programs in their own fashion for their own institutional missions…

    After the first organizing conference, under my direction ACTC conferences took on the following structure: originally, paper proposals were organized into panels over two days with each session exclusively devoted to one of four categories: Interdisciplinary Questions, Science, Social Science, or the Arts & Humanities, accordingly characterized by texts, problems, or disciplines discussed – but not by faculty presenters. That is, if you were a humanist and wished to address Newton’s *Principia*, that was fine. After about seven years, the membership voiced a desire to have panels of the four categories appear in each session. Generally, this movement by the membership was an effort to allow conferees to attend the fields, perhaps the disciplines, which they were most comfortable with.” [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. ACTC has published to this date 10 selected, peer-reviewed proceedings to this date. Seven more are in various states of pre-publication. It also helped to support the publication of Bruce Kimball’s *The Liberal Arts Tradition* which made selections of core texts concerning liberal education available to a wider public. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)