

Modern Liberal Arts: a philosophy of education

Introduction

This essay describes the philosophy of education that underpins a new undergraduate degree in Modern Liberal Arts at the University of Winchester. This degree retrieves for higher education the search for first principles in and through a very specific form of modern metaphysics. This metaphysics carries a renewed comprehension not only of the idea of a principle – and of a first principle – ‘in-itself,’ but also of what is to be understood by any claim – a claim that has always been and remains metaphysical – for an education ‘in-itself’ or ‘for its own sake.’ The latter often seems to be what critics assert is lacking in higher education but the metaphysical basis of which few are currently willing to risk. Undoubtedly, this is in part due to the so-called death of metaphysics where the latter is seen as a free-floating realm able to arrogate to itself an absolute dominion over a pluralist world. My view, not rehearsed directly in what follows, is that this critique of metaphysics as totalitarian and racist is only another shape of metaphysics, one reflecting a particular configuration of social and political relations, and active in and as the *culture of modern reason*.

The first part of the essay traces the idea of the in-itself back to Aristotle to explore the epistemological presuppositions and dialectical difficulties that it carries, before examining its fate in the modern philosophies of Kant and Hegel. Here I will argue that a modern metaphysics of the in-itself emerges, one that any claim for an education in-itself has to work with. The second half of the essay shows how this metaphysical culture relates to the idea of education in-itself and for its own sake. How this translates into specific curriculum content will be the subject of another piece in the near future.

The in-itself and for-itself

The in-itself

In the *Organon*, Aristotle distinguishes between what is simple, elementary and without privation – the in-itself – from that which is corrupted by being composite or compound. The in-itself is where what an object is ‘is its explanation and [where] it is not possible for it to be otherwise’ (Aristotle, 1984a, *Posterior Analytics*, I.2. 71b 11). Since the true is that which is absolutely and completely contained in-itself, so by definition the false is that which is not in-itself. Anything that is caused by another, or caused to change by another, or affected by heteronomous elements, is not therefore its own cause and effect and is not in-itself. This is the logic of truth that grounds Western philosophy for two thousand years after Aristotle.¹ Crucial here is that the Aristotelian ‘in-itself’ successfully trumps the danger of regression *ad infinitum* of cause and effect.² Liberal arts education, defined as the intellectual search for the first principles of God, man and the natural universe, was also grounded in this Aristotelian logic of the in-itself. The Pythagoreans sought the in-itself in the exploration of nature, which became the *quadrivium* of music, astronomy, mathematics and geometry, while Aristotle gave shape to the *trivium*, seeking the in-itself in the arts of persuasion and demonstration.

But Aristotle’s in-itself carries within it the political and social relations of its time. Famously, he claimed that it was only when ‘the necessities of life and things that made for comfort and recreation were present’ (*Metaphysics*, 1984b, I.2. 982b 23-5) that a free man could begin the pure search for philosophical knowledge as an end in-itself.³ The logic of the in-itself here grounds the distinction between freedom and dependence, or, the distinction between master and slave. The pursuit of truth in-itself and for its own sake could be pursued only by the man of leisure whose own physical and material needs did not create dependence upon heteronomous elements that would corrupt education as an end in-itself. Hence the very concept of truth as in-itself separates the scholar (*scholē* – leisure) and *diagōgē* (the civilized pursuits of the gentleman) from those whose lives are not free from the struggle for survival. It is for this

ancient separation of master and slave that ‘classical education’ even today is seen as elitist and class-based, in addition to being predominantly white, Western, and male.⁴

The definition of truth in-itself grounded in the master who is replete carries another logical implication which is less often observed. As Nietzsche and Derrida both point out, it reveals the truth of the in-itself to be the logic of the satisfaction of appetite. Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* argues that the concepts of truth, morality and good conscience are grounded in good digestion; while Derrida in *Glas* refers to *Geist* in Hegel as able to reheat any remains, to assimilate them, ‘to cook, eat, gulp down, interiorize the remain(s) without remains’ (Derrida, 1986, 236). He adds that any crumbs that are left are appropriated by the Last Supper where opposition determines itself such that nothing shall go to waste; there shall be no remains: *Sa. Absolute knowing*.⁵

The for-itself

Despite claims to the contrary, metaphysics is not now nor ever has been *only* the story of the in-itself. Accompanying truth as the in-itself has been that which fails to be in-itself because it fails to be its own principle. What is otherwise than in-itself is that which is compound and changed from without. Its character is negative, incomplete and imperfect in relation to the perfect self-satisfaction of the in-itself. Socrates ruthlessly exploits this relation between the perfect and the imperfect. He shows how, in intellectual activity, when the in-itself seeks to assert its identity, it falls to composition. This is because the *thought* of the in-itself corrupts the purity of the in-itself. As such, the latter is only an object in-itself as it appears *for* the consciousness which thinks it. The Socratic dialogues are the record of Socrates creating instability by revealing every in-itself as for-thought. This is the crux of his negative education. It also seals the future of neoPlatonism in which truth in-itself, always compromised and made composite by being for-thought, must logically transcend experience and be ineffable.⁶

However, nothing short of a revolution regarding the relation between the in-itself and its being for-thought occurs in the European Enlightenment, where the perceived weakness of thought and experience as mediation, as error and as imperfection in fact becomes its strength. To this point in Western intellectual history, the in-itself and the for-thought have only been opposed to one another. But in the Enlightenment, what constitutes reason's *enlightenment* is realizing that when an object is for-thought then it is for reason, and since everything *known* is only for reason or in thought, so reason has priority over the in-itself of the object. (We will see the Kantianism of this revolution below.) Enlightenment here concerns reason's sovereignty over every dogma or superstition, the latter defined here as that which resists having its in-itself negated in thought and therein known rationally.

It is often overlooked that the nature of this modern enlightenment is essentially negative and is the triumph of mediation. It is this negative universality of reason that produces not just the totality of enlightenment reason but also its total instability, for the universal rationality of all objects as for-reason turns against itself. When reason tries to speak its *own* truth, then by the very nature of that truth it loses its in-itself to being for-itself. Up to this point in the history of Western philosophy the for-itself has only appeared in the incomplete shapes of objects being *for-thought*. The *for-itself* strictly speaking appears when reason becomes aware that its universality, its in-itself, is only thought for-thought. The significance of this dialectic of enlightenment yields the instability and ambivalence of modern metaphysics. It is within this modern metaphysics that the logic of truth is re-defined and with it the structure of first principles, not only of education but of nature and freedom as well. For the first time in its history Western rationality is able to express its own ground, its own principle and its own sovereignty. But neither truth nor freedom here conform to the Aristotelian logic of a first principle. Instead reason freely rewrites the logic and metaphysics of the in-itself that is for-itself in its own image, and that means as the totality of its own unstable contingency.

Modern metaphysics

It is Kant and Hegel, together and apart, who articulate the structure and logic of the modern metaphysics of the in-itself, the for-itself and the relation between them. This metaphysics constitutes a totality of mediation and contingency. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781 and 1787) illustrates how enlightenment reason gains its sovereignty by showing how every object in-itself has this truth mediated and compromised by being for thought. From the Aristotelian viewpoint Kant is the great destroyer of the in-itself which Aristotle thought could not be otherwise. But Kant recognises too the instability of this sovereignty to the extent that he is prepared to make it a principle of philosophical necessity, namely the synthetic *a priori*. He describes this as where 'the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are likewise conditions for the possibility of the objects of experience' (Kant, 1968, A158/B197).⁷ This same principle is expressed in the necessity that binds concept and intuition, where 'thoughts without concepts are empty [and] intuitions without concepts are blind' (A51/B75). The result would seem to be that the in-itself is always already for-itself and the for-itself is wholly dependent upon the in-itself and that this dialectic continues *ad infinitum*, precisely what the Aristotelian in-itself protected against. Kant, of course, would argue here that synthesis is intuitive, but nevertheless as Hegel, Adorno and others have pointed out, where there is immediacy there is always also mediation. As such, synthesis is always experienced phenomenologically as aporetic. Faced with the infinite regression that is endemic to this aporetic experience of the synthetic *a priori* Kant returns to an Aristotelian definition of the in-itself, and argues for transcendental pure reason in-itself and pure practical reason in-itself. Here Kant is the crossroads between ancient and modern metaphysics, facing backward to Aristotle yet also forward to Hegel.

Hegel's (and Adorno's) response to the synthetic *a priori* is to re-define the notion of the in-itself and therein of truth, according to the dialectical necessity of the synthetic *a priori*. He argues that it is merely a prejudice to suggest that this necessity of mediation is an error compared to the in-itself that cannot be otherwise. What this prejudgement posits in effect is that thought and truth are irretrievably opposed to one another. How, Hegel asks, in searching for truth could we allow ourselves to believe that we know so much about it even before the search? Perhaps, he argues, it is this fear of mediation as error that is really the error? Perhaps we should instead yield to the necessity of mediation that Kant identified and change our understanding of truth accordingly?

Here Hegel finds an integrity in the way the sovereignty of reason mediates its own in-itself in the same way that it mediates the in-itself of everything else. It practises on itself what it preaches for others. As such, this integrity yields a new and modern understanding of the truth of enlightenment reason. It yields the necessity of a logic where the in-itself is unavoidably and universally for-itself and where this universality of the for-itself is in-itself. But it is 'in-itself' here in a way completely different from Aristotle. Where Aristotle's in-itself cannot be otherwise, Hegel's in-itself is always otherwise. The truth of this logic of mediation of reason by reason he calls the Notion (*Begriff*). The caricatures of the Hegelian absolute as merely truth in-itself do not take account of the essentially negative, uncertain and unstable nature of enlightenment reason that it expresses. It negates everything, including itself. It is this modern version of the in-itself that our modern liberal arts programme aims to work with.

Education in-itself and for-itself

Thus far I have argued for a modern metaphysics of the notion of a first principle. But what has this to do with education? How could this modern metaphysics of the in-itself and for-itself be said to be a philosophy of education in general, or more particularly, how could it be defended as the principle of an *education* in-itself and for its own sake, and therein a philosophy of education of a programme of modern liberal arts?

Is there something fundamentally educational about the modern metaphysics of a first principle? I believe there is. It is not without significance that modern reason is the reason of 'enlightenment.' As described above, the enlightenment that this reason achieves concerns the universality of its mediation of all objects, including itself when it is its own object of thought. The special nature of the fact that reason can be both the thought of the object and the object of thought has been a determining feature of the history of Western philosophy from the Prime Mover to *différance*. What is enlightening about the Enlightenment is that reason becomes the logical universality of all that is known and as such takes itself to be the truth of all things. In the philosophy of education, as in philosophy more generally, commentators are quick to point out

the imperialism of this rationalistic enlightenment. But what they most often do not take into account is that enlightenment reason also sees this imperialism and undermines it rationally. There is a popular train of thought in educational theory that believes that modern reason has never realised its own contingency. One such example is Michael Peters who says of Kant that ‘nowhere in the *Critique [of Pure Reason]* does Kant address the question of how such critical enquiry, itself, is possible (Peters, 2005, 38). But as we have shown above, this is wholly wrong. Reason in Kant precisely knows its own contingency, and the frailty of its own identity. The *Critique of Pure Reason* is written because of this frailty, not in ignorance of it.

This leads us to the explanation of the immanent relationship between education and the way that modern metaphysics expresses this frailty. Modern metaphysics is not the triumph of an all-powerful reason; it is the expression of the hollowness of any such triumphal claim. Modern metaphysics is the truth not of triumph but of understanding the illusions of such triumphalism. This is because enlightenment reason learns that reason in-itself falls to the for-itself and the for-itself makes claims to be in-itself. The philosophies of Kant and Hegel are grounded in this rational and metaphysical learning about reason by reason. In this way modern metaphysics is at root a philosophy of education.

But there are other ways to express this philosophy of education. One way would be to describe the instability of enlightenment reason as a dialectic of enlightenment in the way that Horkheimer and Adorno do. Its credibility as a philosophy of modern social and political education is attested to by their insistence that, in order to retain dialectical opposition even to ‘the totality that is false’ (Adorno, 1991, 28), enlightenment reason must continue to ‘examine itself’ (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1979, xv).⁸ However, below I prefer to describe this dialectic of enlightenment using another educational concept, as the *culture* of reason. While the dialectic of enlightenment expresses the totality of reason’s restless instability and failure to establish itself purely in-itself, culture carries the education of reason when it is formed and re-formed in the experience of its instability. It is, if you like (and I don’t) ‘reasonism.’ It is where reason *learns* of itself negatively and learns of the illusion of its claims to mastery. The culture of reason here

is the vocation of reason to ‘know thyself’ warts and all. *Learning* is the totality that defines modern metaphysics as a philosophy of education for is here that a first principle has its principledness, its integrity, and its consistency in being educational. Here, in modern metaphysics, a truth can be said to be true to itself. The term ‘culture’ expresses this more effectively even than dialectic because while the dialectic can describe an educational process, a culture is that process known to itself. It is within this notion of culture now that I can describe modern metaphysics as the philosophy of education of our Modern Liberal Arts degree.

The culture of Modern Liberal Arts

The *telos* of the degree is education for its own sake. As we have seen, this means not just the search for first principles, as has always been the case, but also the *experience* of the search for first principles. This experience of the culture of reason has its form and content as the in-itself and for-itself of modern metaphysics. This is perhaps where the philosophy of education that I am defending for modern liberal arts is at its most controversial. The controversy arises in the claim that this learning, this education, can speak its own truth. Yet this is essential if the concept of an education in-itself, even one fraught with logical difficulties, is to have import. While Aristotle would dismiss this culture of reason as invoking an infinite regression and would confirm here that therefore ‘there can be no learning of learning’ (1984b, *Metaphysics*, XI.12. 1068b 14), contemporary post-foundational thinkers would likely express concerns regarding the in-itself here as a dogma and as opposed, for example, to pluralism. For Aristotle the culture of learning is not sufficiently in-itself while for post-foundational critics it is far too much in-itself. The answer to both of these concerns is the same. The culture of reason expresses the truth of modern metaphysics where the in-itself is always mediated, and therefore always false, but because it is always false, acknowledges this necessity as a new kind of principle, one whose universality is negative. Modern metaphysics re-defines the idea of truth in-itself as always also for-itself. This is its culture and this culture is its own content as learning. It is this philosophy of education of modern metaphysics, with its own unavoidable instability, that underpins our degree in modern liberal arts.

But what does it gain a student to have such an education for its own sake? This question has been asked consistently for over two thousand years. The brave answer is that there is no gain beyond the education for its own sake. Yet one must still be able to speak of this education in-itself. My answer is to look at what happens to the student who is experiencing this education in-itself. Its first feature is that it is *critical*. In this it shares a fundamental feature of Plato's cave in that beliefs and ideas are challenged. In Modern Liberal Arts as in the cave a critical education is essentially a negative education because it undermines what one holds to be true. This kind of critical education is really an education in contingency. In the cave the prisoners are shown the contingency of the shadows and of the prisoners' own *Weltanschauung* upon another world previously unknown to them. Similarly, a university education is often a lesson in contingency that reveals pre-existing conditions of the possibility of the world one takes for granted. This is one of the defining characteristics of a critical education. It stands in contrast to the analytical education where the logic of reason stands above such contingency.

But there is another aspect to this critical education in contingency. What makes this education an education in-itself is that the experience of contingency is allowed to become an object for thought. This is where the experience of contingency becomes contingent upon itself, and is where its form and content is that of modern metaphysics. What happens to the student here is that experience reveals its educational import and education learns of itself in experience. To become educated in this way is to see the culture of reason at work in everyday experiences. But what difference does this make? It commends itself as a way of life, a way of lifelong learning, a way of freedom expressing itself as self-education. It commends this critical and metaphysical education for its own sake.

Working with this instability of contingency is, of course, nothing new. It is the same instability that has inspired much Western philosophy to work with the paradox of a universality of mediation or contingency or reason for-itself. For Marx this new contingent universal that is for-itself is the proletarian consciousness. For Adorno it is the universality of negative dialectics. For Heidegger it is *Dasein* and the end of humanism. For Derrida it is *différance* which expresses

reason's autoimmunity. But none of these do sufficient justice to the culture of reason in which the instability is not merely the opposition of the for-itself to the in-itself; it is also the metaphysics of this opposition, its own logic and its own principle. I should add here that it is not this metaphysics that carries the potential violence and terror of dogma. Rather the violence and the terror are in the suppression of this metaphysics, and especially when the for-itself takes *itself* as a principle, refuses its own mediation within the culture of reason, and names its universality as worker, or *Volk*, or difference. It is in the name of such universalities that metaphysics is decried. And yet it is this metaphysics that carries the logic – the instability – that exposes the terror of suppressing mediation as its own end in-itself. It is in this metaphysics that the mediation of the principle of mediation, and of the universality of the for-itself, is its own necessity and negates and undermines itself. Immunity from metaphysics is, in fact, immunity from the self-examination of reason that Horkheimer and Adorno knew remained essential for freedom. Metaphysics is the unrest that is always other than itself. This is what is resisted when the for-itself takes form and content at the expense of metaphysics.

The culture of reason in liberal arts education

I will end this essay by drawing attention to two ways in which the culture of reason sits within liberal arts education but unacknowledged as such. The first is in the different visions of liberal arts education of Allan Bloom and Martha Nussbaum, and the second in the status of the Great Books curriculum.

Allan Bloom and Martha Nussbaum

In *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Bloom supports the in-itself of rational human nature which he believes can preserve itself from corruption by the relativism of the for-itself that is historicism and culture. Human nature has revealed its own rational principle of natural rights which are enshrined in the US Constitution. These rights concern what it means to be 'fully human' (Bloom, 1987, 38). But for Bloom it is precisely the rationality that was intended to protect against prejudice that is now itself attacked as a source of prejudice. He is critical of

the emphasis in liberal arts education on race and gender in particular, and on difference more generally, arguing that it has turned openness into an end in-itself. For Bloom openness is only a means to discovering the truth of humanity as a whole. The openness that is an end in-itself he sees as an imperialism of indifference toward those cultures on whose behalf it intends to speak, as it means that no culture has any epistemological significance for any other.

Nussbaum attacked Bloom immediately in *The New York Review of Books* (1987). She argues that liberal arts education is the practical and active search for the best human life which should be distributed to all rational beings. She finds neither the practical, nor the active, nor the democratic in Bloom's book. Bloom, she argues, subjugates activity under contemplation, practical philosophy under fixed eternal truths, and distribution under privilege. Against Bloom, she offers the vision of the ancient Stoics 'who spoke so eloquently of practical reason as a universal human possession,' (1987) but understood in such a way that practical reason was open to its own mediation and doubt. Here Nussbaum seeks to criticise Bloom's dogmatic in-itself with a pragmatic universalism which is necessarily always of-itself and open to its own limitations. This leads Nussbaum to express a vision of liberal arts education in *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) which is very different from Bloom's. For her, the curriculum needs to include the exploration of racial, ethnic, sexual and religious difference. Here the definition of *liberalis*, taken from Seneca, sees freedom as enabling students 'to take charge of their own thought and to conduct a critical examination of their society's norms and traditions' (1997, 30). Here the in-itself of reason is always mediated by the for-itself in which reason is recognised as partial, local and contingent. At the end of her book Nussbaum distinguishes two meanings of 'liberal.' One belongs to the dogmatic in-itself of the education of the free and leisured elite, the other to the democratic freedom of genuine cosmopolitanism that is only in-itself to the extent that it is mediated by the for-itself. In the latter, she says, 'male and female, slave-born and free-born, rich and poor, they have looked into themselves and developed the ability to separate mere habit and convention from what they can defend by argument' (293).

The Bloom/Nussbaum debate reveals how together they express the culture of reason without, it would appear, realizing that they do so. Bloom holds to an in-itself that at best only implicitly acknowledges its mediation by the for-itself. As such, it does not speak of a modern culture of education in-and-for-itself. Nussbaum's mediation of Bloom's in-itself is grounded in a Stoic universality in-itself that claims the truth of its notion of freedom against that of Bloom. But our experience of the relation between Bloom and Nussbaum is metaphysical, seeing the in-itself become for-itself and the for-itself become in-itself.⁹ As such, we need not choose sides here and will not do so in the new degree in modern liberal arts. Bloom is right to draw attention to the value of the continuing search for first principles in liberal arts education and Nussbaum is right to mediate that search by revealing its cultural imperialism. What remains is for the experience of this opposition to be expressed as movement within the culture of reason, to become part of the content by which modern liberal arts education defines itself, and therein to be one of the ways in which the modern metaphysics of education in-and-for-itself is practised. It is part of the phenomenological approach of Modern Liberal Arts that students are encouraged to express the contradictions that are experienced here, so that these experiences can be the content of later discussions regarding the culture of modern reason.

The canon of the Great Books

There is a second way in which the culture of reason is immanent in liberal arts education, and this concerns the thorny issue of the place of the canon of Great Books. This controversy in essence concerns whether the Great Books curriculum is the repository of all that is best in Western intellectual history, or the unacceptable face of Western privilege, power and prejudice. This debate reflects a wider controversy as to whether Western enlightenment reason is the means to global freedom or global imperial domination. But what characterises the debate about the cultural implications of the Great Books curriculum is that generally it lacks recognition of its own culture. Critics of the canon see it as imperialist, colonialist, racist, sexist, dogmatic, oppressive, and so on. They are correct. The Great Books curriculum all-too-easily resists acknowledging itself as both a totality and as a totality that is false. However, this is a reason to read the canon, not to avoid it. It is in reading the canon that the notion of itself as a culture

emerges. To deny students a curriculum that has the Great Books within it, is to put the in-itself of the denial above the for-itself of the students' mediation that will be their experience of the tradition. In curriculum design it is all-too-easy for critics to become surrogates for the student experience.

This leads to a further observation about the nature of study in modern liberal arts. Merely reading the canon will not suffice as an education in the culture of reason. The latter requires that the canon be read not with a view to agreeing or disagreeing with each idea in each individual text, or with finding contradictions in the text and treating them as errors that must be corrected. Adorno, who in his reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (2001) warns against knowing too much of the text in advance in favour of pursuing the logic of the matter at hand, notes too that it is through the contradictions found in texts that the dialectic, and for us modern metaphysics, begins to speak. Just as Hegel says in the *Logic* that the principles of contradiction and identity contain more than is meant by them, so Adorno says that that we should be concerned with what a text 'objectively expresses' (2001, 78) and that this will be found in the 'immanent tension' (79) in the text. Rather than accept 'the idiotic choice of either embracing a philosophy that is unacceptable ... or else of seizing the opportunity to gloat over its defects [one can] appreciate its truth content as one that contains its own untruth' (137). This means letting dialectical or synthetic necessity speak for themselves in the text, and not merely judging an argument inconsistent where such necessities are found. It means too that the tension expresses more than is found on the page. In this phenomenological method of reading, students will already be dealing with the shapes of the in-itself and the for-itself, and will be rehearsing the shapes in which modern first principles appear. The experience of reading the canon is implicitly an education in-and-for-itself which can be rendered explicit in modern liberal arts. It can, in time, produce a rhetoric of the modern aporetic mind wherein eloquence becomes the rigorous expression of the modern metaphysics of education for its own sake.

Against this, however, the critique of the canon, especially post-metaphysical and post-colonial critique, tends to suppress the culture of such critique. This suppression takes many forms, but

primary among them currently is the identity of the for-itself as *difference*. This is an example of the power of illusion in enlightenment reason. Difference is not the end in-and-for-itself of mediation or contingency or scepticism. Nor is it their *a priori* condition of possibility. It is instead one of the shapes that modern enlightenment reason takes in first trying to understand and then to fix its own instability. Difference is only a particular shape of the relation that reason in-itself has to reason for-itself. Its dogma is that it is *not* part of the metaphysics of the in-itself and the for-itself. This dogma in effect fetishizes the new universality of the for-itself by casting it adrift from the social conditions which produce it. Here, bluntly, is where post-foundational thinking loses the concept of humanity. It makes ‘difference’ different from the totality of the phenomenological experience of difference. The challenge of the Modern Liberal Arts degree to post-foundational theorists is this. If they use the idea of culture to express only the for-itself, then they refuse the challenge of the culture of this idea of culture and suppress too how it is reformed in expressing itself. Here, within the culture of liberal arts education in general, and debates over the canon in particular, the opportunity already exists to experience this culture as education in-and-for-itself.

Truth, nature and freedom

I have not in this article been able to look specifically at the curriculum we have created in modern liberal arts. But by way of summary I can say that the culture of modern reason in modern liberal arts expresses the logic of the principle of education in-and-for-itself in the three areas in which liberal arts education has always sought to discover first principles. In the quadrivium of subjects that sought first principles in nature modern liberal arts education can retrieve the opposition of macrocosm and microcosm that characterised ancient and medieval liberal arts education, and find the culture of reason therein.¹⁰ Equally, in the trivium that sought the first principles of social and political life the opposition of master and slave remains an expression for modern liberal arts of the principle of freedom within the culture of modern reason. And finally, modern liberal arts can both retrieve metaphysics as the actuality of the vocation to know thyself and ensure that this actuality of metaphysical experience is not

suppressed by shapes that the in-itself and the for-itself take in their desire for mastery over each other. This marks our modern approach to the ancient themes of nature, freedom and truth.

Conclusion

Perhaps it looks as if not much changes here between traditional liberal arts education and its counterpart in modern metaphysics? The latter still reads the canon, even though it does so through the culture of reason. It still critiques the canon even though it recognizes the culture of doing so. It still investigates first principles even though it does so in the modern metaphysics of Kant and Hegel, and truth, nature and freedom are still the three areas in which first principles represent themselves. Yet in a sense in modern liberal arts education everything has changed. The logic of first principles is no longer the absence of mediation but the totality of mediation which, essentially, also mediates itself. The canon is no longer an end in-itself but now an end that is in-itself when it is for-itself and for-itself when it is in-itself. It is the lack of stability here that now defines education in-and-for-itself. In addition, in modern liberal arts education the critique of the nature of the canon is no longer immune from the culture of such critique or from the necessary instability that accompanies it.

The one difference between the two conceptions of liberal arts education that makes all the difference is that in modern liberal arts an education in-and-for-itself is characterised by a culture of openness to itself as a culture. This openness learns that the culture of reason is present everywhere that arguments for or against the truth of something lead to rational contradictions – which is all the time. This openness is also its own significance for it is where freedom expresses its own principle as absolute openness to self-education and self-critique or, the same, to the vocation to know thyself. But without an openness, too, to its metaphysical significance, freedom remains closed to the philosophical experience of its own contradictions in the world. In modern liberal arts as I have defended it here, *freedom is to learn of freedom*.

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¹ I have explored the fate of this Aristotelian logic as 'neoPlatonism' in Tubbs, (2009).

² Even though Aristotle argues that the universe and matter are eternal and uncreated, this is still in order to avoid the 'infinite' regression of the creator of the creator of the creator...

³ See also *Politics*, I. iv (Aristotle, 1984b).

⁴ It also carries the distinction between leisured intellectual study and mere productive skills. Famously Aristotle rehearses this around music in the *Politics* (Aristotle, 1984b). The scholar will learn only enough about music to be able to judge a good performance from a bad one. The performer, because his playing is for the enjoyment of others, and not therefore an end in-itself, remains only a mechanic (*banauosos*) and a paid hireling (*technikos*).

⁵ I am not pursuing Nietzsche or Derrida here in the case for modern liberal arts education but for a discussion of Nietzsche see Tubbs (2004) chapter 5 and Tubbs (2005) chapter 7; and for a discussion of Derrida see Tubbs. (2008), chapter 4, and Tubbs (2009) pp. 140-3.

⁶ The history of Western philosophy records the different ways in which this confrontation between the in-itself and the for-thought has appeared. There is not space here to rehearse these appearances, although in a way they are all characterised by Scepticism. When Sextus Empiricus says that ‘opposed to every account there is an equal account’ (2000, 51) he sums up the problem that, since every in-itself is undermined by being for-thought, one truth is as good as any other.

⁷ emphasis removed.

⁸ Yet perhaps Adorno also resists this philosophy of education by consistently avoiding its re-formation of the in-itself. See Tubbs (1997a), (1997b) and Rose, 1993, chapter 6.

⁹ That Nussbaum qualifies her idea of education by seeking to avoid any absolutist pretensions of truth in-itself illustrates again how easily difference is traduced into an end in-itself, avoiding the work of conceptualizing the metaphysics of difference.

¹⁰ For a discussion of macrocosm and microcosm in Modern Liberal Arts see Tubbs, (2011).