

References

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Kimball, Bruce A. (1986). *Orators and philosophers: A history of the idea of liberal education*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 292 pp., \$19.95 (cloth).

History without philosophy
Is like a guide who has lost his compass:
Very good in familiar territory
But always nervous on safari.

Zadic

In *Orators & Philosophers*, Dean Bruce A. Kimball makes a valiant effort to sort out two thousand years of earnest but snarled thinking about liberal education. In his examination of the ancient texts, he notes that in Roman antiquity, *liberalis* meant an activity suitable for free men (p. 13). Looking further, he finds that the Greek word *skholé* was used to denote leisure and came to signify that schools were places where those with leisure went to learn (p. 15). Those etymological roots are used to link orators like Isocrates and Cicero to modern defenders of the classics. For example Meiklejohn and Hutchins are portrayed as advocating the classics because classics will enhance human freedom when studied for their own sake and provide a kind of egalitarianism by turning democracy into a universal aristocracy (p. 223).

Although the etymological argument is not central, the tangle it produces is characteristic of the confusion that develops as Dean Kimball reckons with the various views of liberal education set forth by numbers of advocates. When he deals with scholars as profound as Plato, Descartes, or John Dewey, he hardly touches on the weighty thoughts that give depth and substance to their views on education. For example, in dealing with Dewey's Pragmatism, Kimball makes no mention of how Operationalism, with its view of a different concept of length for every way of measuring it, led to a relativism about knowledge that made Experimentalists skeptical about the enduring truths the Classicists claimed to find in literature. As a result of such omissions, the educational views of conceptual lightweights like F.A.P. Barnard, Frank Aydelotte of Swarthmore and A.L. Lowell, President of Harvard University, are inflated. That is, by slighting the grounds on which serious thinkers have based their arguments for one kind of

liberal education or another, Kimball makes it seem that the oratorical pronouncements of college administrators stand on a par with those of serious scholars. As a result, the chains of connection from past to present are far more tangled than necessary.

In an effort to untangle the chains, however, Kimball identifies two very different notions of liberal education and traces their development from ancient to modern times. They are the *artes liberales* view put forth by advocates of the oratorical tradition from Cicero to Mathew Arnold and the liberal-free view fostered by the philosophic tradition from Socrates to Hegel. Set out as ideals, the two positions exhibit the following characteristics:

1. The *artes liberales* ideal (oratorical) puts the stress on the clear and effective public expression of the ideals and values that are well-established in the cultural tradition and most sensitively portrayed in the classic literature of a civilization. It puts the insight achieved by eloquence ahead of the discovery of new knowledge.
2. The liberal-free ideal (philosophic) is dedicated to the free and unhampered pursuit of the truth and stresses the importance of specialized research, scholarly autonomy, and academic freedom. It puts the discovery of new knowledge ahead of the perpetuation of established understandings, and the insights to be achieved by their eloquent expression. (p. 237)

Yet these two views of liberal education are merely opposite poles in a debate that moves all over the ground in-between. To make sense of the various positions taken by the myriad of scholars, educators, administrators and committees addressing the question of liberal education, Kimball charts the accommodations associated with each of the two ideas (p. 238).

Unfortunately his chart does more to tighten the tangle than it does to sort out the ideas associated with the various concepts of liberal education. By putting the seven *artes liberales* characteristics on the line between the *artes liberales* ideal and the liberal-free accommodation it makes them seem as if they stem from an integration of those two positions and represent a meta-accommodation of the oratorical and philosophical positions. Indeed, the text is sufficiently ambiguous to allow or to reject this interpretation. At the end, however, Kimball returns to the ideals in order to specify their weaknesses. He asserts that:

Searching for truth without giving commensurate attention to the importance of public expression *inevitably* leads the individual to isolation and self-indulgence and the republic to amorality and chaos. (p. 238 - italics added)

Whereas,

The oratorical concern with expression and tradition — with language and texts — tempts dogmatic conservation in education and culture, tending in the long run toward authoritarianism. (p. 237)

Here he identifies the dilemma the two ideals create as the paradox of choosing between reason and speech. And finally, he comes out as an advocate of speech over reason. However, the insistence that the search for truth *inevitably* leads to amorality and chaos exhibits a shocking failure to grasp the point of modern ethical theory. Indeed, it is only by the exercise of sound reason that amorality and chaos can be avoided. And the advocacy of speech over reason shows an equal unfamiliarity with recent works in the philosophy of language that hold that it is only in the expression of our thoughts that we find out what our thoughts

mean. For all Dean Kimball's effort, however, the informed reader may well conclude that he has perpetuated an artificial distinction between two versions of the liberal arts ideal by relying on the false dichotomy between speech and reason. But the oddest thing of all in a work that celebrates the virtues of eloquence is to find it so dull that it could have been written by an administrator.

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Stabler, E. (1986). *Founders: Innovators in education, 1830-1980*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 306 pp., \$24.95 (cloth).

Normal schools are institutions of the past. By now in North America, school teachers, administrators, and other specialists, are trained on university campuses as are physicians, lawyers, engineers. This situation indicates a positive evolution in the professionalization of educators. But contrary to the three other occupational groups mentioned, a commonly established and universally recognized *cursus studiorum* for future educators among colleges and universities still has to be identified: there is yet no "Flexnor Model" providing for the integrated education of educators, linking learning and doing adequately, theory and practice satisfactorily, basics and specializations efficiently, and well-defined intellectual contents and real life classroom applications effectively. Nothing approaching university hospitals, student courts, and cooperative training in engineering covers the field of education, other than the deficient (according to many observers) probation period in application/affiliated grade schools. From place to place, program contents and teaching requirements are only partially congruent.

All this to point out that a master plan for training professional educators is still in the making. Fundamental parameters have yet to be clarified. And in order to attain this necessity, success stories from the past (immediate, recent, or centuries old) have to be scrutinized. Dr. Stabler has contributed to this scrutiny magnificently by narrating six of them: the chronicle of educators who had great culture, who conceived and implemented well-adapted institutions as answers to educational needs, and who, consequently, innovated with success in the real world of educational practice. Innovations became institutions and prospered to this day, still meeting contemporary needs. These were men and women of vision in the fields of rural education (Grundtvig in Denmark); of common public schools (Mann in New England); of higher education for women (Lyon at Mount Holyoke College); of cooperative study circles (Tomkins and Cody in Nova Scotia); of international education (Kurt Hahn in Germany and Scotland); and, of adult higher education (the team at the origin of the British Open University).

What lasts after reading this text is the conviction that the innovators were trained to think, to imagine, to organize. Out of their own personality they