Cultural Institutions, Theatre, and Humanistic Liberal Arts Education: Where Do We Go from Here?

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Recent education conferences tend to illustrate a sense of an impending loss of liberal education within a tide of cultural crisis. The call for this conference at St. John's College on "What Is Liberal Education For?" "recogniz[es]" that the traditions of education at liberal arts colleges "have been put on the defensive." The call finds an "emerging consensus" that "consumerism," "new economic challenges," and "the fragmentation of general studies" caused by specialization were "symptomatic" of "a crisis of uncertainty and disorientation affecting every field of human endeavor." The call asserts liberal education "can reaffirm its relevance and [humane] purposes" in response to this broad crisis.

St. John's College is not alone in formulating a crisis that liberal education faces. Phi Beta Kappa and the American Council of Academic Deans and the Working Group of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University are only some of the most notable bodies that have discussed the stress liberal education faces. The 2013 PBK/ACAD conference call was hardly less sweeping than the SJC call, stating that higher education is "undergoing … transformations" of economic necessity, and that education is being "driven by technology" or by demographic stresses on class rigidity for millions of families who aspire for a better life. The call seemed to say that the transformations have put the "structure and character of higher education" along with the entire democratic premises of American society at risk, and that these transformations not only have subjected higher education to the winds and change of fortune, but that more than any other branch of higher education, liberal arts and sciences are suffering "scrutiny" more than ever.

A recent spate of defenses of the humanities and humanism, the college, and the purpose of education -- by Martha Nussbaum, Tony Kronman, Andrew Delbanco, Patrick Deneen, and Reinhard Hütter -- adumbrate a destruction of liberal education correlated to the economic, scientific, and technological conditions under which we live. [i] [ii] Each author attempts to revive traditions of liberal education by linking it to sustaining democracy, spiritual needs of cultures, or 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. Collectively, they might be called 'the whole person defense' of liberal education.

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, good for liberal education, and good for our species. 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.[iii] 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.[iv] 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).[v] Hütter suggests that the humanities cannot address "dire" transformational issues involving both the university and

society because the kind of soul that the humanities might try to produce through education, the imaginative faculty, is inadequate to examine the whole realm of knowledge and conduct the metaphysical search for truth Hütter believes would not only ground a liberal education, but, possibly, turn the sciences toward a self-examination of ends.[vi]

Finally, most 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 accepted 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."[vii] 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. Aside from promoting the cultivation of the imagination, Hütter seems nearly indifferent to art works selected. Whether by disinterest, by concentration on ends mostly external to liberal education, or through contempt for 'know-how' wrought by real misgivings over modern technology, these discussions tend to obscure and ignore the importance of the arts – broadly, the technē -- of the liberal arts.[viii] In sum, all mention liberal arts education; most

defend the fine or liberal arts, but none of these authors ground their defenses of liberal arts education in art per se. Thus, 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?"[ix]

Notwithstanding the good will of many scientists, it is largely humanists and political philosophers who have inherited the liberal education traditions of practice and defense in today's universities and colleges. A problem exists now: as a defense of liberal education, these political/cultural arguments have not worked and there are signs that their appeal is really flagging. Robert Ferrall, Jr, former President of Beloit College, has extensively documented the actual decline in the demographics and finances of colleges in his book *Liberal Arts at the Brink*. He calls for 'collective action on the part of liberal arts colleges' in order that 'high school seniors [counselors and parents will see] the value of a liberal arts education [because] the entire community, that is, society as a whole, will [have been so] persuaded.' (158-160). This particular paper agrees with that view and argues that a pervasive discussion of liberal arts, beginning in the academy and extending to the public is necessary as part of that much larger effort. While I think there are challenges, the purported crisis in liberal education can be approached in a way not usually developed in current discussions at any length: I mean we could speak of an education in liberal *arts*. In the terms of today's discussions, liberal *arts* education is always secondary, a servant to some other larger concern. Further, as far as I can tell, there has been no discussion of what a renewed interest in the arts might do in universities and colleges when set in the context of other types of institutions which employ the arts. When the

question arises about the articulation and persuasive power of a liberal arts education defense, it seems beneficial to consider similar institutions and their problems and successes with the arts.

I'll continue, then, with why we might want to discuss art, and how I'm using the term. Then, I'll look at a cluster of institutions that employ the arts: these include orchestras, museums, churches, humanistic liberal arts education, and the theatre. We'll examine some of the troubles four of these institutions currently face, and we will see that theatre offers a model of cooperative, public arts which humanistic liberal arts education might consider in addressing its current problems. Finally, I'll develop a possible renewal of the liberal arts which might both address current problems in colleges and help to change public perceptions of liberal arts education. Thereby, we would enrich the ecology of our defense and, I think, make perceptible what it is our students are capable of.

Forty to fifty years ago when one went to college, one chose to get a B.A. or a B.S. Notwithstanding a plethora of alternatives, the same choice is still available and nobody doubts that students graduating, today, with a B.S. possess a science. I've been wondering, what art or arts do those graduating with a B.A. possess?

The question seems relevant, for while undoubtedly exempla of the fine arts are discussed in courses taken by bachelor-of-arts candidates, it is not at all clear that bachelor-of-arts degrees are aimed at exploration of arts. Nor is it clear that traditions of education in the liberal arts, more than two thousand years of development of the trivium, quadrivium and other arts which have staked a claim to liberal arts education, are a component part of a bachelor of arts. Finally, while most bachelor-of-science students would probably self-describe their capacities and courses of instruction in scientific terms, it seems doubtful that those educated in the humanities or, possibly, political philosophy, would self-describe in artistic terms. Maybe the term,

'bachelor-of-arts' should be dropped altogether, but we would simply be further reducing our argumentative ecology by eliminating a widely recognized, if not well understood, distinguishing mark of the education we support.

More probingly, the word, "art," like the word "science," has many associations and, therefore, implies the question, "what is art?" and, thus, the question "what would a 'bachelor-of-arts' indicate?" The range of Aristotle's discussion of art provides, I think, a suitable scope for viewing the problems of humanistic liberal education in this light, because the range of Aristotle's discussions suggests the almost vast territory arts in an education could explore. For Aristotle art means the capacity to make, the activity of making, and the object made that is separated from a maker. Thereby, the generic term, "art," comprehends these three specific, correlative relations. For Aristotle art runs from the intellectual virtue of *techne*, (N.E. VI, iv) which is the etymological root of our modern terms, technique and technology, through formulations of specific arts as capacities or powers (*dynamis*) humans exercise – particularly those concerned with thought, for example, the arts of dialectic and rhetoric (Rhet I, 2 1355b), to the objects of human production (*dynamis:* Poetics 1, 1447a)[x] such as lyrics, comedies, tragedies or epics, instrumental music, choirs, painting, sculpture, architecture, mechanical arts, medicinal treatment, indeed, almost *any* made thing that usually happens and is not spontaneous, a product of chance or of nature (Phys II, 5). Thus, for Aristotle, art is a cause of things coming into being in this world that, otherwise, would not exist without active human agency (N.E., VI, 4). It touches our deepest natures and desires, exercises our minds and passions to a degree of inventiveness that our imaginations struggle to keep up with, incorporates almost anything that the universe has to offer, and results in a changed world that, without art, would be barren or, at best, no more than a garden of Eden. Art partakes of the characteristics of our modern

disciplines; knowledge is an important mark of the arts for Aristotle. Indeed, at points where knowledge of arts converges with experience, Aristotle's view on art begins to approach the modern view of the necessity of knowledge to be empirical. (Meta I i) For Aristotle, the teaching of art, as a sign of the possession of knowledge, refers not only to the ordering of experience but the causes of what exists and how it is produced – again, a position not that distant from modernity. (Meta I i) Aristotle repeatedly identifies arts as origins of invention and as often ties these origins to the development of knowledge as well as the invention of new products and capacities (Soph Encl end, Poetics 4, Meta I i). Indeed, the arts may lay the foundation for the *purely* speculative sciences, not only because some of the arts do not aim at utility, but because even useful arts may involve a component associated with the speculative sciences – contemplation (Rhet, def). Moreover, art, faculties, and thought are all described by Aristotle (MetaphysicsVII, 7) as producers of makings, so that when a faculty or thought itself becomes subject to reflection or theorizing about the causes of thought in respect of specific ends, it is possible to speak of an art which contemplates and artistically produces thought. This is precisely what happens in the definition of rhetoric.[xi] The thoughts reflected on are pistoi, persuasives, and Aristotle writes extensively in the introduction to the treatise that Dialectic and Rhetoric, as arts, are counterparts and share many, not all, of the same concerns with inference, enthymemes and examples in rhetoric, syllogisms and induction in dialectic. The prefatory matter of the Topics is much more restricted, but dialectic concerns the opinions, doxa – of all or the majority or the wise – and it aims at methodical conversations and the examination, reasonings, about the bases of the sciences and problems susceptible of address by opinion. (I. 1, 100a 18-25). So, particularly in their critical and poetic functions, the arts frequently stand outside the normative conventions of disciplinary thought while retaining an artistic character

(Parts of Animals I, 1, 639 and Poetics 25 1460a14-1461a8). The combination of criticism, poetic production, and technological development wrought by art means that art, in Aristotle, is foundational to invention and freedom; we make, for ourselves, the possibilities that we experience. Thus, artistic invention and freedom pervasively influence institutions: Aristotle's thinking on art is adept enough to conduct something like thought experiments about institutions, not only about liberal arts education, but about public debate and critical evaluation of the arts and sciences, as well as the audience for them. All of these artistic concerns deeply affect humanistic liberal education for they situate in a *paideia* the four concerns of the humanities: transmission, interpretation, judgment, and invention, and they suggest, thus, what might lie behind a 'bachelor-of-arts' degree.

While it would be a mistake, I think, for a bachelor-of-arts degree to be subsumed under or defined by any one particular artistic concern, so that it became simply another disciplinary endeavor, it is not a mistake to see whether particular arts in an institutional context might suggest some help for liberal education. Not only liberal education, but many other older cultural institutions are facing uncertain, perhaps disoriented, futures, as newer technologies and fashionable art forms seem to be supplanting them. *The New Republic* has noted unsuccessful attempts by orchestras, seeking to maintain support, to substitute social outreach programs, audience participation, and adoptions of more popular music forms in place of the studied appreciation of the classical repertory, an appreciation acquired more or less over a lifetime. *The New York Times* recently noted the decline of space allotted to contemplation within museums in favor of installations offering "experience."[xii] Establishment and fundamentalist churches, a third great cultural institution, have suffered increasing disaffections of attendance regardless of denomination.[xiii] Humanistic, liberal arts university and college programs, since the recession,

are widely reported to be suffering cutbacks, much lower student application and humanities major rates, as well as loss of financial private giving.[xiv] In other words, a cluster of some of our most important cultural institutions appear unmoored from their traditional grounds of acceptance and support. The one exception is the theatre. To cut a long story short, on the whole its audiences are not disaffected, its non-profit theatres recovered well and quickly from the recession, its audience attendance is much better than comparative trends in cinema, it is filled with authors that might be considered 'disorienting,' but the theatre knows and goes about a relatively successful business. Why is that and what lessons are there for the humanities and liberal arts?

Granted that the theatre has experimented broadly with "happenings" and "audience experiences" for the last forty to fifty years, still its mainstay – one that draws audiences – remains "classic works" or works that, at least, seem aware of the potentials of the dramatic and theatrical inheritance. The theatre is simply filled with people who are immersed in these two complementary traditions. Also, theatre people know that they are "live." In Hume's terms, they are vivacious. The audience, because it is assembled, is live; the actors have voices and gestures whose timbre and sweep are, by and large, authentic and inescapable. The theatre can assemble its considerable range of artists, its stage, with its focus of audience attention, and its vivid here and now-ness to achieve – what? It is, of course, true to think that theatre is entertainment. But to "entertain" is to consider and, potentially, when you go to a theatre, you could be asked to use your heart and mind for a wide range of forms stretching over the spectacle of props and choreography, the music of an orchestra to the whistle of a lonely character exiting the stage, the language of the streets or Shakespeare, arguments ranging from physics and philosophy to persuasions of a lover, human character choices and suffering that make a difference to how we

feel about those characters, and conceptual or actional frameworks where we have a mini-system, mini-world or mini-verse before us.

Theatre people seem, by and large, not to conceive of accessibility to this range as a dumbing down or as too plebian to warrant attention. The problem is not Shakespeare's because he was great in his Elizabethan vocabulary and iambs or complex in his plots, nor the audience's because it simply isn't expert enough or intellectually rigorous enough to appreciate technical nuance, but the production company's – how will they make the language convey what Shakespeare was using it for? Presentation in the theatre isn't a matter of democracy – it is a matter of availability. Presentation is a matter of welcoming in a controlled, focused manner so that those who are drawn to theatre (or any other art form) are helped to partake of what it has to offer. Availability, then, is the use of the theatrical arts to make intelligible the dramas presented.

There's an attractive orientation, here, that perhaps churches, museums, orchestras and the humanities could all take a lesson from, and the orientation's attractiveness rests in a*rt.* Art and artistic structure is the phenomenon that is shared by museums, orchestras, to some degree churches, and certainly the humanities. We recognize this phenomenon in two different ways: obviously, so-called fine arts products and activities are central, but equally important and just as nuanced are the argumentative and symbolic arts, exemplified by the liberal arts, that are used to apprehend and appreciate the fine arts. For the humanities, whatever completion the historical draw of politics and culture (as a substitute for politics) may offer, the fact is that art is quintessential, since the humanities would cease to exist and would have no history whatsoever if art did not exist.

And the same is true of liberal education. Humanities departments and, through them, colleges are far more aligned to theatre, museums, and orchestras than they are to the physical or social science departments or research facilities. The recent, much discussed, Harvard white paper on the humanities wants the history of the humanities to begin, more or less, with the rise of universities, which, in turn, become the home of scientific and humanistic disciplines after the Enlightenment. But, before the rise of universities and, then, a humanism separated from the sciences, the arts and humanities were intertwined by the liberal arts of the Greco-Roman and, to a more limited extent, the early Christian and Middle-Ages worlds. Foundational to humanistic study is not discrete disciplinarity, but artistic capacity, scope, and performance. Put differently, liberal education without art is simply not liberal education, for, without it, liberal education's "freedom" has little room for invention, its examinations of disciplines will be confined to stock rehearsals of accepted postulates, and, as it has, it will lose a position, largely aesthetic, from which to criticize current political debate of any stripe. In recognizing the centrality of arts, for the humanities what is at stake is what constitutes the fields of the humanities; for liberal education the claim that colleges offer a liberal *arts* education is at stake.

The vivacity of the theatre can be captured in the humanistic classroom, but not through technological gee-whiz nor some sort of 'theatrical' staging effects. Nor is it likely to be captured in lectures. Notwithstanding the times all academics have marveled in remembering the lecture a professor gave, lectures are not "made to be performed" in the way dramas are. Put differently, if a professor cannot figure out how to "perform" an idea, then she or he will have to resort to other means. The seeming absence of performance instruction has important implications for focusing the thought of humanities students through pedagogy. The arts of grammar, rhetoric and logic, dialectic, interrogation and conversation, arts of interpretation, of

meaning, and of a specific artistic appreciation (e.g. knowing scales in music, perspective in the visual arts, prosody in literature, specific differentiated forms of imitative and inquiry literatures) take on enormous importance. Such arts suggest a partnership of artists in the classroom, not unlike that of playwright and performers in the theatre. Not only must the professors generally employ these arts in the (relative) absence of stage props, choreography, performed musical scores, oral interpretation, and, especially, acting, but the students themselves will have to learn to employ them because there is little or no staging that they can rely on.

Some canaries in the cage of higher education are chirping loudly that no arts like these are any longer being learned on today's campuses. Verlyn Klinkeborg, member of the editorial board of the New York Times, has taught at many top flight colleges and universities. In an essay on the "Decline and Fall of the English Major," he notes that the "kind of writing – clear, direct, humane – and the reading on which it is based are the very root of the humanities," but that students, today, cannot produce clear writing. He adds, brutally, "the humanities do a bad job of teaching the humanities" largely because "writing well used to be a fundamental principle of the humanities…" [my emphasis] Of course, the problems of the humanities are more general than problems of the English major. And here is where the shoe really begins to pinch. Arum and Roksa's *Academically Adrift* found in national samplings that "three semesters of college education … have a barely noticeable impact on students' skills in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing."[xv] Controlling for socio-economic background doesn't improve the picture. Worse, Blaich and Pascarella found in a national study of 11 liberal arts colleges and 6 universities where the kind of practices that tend to be recommended to improve scores are employed – e.g., discussion groups, peer groups, working across disciplines, imagining an argument from someone else's point of view – the capacities of students for moral reasoning and

critical thinking on average "increased only a small amount" over four years.[xvi] Positive attitude toward literacy declined in 53% of all students, two-thirds of students during four years reported declines in academic motivation, and interest in "contribut[ing]" to both the arts and sciences declined for twice as many students as those that experienced growth in interest. One might think that college can only affect such measures marginally, but, no, it turns out that practically the same measures indicated large advances by undergraduate students in the 1980s. As Arum and Roksa put it, "low gains…are…not simply an artifact of our measurement strategy, but a disconcerting reality." (37)

Let's be clear. The data doesn't say that no students improve significantly in moral and critical reasoning or writing ability. Some do, but not nearly enough. Upon graduation, apparently few students want to make contributions to the arts and sciences, but some do. Some are still academically motivated. Still, the data does say that by our own lights there is both a problem and an opportunity for the humanities and liberal arts education. Arum and Roksa make it very clear that, generally, time on the task of studying, and specifically far more reading and writing than is the usual practice in our colleges and universities, improves student learning (131 and 132).

So what might students take time to read or artfully produce? As Executive Director of ACTC, I am a strong proponent of using classical works, but I have come to believe, especially with regard to questions of students working across disciplines or inventing arguments, that a more capacious view of what counts in classical works would reward our students. After reviewing more than 50 general education programs, including many core text, great books programs, and after having approved over 2000 paper proposals for our ACTC conferences over 20 years, I find it disturbing that philosophical or theoretical -- in the Greek sense -- discussions

of art and appreciation of some of the technical development entailed have virtually disappeared from coherent general education curricula and discussions at ACTC. There is the Platonic exception, but works of Aristotle, Isocrates, Cicero, Augustine, Priscian, or, moving forward, Bruni, Petrarch, or Erasmus, on grammar, rhetoric and logic are largely absent from core text, general liberal education programs. Nor is it better when we get to the moderns: no Saussure, Burke, Austin, Smullyan, and so forth. Sure, there are courses with these texts and authors, and there are professors who teach these arts in isolated courses, but we don't teach *across the curriculum these liberal arts texts* that contain the questions and techniques that would make the liberal arts truly available to all.

Great or Big Questions may be asked in general education programs, but I can assure you that "What is Art?" is rarely among these in any systematic way.[xvii] Since we offer bachelor-of-arts degrees, the chance meeting of this question seems particularly disturbing because it comprehends other fascinating questions that the liberal arts raise and that scholarship has pointed out. Questions of perception, aesthetics, imitation, elements of speech, separations and relations of language to the physical, psychological and conventional worlds, available modes of interpretation, the relations of the origin of language to the divine and civilizational origins of our humanity, not to mention questions of equity, justice, the nature of truth and the determination or freedom of thought are not only pointed out by scholars, but directly observable in such liberal arts texts by our undergraduate students.[xviii] Indeed, taken very seriously, the liberal arts question, "what is art," will lead to examinations and reformulations of whole disciplines, as Henry Adams illustrated in *The Education of Henry Adams.*[xix] But we don't teach *across the curriculum* the liberal arts texts that I indicated that contain the questions and techniques that would make the liberal arts truly available to all.[xx] Again, I repeat, in isolated

courses all of the arts, questions, and texts can be found. In some isolated institutions, the bachelor-of-arts degree is more artistic. But, comprehensively, in the current structural situation of the university and collegiate education, the humanities are probably our chief source of hope for an education in the arts which reaches all students systematically. The question is whether a humanistic liberal *arts* education is desirable.

I think it is. Teaching distinguishable liberal arts are to the vivacity of human achievements as the arts of the stage are to the liveliness and intelligibility of drama. That is, what arts are used and the proportions of their use, the recognition that *art* in its largest sense is the object of study, is central to focusing the mind of students in the humanities. Conversely, the proper production by students from the humanistic point of view is conversation with fellow students and teachers, the essay, formal speeches and debates, video, audio, and web productions, musical performance, stage performance, oral interpretations, original translations, poems, stories, and conversational defenses or explanations of one's work. And these artful productions suggest that the term "undergraduate research" does not necessarily point to, inculcate, require or comprehend the pedagogy or use of any of these other arts.

At stake in the classroom interaction between books, essays, works of fine arts and the corresponding liberal arts students employ is the realization of the possibilities, the intellectual freedom, which humans make for themselves, not only in the past but for a future. That is, we can no more know the truth about human existence or beyond without examining the possibilities found in products and performances of art, than we can know the possibilities of human existence or beyond simply by possessing the truth. We must work out both and get better or worse in doing so.

The argument above seems to preclude the scholarly nature of book and article publishing in the humanities – the artifact of research that many humanists hold most dear. But not really. Literate audiences were small in ancient times. As literacy has spread, generally, products of art such as play scripts, and their cinematic versions, became widely distributed – think of the motivation for the publication of Shakespeare's folio -- whereas humanistic publication has shrunk and sunk into academic libraries and tiny, specialized audiences. This is a mistake we are paying for. We need, instead, a vigorous public scholarship.

If time permitted, I would elaborate three examples of public scholarship. Here, I'll simply allude to the specifics they offer. They involve transmission, interpretation, criticism, and invention – four functions basic to liberal arts efforts to inculcate freedom. Their order marks increasingly wider freedom in liberal education.

Our first example is a recent article in the *New Republic* by Helen Vendler. [xxi] She argues that the recent digitalization of Emily Dickenson manuscripts has revealed that "perhaps, for Dickinson, the principal unit of thought in poetic composition was sometimes not the stanza, not even the line, but the individual word." Her liberal-arted, scholarly defense of Dickenson's poetry within the traditions of grammar has real consequences, because she raises for our students the pedagogical question, "can you think of a better word, here?" She makes clear the intellectual, emotive and formal advantages of such an education in artistic making, but we can add that such repeated exercises would move in the direction of building precision in vocabulary and perception, as well as a sense of reasoned choice, while appreciatively reading a great core text author. That's a lot of bang for your buck.

The second example belongs to Roland Barthes. He originally published "The World of Wrestling" in 1957 in *Espirit*, a literary magazine founded in the 30's.[xxii] In "Wrestling" Barthes

invokes a knowledge of Greek philosophy and drama, as well as French classical theatre. Still, this comic, ironic essay is intelligible to any student, now, because the modern, media-promoted versions of American wrestling have enough in common with the French wrestling hall of 1957 to allow for understanding that, ultimately, reaches back to earlier art forms. Barthes' careful extraction of devices of meaning via the staging of matches -- devices such as the utterly catastrophic "forearm smash" against the chest of the opponent – indicates how the audience is led to experience a match, a "spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice," as a "Natur[al]…understanding of things," rather than the constructed understanding it is. Given sufficient examples in a curriculum of liberal arts texts, students would see that mark of humanistic liberal arts – recurrent use – and, thereby a range of intellectual choices open to them. For the analytic construction and deconstruction of art by critics of the 20th Century recovered that movement of Greek arts between the development of a poetics of whole works and the rhetorical handbooks of separable topics, extracted from works, designed to lead to future compositions.

Finally, J. L. Austin delivered, at university and on BBC radio, lectures which became the work, *How To Do Things with Words.* Born out of philosophical work with descriptive sentences which could be subjected to scrutiny on questions of truth or falsity as logical statements (1-2), Austin's concern is to distinguish and elaborate a class of utterances which are performative, not descriptive,[xxiii] where we can say accurately and truthfully that someone is "doing...an action" (5-7, 13). I will not state the analysis of his six conditions for recognizing performative statements that leads me to the conclusion that in his own terms to perform a play, to read a poem or any literate text is "doing an action." [xxiv] But I would point out that play scripts are instructions for performance to a director, actor, and the entire company – and if those

artists don't act as fully as they can with their own arts, you know that production has failed. In this sense, Austin's work is germane to knowing, perhaps even assessing, when we are acting in a liberal-arted fashion, for the theatrical point is generalizable to all works of art: each of them are potentially instructions on how to read a work, but only the unusually gifted are likely to read a work well without actualizing liberal arts to guide them, any more than one is likely to sing or speak well on stage without having had phonetic and interpretive voice training. That is, in choosing to examine and use, or not use, the liberal arts, we choose performatively to read a work well, artfully, habitually, spontaneously, or badly.

If our students do well, artfully, what then would persons who hold a bachelor-of-arts look like – independently from a major? First, they would have the character of an artist, a free, liberal one at that. They would think about art and be able to demonstrate such thought by exercising a capacity for generating works of the intellect and imagination, ranging between truth and possibility, which captured their own and others' souls. They would know how to listen, look and read with an attention and respect for the work and voices of others. They would properly believe, because the belief belonged to their experience, that contributing to and making artistic productions would involve cooperation, planning, foresight, reasoned choice, and their own plain, disciplined hard work with others. They would have at their command a ready technology of production, appeals, reasoning and expression which could be put at the service of themselves, their families, corporations, non-profits and associations, governments, and international organizations, and they would also possess a technology of the mind which they could summon to think about ideas and ideals, now and in the future. They would have the experience of their own immediate culture and the reasoned possession of traditions of the West and other major cultures over a range of disciplines and formed works, and their experience and

possession of tradition would be a resource for them to draw upon in almost any contingency. They would have ways to analyze, translate, communicate, analogize, question, and invent experience for themselves and others. They would be able to examine science, art, politics, business and economic affairs, religion, culture, communities, neighborhoods, families and friends with an eye to human passions and the confidence, charity, faith and hope that belongs to those who hold the future. They would be able to discriminate when to make, to act, and to contemplate, and when each was best and when it was not. Finally, they would know how to look out upon the achievements of humanity to discover, with wonder and appreciation, not only how to bring their vision of a liberal arts education to a wider public, but what a precious thing our humanity is. No one discipline can build either such a character or offer such a degree, but a humanistic liberal arts education can.[xxv]

The humanities have one primary job: to make available, by focusing the mind of students in and out of the university, works of art and intellect that a crafted, intellectual heritage of the West and other traditions of the world have transmitted. The liberal arts are the most substantive way by which to make these inheritances available for inquiry and examination. Philosophy, Religion, Politics, Economics, Culture, Science and everything else follows, sometimes simultaneously, *after* that. A core text core which includes examination of the liberal arts as such does all this. If the humanities really pay attention to art, then they will look to the artistic reasons why theatre is not failing in a world where cultural institutions seem on the verge of crumbling. If they do, not only the humanities, but liberal arts education will be better off.

[i] Versions of this paper have been delivered at the Transylvania Seminar (summer 2015) and at St. John's College, Santa Fe, as part of its conference on What Are the Liberal Arts For? (fall 2015). This version incorporates, here, a modified version of the opening paragraphs of "Enriching Liberal Education's Defense in Universities and Colleges: Liberal Arts, Innovation, and *Technē*," appearing in *St. John's Review*, fall 2015.

[ii] 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.)

Reinhard Hütter, sharing many of Deneen's concerns with technological (Baconian) transformations, argues for Newman's understanding of enlargement of the mind by liberal education as an end for its own sake. The modern state has provided pseudo-ends for the university and defenses of it share the common conviction that management of the scientific enterprise toward 'progress' will solve political/cultural problems; the current university is that organ for management (1019). Liberal education, based on a search for ultimate truths, is set in opposition to a *"techne"* knowledge gained in the late modern university…" (1022). Two arguments demand reformulation via a theological search for the truth: (1) almost all of the research functions of this *techne* could be relocated to other institutional organs (businesses, medical labs, and military-industrial complexes; 1022) and (2) even if the machinery keeps going it threatens to subject to production the nature of humans and, possibly, the existence of the whole human species (1040). Liberal education provides, at least, a check, "a critical examination of its own operative beliefs and a vision of the whole." "University Education, the Unity of Knowledge—and (Natural) Theology: John Henry Newman's Provocative Vision," in *Nova et Vetera* 11, 4, 2014.

[iii] *Not for Profit*, 133.

[iv] Op cit. (95). Apparently, literature does not rise to "breakthroughs."

[v] 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.

For Hütter the humanities provides no hope since there are unbridgeable epistemic disagreements within the humanities that would forestall a move toward a unified curriculum, and with their reliance on promoting the imagination, in preference to the abstraction by the intellect, were the cultivation of the imagination to form a unified end, this would be necessary but insufficient for a full operation of the intellect. It is here that Hütter comes closest to discussing the arts in so far as these are material aids to asking "life questions." But the consequence of such questioning is a pluralism of views with no way to reconcile them (1050-1051). A conflicted, not unified, self is all that is produced.

[vi] Huetter's program is based on an epistemic 'enlargement of the mind' as prescribed by Newman.

[vii] Op. cit. 109.

[viii] Delbanco, in a discussion that contrasts the sciences to the humanities, lands upon the mimicry that the humanities have had of the sciences for over 200 years in formulating the fields (e.g., 'scientific linguistics' or 'searching for historical laws') and, more recently, in adopting computerized 'distant reading programs' that, as research, have little to do with reasons undergraduates attend colleges. Most interesting, here, is that Delbanco offers no humanistic liberal education technē, that is techniques, as a part of the contrast. Instead, 'preserving truth,' denying 'the very idea of truth,' or answering the questions "how to shape a life or how to face death" are the contrasted to technology. If there is any elaboration of a humanistic technē or art, here, it is an attempt 'to

state the value of such an education' in its component abilities to 'contract space and time' or to 'speak to us in a subversive whisper that makes us wonder whether the idea of progress might be a sham." (93-101).

[ix] Hütter, it should be acknowledged, seems to have an end in view for the university which is derived, in part, from its historical and functional search for truth. But this is still a 'practical' argument because (a) he wants to reform an institution and (b) he grounds his justifications (in part) on the threat that technology provides. It is the latter which provide urgency for the former, even if his solution is or appears to be epistemic or theological.

[x] An important set of terms and argument connects *technē* to the equally important and differential term, *mimesis*, and thus power and poetics. "… a bed or a coat and anything else of that sort, *qua* receiving these designations – i.e. in so far as they are products of art – have no innate impulse to change" (Phys. II 1, 192b 18) And, "Where a series has a completion, all the preceding steps are for the sake of that…and generally art partly completes what nature cannot bring to a finish, and partly imitates her" (8, 199a 15). Imitation differentiates the arts, particularly as products, but so do the steps, incorporating means, materials and manner of use, anyone one of which might be natural, completing the products which don't exist in nature as a result of these processes. This implies spectra of arts and imitation. The scope of imitation is confined to the arts in Aristotle (unlike Plato) (see R. P. McKeon, "The Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," in R.S. Crane, Critics and Criticism, U. Chicago Press, 1952. The article, in respect of Aristotle, has long informed this writer's thinking, but its purpose was, perhaps, informed by a concern, at the time, to differentiate the modern study of literature (and art) from historical and concurrent studies in terms of ethics, religion, civilizations. Following Aristotle, questions of particular form(s) and matter(s) become important within this section of McKeon's article. The net effect of the section on Aristotle is to differentiate him from Plato by showing two things: how relatively restricted the concept of imitation was (essentially to things made by humans) and how Aristotelian distinctions in the arts actually made considerations of the arts, qua arts, as something that Plato could not do. Changes in critical and cultural fashion have turned the appreciative situation on its head; now, in order not to reduce art (and liberal arts education) to some other more important function, it becomes desirable to think of the *range and scope* of Aristotelian arts and artistic terms as a way to expand what liberal arts education can do and can articulate.

[xi] This contemplation of thought in the Rhetoric seems to partake of the wider possibilities of the soul reflecting on its own thought that appears in the De Anima: III, 4 of his *De Anima* (430a2–9): "Thought is itself thinkable in exactly the same way as its objects are. For in the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical; for speculative knowledge and its object are identical." Cited in "University Education, the Unity of Knowledge—and (Natural) Theology: John Henry Newman's Provocative Vision" by REINHARD HÜTTER. In Nova et Vetera, 11, 4, 2013; 1050.

[xii] Judith H. Dobrznski, "High Culture Goes Hands-On," New York Times, August 10, 2013. This particular article included the 'installation' of a slide between floors of a museum. Obviously, some installations, whether contemplative or not, are serious works of art. See for example, Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness.* Philip Kennicott, "America's Orchestras are in Crisis: How an effort to popularize classical music threatens to undermine what makes orchestras great." New Republic, August 25, 2013. The latter position was rebutted in an August 30th reply by Jesse Rosen, but for purposes of this article, what mattered was the apparent agreement by these two authors that artistic works were central to recovery. Roxanna Popescu, "Letter from San Diego: Endangered Opera." *Paris Review,* May 12, 2014. This article laments the closing of opera – that hybrid of theatre and orchestras – in San Diego, and Orange County, Baltimore, Cleveland and New York City and makes some of the linkages between the failure of the arts and the failure of the humanities made in this paper.

[xiii] Laurie Goldstein, "Francis Has Changed American Catholic's Attitudes, but Not Their Behavior, a Poll Finds." NYTimes, 12/15/2012. "The poll showed that church attendance had not shifted in the past year, with 40 percent saying they had attended Mass at least weekly"; Ross Douthat, "Can Liberal Christianity Be Saved?" NYTimes, 7/14/2012. "Yet instead of attracting a younger more open-minded demographic..., the Episcopal Church's dying has proceeded apace… In the last decade, average Sunday attendance dropped 23 percent, and not a single Episcopal diocese in the country saw a churchgoing increase"; http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ASA_by_ProvinceDiocese2000-2010.pdf; John S. Dickerson, "The Decline of Evangelical America." NYTimes, 12/15/2012, "In 2011 the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life polled church leaders from around the world. Evangelical ministers from the United States reported a greater loss of influence than church leaders from any other country… Studies from established evangelical polling organizations – LifeWay Research,… and the Barna Group – have found that a majority of young people raised as evangelicals are quitting the church, and often the faith, entirely." Self-reported attendance probably masks further disaffection: Michael Paulson, "Americans Claim to Attend Church Much More Than They Do." NYTimes, 3/6/2014. Different polling methods, designed to detect 'social desirability bias,' suggest that as much as 43 percent of people "acknowledged rare attendance" at church, a higher percentage than is usually suggested by customary self-reporting methods.

[xiv] Reported drops in humanities majors (see the Harvard report, below) at prominent universities, cut backs of programs at public universities, steep declines in giving to baccalaureate private institutions, and long-term declines in the number of private liberal arts colleges (see Kimball, below), have produced a question about the health of humanistic liberal arts education in the last three to four years. What might be at stake in questioning that health is the subject of this paper. Jinjoo Lee, "Concerns About Job Market Lead Students to STEM Majors," The Cornell Daily Sun, 2/25/2014, reports that in 2011 "the percentage of students with a humanities major" dropped 10% and has only recovered 1% point since then. Gordon Hutner and Feisal G. Mohamed, "The Real Humanities Crisis Is Happening at Public Universities." The New Republic, 9/6/2013. This article analyzes the new models of education, whether found in universities or in the federal government, that work against sustaining the humanities: "Under this new business model, humanities programs suffer in general and small departments, like classics and philosophy, find themselves perpetually under threat, no matter what their historical significance to higher learning." Daniel de Vise, Washing Post, 5/ 13/2011, "At St. John's, a Defender of the Liberal Arts." Though St. John's later successfully reversed its application totals, the economic crises saw a decline in applications "from 460 in 2008 to 357 in 2010." Scott Jaschik, "Contributions to Colleges Drop 12%." Inside Higher Ed, 2/3/2010. Declines in giving to private colleges were the most severe, except for community colleges (which derive a much higher percentage of their income from governments). "John Lippincott, president of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, said he wasn't surprised that the numbers were down, but that the depth of the decline was a surprise. 'We're in unprecedented territory,' he said, both because of the severity of the economic difficulties and the volatility of campus conditions."

[xv] Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses.* University of Chicago Press, 2011, 35.

[xvi] Charles Blaich and Ernest Pascarella. http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/storage/4-year-change-summary-website.pdf, p. 3. These are 2006 results but the authors seem to find a continuum between Arum and Roska's 2011 work and their original study.

[xvii] We are dealing in generalities. Yale's Directed Studies program has an explicit (fine) arts program; Concordia University—Irvine's new core program does raise the question with students, "What is art?"

[xviii] E.g., Richard P. McKeon, "Criticism and the Liberal Arts: The Chicago School of Criticism," *Profession,* 1982, 1-17. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 1983. Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition*: *Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and Its Humanist Reception.* 1997.

[xix] On Adams: see particularly the chapters of the book which begin after 1890. It is important to note that a disguised comic reversal in Adams' intellectual interest appears earlier in the book, when he discusses his work for his father in England during the Civil War. The period was one of great tension and it appeared as if Great Britain would side with the South. Adams discovers the real motives of the government in publications around 1890, and this changes his view of what history is. His first step (after the reversal) is to begin to consider the new technologies of science in relation to the figure of the Virgin Mary in the 12th Century. In a real liberal arts "move," he begins to think of her as a symbol drawing human "energy" toward her. The story of his own development, then, becomes the culmination of his "Education," a liberal arts reconsideration of history.

[xx] Thus, most of the texts mentioned above are great, or at least, important; their conceptions and operations of art are essential to any understanding of the works, including those of science, that are read in liberal arts education or, frankly, an understanding of the way the world really operates. Yet, the smaller the liberal arts, core text program, the more direct discussion of liberal arts and their formulations are forced out, and the curricular situation resembles that described by Aristotle at the end of *On Sophistical Refutations*: "For the training given by paid professors…was like the treatment of the matter by Gorgias. For they used to hand out speeches to be learned by heart…supposing that [the] arguments on either side generally fell among them." Thus, fine art works, in liberal arts programs, become not examples of art, but vehicles to questions and issues while it is supposed that students learn to read and write in this way.

There is a quasi-exception to the statement above excluding teaching of liberal arts to all students. Concordia University—Irvine has a Core Philosophy I course in which "elementary statement logic" is taught. Unpublished manuscript, "The Core Logic Unit: An Imaginative Approach to Reasoning," Susan Buchanan. ACTC 20th Annual Conference, April 11, 2014.

[xxi] Helen Vendler, "Vision and Revision: How Emily Dickinson Actually Wrote Her Poems." New Republic, March 24, 2014, p. 48. For a skeptical view on the value of the digital collection, see Angie Mlinko, "Infamy or Urn?" The Nation, Jan. 27, 2014, 31-32.

[xxii] Collected into his 1957 publication, *Mythologies*.

[xxiii] Or, better, "constative."

[xxiv] (a) use of conventional procedures; (b) appropriate of persons and circumstances for invoking the procedure; (c and d) correct and complete execution of the procedure; (e) the corresponding feelings and thoughts that the convention invokes, intentionally used in the conduct indicated by the utterance; and (f) the appropriate conduct.

[xxv] The arts have a history of being woven into the fabric of education for over 2000 years, in both the West and the East. One of the marks of arts, particularly one that came to be seen as one of the liberal arts, rhetoric, for both Plato and Aristotle was that it should be able to give an account of itself, to offer systematic reasons for its operations, both how and why they work. (Gorgias, 465d, 504d, Rhetoric 1. I, 1354. 10). An added, serious account of a liberal arts education, as an arts education rather

than a political or quasi-spiritual education, would enrich our own accounts to ourselves and to the outside world of what it is we know, do and make.