Liberal Education and the Ideal of the Educated Person

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The aim in this paper is to examine the relationship between the idea of a liberal education and the ideal of the educated person. The main focus will be upon the debate among major contributors to the discussion of this relationship within the context of schooling during the past half century or so and the directions it suggests for the future.

While recognizing that there are many intermediate points between two extremes, for the purpose of this paper I shall adopt a distinction made by John Dewey (Dewey, 1963) in identifying two main sets of rivals. The one I shall label ‘traditional’ and the other ‘progressive.’ Those who may be counted in the traditional camp include Philip H. Phenix, Harry S. Broudy, Paul Hirst, R. S. Peters, and Mortimer Adler. Those counted among the progressives are Richard Pring, Jane Roland Martin, Ira Shor, John White, and Carl Bereiter. The main feature distinguishing between these two camps is the emphasis among traditionalists upon the nature and structure of knowledge in determining the content of the curriculum and the emphasis by progressives on valuing student experience and practical forms of knowledge in doing so. It is an interesting question, of course, how Tim Reagan would characterize the position he adopts in his paper today and elsewhere (such as Reagan, 2004 and Reagan, 2009b) in relation to this continuum. Would the educational outcomes or benefits of second language acquisition be viewed as a form of knowledge as Hirst defined it, as a case of practical knowledge
and skill, an interpretive skill, or as yet another form of experience or ‘core area of knowledge’ as Tim puts it?

I shall argue that one way of adjudicating the debate between the two main opposing views I identified is to examine what it is we understand by an educated person. If this is defined with reference to largely academic accomplishments the answer is likely to be quite different from a view of the educated person as one of many-sided accomplishments, including the abilities to engage in fruitful action and show care, concern, and connection to others. I shall also suggest that the latter view is the more worthwhile.

The Traditional Idea of a Liberal Education

Historically, liberal education has been characterized by its selective focus upon the word, that is to say, the study of great works that we have come to know as the classics (Reagan, 2003; Reagan, 2009a). Whatever the exact origins, one may reasonably look to ancient Athens and specifically to Plato’s inclusion of philosophical discussion, mathematics, and science in the plan of education he prescribed for the philosopher king as an early point of departure for liberal education. For his part, Aristotle used the term ‘liberal’ to refer to the knowledge one seeks out of mere curiosity or for enjoyment, and he characterized knowledge that was sought for some purpose beyond itself as mechanical or useful (1903, 108). This made way for a distinction between liberal knowledge or liberal education intended to promote one’s potential to know and to enjoy knowledge, and professional or practical education intended to offer knowledge and skills needed in professional areas such as the practice of law, in a range of vocational and
technical occupations, and in service to others. With the arts and the humanities bearing the burden of liberal education throughout much of history, this is a distinction that exists right up to the present day. In his time, Newman drew on the distinction in advocating a liberal education modeled on the more traditional Oxford approach while the University of London reflected the appeal of specialized and practical knowledge resulting from the impact of the industrial revolution and the rise of science in the nineteenth century. The same distinction is drawn in the report of the faculty of Harvard University, *General Education in a Free Society*, accepting as it does traditional principles of liberal education, and in *The Paideia Proposal* by Mortimer Adler. In both documents, liberal education is distinguished from specialized education and a core of general knowledge and basic intellectual skills which is to be acquired by all is laid out. Largely excluding practical knowledge and skills, the core included the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences, and the requisite intellectual skills included effective thinking, communication skills, making relevant judgments, and discriminating among values (Harvard University, 1945; Adler, 1982).

Odd as it might appear given the technological challenge that was faced, the push for excellence and curriculum renewal in the United States in the late 1950s and 1960s following the launching of the Soviet satellite, Sputnik, in October of 1957, opened the way for the philosophical discussion that quietly accepted the distinction and the separation of the liberal from the practical until well into the second half of the twentieth century. The continuing acceptance of the historical tradition of a liberal education manifested so persuasively in Newman was reflected in *Realms of Meaning* by Philip H. Phenix and *Democracacy and Excellence in American Secondary Education* by Harry S.
Broudy, B. O. Smith, and Joe R. Burnett. But it was the work of an Englishman, Hirst (1974), that attracted the greatest attention as he made the case for his celebrated and highly rationalist forms of knowledge theory of a liberal education.

Playing counter point to the writings of Adler and Hirst and twentieth century curriculum theorizing in general was the work of Richard Pring in England and the innovative and feminist inspired writings of Jane Roland Martin in the United States. Martin’s work marked a huge point of departure in viewing the relationship between the liberal and the practical. For her, education for action and for caring was to become a central feature of a reconceptualization of liberal education itself. Taken together, the writings of Hirst and Adler represent well forces of tradition in the debate on liberal education in the late twentieth century; those of Martin, Pring, and White, among others, represent a departure or at least a modification of it. It is a modification that bears closer scrutiny.

A Twentieth Century Challenge to the Traditional Idea

To fully grasp the significance of Martin’s challenge to the traditional idea and her justification for education for action in liberal education, including the arts and humanities, it is necessary to identify the key elements in Hirst’s theory that became the focus for her critique. In expressing his position, Hirst made a number of alterations to earlier views that shaped the humanistic tradition in education. Yet up until his retraction of his original theory in 1993 (Hirst, 1993) it is he who remained most steadfast to the exclusive ideals of cultivation of the intellect, promotion of broad knowledge and understanding, and development of intellectual skills. This said, even in his original
theory Hirst departed from the realism of Aristotle and the claim that knowledge is a correct or true account of reality. This view had long been relied upon as a metaphysical support for theories of liberal education. In a more postmodernist stance, Hirst presented the view that human beings have created seven different forms of knowledge in order to understand their world. Originally these were identified as follows: mathematics, physical sciences, human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, and philosophy (1974, 46). Even if the account presented in the various forms is not a true account, it can be referred to so as to sustain an objectively grounded public discourse and publicly verifiable methods of investigation and proof for the knowledge claims that are made, he argued. Over and above their being an objective and verifiable basis for public discourse about reality, the forms of knowledge represent how the human mind thinks and they enable the young to be initiated into such thinking and to worthwhile knowledge.

Being both a trenchant critic of the traditional idea as expressed by Hirst, for example, and a radical reformer of it who may well have been instrumental in Hirst’s change of position, (Mulcahy, 2003) Martin is of particular interest among writers on liberal education. A critic of the over emphasis on exclusively academic education in both schools and colleges, as a counterbalance to this emphasis in Coming of Age in Academe (2000) and elsewhere, she pointed to other kinds of subject matter to deal with omissions and objectionable commissions of the academic tradition. She also argued in her critique of Hirst’s theory that a failure to attend adequately to goals and purposes while assuming that academic knowledge is the mainstay of the curriculum was a serious deficiency (Martin, 1994, 170-186). So too was its neglect of the experience of women,
as is brought out clearly in Martin’s critique of R. S. Peters ideal of ‘the educated man.’ (Martin, 1994, 70-87).\(^1\)

In her critique of Hirst, Martin leveled three main charges against his theory: a) it was guilty of the epistemological fallacy, i.e., of putting curriculum content before educational goals; b) it created ivory tower people, i.e., people who knew but could not act, do, or make anything; and c) it created untenable dualisms by separating mind from body, thought from action, and reason from feelings, leading to the creation of uncaring and apathetic human beings. She then proposed the outlines of a way forward upon which she later builds (Martin, 1994, 181):

Begin with a conception of liberal education as the development of a person, add to it an analysis of the concept of a person in which mind and body are inseparable, mix in the value judgment that the purpose of a liberal education ought to be to develop us as persons and not simply as minds. Guidelines for a liberal education that drives no wedge between thought and action, between reason and emotion begin to emerge.

Building on the outline presented here in her later works (Martin, 2002; Martin, 1992; Martin, 1999), Martin emphasized education that would prepare both men and women in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential to a caring society, what she summarily referred to as the 3Cs of care, concern, and connection.\(^2\) As did Paulo Freire (1970) before her, she also emphasized education for action and not mere observation. In doing so, like Freire, Martin sees beyond the present into the future where she is joined
by others who are like minded, a point taken up more recently and elaborated by Marquez
(2006). According to Marquez, Western philosophy has described well desirable states
of being, but where ‘it has failed miserably is at providing a framework for
understanding, effecting, and affecting the process of becoming.’ (2006, 152). Our
present philosophical task, he adds, is to remedy this deficiency, a remedy that Martin
now envisages as an educational task as well. In so doing she points to new possibilities
that may themselves come into being and find justification through a reconceived idea of
liberal education in which there is a place for reflective practical knowledge of the kind
that Marquez also sees as lacking and as part of today’s educational challenge to the
humanities. It is a challenge for which Parker believes ‘the Humanities should develop
and promote a sophisticated and thoughtful skills agenda.’ (Parker, 2008, 87).

Whether Martin sees correctly is, of course, a matter of debate. A particular
debating point is whether Martin is promoting a form of education that is illiberal rather
than, as she claims, liberal. It could be argued that not only does her position break from
the traditional view of liberal education as focused exclusively on academic studies and
cognitive development but that it involves questionable dualisms and normative
commitments about what people ought to be like that are quite at odds with the idea of a
liberal education. To the extent that the first of these concerns is part of the matter at
issue here, namely, how one ought to define liberal education in the first place, one may
respond that Martin is merely attempting to legitimize a broader discourse around the
idea of liberal education. As for the second concern, it is, I believe, a fair reading of
Martin to say that the kind of person she envisages is one committed to care, concern, and
connection and respect for others. In addition, as she puts it in The Schoolhome, she
believes the young must be educated in ways of living in the world as well as knowing about it, in action as well as thought. (Martin, 1992, 85-87)³ She is joined in her objections to what she considers false dualisms such as that between thought and action by others such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) when they emphasize the importance of intellectual and practical skills and urge an end to what they call the artificial distinction between liberal and practical education (AAC&U, 2002) and by Marquez who seeks to bridge the gap between contemplation and action. Whether one wishes to consider the values upheld by Martin to imply normative commitments at odds with the idea of a liberal education is also related to Martin’s search for a new paradigm for liberal education. This is a matter about which she is very explicit simply maintaining, as others increasingly do, that the traditional idea is in serious need of reconsideration.

The Future of Liberal Education

The various challenges to liberal education notwithstanding, a commitment to the study of core academic disciplines promoting broad knowledge and understanding and a development of intellectual skills has persisted in the ideal of a humanities based education from its beginnings right up to the present day. While reaffirming the commitment to cultivation of the intellect and the development of intellectual skills, the debate also largely affirmed civic formation and the aspiration to education for all, as was made clear especially in Adler (1982) and later Nussbaum (1997). Grounded in a newfound feminist sensibility, the debate also introduced the notion of education for caring. As we look to the future of liberal education, key commitments to intellectual formation
and civic education are likely to persist. The case for education in caring and emotional formation is likely to grow, if not without resistance. These will likely be joined by newly emergent trends and especially a new openness to practical knowledge increasingly evident in different areas of scholarship. It is now time to examine these newer trends and their merits, paying particular attention to how they interact with liberal education in potentially creative and productive ways.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Influenced by the progressive educational thought and activism of Freire, and especially his emphasis on praxis, the central tenets of critical pedagogy as expounded by writers such as Henry Giroux and Ira Shor hold out possibilities for education that have not been well articulated in the tradition of a liberal education but which, in their emphasis on the development of critical reflection skills, resonate with central principles of education in the arts and humanities. In his critiques of what he terms the culture of positivism and technical rationality and the corporate culture, Giroux (1997, 3-34; 2003, 119-125) challenges their philosophical and economic underpinnings. He also portrays what he considers the special harm they cause in what he sees as an attack on the public good by private interests. Giroux’s critique of the interests of the past and present that he sees aimed at undermining historical goals of education commonly associated with a liberal arts and humanities education, such as critical and creative thought and democratic citizenship, is a powerful one. Just as Griffin (2006) does, he lays a basis for viewing the arts and humanities every bit as pertinent to the resolution of challenging societal problems as are the physical and social sciences. Even more powerful in their
implications for regenerating liberal education are Shor’s proposals that move beyond critique into a new way forward for the future.

The goals of empowering or critical education as understood by Shor open up exciting new possibilities for liberal education as it relates personal growth to public life. Drawing heavily as he does on his experience as a professor of English in a university, this he aims to achieve ‘by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change’ (Shor, 1992, 15). For Shor, following Freire, there are three avenues to the kind of critical thought he envisages: generative, topical, and academic themes. They have implications as important for pedagogy in higher education as they have for content. The generative theme found in student culture expresses problematic conditions of everyday life and makes up the primary subject matter. The topical theme raised by the teacher in class represents a social question of importance locally or globally. The academic theme also raised by the teacher has it roots in ‘formal bodies of knowledge studied by specialists in a field’ (Shor, 1992, 55). Taken together these themes recognize both the experience of the student and organized or disciplined knowledge, envisioned by Dewey (1963) as being at opposite ends of the continuum of the progressive organization of subject matter.

Empowering education as presented by Shor is dialogic pedagogy and is academically demanding of both students and teacher alike. Adopting the view that student discourse is informed by personal experience, the dialogic teacher engages students through language that is legible to them, in a discourse that Shor calls the third idiom. It is here that the two ends of Dewey’s progressive organization of subject matter meet: in between the one idiom of the teacher and the other of the student. The dialogic
third idiom overcomes the noncommunication of students, Shor writes, for it is ‘simultaneously concrete and conceptual, academic and conversational, critical and accessible’ (Shor, 1992, 255). It transforms the idioms of student and teacher into a new discourse, ‘which relates academic language to concrete experience and colloquial discourse to critical thought. Everyday language assumes a critical quality while teacherly language assumes concreteness’ (Shor, 1992, 255). Emphasizing the rigorous academic nature of the process, dialogic teaching Shor insists is not permissive, nondirected, nor unstructured, committed as it is to intellectual skill development and systematic knowledge (Shor, 1992,). There are, of course, serious issues concerning the form, value, and extent to which reliance on student experience would be constructive, educative, and effective, and one could claim conversely that it might actually be permissive and nondirected.

This is a point that comes into focus as one pursues the notion of service-learning closely associated with critical pedagogy and one promoted in the 1980s for both schools and colleges by Ernest Boyer. Following Boyer’s innovative work (1983, 1987), Joe DeVitis, Robert Johns, and Doug Simpson (1998) raise themes that resonate with critical pedagogy, feminist theory, and education viewed as preparing one for the callings or vocations of life where students will have the opportunity to investigate social institutions, power relations, and value commitment. In their opinion, the key values of autonomy and service to community central to the arts and humanities are not taught through didactic methods for they require the learner to experience individual and group challenges, a view that has begun to attract attention in different quarters (Raelin, 2007). For them one must experience citizenship at a deep level of involvement and
participation to learn it and not all forms of service-learning would be considered educative. To be so, for them, following Dewey, ‘the student must be duly involved in the creation of purposes related to service-learning.’ (DeVitis et al, 1998, 10)

Given the testimony of students such as Jennifer Dodge (Davis and Dodge, 1998) and research findings such as that reported by Boland (2009), Eyler (2005), and Eyler and Giles (1999) there is reason to believe that with appropriate structure, guidance, and opportunity for participation, personal student experience such as one finds in service-learning holds out the prospect of integrating academic and experiential learning as well as theoretical and practical knowledge. To that extent such practical engagements attempt to square up to the challenge of enabling people to “become”, that is, ‘showing rational subjects how to become effective agents and managers of their process of becoming,’ (Marquez, 2006, 152) not merely describe and even prescribe desirable states of being. As such, practical engagements such as those found in service-learning and professional fields of study point to a way of enriching and enlivening liberal education both from a content point of view and a pedagogical one with direct consequences for learning (Sullivan and Rosin, 2008). Approached in an appropriate manner, Shor would likely argue that much the same claim may be made on behalf of prior experiential knowledge gained by students in unstructured, non educational settings.

Knowledge Production, Practical Knowledge, and Liberal Education

Shor’s proposal for greater attention to student research in educational settings leads to a question brought in more dramatic terms by Carl Bereiter when claiming that the survival of liberal education necessitates a synthesis of new ideas and enduring
principles. He envisions a knowledge society organized around the production of knowledge, just as agrarian society was once organized around agricultural production. Bereiter has attracted criticism for using the term, “knowledge production,” not least, it is asserted, because ‘in the humanities there is also a need to transmit a shared fund of facts, and acquaint students with a handful of key concepts, if only to create a common frame of cultural reference’ (Miller, 2002, 108). In addition, it may be said that knowledge involves comprehension, appreciation, awareness, and focused attention and is not well suited to being characterized as a “product”. In his defense of his notion, Bereiter explains that ‘the most likely products of youthful knowledge building are explanations of physical and cultural phenomena, interpretations, historical accounts, and other more-or-less scholarly efforts’ (Bereiter, 2002b, 226), an explanation that appears to meet the objections at least in part. Either way, yet also modifying his language, Bereiter believes that in the kind of society he envisages the school ‘should be a productive part of that society, a workshop for the generation of knowledge’ (Bereiter, 2002, 12). While sharing with critical pedagogy a disinclination toward didactic teaching, and introducing a perspective on liberal education that appears to support a greater role for independent learning and student inquiry, Bereiter does not go so far as to advocate activism. Despite the support provided by Bereiter’s stance for a greater role for independent learning, student inquiry, and a greater individualization of learning in higher education, neither does he link his thinking to two other areas potentially transforming aspects of higher education. The first is an interest in engagement in social practices and the implications for education; the second is what Bruce Kimball describes as the emergence of pragmatism in the intellectual evolution of liberal education (1995).
Ever since the emergence of Hirst’s new found emphasis on the educational significance of initiation into social practices the notion has been of interest to many. In the work of White, general education is viewed as being concerned to promote ‘a person in the round, a person with a life to lead, a path to follow through all its conflicts, opportunities, contingencies,’ as one ‘who lives the life.’ Highlighting what he calls ‘the primacy of the practical,’ and drawing on Aristotle in support of his own view that practical rationality is at the heart of the good life, he goes on to argue that we ought to ‘begin our thinking about the curriculum with the human being as agent, not the human being as knower.’ Here White is following a line of thought from Aristotle and other early Greek philosophers that reemerges strongly in work of Pierre Hadot (1995) and is reflected in Marquez when he writes that these philosophers try to ‘pinpoint how it is that one moves from a reflection on life to the living of a life’. (Marquez, 2006, 148) This, White believes, may lead us to ‘a more practically-oriented curriculum’ of general education as distinct from one premised on the acquisition of knowledge which leads to the neglect of ‘thinking about ends and means, planning and evaluating one’s actions’ (White, 2004, 184).

Freire, whose view on the matter predates both Hirst’s and White’s, may be seen as even more emphatic on this point as he makes the case for the place of praxis in education. By praxis, Freire means ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it,’ (Freire, 1971, 36). For him, this is the pathway to our becoming more fully human. Revolutionary as this notion may have been when Freire brought it into the conversation in the 1960s, it has gained support even among those engaged in professional education. According to Raelin (2007), for example, higher education is
stuck in an outdated mindset whereby the brightest and the best have only to transmit knowledge to the recipient—to deposit it, to use Freire’s term. Yet, picking up on Freire and the later Hirst, Raelin argues that advances in epistemology have shown that ‘human agency can be improved through discourse within the very activity of practice. Aside from the discourse’s lens into social structure, we can also analyze it as a means to expand knowledge for improved action in the world…. praxis, exhibited through the process of reflective practice, is available as a means to enrich professional, general, and liberal arts education within the academy.’ (Raelin, 2007, 73-74)

Redefining Liberal Education

The foregoing treatment of differing points of view on liberal education captures persistent themes and new departures within it. It also shows that unlike the stability of view that characterized the idea of a liberal education following its formulation by the mid nineteenth century, the idea has been in flux for some time now. This is so, in large part, because the underlying ideal it aims to promote, namely, that of the educated person, is itself undergoing transformation. Gone is the certitude that once sustained this ideal and gone, too, the clarity of educational purpose that once obtained. But there have also been valuable accretions, the most important of which may be a growing awareness of pedagogical considerations highlighted. It is an awareness we find in Shor in his blending the question of the what (or content) with the how (or methodology) of liberal or general education. If, therefore, a new generation is to express what is understood by liberal education as a unified concept distinct from the sum of its parts, it is necessary to
have some sense of what it means to be an educated person and the implications for pedagogy and content.

*The Ideal of the Educated Person*

In that version of the theory of liberal education held out by Newman and once championed by Hirst, the ideal of the educated person is of one who possesses knowledge and understanding in depth and breadth. It is not just any knowledge and understanding but knowledge and understanding as developed in relation to recognized forms of scientific or scholarly knowledge. It is through initiation into these forms of knowledge—disciplined, theoretical knowledge—that the mind is developed and enabled to reflect analytically and critically. Alternative idealizations envisioned by Bereiter, Martin, Shor, White, myself, and others suggest a view of the educated person as one accomplished not merely in such theoretical pursuits but in action, including a wide range of practical pursuits, such as work in various forms, knowledge production, and service to others.

If the ideal of the educated person is to embrace knowledge, attitudes, and skills not previously associated with the idea of a liberal education, and if liberal education is to be expanded to take cognizance of an extended range of studies including practical studies and the understandings to which they lead, both ideas will obviously differ considerably from their traditional counterparts. This does not mean that there would necessarily be a rejection of traditional values associated with liberal education and the ideal of the educated person. It could just as easily suggest that there would be an enrichment of them.
By contrast with what Martin termed the ivory-tower person of the more traditional image (Martin, 1994, pp. 78, 173-176), the ideal of the educated person I presented in *The Educated Person*, for example, is of one of many-sided development (Mulcahy, 2008, pp. 177-196), who would be able to deal with a wide range of the practical demands of living in the workplace and other settings and relate sensitively to others. This person would possess the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of recreation across a range of interests and pursuits. He or she would have an appreciation for truth, goodness, and beauty and an understanding of the world that enables him or her to develop a philosophy of life that also serves as a moral guide.

The content and form of a liberal education aimed at creating such a person would be more wide ranging than traditional conceptions and it would be sensitive to existing student experience. It would consist of core academic disciplines and a range of practical studies and would be appropriately individualized for all students in accordance with their experience, interests, capacities, and needs. In general, the curriculum of an education conceived as a broad preparation for life would be multifaceted and varied. Because it would include practical studies and studies aimed at education for action and for emotional formation, alongside intellectual cultivation as understood by Newman and the early Hirst, for example, it would represent a partial departure from a largely academic curriculum. It would, as a consequence, constitute an important shift in how we view the content and the scope of a liberal education. With this shift in content and scope, it would welcome the incorporation of practical knowledge for what it adds to the formation of the educated person as one prepared for engagement in the world.
Alongside the broader ideal of the educated person—and a correspondingly broader concept of curriculum—to which attention has been drawn in elaborating a newly fashioned theory of a liberal education, the pedagogical dimension of education is also given prominence here. If only obliquely, the need for this is captured by Thomas Green when responding to Kimball’s essay on the rise of pragmatism in liberal education. According to Green what is needed for a resurgence of liberal education is not a new way of justifying content but an “engaging pedagogy, a way of talking about what paths of learning are best suited” to engaging the human capacities for the exercise of craft, judgment, and taste (Green, 1995, p. 243). This suggests that in any reconceptualization of the idea, it may be necessary to absorb into how liberal education is conceived a process dimension of the kind envisioned by Shor, for example. It is now well recognized that students bring a great deal of experience and practical knowledge with them to school or college, experience that Pring suggests may be may be most evident or present in an enactive mode (Pring, 1976, pp. 84-128). This experience may not be well informed since it exists at a commonsense level but it can be brought along the path from commonsense knowledge to organized knowledge or theory as it exists in the academic disciplines where it has become reflective, organized, and scientific. But students can only be brought to it from where they are, a point that has been nicely brought out with reference to the educational experiences and ideas of Albert Einstein (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Tippins, 1999, pp. 49-63). Hence the pedagogical challenge to recognize that any curriculum to be successful depends on the level of experience of the student and his or her capacity to interact beneficially with new experience. As Dewey put it, “it is
no reflection upon the nutritive quality of beefsteak that it is not fed to infants.” To this
he added that without regard to the stage of growth of the learner, no subject is such that
inherent educational value can be attributed to it (Dewey, 1963, p. 46). It requires
appropriate handling by the teacher to be of educational value to the student.

Conclusion

The analysis presented here shows that the idea of the educated person and the
ideal of a liberal education with which it has been closely associated is a rich and
powerful one that has evolved over time and assumed a variety of forms. In this
evolution, the protagonists for different points of view have at times, like ships in the
night, spoken past one another. At other times they have heatedly interacted, as in the
nineteenth century debate between the defenders and the critics of the Oxford tradition
and more recently in Martin’s critique of Hirst’s original theory of a liberal education.
Similarly, claims on behalf of the ideas of the educated person and liberal education that
they embody or promote the capacity for critical thinking or that they need to embrace
more fully aspirations to education for caring, depending on the weight of available
evidence, may warrant closer analysis. Criticism and differences of opinion surrounding
these interrelated ideas notwithstanding, they ought not be trivialized or hastily dispensed
with. But they do need to be redefined more broadly bearing in mind the main features of
how they have been characterized over time. These may be summarized as follows:
inspired by varying conceptions of a liberal education, the ideal of the educated person
has come to mean a person of intellectual formation, one who possesses knowledge in
depth and breadth, one who possesses the knowledge and skills of citizenship, and who is
respectful of others and caring towards them, and one who is enabled to engage in thoughtful action. Bearing this in mind, the position adopted here is that the idea of the educated person needs to be recast in a way that retains its emphasis on what Newman called cultivation of the intellect, recognizes the importance of practical knowledge and education for action, accommodates the view that education of the whole person brings into play emotional, moral, and spiritual formation, and adopts a pedagogical stance that gives full recognition to the experience, capacities, and interests of the individual. As it is reconceived, the idea of a liberal education as the education befitting the educated person would need to be similarly re-envisioned.

References


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3 For a fuller discussion of these and related matters, see Mulcahy, *Knowledge Gender, and Schooling*. 

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