



A Brief History of Classical Education

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Lesson 3: Education in the Medieval World

Outline:

Education in the Medieval World – The Liberal Arts

- Medieval and Early Modern Education intersect because they are organized under a focus on faith, Church teaching, and theology.
- Medieval Curriculum begins with the Trivium (Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric) and moves to the more advanced Quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music).
- After the Trivium and Quadrivium education seeks Theology (the Queen of the Sciences)
- The Trivium and Quadrivium are the “7 Liberal Arts”

What is an Art?

- From the Latin “ars” (“artis” - *genitive*) (which may be translated as character (pl.), method, way, science, knowledge, skill/craft/art, trick, wile)
- The Greek equivalent is “*techne*” (τέχνη) which is the etymological source of English words like “technique” and “technology”
- Because of our understanding of these English words, the concept of “*techne*” has taken on a meaning of imposing on nature to suit our human purposes.
- *Doctors at University of Paris (14^{c.} manuscript)*
- The Greeks had a different understanding of “*techne*” – this understanding is one from agriculture (old fashioned agriculture rather than mechanized). In this sort of agriculture, all inventions and techniques must follow rules of nature (nature teaches you as you study it). Nature teaches you to allow the



Doctors at University of Paris (14th c. manuscript)

grace of nature to provide you with nature's best fruits with the art (techne) of agriculture.

- The 7 Liberal Arts are responding to human nature, especially in the family and community, in the way this kind of agriculture does.

What is meant by Liberal?

- Sir Isaiah Berlin: There is a distinction between Negative Liberty and Positive Liberty
 - Negative Liberty – Freedom **from** any interference (a lack of limits)
 - Positive Liberty – Freedom **to** do something in particular
- The Liberal Arts are Positive Liberty (not the freedom to do whatever you want)
- Negative Liberty had a different word in Old English: “License” – connected to “licentiousness”
- With the Liberal Arts one is unhindered in ability to achieve human excellence.
 - The concept of human excellence was especially meaningful in the Medieval and Ancient societies where (low class) serfs and slaves did not have liberty or leisure to study high things. Even a very pious serf is not at liberty to study Liberal Arts (including Theology).
 - This is important to keep in mind because it is in pursuing virtue that humans can fulfill their proper end.

History of the Trivium and Quadrivium

- Quadrivium – The term is older than Trivium. Boethius first used it and it has roots in Plato's *Republic*.
- Trivium – Though before the Quadrivium, the term Trivium is newer. It was first used in the Carolingian court.
- Both terms refer to a number (3 or 4) roads meeting.
- Martianus Capella's *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury (De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii)* – outlines the 7 Liberal Arts (without the terms “Trivium” and “Quadrivium”)
- Liberal Arts have pagan roots but it was Christians who really clearly delineated.
- Christians consistently held that the Trivium is first, then the Quadrivium, and with Theology on the top.



“Retorica” by Gherardo di Giovanni del Fora



- Of course, the Trivium is more basic, but the Ancients said each of the three parts has a more advanced correlate:
 - Grammar ⇒ Literature
 - (Understanding Poetry and such)
 - Logic ⇒ Dialectic
 - (In Plato's *Republic*, he holds that dialectic is actually the highest art)
 - Rhetoric ⇒ Ethics/Politics
 - (Quintilian says that one must be a good person to be a good speaker. i.e. law court rhetorician must think of the common good)
- Each aspect of the Trivium might correspond to a transcendental:
 - Grammar - Beautiful
 - Logic - True
 - Rhetoric - Good
- Some were interested in getting rid of the Trivium during the Middle Ages (this is where we get the word "trivial")
- In *Metalogicon* by John of Salisbury, he defends the Trivium against the opponents.

How were the Liberal Arts conveyed?

- The Medieval Cathedral Schools and Monastery Schools were important for this (and great examples of *scholè*).



Cistercian Abbey of Sénanque (Provence, France)

- There was a conflict between studying the pagan authors and studying the scriptures. The Church Fathers had recognized this tension.
 - There were two different perspectives:
 - Pagan writings and Scripture are different because there is something fundamentally irrational about Scripture while the pagan philosophers sought reason above all.

- They are different because the Scripture contains certain things that transcend human understanding and pagans have not received this Christian revelation, so they go in one direction rather than another.
 - The second perspective, (B), was adopted by many saints and monastics in the Medieval period and informed the education that emerged.
 - St. Augustine of Hippo notably addressed the question. He saw things that transcend reason with which pagans do not disagree and saw certain core problems in works of pagans that Christ's revelation solves.
 - St. Augustine said he achieved a greater thing by combining Scripture with the insight of pagan philosophers. (Though, he makes it clear that one can live a virtuous and fulfilled life with only Scripture, but one cannot live a virtuous and fulfilled life with only pagan philosophy.)
 - Augustine holds there are several things lacking in pagan philosophy. For instance, he holds that the [Neoplatonist](#) philosophy is lacking because if there is only one thing that everything emanates from, one cannot explain lower orders of change. Also, if there is only one source, Neoplatonism cannot explain the existence of evil without blaming the source.
- Monasteries accepted St. Augustine's arguments of the value of pagan works and copied and studied them.
- People training to be monks along with some others benefitted from the monastery knowledge resources.
- Cathedral Schools develop after Monastery Schools and allow even more to participate in this education.
 - In these schools, there was a major focus on the 7 Liberal Arts.
 - Schools begin to divide into elementary/primary education and secondary education.
 - These schools constitute the basis for the University.



"The Conversion of St. Augustine" by Fra Angelico

What is a University?

- From the Latin, 'universitas' ('unis' = one point and 'verse' = turn).



- The term refers to everything turning around a single point, in this case, theology.
- Also, it refers to a singular body (a whole/united group), often a guild or society.
- Degrees were conferred: Bachelor of Arts (BA) for those who tap out early after completing 4 out of 6 years and Master of Arts (MA) the terminal degree after 6 years.
 - “Art” here means the harmonization with nature and “Mastery” does not mean domination besides self-mastery.
- University Pedagogy:
 - Less Socratic discussion and more lectures and debates
 - The Great Books were central. (Not in conflict with the Liberal Arts because one learns about Liberal Arts through the Great Books.
 - Individual universities were not prestigious, but rather certain instructors were prestigious.
 - The University was not understood as a certain location, but rather as anywhere people gathered to learn (it was over time that buildings became important).
- 3 University Models:
 - Students pay the teachers (Market interest)
 - Church pays the teachers (guidance from the Church)
 - Crown pays the teachers (guidance from the crown)
- Teachers were least pleased when students payed them because students had demands. The students often expected education to be instrumental.
- There was often enormous misbehavior of University students (i.e. St. Scholastica Day riot). This lead to conflict between students and the local town called “town and gown conflicts.”

The End of the Medieval University

- There was a disrespect for learning at times in the Church that made the Church seem like an authority that fostered ignorance. (i.e. In Galileo’s trial, clergymen refused to look through a telescope and instead declared that they already knew the answers.)
- The learned often refused to admit their own fallibility even though many of his ideas have been shown false.
 - There was a very damaging trend of using popular scientific observations about the natural world as evidence for or against theological positions. (i.e. Newton’s “Principia Mathematica” finding that the earth’s gravity impacts the motion of the moon was taken as arguing that the heavens are not real because theologians had used observations of the sky and planets as proof that the heavens are real.)
 - This sort of thing gave the Church the reputation of being against learning, even though the Church was what had supported schools in Europe from the start. (i.e. Monastery and Cathedral Schools)

- “Town and Gown Conflicts” also lead to the end of the Medieval University. Hobbs said religious disagreements and conflicts inflamed wars and violence. He looked at the ideas discussed in University with suspicion. (i.e. The Medieval understanding of Transubstantiation – Hobbs was very afraid that this would make priests into conjurers because they could change the essence of something with only words. Priests might seriously abuse this power if people were convinced of it.) The concern was about the University and scholastics’ ability to cause strife and discord.



“Galileo facing the Roman Inquisition” by Cristiano Banti