

A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO THE VALUE OF LIBERAL  
EDUCATION

A HALF-THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN  
THE SUBJECT OF  
PHILOSOPHY AT  
RHODES  
UNIVERSITY BY  
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JUNE 2022

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout history, scholars have offered numerous conceptions of liberal education, with each scholar providing a slightly and sometimes extremely different idea of what liberal education actually is, what it entails, and what value one stands to gain by partaking in this particular type of education. In this thesis, I inquire into the topic of liberal education in an attempt to clearly understand what value partaking in this type of education offers the contemporary South African. In the process, I offer a defence against what I refer to as the societal context problem—a problem that questions the possibility of a universal benefit that can be obtained by partaking in liberal education. I also offer a comprehensive argument for the preference of Jacob Klein's conception of liberal education, making the claim that Klein's conception and the value he identifies with his conception is more convincing than that offered by other scholars because Klein's conception and the value associated with the conception is universal in a way that allows it to remain relevant even when confronted with the problem of societal context.

## PLAGERSISM DECLARATION

I have read and understood the university's policy on plagiarism. I declare that the work in this thesis is my own work.

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## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

The societal context problem is a problem that acts as a challenge to the notion of a universal value that can be obtained by partaking in liberal education. This problem emerges from a theory that I refer to as the societal context theory. This theory (the societal context theory) is based on a claim that is advocated by French philosopher Michel Foucault, which states that each society has its own regime of truth and that each society's regime of truth is usually determined by the values and aims of that particular society.<sup>1</sup> The implication that arises from this is that each society has its own goals in terms of the type of society it aims to embody, and as a result of the aims of each society being so different, the means to achieve these aims cannot be the same for all. From this line of reasoning, we can conclude that one's societal context determines what is of value and what is not. When the societal context theory is applied in relation to the idea of liberal education, the following implication arises: if a conception of liberal education (as well as the value associated with the particular conception) originates in a society that is vastly different from the one we currently inhabit, then that conception, as well as the value associated with partaking in that conception of liberal education, cannot be applicable to the society which we currently inhabit. This is the manner in which the societal context problem acts as a challenge to the notion of a universal value that can be obtained by partaking in liberal education.

The main interest of this thesis is identifying the value of partaking in liberal education, specifically for the contemporary South African. However, according to the societal context theory, since the knowledge and values of each society, including their conception of liberal education and its value, are context-dependent, it then seems that conceptions of liberal education from non-contemporary non-South African authors are inapplicable to the modern contemporary South African. In the thesis, I argue that this is not the case. I do so by arguing the preference of Jacob Klein's conception of liberal education, basing my preference for Klein's conception on two reasons:

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, Michel. n.d. "Truth and Power." In *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, by Michel Foucault, edited by Colin Gordon, 109-133. New York: Pantheon Books.133.

(1) The theory of truth that Klein adopts is a more convincing theory of truth than that of other scholars because it doesn't alter the essential defining components of concepts. As a result of this, his conception of liberal education is also more convincing than that of other scholars as it retains the same identity it always has.

(2) Klein's conception is more practical for a multicultural society like South Africa as it applies in the same way to all people. In comparison, other scholars' conceptions would have to be implemented in various ways to suit the various cultures found within the same society (contemporary South Africa).

In addition to arguing for the preference of Klein's conception, I also offer a defence for Klein's conception against the threat of the societal context problem, and this is achieved by arguing that the threat of the societal context problem does not apply to Klein's conception of liberal education nor does it apply to the value he identifies with the act of participating in liberal education. This is because Klein's conception of liberal education is based on an educational theory that is universally applicable to all people, regardless of the society they inhabit.

I begin my argument by demonstrating how Klein's conception of liberal education differs from other scholars' conceptions, pointing out that one key difference lies within the theory of truth that each scholar adopts. I argue that Klein adopts a theory of truth that advocates for the existence of truths that are not determined by us and that he identifies his conception of liberal education as one of these truths. As a result of this, Klein is unable to overcome the threat of the societal context problem by using the same method used by other scholars (reconceptualization and redefinition method). I then argue that an alternative option available to Klein (and anyone who adopts his theory of truth) to overcome the problem of societal context is to demonstrate the universal applicability of their conception, which I demonstrate as a defence against the societal context problem. I also argue that this method (the demonstration of the universal applicability method) is not only a good option for Klein and anyone who adopts the same theory of truth, but it is also a better method of addressing the societal context problem than the reconceptualization and redefinition method. My reasoning is that the act of demonstrating that one's conception is universally applicable to all human beings in all societies overcomes the problem of societal context by showing that the societal context one inhabits is irrelevant. Furthermore, unlike the reconceptualization and redefinition method, this method also makes the value identified in one's conception applicable to all people in all societal contexts (including modern-day South Africa) without

the risk of altering the defining component of liberal education in order to make it applicable to the modern-day South African.

## STRUCTURE

This thesis is divided into three chapters: each chapter focuses on a specific objective which contributes to the main aim of the thesis. Chapter one focuses on demonstrating that Klein's conception of liberal education differs from that of other scholars, highlighting that the main difference lies within the theory of truth adopted by each scholar. I argue that Klein adopts a theory of truth that advocates for the existence of truths that are not determined by us, leading him to conclude that we do not determine what liberal education is.<sup>2</sup> Adopting this theory of truth prevents Klein from overcoming the threat of the societal context problem in the same manner as scholars who adopt a theory of truth that argues that we determine truth: therefore, enabling such scholars to make the claim "we determine what liberal education is". As a result, Klein has to use an alternative method to overcome the problem of societal context, one that is in line with his theory of truth.

This first chapter is written in the form of an inquiry, and the inquiry is on the value of liberal education. To be more specific, the question of interest is *what benefit does liberal education offer one who partakes in it?* However, before this question is addressed, a clear definition of liberal education is required. Thus this chapter revolves around answering the two following questions (1) *What is liberal education?* (2) *What benefit does liberal education offer one who partakes in it?* The second question is accompanied by an additional consideration concerning any benefit associated with liberal education. The consideration can be stated as the following question: are the benefits of partaking in liberal education socially relative?

Constructing the first chapter around answering these questions provides a good structure for introducing and assessing the general concept of liberal education. In answering these questions, I demonstrate that there are numerous conceptions of liberal education, with each conception offering its own take on the value of partaking in liberal education, which presents the challenge of having multiple differing conceptions that share the same title of liberal education. To overcome this challenge, I refer to American economist and educator

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor, Overton. 1945. "Liberal Education and Liberalism." *The University of Chicago Press Journals: Ethics* (The University of Chicago Press) 55 (2): 88-109. 165.



Overton Taylor's text "Liberal Education and Liberalism" to introduce what I refer to as Taylor's three categorical conceptions of liberal education.

These three categorical conceptions<sup>3</sup> allow us to categorize other scholars' conceptions of liberal education accordingly. Since Taylor states that the three categorical conceptions capture the essential ideas of all other conceptions of liberal education, using his categorical conceptions helps to easily identify where and how each conception of liberal education differs as well as where and how each conception is similar.

Furthermore, the act of grouping each conception appropriately also allows for the prediction of problems that each scholar's conception is likely to have and how each scholar can overcome the problem associated with their conception enabling us to address every conception appropriately while also being concise in the inquiry. Once all of this is done, it is easier to clearly distinguish the difference in Klein's conception from that of other scholars.

The second chapter focuses on the societal context problem. In this chapter, I offer an in-depth assessment of the societal context problem and give careful consideration to the following questions: *How does the problem of societal context come to be? What methods can one use to overcome the societal context problem? And what issues must be addressed when applying a specific method to overcome the societal context problem?* Here I outline three possible methods for overcoming the societal context problem:

(1) ***The reinterpretation method.*** Which is used by scholars who adopt a theory of truth that allows them to determine what liberal education is. I then point out that one obvious problem with this method is its dependency on adopting a theory of truth that claims that we determine what things are.

(2) ***The method of adopting a convenient theory of truth.*** This method suggests that if one is unable to overcome the threat of societal context through redefinition and reconceptualization due to the adaptation of a theory of truth that does not allow the use of the aforementioned method, then one ought to abandon such a theory of truth in favour of adopting a theory of truth that allows them to use the reconceptualization and redefinition

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor defines the three categorical conceptions in the following manner: (1) General education: "general, broad, rounded, or reasonably complete education, in contrast with a merely vocational or otherwise narrow, specialized education. (2) Liberalism in education: a self-chosen in contrast with a prescribed or uniform education the free elective system. (3) Education in liberalism: an education designed to form the students into good "liberals" or loyal and properly equipped participants in, and supporters of, a "liberal," or free, society and civilization".

method as means of overcoming the societal context problem. I then argue that a theory of truth that claims we determine what things truly are is flawed because it commits a logical fallacy. The fact that other scholars adopt a theory of truth that commits this logical fallacy also reinforces the reason behind the preference for Klein's conception.

(3) *The method of demonstrating the universal applicability of one's conception.* This is the method I advocate for: this method overcomes the threat of the societal context problem by showing that one's conception is universally applicable to all humans regardless of their cultural context. To achieve this, I argue that Klein's entire educational theory revolves around components that are intrinsically human, meaning Klein's educational theory revolves around components that cannot be dissociated from being human. It goes as far as to say one's capacity to be fully human is dependent on the components listed by Klein. One example is Klein's elemental education which he describes as an education on the elements of human life.<sup>4</sup> Klein argues that it is through this education that one learns what is considered to be appropriate human behaviour.

The implication of Klein's entire educational theory revolving around components that are intrinsically human is that Klein's conception of liberal education, as well as its value, also revolves around components that are intrinsically human. This leads to the further implication that Klein's conception and its value apply to all humans in so far as they are human. Applying this method is the focus of the third chapter.

The third chapter focuses on arguing that the best way for Klein (and anyone who adopts his theory of truth) to overcome the problem of societal context is to show the universal nature of their conception.

I open the third chapter with an in-depth assessment of Klein's educational theory. This is done in order to clearly outline the theory of truth that Klein advocates for and to demonstrate to the reader why I believe Klein adopts a theory of truth that differs from one that is used by other scholars. I then proceed to argue for the universal applicability of Klein's educational theory as a defence against the societal context problem. I argue for these points by demonstrating that Klein's educational theory consists of three parts which are categorized as three types of education, (1) elemental education, which is concerned with the elements of human life, (2) formal education, which is the systemization of elemental

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<sup>4</sup> Klein, Jacob. 1960. "The Idea of Liberal Education." In *The Goals of Higher Education*, edited by Jr. W. D. Weatherford, 157-170. Harvard University Press. 158.

education. And (3) liberal education, which is concerned with study for the sake of study. I then argue that all three of these categories of education are universally applicable to all human beings. I base the argument for elemental education being universal on Klein's claim that for one to be considered human, they have to have learnt these elements of human life. Thus making elemental education an integral part of being human. I base the argument for formal education being universal on the claim that facing problems and coming up with solutions to particular problems is not something that occurs to an isolated human but rather something that happens to all humans in all societies, giving all humans in all societies the capacity to form a body of knowledge out of their experiences. I base the argument for the universality of liberal education on the claim that any society that has the potential for leisure has the potential for liberal education. Making the potential to partake in liberal education universal provided the country allows its citizens to reach a point where they can enjoy leisure. In this example, I point out that the only true obstacle against one's ability to partake in liberal education is the inability to live a life of leisure, and thus if the societal context problem were to persist, it would persist in a form that argues that the value identified by Klein only applies to societies that do not allow their citizens to enjoy a life of leisure.

I conclude the chapter by demonstrating why Klein's conception and the value associated with his conception are applicable to modern-day South Africans. I also argue that Klein's conception is more practical for a multicultural society like South Africa as it applies in the same way to all people. In comparison to other scholars' conceptions, that would have to be implemented in various ways to suit the various cultures and cultural differences found within the same society. I then end the thesis with a concluding chapter that summarizes the central argument.

## CHAPTER ONE: UNDERSTANDING LIBERAL EDUCATION.

### INTRODUCTION

As a result of the thesis structure being that of an inquiry about the value of liberal education, establishing a clear understanding of what liberal education is, is essential to answering the main question.

While the question “*what is liberal education*” is simple and somewhat straightforward, there is great difficulty in providing a simple answer to this question. This difficulty is due to the issue of having multiple conceptions of liberal education that all fall under the generic term “liberal education”. This issue is compounded by the fact that some of these conceptions directly oppose one another. Thus, assessing the value of a single conception would only apply to the particular conception under assessment (and the conceptions which are similar to the one under assessment). Such an approach would be lacking and would not provide a satisfactory answer to the questions “*what is liberal education*” and “*what benefit does liberal education offer one who partakes in it.*”

To overcome this problem and to better address the question “*what is liberal education*” The thesis will outline various conceptions of liberal education that have been advocated for by scholars of the past. The thesis will also consider conceptions provided to us by modern scholars. Outlining each conception should aid in identifying the points of change and perhaps even identify the cause of each change in the conception of liberal education. Admittedly, outlining the points of change would work best if there was only one conception of liberal education and the changes made only applied to one conception of liberal education led us to one revised conception. The revised conception could have been assessed as the modern definition of liberal education. However, since this might not be the case and we are left with many conceptions, the thesis will also attempt to properly address the historical events that led to the creation of the current opposing conceptions of liberal education. These factors are important to consider when trying to outline a definition of liberal education because the conception of liberal education that one adopts dictates how one interacts with liberal education. This also provides an idea of how each past scholar was able to interact with each specific conception of liberal education.

In the attempt to clearly outline what liberal education is, we will look at a text that attempts to offer a clear definition of liberal education by looking at the different conceptions of liberal education throughout history. The text in question is written by American economist and educator Overton Taylor and is titled “Liberal education and Liberalism”.

In the opening paragraph of his text, Taylor acknowledges the issue of different conceptions of liberal education. Taylor then states that the main focus of his paper will be attempting to overcome the confusion created by these multiple conceptions of liberal education and provide what he believes to be a clear definition of liberal education.

By successive additions of new to old usages in the course of its long history, the good phrase "a liberal education" has by now acquired, as I will try to show in this paper, three over-lapping but largely diverse and in some respects conflicting meanings, which now tend, respectively, to be uppermost in different minds as vehicles of their differing special ideals for education. And because these meanings of a single phrase much used by all parties, and the special clusters of ideals they stand for, are seldom clearly distinguished and understood in their complex mutual relations, current discussions of educational aims are full of confusions which block convergence toward agreement. To make some clarifying suggestions, by sketching the history of education against the relevant background of social and intellectual history, and the origins, contents, and relations of successively developed views of what "a liberal education" means, is the aim of this paper.<sup>5</sup>

As stated in the previous extract, Taylor attempts to overcome the problem of multiple conceptions by providing three categorical conceptions of liberal education, which he believes capture the essential elements of all the other conceptions of liberal education that past scholars have provided. He lists his three conceptions in the following manner: The first way is to understand liberal education as a “general, broad, rounded, or reasonably complete education, in contrast with a merely vocational or otherwise narrow, specialized education.”<sup>6</sup> The second way to understand liberal education is to conceive of it as “self-chosen in contrast with a prescribed or uniform education- the free elective system- what Taylor refers to as "liberalism in education".<sup>7</sup> And finally, the third way to understand liberal education is to

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<sup>5</sup> Taylor, Overton. 1945. “Liberal Education and Liberalism.” The University of Chicago Press Journals: Ethics (The University of Chicago Press) 55 (2): 88-109. 88.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

conceive of it as "education in liberalism," an education designed to form the students into good "liberals" or loyal and properly equipped participants in, and supporters of, a "liberal," or free, society and civilization".<sup>8</sup>

In this chapter, I focus on clearly outlining Taylor's three categorical conceptions and using Taylor as a framework to introduce, categorize and assess other scholars' conceptions of liberal education. By grouping each conception appropriately, I am not only able to offer various conceptions and the value associated with each conception, but I am also able to predict the problems that each scholar's conception is likely to have and how each scholar can overcome the problem associated with their conception. Ultimately this approach enables me to address every conception appropriately while also being concise in my inquiry: furthermore, this approach allows me to clearly distinguish Klein's conception of liberal education from that of other scholars.

### THE THREE CATEGORICAL CONCEPTIONS.

#### A LIBERAL (ROUNDED) EDUCATION.

The thesis will start by looking at Taylor's first conception of liberal education, which is described as a "general, broad, rounded, or reasonably complete education, in contrast with a merely vocational or otherwise narrow, specialized education."<sup>9</sup> The first noteworthy point in Taylor's first conception is the fact that the conception can be said to consist of three defining parts: (1) the education is general or broad, (2) the education is well-rounded, and (3) the education is not vocationally based. It is essential that our inquiry acknowledges that though each of these three defining points is sufficient in defining a specific form of education, each defining element produces a different form of education. For example, calling something general education and calling something a well-rounded education does not necessarily refer to the same thing. This is because something general does not necessarily need to be well-rounded. The same can be said of an education that is not vocationally motivated: referring to education as general education does not necessarily imply that the form of education is not vocationally motivated. If we assess the second defining point, "liberal education as well rounded, we can make the same claim and state that a well-rounded education is not necessarily an education that is not vocationally motivated. It is not one of

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

these three defining components alone that define Taylor's first conception of liberal education, but the collaboration of all three of these defining components. This is an important distinction to make because Taylor spends the majority of the time referring to this type of education as "general" education, and this term might cause unnecessary confusion as it seems to be suggesting that the general component is what makes liberal education liberal when it is clearly not the case.

Taylor informs us that "General education was originally called liberal education because it was the kind of education given to free men and citizens in ancient slave-owning societies".<sup>10</sup> This statement suggests that this conception of liberal education originated in a society that consisted of people who were considered free citizens as well as unfree citizens. The "freemen" are said to have formed a ruling class which was also considered a leisure class, liberal education as described by Taylor was designed specifically for this leisure class, as it made more sense to offer "free men" an education that is not specialized or for the sake of securing a vocational position.<sup>11</sup> Taylor also informs us that after the age of antiquity (where this original conception of liberal education is believed to have originated), in the age of aristocratic societies, liberal education remained a privilege for the citizens who made up the upper leisure class, this is due to the fact that the majority of citizens still lacked the freedom possessed by the upper leisure class, but in this particular case, the freedom they possess does not refer to freedom from slavery, but rather freedom from the need to perform menial labour to ensure one's survival.<sup>12</sup> Thus, "Effective freedom to seek "the good life" reflectively, to share all culture, and to share in managing community affairs, was restricted everywhere to the members of ruling, leisured, upper classes".<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that the societal structure where this conception of liberal education originates can be said to be very different from the society we currently inhabit (contemporary South Africa). Taylor emphasizes this point through the following claim. "General education as developed under those conditions was "liberal"-stood in relation to liberty or freedom-in that it was, not education for life in a free society, but education for the few who were really free in a largely unfree society".<sup>14</sup> Unlike the society where this conception of liberal education was first conceived, Contemporary South Africa is considered to be a democratic non-slave owning society where all citizens are considered equal and free citizens. There is a clear and

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, 88.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, 89.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*.

distinct fundamental difference between the two aforementioned societies, and the difference in these two societies leads us to a question that points out a possible problem of compatibility: if the conception of liberal education was designed in a society that is mostly unfree, for a society that is mostly unfree, what use could such a form of education have in a society that is completely free? This issue is emphasized even more when one takes into consideration that the idea of a free man in an ancient society, the idea of a free man in an aristocratic society, and the idea of a free man in a modern democratic society are not mutually exclusive ideas. Taylor points to this tension when he makes the following claim "In contrast with the old, aristocratic societies, democratic society not only turns all men into free men and citizens but also rejects the idea of a leisure class and demands that all shall make themselves useful in specific jobs".<sup>15</sup>

Here, we begin to see the first manifestation of a key issue which we will have to constantly address throughout this inquiry, and that is the problem of societal context. To understand the problem of societal context clearly, I would like to direct the reader's attention to the following extract by Foucault.

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned: the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.<sup>16</sup>

This extract assists in providing a good understanding of the societal context problem because it emphasizes the claim **each society has its own regime of truth**. This regime is usually determined by the values and aims of the society. And as we have previously mentioned, the ancient society that conceived this conception of liberal education is vastly different from the society we currently inhabit: the values of this conception of liberal education might not and most probably do not apply to the modern-day democratic society.

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 90.

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, Michel. n.d. "Truth and Power." In *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, by Michel Foucault, edited by Colin Gordon, 109-133. New York: Pantheon Books. 131.



To overcome this problem, Taylor hints to the readers that the nature of the society also seems to dictate the nature of liberal education (Which appears to agree with the claims made in Foucault's extract). Taylor makes this evident by presenting multiple examples that suggest the cause of each shift in the conception of liberal education is directly linked to the change of the society's ethos or nature. Thus Taylor's solution to the problem of societal context is to alter the conception of liberal education to fit and serve the context that seeks to adopt this form of liberal education.

## LIBERALISM IN EDUCATION.

Taylor informs us that the second conception of liberal education is "Self-chosen in contrast with a prescribed or uniform education- the free elective system- what Taylor refers to as "liberalism in education".<sup>17</sup> Is first conceived in the 19th century and was inspired by the individualistic liberalism movement. The movement is said to have inspired educators to introduce a more progressive educational approach. Among the educational approaches that were introduced, it is believed that Harvard, under the leadership of Charles William Elliot, was the main educational institution that pioneered the free-elective system. This system allowed the student to choose their own educational path as opposed to being obligated to follow an old pre-selected and compulsory educational path. Taylor informs us that this free elective approach was based on the optimism of the early modern liberal philosophy, which assumed that all are endowed by nature with all the interests that are best for them and for their best functioning in an automatically harmonious society and that all they need to do, for their own welfare and that of their fellows, is to follow their own individual interests.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to the first conception, this conception also has its fair share of challenges: however, the main source of the challenges we identify here is not necessarily linked to societal context alone. Instead, the issue lies within the inner workings of the conception itself. Taylor claims that most of the problems found in this conception are based on the very thing that is used to justify the necessity for this type of education, and that is the theory of relative value judgments. The selling point of liberalism in education was based on the claim that all individuals have different values and that every individual should be offered a system of learning that falls in line with each individual's values. This claim forced the educators of the

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<sup>17</sup> Taylor, Overton. 1945. "Liberal Education and Liberalism." The University of Chicago Press Journals: Ethics (The University of Chicago Press) 55 (2): 88-109. 88.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, 107.

time to lose faith in the old traditional educational curriculum, as it was un-relatable to the values of the people of the time: this meant there was no conceivable reason which could have been given to keep the old educational system. This point is emphasized by Taylor in the following extract.

The old "compulsory" program for all had become a "dead tradition," ill-adjusted to its ends under modern conditions and carried on with no adequate understanding of its grounds or *raison d'être* even on the part of its defenders: and as teachers could no longer convince themselves, their colleagues, the students, and the public that they knew what all educated men ought to know and why, the easy, solution was to offer everything and let every student take what he pleased.<sup>19</sup>

Taylor points out that the difficulty this situation created is one where people were unable to agree on what the common content of general education for all ought to be and why it ought to be what it is said to be.<sup>20</sup> The old traditional educational system had established specific values which justified why specific subjects ought to be taught as opposed to other subjects: it also had clear reasons why these subjects should be taught. However, this old traditional education system is one that originated in a society that only offered education to the minority who, in most cases, were well-off: thus, the values that this educational system was based on only took the values of the minority into consideration. While slight adjustments were made to the educational system throughout time, the values that the old traditional educational system held were still the foundation of education: even when education became accessible to the majority, it still held the values that were established by the minority of the ancient world. Now that education had become accessible to the majority, the education system had to be based on the values of the majority, but because the majority (unlike the ancient minority) consisted of many more individuals from different backgrounds, it meant that there could not be a uniform set of values that would equally apply to all individuals.

This is the source of tension Taylor identifies with this conception of liberal education, and he believes that there are many dangerous implications that arise due to this conflict of values. He states a couple of these implications in the following extract.

This means that there is indeed some danger now that one or another group with an arbitrary program to impose may succeed in imposing it in this or that institution, by force or maneuver, against substantial opposition which they cannot win over by

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

rational argument because the grounds of their own convictions are not really clear and convincing. And the still greater danger is that of clash and deadlock among rival programs, all lacking adequate, persuasive Wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

To overcome this problem, Taylor suggests that we ought to reach an agreement about the general content of liberal education, but he emphasizes that it is best to proceed slowly and cautiously when establishing educational reforms to avoid causing further chaos. This seems to be the only solution that Taylor provides.

## EDUCATION IN LIBERALISM.

Taylor informs us that the third conception of liberal education "an education designed to form the students into good "liberals" or loyal and properly equipped participants in, and supporters of, a "liberal," or free, society and civilization."<sup>22</sup> Is formed out of the desperate attempt to answer the question that was brought up in the last section, *what should the common content of a modern, rounded education be?* Taylor argues that the natural response to such a question would be to choose a unifying objective that will bring what appears to be unrelated ideas into focus.<sup>23</sup> By having a unifying objective, we would be able to clearly assess if our educational system is well-rounded enough to achieve the set objective. Without a unifying objective, it seems impossible to assess the efficiency of the educational system in place. We are informed by Taylor that most of the societies of his time were driven by a political objective. These societies in question were either considered free societies, or they strived to be free societies, and the unifying objective they opted for was forming students into loyal and effective defenders of all the values of a free society.<sup>24</sup> This made liberalism, or education on the principles of liberalism, the main focus of this age's conception of liberal education.

Like the previous two conceptions, this conception has its fair share of problems: in fact, it seems that this conception is the one that Taylor finds least convincing of the three. The main issue that Taylor identifies with this conception lies in the lack of agreeability on what the values of liberalism actually are. Taylor argues that there seem to be many varieties of liberalism and the great majority of the values of each variety contradict each other. Thus, that

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, 107.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, 108.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*.

which is considered liberal to a group that holds a particular variety of liberalism can be considered illiberal to another group of liberals. This not only makes liberalism a terrible and inconsistent unifying objective due to its relative nature, but it also outlines a number of potential issues one is bound to face with this conception of liberal education. Taylor gives a few examples in the following extract.

Since no group of "liberals" has a complete and thorough, rational philosophy of its own scheme of values, there is bound to be an element of "propaganda" in the bad sense manipulation of minds by dogmatic eloquence or by subtle influence, rather than education leading to rational convictions thorough examination of all alternatives and real reasoning by students and teachers on all the issues in any program for making education a bulwark of liberalism as defined by its sponsors. And finally, the whole idea is too narrow in that it suggests subordinating all education to the one aim of making students believers in some idea or vision of the good society when that is only a part of what they need.<sup>25</sup>

While this is the first issue that Taylor identifies with this conception, it seems he puts more emphasis on another issue about this conception, and that is the fact that it is too narrow and it provides only a part of what the student needs.<sup>26</sup> The solution Taylor suggests for this problem is simply re-evaluating the aims of the education. He believes that the values that were held by the old conception provide a good idea of values that liberal education can and should be formed around. He emphasizes this in the following extract.

We had better think of the educational task as one of equipping the members of a free society to approach its problems and the problems of their lives with informed intelligence, giving them enough knowledge of natural science and social science (not moral but explanatory predictive) principles and methods to enable them to add to knowledge of this kind through later reading and experience and reflection and become intelligent about the actualities and processes they may have to cope with or help to control, and initiating them into reflective thinking... Above all, we had better make sure that reforms in education which look in the direction of restoring breadth, generality, catholicity, and unity to every student's whole education, do not at the same time also look or seem to look toward moulding students into liberals of some special variety.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 108-109.

Simply put, Taylor's suggested solution to this conception of liberal education is to simply alter it to another conception.

### BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE THREE CATEGORICAL CONCEPTIONS

Here is a brief outline of Taylor's three conceptions, the challenges faced by each conception, and the possible solutions to each challenge:

The first categorical conception of liberal education that Taylor outlines, "General education," is subject to the threat of the societal context problem, and the solution suggested is an alteration of the conception in order to ensure that liberal education becomes compatible with the context in which it is being applied.

The second conception that Taylor outlines, "liberalism in education", faces a challenge of relative values, which leads to a disagreement about the general content that makes up liberal education. The solution suggested to this issue is to make an attempt to reach an agreement about the general content of liberal education through delegations that lead to thoroughly thought out educational reforms.

The third conception, "education in liberalism," suffers from an issue of having differing conceptions of Liberalism and the conception being too narrow. To overcome this problem, the suggestion is to reconceptualise this conception of liberal education. These three categorical

conceptions serve as the three categories used as an analytical lens to assess and group the other scholar's conceptions of liberal education.

### A BRIEF LOOK AT OTHER SCHOLARS' CONCEPTIONS.

#### Brian Crittenden

##### A brief outline of the conception.

Associate Professor of Philosophy of Education Brian Crittenden defines liberal education through its objective/aims, claiming liberal education is education that aims for the development of the common and distinctively human capacities to be exercised in all aspects of life, in contrast to technical training for some specific task.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Crittenden, Brian. 2006. "The School Curriculum and Liberal Education." Education

Crittenden argues that a study of liberal education requires an all-inclusive program that combines a broad study of the humanities, arts, and sciences along with depth in some areas.<sup>29</sup> He also states that “any systematic effort to explain or interpret features of human life or the world can be an object of liberal education”.<sup>30</sup> Crittenden stresses that the emphasis should be on what such systematic inquiry enables us to understand about our own nature as human beings or the physical world that we inhabit and interact with.<sup>31</sup> He also stresses that we should make a serious attempt to achieve a good understanding of how to use the methods of liberal education and to understand both the capacity and limitations that are intrinsic to liberal education. This includes understanding how it connects with other ways of explaining or interpreting and the human values on which it throws light or to which it is subject.<sup>32</sup> “A key feature of the curriculum as a whole is the acquisition of a balanced range of intellectual perspectives”.<sup>33</sup>

In relation to the subject of the academic environment, Crittenden states that “the advocacy of liberal education as the distinctive work of schools does not require a curriculum of isolated academic subjects”<sup>34</sup> From this claim, I gather that he is arguing that liberal education is not dependent on the content of study but rather the method one employs when engaging with the content that he or she is studying or exposed to. It also seems to be suggesting that while the institution can be a good place for one to partake in liberal education, it does not seem like a school curriculum is necessary for one to partake in liberal education. These claims are supported by my interpretation of Crittenden’s claim that the capacity to produce self-educators that are reflective both of themselves and society has been one of the enduring ideals of liberal education since its conception.<sup>35</sup> However, this does not suggest that Crittenden believes the educational institution does not fulfil any role of importance: in fact, when outlining what he believes to be the benefits of liberal education, he states the following.

Liberal education at school provides a broad introduction to those major aspects of literate culture in which human beings have most significantly expressed their intellectual, imaginative and emotional capacities. This experience enriches the students' personal lives by making them aware of the varied dimensions of public

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Research and Perspectives 33 (1): 105-127. 106.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 106.

reflective culture beyond the narrow limits of each one's own immediate experience and background, and by equipping them to participate with critical appreciation and enjoyment. The experience also provides them with the intellectual skills and a sense of the values and historical perspectives that form the basis for acting intelligently and responsibly as citizens of a democratic society. Such an education is liberal in two related senses: as being appropriate for free and responsible citizens and as setting people free from a limited awareness of what is of human worth and thus enlarging the quality and scope of choice.<sup>36</sup>

This extract not only shows us the role that educational institutions play in their relationship with liberal education but also outlines the social benefits that are produced by the relationship between the educational institution and liberal education. While Crittenden stated that one of the defining elements of his conception of liberal education is the fact that it aims for the development of the common and distinctively human capacities to be exercised in all aspects of life, in contrast to technical training for some specific task. He does not make the claim that liberal education does not or cannot be beneficial for employment: on the contrary, he claims liberal education provides good preparation for the work environment, and it does so in two ways: Firstly, it develops the range of general intellectual skills that enables a person to adapt intelligently in changing circumstances and to be relatively more easily trained for new tasks.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, liberal education can and should provide a critical interpretation and understanding of the employment system.<sup>38</sup> “This includes the historical background since the industrial revolution: the role of private enterprise and government: trade unions: conflict between management and labour: the industrial arbitration system: a comparison of capitalism and socialism: advertising and the stimulation of artificial wants: problems such as poverty, inflation, unemployment, and the depletion of energy resources: changing patterns in work through advances in science and technology and other causes. The study would need to include historical, political, economic, and moral aspects. But it might also examine how work is interpreted in literature and the arts”.<sup>39</sup> Though the second benefit does not apply directly to the working environment, it does benefit the student who partakes in liberal education by giving him a deep understanding of the work environment before they themselves become a part of it.

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, 107.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, 122.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*.

### Assessment of the conception.

The conception that Crittenden advocates for (liberal education is education that aims for the development of the common and distinctively human capacities to be exercised in all aspects of life, in contrast to technical training for some specific task) is almost identical to Taylor's first conception of liberal education (a "general, broad, rounded, or reasonably complete education, in contrast with a merely vocational or otherwise narrow, specialized education). Crittenden also emphasizes the importance of a broad and general education when he states that liberal education requires an all-inclusive program that combines a broad study of the humanities, arts, and sciences along with depth in some areas.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, we can conclude that Crittenden's conception clearly falls under Taylor's category of general education.

The suggestion that an educational institution is beneficial but not necessary for the study of liberal education also seems to suggest that this conception could be categorised under Taylor's second conception, "liberalism in education," since the lack of an institution could easily suggest the lack of a set curriculum. However, Crittenden does not use this as a defining point. The conception that Crittenden advocates is primarily defined through factors that place it in Taylor's first category.

Crittenden also identifies a possible additional benefit in liberal education, one that is surprisingly linked to the world of employment. Though the conception is defined through its disassociation with vocational ends, Crittenden provides us with good examples of how liberal education can still be beneficial to the person looking to specialize in a specific vocation. This is an interesting observation made by Crittenden because it shows us that anything related to human life (even labour) can be an object of study for liberal education. Essentially what I am able to draw from Crittenden's conception is how liberal education can be used as a vehicle for attaining a holistic understanding of oneself and the world that one inhabits while also receiving the tools necessary for the development of one's own nature.

Leo Strauss

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 106.



### A brief outline of the conception.

German-American political philosopher and classicist Leo Strauss offers us a number of differing conceptions when trying to define what he believes liberal education is. He begins with what he believes to be the original definition of liberal education, defining liberal education as education in culture or toward culture, making the claim that the finished product of a liberal education is a cultured human being.<sup>41</sup> He also refers to liberal education as education to perfect gentlemanship & human excellence.<sup>42</sup> It isn't clear whether these three things (cultured human being, gentlemanship, and human excellence) are all a unified result of one who partakes in liberal education: that is to say, I am uncertain whether obtaining one of them necessarily implies one has all of them. However, I am of the impression that Strauss believes this is the case, at least when referring to what he considers to be the original definition of liberal education. The reason I am of the impression that Strauss holds this belief is found in how Strauss defines terms such as culture, gentlemanship, and human excellence. He puts great importance on clearly defining and differentiating what such terms meant in the ancient societies where this form of liberal education was practised and what these terms mean in the Modern society. Strauss informs us that culture or *Cultura* primarily means agriculture or the cultivation of the soil and its products, taking care of the soil, and improving the soil in accordance with its nature.<sup>43</sup> He then tells us that derivatively, culture can also refer to the cultivation of the mind, the care-taking, and the improvement of the native faculties of the mind in accordance with the nature of the mind.<sup>44</sup> I am of the impression that the cultivation of the mind cannot be divorced from the cultivation of the human being. Thus we can make the claim that the cultivation of the mind is, in fact, the cultivation of the human being or, at the very least, an essential part of the cultivation of the entire human being. A cultured human being can be seen as a human being who has received the proper care that leads to the improvement of one's own nature as the type of thing that they are. This is the manner in which I have come to understand the link between a cultured human being, gentlemanship, and human excellence and the reason I believe the three cannot be separated from each other.

Through the continuing use of agricultural imagery, Strauss informs us that in the same way

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<sup>41</sup> Strauss, L. (2003, December). What is Liberal Education? *Academic Questions*, 17(1), 31-36. 31.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, 34.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, 31.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*.

that the soil requires farmers to cultivate it, we require teachers to cultivate the mind: however, Strauss stresses that we cannot and should not settle for any teachers but only the greatest or best teachers, the reason is teachers can be considered as advanced students meaning they too are in the process of cultivation. However, Strauss points out that there cannot be an infinite regress. He states that there must be teachers who are not students, and these teachers should be considered not only the best and greatest of students but also the best and greatest of minds.<sup>45</sup> Strauss then concludes on the matter by informing us that the greatest books are our connection with the greatest minds: thus, the study of liberal education consists of listening to the conversation among the greatest minds, and this is done via the reading of great books with proper care.<sup>46</sup> “A study in which the more experienced pupils assist the less experienced pupils, including the beginners”.<sup>47</sup> This approach to partaking in liberal education is the method Strauss advocates for even when he redefines liberal education to suit the modern context. Thus we can deduce that the method that Strauss advocates for, for partaking in liberal education is simply to read great books with proper care.

After Strauss has introduced and elaborated on what he believes to be the original conception of liberal education, he proceeds to make the obstacles of this conception apparent to us. He begins by outlining the issues one must consider when adopting this conception of liberal education. The first issue arises when considering the question, what does it mean to study the greatest minds "with the proper care"? Strauss points out how the greatest minds are not in complete agreement about the most important themes.<sup>48</sup> This enables him to make the following argument. If the community of the greatest minds is rent by discord and even by various kinds of discord. Then we can conclude that liberal education cannot be simply indoctrination.<sup>49</sup>

The second issue that he identifies is expressed through the following question if liberal education is education in culture, then what culture, in particular, are we referring to? Strauss points out that originally both the understanding of what culture is and the culture that liberal education was associated with can be said to be rooted in the western tradition. Strauss then argues that this can no longer be the case: to continue to associate liberal education with an exclusive conception of culture risks turning liberal education into a kind of parochialism.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

The liberal and open-minded nature that is an essential part of liberal education demands that liberal education is inclusive of other traditions and other cultures. Exclusively adopting the western tradition may have been acceptable in the old pre-modern democratic world, but liberal education in the modern world ought to be applied to its full capacity (on a global scale). To achieve this, Strauss believes we could adopt the modern conception of culture ("culture" is any pattern of conduct common to any human group).<sup>51</sup> He does, however, emphasize that this does not imply that liberal education ought to be the study of any and every culture, and he seems to suggest that rather it ought to be the study of the best and highest human culture. However, a question that could and should come up is how do we distinguish the worst culture from the best culture? A possible answer to this question involves us distinguishing that which is harmful to our human nature from that which is beneficial. Strauss hints at this solution when he states that we are able to "speak of the culture of suburbia or of the cultures of juvenile gangs both non-delinquent and delinquent". He stresses that every human being can be seen as a cultured human being based solely on the premise that he or she participates in a culture.<sup>52</sup> This is best expressed by the extract below.

If we contrast the present-day usage of "culture" with the original meaning, it is as if someone would say that the cultivation of a garden may consist of the gardens being littered with empty tin cans and whiskey bottles and used papers of various descriptions thrown around the garden at random.<sup>53</sup>

This extract clearly outlines Strauss's reluctance to advocate for the mindless acceptance of any and every culture associated with human existence, as some cultures can be regarded as harmful to one's own nature. It is the emergence of these issues, particularly the second issue, that leads Strauss to re-evaluate the original conception of liberal education and ask himself the question: what could liberal education mean in his present day.<sup>54</sup> It is at this stage that Strauss starts redefining liberal education and offers us a more politically motivated definition of liberal education, defining liberal education through a political function which he believes it serves. Strauss re-defined liberal education as "the counter poison to mass culture, to the corroding effects of mass culture, to its inherent tendency to produce nothing but "specialists without spirit or vision and voluptuaries without heart".<sup>55</sup> He then States that "liberal

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*, 33.

education is the ladder by which we try to ascend from mass democracy to democracy as originally meant.

Liberal education is the necessary endeavour to find an aristocracy within a democratic mass society. Liberal education reminds those members of a mass democracy who have ears to hear, of human greatness”.<sup>56</sup>

#### Assessment of the conception.

Strauss’ conception is a difficult one to properly categorise: the manner in which Strauss defines his conception does not clearly fit into one of Taylor’s categories. It does, however, seem to have a strong link with the third conception (education in liberalism). This is because the theory seems to advocate for a particular political aim. However, Strauss does not advocate that students partake in liberal education purely through the study of liberal ideals or theories of liberalism: on the contrary, Strauss advocates only for the study of great books, arguing that these books will remind those who partake in liberal education of human greatness. It is also interesting to note that Strauss’ method of partaking in liberal education avoids the problem that Taylor identifies with his third conception of liberal education. Strauss has clearly demonstrated how the disagreement between the greatest minds serves as an example of how partaking in this form of study is not simply an indoctrination of ideals but an exercise in engaging with great ideas from great minds. Ultimately the decision of what ideals to adopt falls in the hands of the student. At this stage, a similar benefit to the one identified in Crittenden’s conception can be seen. By partaking in the study of liberal education, the student engages with the greatest ideas from the greatest minds and attains a wealth of knowledge concerning human culture. From this wealth of knowledge, the student is able to engage with ideas that show the student things that relate to human greatness, essentially giving the student a chance to employ all that he has learned to understand himself as the type of being that he is and the tools necessary to cultivate himself.

It is also difficult not to categorise this form of education under Taylor’s first conception (general education) due to the nature of the content that is studied. The great books written by the greatest minds cover a large set of general themes and topics. And in this sense, the study of these great books can be viewed as a broad and general education. Furthermore, this education is not for the sake of a vocational end. Though it may be for a political end, it seems that Strauss is arguing that the political end is primarily reached through the

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

self-cultivation that happens when one partakes in liberal education. The second conception (liberalism in education) seems to also fit in because of the nature of the content studied. Since the greatest books cover a vast number of themes and topics, the student who partakes in liberal education also receives the freedom of choosing which themes and topics he is interested in while engaging in these great texts. However, we must acknowledge that freedom is limited to these great texts, as Strauss clearly points out that the focus must be on them. Thus even though there is great freedom within the content of the texts, the curriculum that Strauss advocates for is still exclusive and limited to a certain number of texts.

Essentially Strauss' conception is so fluid that it shows characteristics that belong to all three categories. However, Taylor's first and third conceptions seem to have more of a clear link with Strauss' conception. The second conception can be easily disputed.

Johnathan Becker

#### A brief outline of the conception.

Like the other scholars, Associate professor of political studies Jonathan Becker starts out by acknowledging the issue of relevance with regard to the study of liberal education: thus, from the outset, he makes it a point to separate his conception of liberal education from what he considers the traditional conception of liberal education. Becker does not spend a great deal of time defining what he believes the traditional conception to be. Instead, Becker focuses on defining his conception of liberal education.

His first act of distinguishing his conception from the traditional conception is to refer to his conception as Modern liberal arts education, as opposed to liberal education. Similar to Crittenden, Becker defines his conception through its objectives. Claiming Modern liberal arts education is defined as "a system of higher education designed to foster in students the desire and capacity to learn, think critically, and communicate proficiently, and to prepare them to function as engaged citizens".<sup>57</sup> He also explains that his conception is distinguished by a flexible curriculum that allows for student choice and demands breadth, as well as depth, of study and by a student-centred pedagogy that is interactive and requires students to engage directly with critical texts within and outside of the classroom. By defining his conception

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid*, 3.

through its objectives, Becker also hints at what he believes are the benefits of partaking in this particular kind of education. Understanding that Becker defines his conception of liberal education (or modern liberal arts education) through objectives also helps us understand that whenever he is outlining an objective, he is also outlining a defining component of his modern liberal arts education. This is seen in the following extracts

The central tenet of liberal arts education is that it is more concerned with the development of the individual than the preparation of the student for a specific vocation.<sup>58</sup>

Harking back to its Greek origins, it is concerned with shaping citizens who are capable of being active participants in democratic society. In modern times, it goes beyond this to prepare students to function in a dynamic social environment. The liberal arts wager is that love of learning, capacity for critical thinking, and ability to communicate effectively are, in the course of their lives, more valuable to students than depth of knowledge in one subject. These qualities are particularly important in allowing graduates to adapt to changing social and economic conditions and to help them to continue to grow, learn, and adapt to changing conditions long after they have left the halls of academe.<sup>59</sup>

As previously stated, every objective of this type of liberal education can also be viewed as a potential benefit one would obtain by partaking in this type of education. While Becker does primarily define his conception of liberal education through its objectives, he also defines his conception through its method of study. This is clearly seen in the two claims: (1) “the modern liberal arts programme is distinguished by a flexible curriculum that allows for student choice and demands breadth, as well as depth, of study, and by a student-centred pedagogy that is interactive and requires students to engage directly with critical texts within and outside of the classroom”.<sup>60</sup> And (2) his insistence that at the heart of liberal education is the act of teaching.<sup>61</sup> Through these two claims, we can conclude that the method of study can be said to be divided into three components: these three components are student choice, subjects of study, and teaching method.

### Student Choice

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

Student choice is divided into two forms, the first form involves the curriculum, and we are informed that the curriculum is sufficiently flexible in order to offer students substantial leeway to choose courses that they will take while offering students the possibility to choose an area of academic concentration (often called a ‘major’) after they have entered their higher educational institution.<sup>61</sup> Becker emphasizes that giving students the opportunity to choose and shape their program of study prepares students for crucial decisions in their lives later. He also explains that allowing students to choose their own areas of academic concentration underlines liberal arts’ belief in the capacity for people to grow and change.<sup>62</sup> This growth and change is also linked to the idea of continuous learning, and its stress on the importance of critical thinking, as opposed to the accumulation of knowledge”.<sup>63</sup>

### Subjects of Study

When it comes to the topic of subjects associated with liberal education, Becker argues that modern version of liberal arts education, curricular requirements should not be bound only to the arts and humanities. It ought to extend to mathematics and the natural sciences as it once did centuries ago.<sup>64</sup> He argues that this is essential if students are to participate in important decisions which require the understanding of scientific concepts.

### Teaching Method

We are informed that the analytical skills of the students are developed through exposing the students to different points of view, familiarizing them with a variety of theoretical approaches that they must engage with, and identify potential issues. To achieve this, the students must engage with the texts with a critical eye.

Becker also adds that “it is not only the substance of teaching that is different but the entire educational process”.<sup>65</sup> There is great emphasis on adopting an interactive, student-centred approach. This approach rids itself of the traditional teaching method where the teacher presents the study material for the large duration of the lecture. Instead, “The classroom is an environment in which students are encouraged to question assumptions and conclusions and

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid*, 4.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*, 5.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*.

to learn from each other, thus democratizing the learning experience”.<sup>66</sup> We are also informed that in order for this type of education to effectively take place, the student must also engage with the necessary reading material outside the classroom. During classes, the teacher takes the role of a guide. They clarify issues and express their views. The views expressed by the teacher are also open to evaluation and questioning. However, the extent of questioning is determined by the subject matter and the specific teacher.<sup>67</sup>

#### Assessment of the conception.

Like Strauss’ conception, Becker offers us a fluid conception of liberal education. The conception is difficult to place under one of the three categories that Taylor identifies. Instead, Becker’s definition seems to fall under all three of Taylor’s categories. We see elements associated with “general education” when we look at Becker’s statement, “The central tenet of liberal arts education is that it is more concerned with the development of the individual than the preparation of the student for a specific vocation”.<sup>68</sup> We also see strong elements of “liberalism in education” when we assess the method of study that Becker advocates for, as we can identify a strong emphasis on student choice and great variety in the choices given to the student. Lastly, we see strong elements of “education in liberalism” as the method of study that Becker advocates for strives under a democratic environment, and due to the conception’s reliance on this type of environment, the students and educators who partake in this form of education are compelled to ensure that this specific type of environment is always in existence to ensure the survival and well functionality of this type of education. The method of study advocated for can also be seen as a means of ensuring that both the educators and the students are trained to become the type of people who function best in this specific environment.

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, 8.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, 6.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*, 3.



A brief outline of the conception.

Similar to Overton Taylor, Kara Godwin and Research Professor Philip Altbach try to outline a clear definition of liberal education by adopting a historical study of liberal education. The study looks at the historical uses of the term liberal education and how liberal education has been conceived in many civilizations throughout the years. Unlike Taylor, Godwin and Altbach do not offer three conceptions that supposedly capture the essential elements of a liberal education. Instead, Godwin and Altbach provide a list of three necessary components they believe all conceptions of liberal education must abide by to be considered liberal education. These three components are: (1) “Liberal education is interdisciplinary. It provides broad exposure to the arts, humanities, social and natural sciences in a way that illustrates multiple and interrelated ways of knowing and questioning”. (2). “Liberal education has a “general education” component. That is, within a given program, the broad curriculum approach is required of all or most students”.<sup>69</sup> (3) Liberal education strives to engender elemental skills that include critical thinking, problem-solving, analysis, communication, global citizenship, and a sense of social responsibility.<sup>70</sup>

After outlining the three necessary components, Godwin and Altbach make it a point to clearly distinguish liberal education from modern general education: they claim that even though general education is a part of liberal education, it can also exist in programmes that do not follow the liberal education philosophy they have defined.<sup>71</sup> This is expressed clearly in the extract below.

A general education curriculum may be multidisciplinary and require all students to take courses from a variety of disciplines (sometimes called “distribution requirements”). Alternatively, students in general education programs may be required to take one, two, or more prescribed courses (often a national history or, in some countries, a political thought or ideology course, as in the case of China). We subscribe to the view, however, that liberal education is more interdisciplinary and deliberately synthesizes different ways of knowing as a means for, among other

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<sup>69</sup> Godwin, Kara, and Philip Altbach. 2016. “A Historical and Global Perspective on Liberal Arts Education.” *International Journal of Chinese Education* 5-22. 8.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

things, developing a broader set of writing, analysis, and critical thinking skills.<sup>72</sup>

It is interesting to note that the three components provide two different types of definitions. The first two components define liberal education through its nature and how one partakes in it, the primary focus being on describing how one partakes in liberal education. The third component describes the aims of liberal education, and as was the case in the previous conceptions, the aims also hint at the possible benefits that Godwin and Altbach associate with liberal education. The aims mentioned in the third component are the only aims that they outline. Through Martha Nussbaum, they also claim that a “liberal education liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world”.<sup>73</sup> We are informed that to achieve the goal of liberating the mind, one must adopt a “multitude of perspectives, ways of thinking methods and knowledge content anchored in a variety of disciplines”.<sup>74</sup> It is emphasized that the study should go beyond a single subject or one family of disciplines, and it should definitely go beyond the humanities.<sup>75</sup> Godwin and Altbach believe that doing so “lays the foundation for learning how to interpret, interrogate, or to make new knowledge framed in the constructs of various fields”.<sup>76</sup>

#### Assessment of the conception.

This conception is almost identical to Taylor’s first conception “general education”. The three components mentioned in Godwin and Altbach’s conception of liberal education clearly indicate that their conception of liberal education is not vocationally motivated: instead, it focuses on developing a broad and general knowledge foundation for the student who partakes in this type of education. Though we can argue that there are some elements that belong to Taylor’s second category, “liberalism in education,” the category that this conception primarily belongs to is Taylor’s first category, “General education”.

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<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

A brief outline of the conception.

Russian American Philosopher Jacob Klein is interested in the question is genuine liberal education is possible in the contemporary world. He defines liberal education as education for its own sake as opposed to being for the sake of some external end. This conception that Klein advocates for is rooted in what he believes to be the original conception of liberal education. This original conception is an Ancient Greek model of education that was said to be suitable for liberal education as an education proper to the free and noblemen. This is in contradistinction to slaves and other people engaged in any kind of menial work.<sup>77</sup> Klein explains that to be a free man meant to be a man enjoying leisure, thus referring to a man not under any necessity or compulsion to do servile work.<sup>78</sup> Klein also makes use of Aristotle to emphasize the relationship between liberal education and leisure, providing us with what I believe to be the one passage that provides Klein's clearest definition of liberal education.

To study for the enjoyment of leisure and in leisure means to be engaged in liberal education, it is an arduous task. This kind of education does not look for some goal or good beyond itself. It is in itself its own end, long before Aristotle and long after him, even under totally different social conditions, this statement defined liberal learning and liberal education.<sup>79</sup>

When it comes to the question of method (how does one partake in liberal education), we are given two different sets of answers. The first answer that Klein provides is a more general answer. This is the answer that is of most interest to the study. This answer consists of three interlinking parts. Klein informs us that whenever these three parts are taking place, then the study of liberal education is taking place. (1) Whenever a subject is being studied for its own sake, (2) whenever the metaphysical way of questioning is upheld, (3) whenever genuine wonderment is present, liberal education is taking place.<sup>80</sup> The second answer is more particular than the first: it applies to Klein's curriculum of liberal education. It is essential to note that the curriculum is not an essential part of partaking in liberal education. Instead, Klein introduces this curriculum to overcome certain issues that come up when one is

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<sup>77</sup> Klein, Jacob. 1960. "The Idea of Liberal Education." In *The Goals of Higher Education*, edited by Jr. W. D. Weatherford, 157-170. Harvard University Press.165

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

attempting to partake in liberal education and do so efficiently. This, however, is not essential for understanding what Klein describes as the original conception of liberal education or how one partakes in liberal education.

On the subject of value, Klein argues that liberal education has the greatest of all value because it concerns itself with that which makes us most human, and that is our desire to know.<sup>81</sup> Unlike some of the other scholars, Klein's conception does not look to instill a particular ideology or characteristic within us. Instead, it looks to develop the character that makes us the type of being that we are.

### Assessment of conception.

This conception easily falls into Taylor's first category, "general education": in fact, the conception is almost identical. This includes whom the education was initially designed and intended for (free and noblemen). Liberal education is education for its own sake and not for the sake of some external end. Genuinely partaking in liberal education requires one to be in a position where they are enjoying leisure and not compelled to work in order to sustain their survival. This means this conception will face the same issue that Taylor's first conception faced, which is the issue of societal context. The question to consider is if this issue can be solved in the same way.

## CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the chapter, we established three categories of liberal education based on three conceptions distinguished by Taylor. These Three conceptions included the following: (1) liberal education as a "general, broad, rounded, or reasonably complete education, in contrast with a merely vocational or otherwise narrow, specialized education."<sup>82</sup> (2) "Self-chosen in contrast with a prescribed or uniform education- the free elective system- what Taylor refers to as "liberalism in education".<sup>83</sup> (3) "an education designed to form the students into good "liberals" or loyal and properly equipped participants in, and supporters of, a "liberal," or free, society and civilization".<sup>84</sup> We used these three categories to introduce the conceptions of other scholars believing that doing so would help us isolate a single definition

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid*, 66.

<sup>82</sup> Taylor, Overton. 1945. "Liberal Education and Liberalism." The University of Chicago Press Journals: Ethics (The University of Chicago Press) 55 (2): 88-109. 88.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid*.

of liberal education or at the very least decrease the number of conceptions to a manageable few. We also believed employing this method would help us predict and address the potential issues that could arise from each scholar's conception.

In our attempt to categorise the conceptions of other scholars, we came to the following conclusion. All the other scholar's conceptions have elements belonging to Taylor's first conception, meaning Taylor's first conception "general education" can be identified as a universal conception of liberal education (at least in the context of this thesis). This implies that every scholar's conception of liberal education is in some way or another affected by the primary issue that belongs to this conception (the societal context problem). The majority of the scholars are aware of this problem and are able to overcome the problem of societal context by employing the same method employed by Taylor (altering the conception to suit and benefit the contemporary environment). Though the nature of the alterations may differ slightly, it does not change the fact that the alteration of the conception to suit and benefit the contemporary environment is the method that is employed by the majority of the scholars that we assessed.

We also noted even though every scholar's conception has elements of Taylor's "general education, some scholars' conceptions have these elements to a greater degree than others. For example, Klein, Godwin, and Altbach's conceptions can be said to be entirely and exclusively linked to Taylor's first conception "general education". While conceptions of scholars like Crittenden are primarily linked to Taylor's first conception but they also have a secondary link to Taylor's second conception, "liberalism in education". Having elements belonging to more than one of Taylor's conceptions has specific implications, the first implication being that the scholar's conceptions should have the benefits associated with the two conceptions it is associated with, and secondly, this also implies that the scholar's conception should also inherit all the issues associated with both of the conceptions it is associated with. This same line of reasoning can be applied to Scholars who have a very fluid conception possessing elements belonging to all three of Taylor's conceptions, such as Strauss and Becker. Fortunately, as we have previously mentioned, the majority of the scholars overcome the major issue associated with the first conception via the alteration of their conception to suit the contemporary environment. However, we still need to address the issues that belong to the second and third conceptions.

Becker is the only scholar whose conception has a clear primary link with all three of Taylor's conceptions. Unlike the other scholars, this conception could be the only one that makes

Taylor's first conception the least relevant defining element. Instead, there is great emphasis on elements that belong to the other two conceptions ("liberalism in education" and "education in liberalism"). We see elements of "liberalism in education". Through a strong emphasis on the importance of student choice, making the student's freedom to choose their subjects of study one of the key defining elements of his conception of liberal education. The main issue that Taylor identified with this "liberalism in education" was the inability of those who partake in it to reach a consensus about what the general part of liberal education ought to be for all and why. Becker addresses this problem by emphasising the need to alter the conception in a manner that is relative to the environment in which it is being studied, ensuring that it is relevant and beneficial to the particular social environment in which it is being studied. This solution is identical to the one used to address the main issue outlined in Taylor's first conception "general education".

Becker also has a strong link with Taylor's third conception, "education in liberalism". This is seen in the dependency relationship between Becker's conception and a democratic and liberal environment. The need for this environment obligates those who partake in this education to ensure that the environment remains ideal for the survival and function of Becker's conception of liberal education. Taylor outlined two problems with this conception of liberal education "education in liberalism". The first and main issue is the lack of agreeability on what the values of liberalism actually are.<sup>85</sup> The second problem is the narrow nature of this conception, as it provides only a part of what the student needs.<sup>86</sup> Becker overcomes the first issue through the nature of his method of study. Since Becker's method of study advocates for free and open questioning of all things that are studied by the scholars who partake in this conception of liberal education, these scholars are also free to question and alter the values of liberalism as well. This enables the concept of liberalism to be fluid and malleable, enabling the students to alter the meaning of liberalism to the most suitable meaning for the contemporary environment. Of course, this solution only reinforces Taylor's issue because it still implies that there will be disagreements about the values of liberalism. The only difference is Taylor views this disagreement as an issue while Becker views it as an essential component of liberal education which keeps liberal education fluid and flexible, able to be adaptable to any end.

The second issue mentioned by Taylor is also hardly a problem for Becker's conception. This is because Becker's conception is not exclusively focused on the values of Taylor's third

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid*, 108.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid*.

conception: Becker's conception only emphasises the importance of liberalism as a means of creating a conducive environment for the study of liberal education as conceived by Becker. Thus the conception is in no way narrow. In fact, there is great emphasis on producing a broad and general curriculum. Becker's conception remains exceptional due to it being the only conception out of the ones we have addressed that has elements belonging to all three of Taylor's conceptions. Furthermore, even though Becker's conception has elements belonging to all three of Taylor's components, Becker's conception does not fall into the issues that Taylor identifies in each of his three conceptions.

### Identified Benefits.

When it comes to the topic of benefits, Taylor has already identified the benefits that belong to the three conceptions that we used to categorise the other scholars' conceptions. This implies that any conception that has elements belonging to any of the three categories should have the benefits belonging to that particular category. Additionally, while Taylor does provide us with a shortlist of benefits, the other scholars expand on that list by providing the benefits which they believe belong to their conception of liberal education.

Crittenden identifies the development of common and distinctively human capacities that can be exercised in all aspects of human life as the main objective of his conception of liberal education. As such, this aim can be identified as the main benefit of partaking in his conception of liberal education. Crittenden informs us that partaking in liberal education achieves the aforementioned aim by endowing the learner with the intellectual skills, sense of values, and historical perspectives that form the basis for acting intelligibly and responsibly as a citizen of a democratic society.<sup>87</sup> He also informs us that liberal education allows the one partaking in liberal education to be made aware of the varied dimensions of public reflective culture beyond the limits of one's own immediate experience and background - This sets people free from a limited awareness of what is of human worth and thus enlarging their scope of choice.<sup>88</sup> It is in these aforementioned ways that liberal education (as conceived by Crittenden) is able to benefit the social life of one who is partaking in liberal education. We are also informed that liberal education provides good preparation for the work environment, and it achieves this by developing a range of general intellectual skills that enable a person to

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<sup>87</sup> Crittenden, Brian. 2006. "The School Curriculum and Liberal Education." *Education Research and Perspectives* 33 (1): 105-127. 107.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

adapt intelligently to changing circumstances, and to be more easily trained for new tasks: essentially, it makes the one who partakes in liberal education more flexible.

Strauss informs us that the study of his conception of liberal education cultivates the human being. A cultured human being is seen as a human being who has received the proper care that leads to the improvement of one's own nature as the type of being that they are. The manner in which I understand this benefit is similar if not identical to the manner in which I understand Crittenden's main benefit of liberal education (The development of common and distinctively human capacities that can be exercised in all aspects of human life as the main objective of his conception of liberal education). The only difference lies in the method by which this aim is achieved for Strauss. It is achieved via engaging with the greatest minds via the greatest books. Engaging with these great books exposes the students to the things that represent the greatness of humanity, and the engagement with such things develops the student's capacity to pursue human greatness in all aspects of the student's life. Strauss also identifies a political benefit for liberal education, claiming that liberal education can act as a counter-poison to mass culture and mass democracy, ensuring that democracy is returned and kept in its originally intended state.

Like Crittenden and Strauss, Becker claims that the central tenet of liberal arts education is that it is more concerned with the development of the individual than the preparation of the student for a specific vocation.<sup>89</sup> Thus, like the previously mentioned scholars, Crittenden's conception highlights the ability to adapt and function in a dynamic social environment. This is achieved by instilling a love of learning that will extend outside an educational institution into the student's daily life. There will also be a strong focus on developing the capacity to think critically and communicate effectively. Becker believes that these skills will help the student grow throughout the course of their lives. Thus as it was with the two previous scholars, liberal education provides the one who partakes in it with the tools necessary for a lifetime of self-development.

Godwin and Altbach inform us of the benefits of their conception of liberal education through their third defining component, which states, "Liberal education strives to engender elemental skills that include critical thinking, problem-solving, analysis, communication, global citizenship, and a sense of social responsibility."<sup>90</sup> This implies that partaking in liberal education provides one with the benefits mentioned in the aims, and these benefits include the

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<sup>89</sup> Becker, Johnathan. 2003. "What a Liberal Arts Education is...and is not." 1-13. 3

<sup>90</sup> Godwin, Kara, and Philip Altbach. 2016. "A Historical and Global Perspective on Liberal Arts Education." *International Journal of Chinese Education* 5-22. 88.



student developing the following skills: critical thinking, problem-solving, analysis and communication skills. Another benefit is expressed through Martha Nussbaum's claim that "liberal education liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world".<sup>91</sup>

Klein's benefit is the most simply expressed of all the other scholars' Klein informs us that liberal education has the highest value because it concerns itself with that which makes us human, which Klein identifies as our desire to know. Klein's claim about the nature of liberal education is consistent with the claims made by the other scholars. Every scholar that we assessed identifies the development of "the most human faculties" as a central benefit of liberal education. The only difference is Klein claims that the thing that makes us most human is our desire to know, whereas the other scholars do not openly make this specific statement.

In terms of benefits associated with liberal education, we were able to list plenty, some being exclusive to the particular conception of liberal education and others being a benefit belonging to more than one conception of liberal education. However, the benefit associated with the development of human beings seems to be a universal benefit belonging to all the conceptions of liberal education that we have covered during the course of our inquiry.

#### Applying the benefits to contemporary South Africa.

Now that we have outlined the benefits associated with liberal education, I would like to address how these benefits apply to contemporary South Africa. Earlier in the chapter where we discussed Taylor's three conceptions, we briefly introduced the problem of societal context. The societal context problem emphasizes an issue of compatibility, whereby we bring up the question can an idea that was conceived in a society completely different from the one we currently inhabit be beneficial to any other society besides the society of its origin, more specifically can that idea be beneficial to the society we currently inhabit (contemporary South Africa).

I believe this previous chapter clearly suggests that liberal education can be beneficial to any society, provided it is adapted to suit the needs of that particular society. Fortunately, the majority of the scholars we have assessed attempt to adopt liberal education in a multicultural democratic society: their efforts to do so are of great benefit to our inquiry because the society we currently inhabit (contemporary South Africa) fits the description (multicultural

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<sup>91</sup>*ibid.* 9.

democratic society) perfectly. Thus all the benefits that are identified by the other scholars seem applicable to contemporary South Africa. This is especially true for the central benefit of liberal education (the development of the faculties which are most human), as it seems to be less dependent on the nature of the society and much more dependent on the nature of the student. This is an essential point to take note of because our main inquiry is not concerned with how liberal education benefits contemporary South Africa as a nation: instead, the focus is on how liberal education can benefit the individual, and the main benefit is primarily concerned with the development of the individual.

At this point of the inquiry, a significant attempt has been made to answer both of the initial questions that were brought up at the beginning of the chapter. This attempt not only provided numerous conceptions of liberal education as an attempt to answer the question, what is liberal education? As well as outline the value associated with each conception of liberal education as an attempt to answer the second question: what does one who partakes in liberal education stand to benefit? A further attempt to offer what could be considered a universal definition of liberal education and a universal value associated with partaking in liberal education was also made. I believe a lot of people would be satisfied with the answers that have been offered at this point, and some people would argue that the inquiry does not need to go any further beyond this point. However, while there are those who might argue that the answers provided could be considered satisfactory, I would now like to argue that the answer, or perhaps the method employed to attain the answer, is still lacking.

The majority of the scholars we assessed overcome the problem of societal context through an alteration of liberal education, ensuring that liberal education would be suitable and beneficial to the society in which it would be utilized. While this is a convenient manner of addressing the societal context problem, I would like to argue that not only does this method not work for every scholar's conception of liberal education, I want to argue that the method of reconceptualization and redefinition is, in fact, a flawed method. To argue these points, I will be turning my attention to Klein's conception of liberal education.

As was previously stated, Klein is interested in the nature of 'genuine' liberal education, and he defines 'genuine' liberal education as education for its own sake (inquiry for the sake of inquiry), claiming that liberal education is not for the sake of any external end, it is merely to study for the sake of study. Klein's insistence for this definition in the following extract.

To study for the enjoyment of leisure and in leisure means to be engaged in liberal education, it is an arduous task. This kind of education does not look for some goal

orgood beyond itself. It is in itself its own end, long before Aristotle and long after him, even under totally different social conditions, this statement defined liberal learning and liberal education.<sup>92</sup>

This extract also suggests that, unlike the other scholars, Klein does not advocate for a malleable conception of liberal education. Instead, Klein believes that true or genuine liberal education ought to be defined today in the same manner as it was defined in its original conception. This poses a potential problem when applying Klein's conception of liberal education to any other society outside the society of its origin because the alteration of the conception of liberal education would imply a complete abandonment of liberal education for Klein or anyone who shares Klein's theory of truth.

This introduces another problem that requires careful consideration. I refer to this problem as the theory of truth problem. The problem can be understood in the following manner. Scholars who believe that concepts are re-definable are able to overcome the problem of societal context by simply redefining liberal education to suit a specific environment. However, scholars who believe concepts cannot be re-defined without the risk of losing their essential nature (which many scholars believe is the defining element of a particular thing, be it corporeal or incorporeal) are unable to overcome the societal context problem in the same way. The reason is that the alteration of the conception would mean the alteration of the essential nature of liberal education. This would imply that even though we are still using the term liberal education, we would actually be talking about a different form of education altogether. Klein serves as a perfect example of the type of scholar who is unable to alter his conception of liberal education without the risk of losing the essential nature of his conception altogether. If one were to alter Klein's liberal education to suit the requirements of a specific society, it would cease to be education for its own sake and would become education designed to fulfil a specific political end. This implies that the method of alteration is unacceptable for Klein.

One way of addressing this problem is to completely abandon Klein's conception, as it is the only conception that seems to be affected by the problem. By abandoning Klein's conception and accepting the results produced by the other scholars' conceptions, the inquiry is able to offer a clear answer to our two initial questions. Furthermore, the inquiry is also able to offer a clear answer to the central question of the inquiry (What value does partaking in liberal

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<sup>92</sup> Klein, Jacob. 1960. "The Idea of Liberal Education." In *The Goals of Higher Education*, edited by Jr. W. D. Weatherford, 157-170. Harvard University Press.. 165.

education offer the contemporary South African?) Therefore it could be deemed reasonable to end the inquiry at this point. However, concluding the inquiry at this point would be a mistake. This is largely due to the fact that even though the issue was brought up as a problem, that might only apply to Klein's conception of liberal education. I argue the issue also poses a challenge to all the other scholars' conceptions, and it does so in the following manner: if one were to argue that the values associated with partaking in liberal education, which other scholars identified, are completely dependent on adopting a particular theory of truth, (one that allows the alteration of conceptions). This would imply that in order for the thesis to defend the values that have been identified by these particular scholars, it would have to demonstrate why the theory of truth that these scholars adopt is a believable and reliable theory of truth to use. Additionally, the thesis would have to clearly demonstrate why we ought to prefer this theory of truth instead of the one I associate with Klein.

As I previously stated, the questions mentioned above highlight a potential problem for the validity of all that has been established in our thesis so far. Fortunately, the solution to this issue is clear, one needs to assess and verify the reliability of the theory of truth used by the scholars in question, and if the reference is deemed reliable, then their conceptions, along with the values associated with their conceptions, will remain valid and reliable. While the solution is clear, it is by no means an easy matter to implement the proposed solution: the primary issue with assessing a theory of truth for reliability lies in the theory used to assess the theory of truth in question. It seems one must already have a theory of truth which they have deemed both true and reliable in order to have a method to assess and confirm truth and reliability. However, I propose that we can overcome this issue by using the same theory of truth in question to assess itself and its own reliability.

## CHAPTER TWO: AN IN-DEPTH ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIETAL CONTEXT PROBLEM.

### INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I briefly introduced the problem of societal context. In this chapter, I conduct an in-depth assessment of the societal context problem. In the assessment, I consider the following questions: *How does the problem of societal context come to be? What methods can one use to overcome the societal context problem? And what issues must be addressed when applying a specific method to overcome the societal context problem?*

The chapter opens with a recap of the earliest introduction of the societal context problem in the first chapter of the thesis. In the recap, I address how the societal context problem comes to be. This is done by reassessing how the societal context problem initially came up in the first chapter.

After the recap, I assess the theory of truth used in the construction of the societal context problem. This is done in order to determine whether the problem of societal context can arise under a different theory of truth. I then reassess how this problem is addressed in the first chapter. This provides the first method used to overcome the problem and also acts as a perfect opportunity to assess both Foucault and Taylor's theory of truth (which I argue is the same theory of truth employed by anyone who attempts to overcome the problem of societal context through the method of reconceptualization. In my assessment of this theory of truth, I conclude that the theory of truth adopted by scholars such as Foucault and Taylor commits a logical fallacy that deems the theory of truth less convincing than that which Klein adopts. As a result, I argue that the reconceptualization method is flawed and fails to convincingly overcome the societal context problem convincingly.

### A BRIEF RECAP

The societal context problem was initially identified as the fundamental challenge to Taylor's first conception of liberal education. (A "general, broad, rounded, or reasonably complete

education, in contrast with a merely vocational or otherwise narrow, specialized education).<sup>93</sup>

By referring to the following illustrative quote by Foucault<sup>94</sup>, we could argue that an ancient conception of liberal education such as the one presented by Taylor can be regarded as culturally biased. This is because each individual society has its own regime of truth. Thus, through Foucault, one could argue that each society has its own goals in terms of the type of society it is aiming to embody. Owing to the aims of each society potentially being so differentiated, the means to achieve these aims cannot be the same for all. Consequently, a theory of liberal education that originates in a society that is vastly different from our current society, which in this case is the Ancient Greek model of education, is culturally biased and thus has little value to us. This is how the thesis initially introduced the problem of societal context.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE THEORY OF TRUTH USED TO CONSTRUCT THE PROBLEM OF SOCIETAL CONTEXT

To understand the theory of truth used in the construction of this problem, I suggest that we direct our attention back to the quote extracted by Foucault, as it provides the foundational argument that gives rise to the societal context problem.

The arguments are the following:

A1: Different societies have different regimes of truth. (Each society has its own regime of truth). The Ancient Greek model of liberal education is based on the Ancient Greek Society's regime of truth. Therefore, The Ancient Greek model of liberal education is culturally biased.

A2: That which is culturally biased cannot be universal. The Ancient Greek model of liberal

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<sup>93</sup> Taylor, Overton. 1945. "Liberal Education and Liberalism." *The University of Chicago Press Journals: Ethics* (The University of Chicago Press) 55 (2): 88-109. 88.

<sup>94</sup> "The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned: the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true".

Foucault, Michel. n.d. "Truth and Power." In *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, by Michel Foucault, edited by Colin Gordon, 109-133. New York: Pantheon

education is culturally biased. Therefore The Ancient Greek model of liberal education cannot be universal.

A key point that Foucault points out is how different societies have different regimes of truth. One way to understand this concept of a “regime of truth” is to understand it as truths that are specifically tethered to the aims of a specific society. For example, a society that has a particular aim can either be benefited or harmed by certain choices made and actions taken within the society. The choices that lead to actions that are beneficial to the aims of the society are considered to be good choices and good actions, while those that harm the aims of the society are considered to be bad choices that lead to bad actions. Thus if there are two societies with two separate aims, then what is considered good and what is considered to be the contrary of good differs in each society. I am of the opinion that this line of reasoning is based either on a pragmatist theory of truth (because each society adopts what they believe works for their end), a relativist theory of truth (because each society has its own idea of what a good society should be), or at the very least something similar to the aforementioned theories.

Another way to understand Foucault’s extracted statement is to view it as making the claim that we decide what is true and what is false. We accomplish this by deciding the method one employs to decide what is considered true and what is considered to be contrary to truth.<sup>95</sup> If one views Foucault’s statement in this light, then one could conclude the theory of truth that Foucault’ adopts is one that advocates for the claim that “truth is determined by us”.

One subject that the societal context problem tends to be associated with is the subject of moral ethics. In this field of study, the societal context problem is mainly brought up as an argument against the existence of universal moral truths, and in some cases, some might attempt to take this even further as an attempt to argue against the existence of universal truths altogether. American philosopher James Rachels, in his short text titled “The challenge of cultural relativism” discusses how certain people argue for cultural relativism. He informs us that most arguments for cultural relativism are based on the observation of two different societies, with a specific focus given to the observation of the cultural norms of each society. Once our observations bring us to the realization that what is considered right and wrong differs from society to society, we come to understand that moral standards are based on the society one inhabits.<sup>96</sup> This realization leads certain people to make the following claim: if moral standards are based on the society one inhabits, then there are no universal moral truths.

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Rachels, James. 2012. “Chapter Two: The Challenge of Cultural Relativism.” In *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, by James Rachels, 14-31. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 17-18.





Rachels offers us an example through a story that is said to have been told by Herodotus, which involved the subject of burial rituals.<sup>97</sup> We are informed that in the story, Darius, who was a Persian ruler, was fascinated by the diversity of cultures and cultural practices. One day he called two separate groups of people (the Callatians and the Greeks) in order to ask them about their burial ritual. The Callatians were said to have been people who customarily ate the bodies of their dead. While in contrast, the Greeks customarily cremated their dead. It is said King Darius asked the Greeks what it would take to have them eat the bodies of their dead, to which the Greeks were astonished at the thought of such an act and responded that no amount of money would lead them to ever do such a thing. The king asked a similar question to the Callatians, asking what it would take to have them cremate their dead, and the king received a similar response as he did from the Greeks.<sup>98</sup> Rachels points out that to each group of people, the other's custom was not only strange but was also deemed inappropriate as a burial ritual. This example shows us how the same thing that is considered morally good in one culture can be considered morally bad in another, therefore suggesting that one's culture acts as one's moral compass. A similar line of reasoning can be applied in an attempt to discredit the existence of universal truths altogether. For example, one could employ the following argument. If we were to observe two different people lifting weights (let us say for argument's sake that one person is extremely weak while the other is extremely strong). We would come to realize that the weight is different to each individual. If the weight differs from individual to individual then there is no universal way the weight truly is. This line of reasoning can be applied to a number of different examples to provide the same answer. In the end, all these examples would undermine the existence of universal truth and advocate for the relativist theory of truth.

#### Methods used to overcome the problem of societal context.

There are three methods that I would like us to consider that I believe are possible options that can be used to address the problem of societal context.

##### 1. The re-conceptualization method

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<sup>97</sup> *ibid*, 14

<sup>98</sup> *ibid*.

The first option is the reinterpretation or reconceptualization method used by Taylor. In the first part of the thesis, Taylor informs us that in order to overcome the issue of societal context and make the ancient conception of liberal education applicable and beneficial to the modern democratic environment, we need to consider: “meeting the needs of all in a democracy for liberal education: meeting their needs for modern types of vocational training: working out a rational adjustment and combination of the two parts of everyone's whole education – for reflective living and citizenship and for usefulness in a definite occupation”.<sup>99</sup>

The method used by Taylor to alter liberal education so that it may suit the needs of the contemporary context is, in some sense, viable. If one can alter liberal education to fit the contemporary context, the problem of value would cease to exist, and by altering liberal education to suit the needs of the contemporary context, one would be making liberal education of value. Thus this method proves to be an effective solution but only under the condition that one adopts a theory of truth that allows one to alter and redefine conceptions.

The approach informs us that, like Foucault, Taylor adopts what we could understand as either a pragmatist epistemological theory or a relativist epistemological theory. Furthermore, the ability to re-conceptualize a theory as we see fit while holding on to the claim that it is still the same thing it was before it was reconceptualised seems to suggest that Taylor and anyone who adopts his approach believes that we determined what things are, that it is to say we decide what a thing is and what it is not (at least when we are talking about ideas or conceptions).

## 2. Adopting a specific theory of truth as a method of overcoming the societal context problem.

In the previous paragraph, we established that Taylor's conception employs three epistemological theories, the first two being a relativist & pragmatist theory of truth and the other being the idea that we determine what conceptions are and what they are not. I would like to focus on the second theory of truth and explain how simply adopting that theory of truth can be used as a method to overcome the societal context problem.

I want to suggest that there are only three ways to view truth's origin. The first is to subscribe to the view that we determine truths as humans. The second way is to subscribe to the view that we do not determine truths. Instead, they are determined by things outside of us, (This

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<sup>99</sup> Taylor, Overton. 1945. “Liberal Education and Liberalism.” *The University of Chicago Press Journals: Ethics* (The University of Chicago Press) 55 (2): 88-109. 89.

implies that we do not create truth: instead, we discover truth by becoming aware of what has always been true). The third way is to subscribe to the view that there are two kinds of truths (the ones that we previously mentioned: those determined by us and those not determined by us), and each kind of truth applies to specific things.

We previously established that the societal context problem presented through Foucault could potentially be based on the premise that truths are determined by us. If this is truly the case, then this has certain implications for our inquiry. The first implication would be the mutable nature of definitions: this means we would be able to define and redefine things and concepts as we see fit without any consequences because we would be the ones who determine what a thing truly is. This would lead to the second implication: if we decide what things truly are, then we can decide what liberal education truly is, meaning we can define and redefine liberal education as we see fit in any context. This would then lead us to the third implication if we can define and redefine liberal education as we see fit, then the redefining method inspired by Taylor would be a valid method of addressing the problem of societal context. These implications would lead to the following conclusion: the argument that argues for the preservation of the essential nature of Klein's conception of liberal education would be invalidated due to its dependency on the immutable nature found in truths that aren't determined by us (such as self-determining truths, objective truths and universal truths). This would imply that our inquiry would not need to go any further beyond this point, as we would have answered the question of value and how to apply value to any society, including contemporary South Africa.

If the second manner of viewing the origin of truth is correct and the only truths that exist are those that are not determined by us, then we have to address a completely different set of implications. The first thing that would require our attention is addressing whether the societal context problem still presents itself. Since the initial account of the societal context problem would have been based on the premise that argues that we create all truths, it is reasonable to assume that the societal context argument could have an interdependent relationship with the inexistence of truths that are not determined by us. If this is the case, then we might not even need to consider how to overcome the problem of societal context because it might not even come up as a problem. Our inquiry would not require us to go any further from this point, as we would conclude that the value of liberal education is, as Klein claims, and his claim would be true regardless of the societal context.

These are two possible ways one could use the adaptation of a theory of truth as a method to address the problem of societal context. However, this method only works if certain foundational assumptions are true. Thus the main issue with this approach is if one can convincingly argue for the falseness of the foundational claims used in our two examples, then the conclusions that arise from these claims would cease to be convincing.

### THE LOGICAL FALLACY ARGUMENT

As previously mentioned, this method only works if certain foundational assumptions are true. Thus, the main issue with this approach is that if one can convincingly argue for the falseness of the foundational claims used in the two examples, the conclusions arising from each example would cease to be convincing.

In the first example, the foundational assumption that the entire example is based on is the claim “the only truths that exist are those that we determine”. The focus of this section will be outlining why it is more convincing to believe that truths determined by us cannot be the only type of truths that exist. The thesis will attempt to argue this by showing a logical fallacy that is made when one makes the claim “truths are determined by us.”

I would like to propose the argument that there are two assumed fundamental parts that are an intrinsic part of every comprehensive theory of truth. The first part is concerned with the nature of truth and usually asserts truth exists and it exists in a certain way. The second claim is always concerned with how we can come to possess truth. This claim is always about the method used to assess what is true from what is not.

For example, suppose we are to assess the correspondence theory of truth. In that case, we see correspondence theory of truth functions under the simple claim that truth is that which corresponds with reality.<sup>100</sup> It is obvious that this theory assumes the existence of truth as it claims truth can be identified via claims corresponding with reality. Thus it is clear that the first fundamental part (truth exists and it exists in a particular way) is present within the correspondence theory of truth. The second fundamental part is even easier to identify as it is in the very definition of the correspondence theory. We assess what is true from what is false by assessing whether our claims correspond with “reality”.

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<sup>100</sup> Boyles, Robert James, Mark Anthony Dacela, Jeremiah Joven Joaquin, and Victorino Raymundo Lualhati. 2013. “The Nature of Truth.” In *Exploring: The Philosophical Terrain*, by Dennies Apolega, 38-50. Quezon City: C&E Publishing.

We can identify the same two fundamental parts when assessing the coherence theory of truth and the pragmatic theory of truth. The coherence theory of truth functions under the claim, truth is that which coheres or is consistent with other statements or beliefs.<sup>101</sup> It is as obvious as it was in the correspondence theory that this theory assumes the existence of truth, and they assume that truth exists in a particular way, i.e. as something that is coherent. The second fundamental part is also as obvious as it was in the case of the correspondence theory of truth, as it can also be identified within the definition of the coherence theory. The pragmatic theory of truth functions under the claim, truth is that which is useful to believe.<sup>102</sup> This claim is predicated on the claim “It is useful because it is true,” and “It is true because it is useful” mean exactly the same thing”.<sup>103</sup> As was the case with the previously mentioned theories of truth (correspondence & coherence), this theory of truth assumes the existence of truth, and it assumes the truth exists in a particular way (as something that is useful). In terms of the second fundamental part of theories of truth, this theory suggests that we can come to know what is true from what is false by simply applying it.

I believe that all comprehensive theories of truth consist of these fundamental parts in one way or another, with most, if not all, comprehensive theories agreeing on the first claim (that the truth exists and it exists in a certain way). The thing that sets most theories apart is the second claim, which addresses the manner in which we can come to attain truth.

Let us direct our focus to the first claim (truth exists, and it exists in a certain way). I would like to pose the argument that all theories that refute the first claim are either claiming that the truth does not exist or that the truth exists, but there is no particular way that the truth exists. Those who make the first of these claims (truth does not exist) commit a logical fallacy. This is because the claims made by such theories would still be making what they believe to be a true claim. Such theories would be subject to the question: if truth does not exist, what makes the theories of truth that denies the existence of truth any less false than the theories of truth that claim the existence of truth? A theory of truth that denies the existence of truth undermines itself and gives us no reason to take it seriously because there is a clear contradiction within the theory itself. Thus due to these theories being based on claims that fundamentally contradict themselves, any theory that denies the first claim undermines itself and provides no sound reason to adopt it as a theory of truth.

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid.* (Page 3 of 10)

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.* (Page 5 of 10)

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

I believe the same line of logic can be applied in the following example. A theory of truth that denies the existence of truths that are not determined by us can be said to be making one of two claims: (1) the theory can be said to be claiming truth exists, and it exists in a particular way, i.e. truth exists as something that is determined by us. (2) The theory can be said to be claiming that there is no particular way that truth exists, and thus the truth can exist in any particular way we want it to. There is obviously a fundamental issue with the second option as its opening premise denies that truth exists in any particular way, only for it to conclude by confirming the existence of truth in a particular way (as something decided by us). There is an obvious contradiction between the opening premise (there is no particular way that truth exists) and the conclusion that suggests the existence of truth even if truth exists as something decided by us. Thus we will not consider the second option beyond this point.

While the aforementioned claim, truth exists and truths exist in a particular way (we determine truth), has a better standing than the claim “there is no truth”, it creates conditions that inevitably lead to a similar problem. For example, if truth is determined by us, if we were to determine that we do not determine truth, would this still be true even though it contradicts the foundational claim on which this claim itself is based? If truth is truly determined by us, then we would have to conclude that this statement still stands as true: however, like in the previous example, there is an obvious fundamental contradiction because both claims cannot be convincingly true at the same time as one disputes the other.

This implies that the method of adopting a theory of truth that claims the only truths that exist are the ones we determine would prove to be an ineffective method. Additionally, invalidating a theory of truth that claims the only truths that exist are the ones we determine threatens to invalidate the method of redefining and reconceptualising as it would imply things are what they are, and when we alter something, it ceases to be what it originally was, and it becomes something else even if it retains the same name. This conclusion has major implications for all that has been established about liberal education thus far, specifically when we consider that most of the scholars that we assessed employed the method of reinterpretation and reconceptualization to overcome the problem of societal context.

I want to suggest that there are a number of possible responses that the scholars who use the re-conceptualization method as a means to address the societal context problem could give in defence of the validity of their conceptions. I, however, will only consider what I believe are the two best possible responses. The first response could simply be the claim that though

their conceptions may share the title of liberal education, they are, in fact, different types of education that share a similar theme, the theme that they share is inspired by the original conception of liberal education, and thus, these conceptions are all referred to by the name of the original conception even though they are not the same thing. Given that they are not the same thing, they ought to be assessed as the type of things that they are, and the value that they provide ought to only apply to the specific conception from which the value has been extracted. This would be a fair response to offer, and by giving this response, we need not even bother to compare the nature of these conceptions to the nature of the original conception.

Another possible response is arguing that there is an essential and fundamental principle of liberal education that is (1) universally shared in all the scholars' conceptions of liberal education. And (2) this fundamental part would not have been lost through the alteration of the original conception of liberal education. However, one would have to present a good extensive argument for this response, and it would require one to provide a good reason why they believe there is a universally shared fundamental principle. Furthermore, they would have to identify the universal principle, and thirdly they would have to demonstrate how each scholar's alteration of the concept does not lead to the loss of that universally shared principle.

I believe the first response provides a more convenient manner of addressing the issue. It provides an approach that enables us to avoid the invalidation of the other scholars' conceptions of liberal education while allowing us to retain all the value that each conception of liberal education provides.

### 3. Using Universal truths to negate the threat of the societal context problem

Of the three methods that we have discussed thus far, I believe the method we are about to discuss is the best method to use, specifically for Klein or anyone who shares his theory of truth. This method requires that we prove the universal nature of the theory in question, which in this case is Klein's theory of education. If one is able to clearly demonstrate that Klein's theory is not culturally biased but applicable to all societies, then the conclusion regarding the value of liberal education that Klein concludes would also apply to all societies, and this would enable us to overcome the problem of societal context and validate Klein's claim about the value of liberal education to the contemporary South African. This is the main aim of the following chapter.





## Conclusion

The chapter began with a recap of the societal context problem. This recap was a refresher on how the first chapter initially introduced the societal context problem. After the recap the chapter began to provide an in-depth assessment of the societal context problem with the aim of answering the three following questions were considered: (1) *how does the problem of societal context come to be?* (2) *What methods can one use to overcome the societal context problem?* And (3) *what issues must be addressed when applying a specific method to overcome the societal context problem?*

I answered the first question *how does the problem of societal context come to be?* By stating that the problem is rooted in the claim (different societies have different regimes of truth). From this claim, one is able to formulate the following argument as a means of disputing the plausibility of a universal value that can be obtained through partaking in liberal education.

A1: Different societies have different regimes of truth. (Each society has its own regime of truth). The Ancient Greek model of liberal education is based on the Ancient Greek Society's regime of truth. Therefore, The Ancient Greek model of liberal education is culturally biased.

A2: That which is culturally biased cannot be universal. The Ancient Greek model of liberal education is culturally biased. Therefore The Ancient Greek model of liberal education cannot be universal.

To answer the remaining two questions, (2) *what methods can one use to overcome the societal context problem?* And (3) *what issues must be addressed when applying a specific method to overcome the societal context problem?* I outlined the three methods (1) The reinterpretation method. Which is used by scholars who adopt a theory of truth that allows them to determine what liberal education is. I pointed out that the main problem with this method is its dependency on adopting an unconvincing theory of truth that claims. (2) The method of adopting a convenient theory of truth. This method suggests that if one is unable to overcome the threat of societal context through redefinition and reconceptualization due to the theory of truth that they have adopted, then one should adopt a theory of truth that allows them to use the reconceptualization and redefinition method as means of overcoming the societal context problem. I argued that a theory of truth that claims we determine what things truly are is flawed because it commits a logical fallacy and undermines itself. (3) The method of demonstrating the universal applicability of one's conception. This is the method I advocate for: believing this method overcomes the threat of the societal context problem by demonstrating the universal applicability of one's conception.

## CHAPTER THREE: ARGUING FOR THE UNIVERSAL NATURE OF KLEIN'S THEORY OF EDUCATION.

### INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter of the thesis, I briefly assessed Klein's conception of liberal education. The brief assessment was conducted for the sake of attaining a basic understanding of Klein's conception and to identify the benefits associated with his conception. In this chapter, we will reassess Klein's conception. However, we will not be assessing his conception of liberal education in isolation as we did earlier in the thesis: instead, we will look at Klein's entire theory of education. The objective of this approach is to attain a holistic understanding of Klein's conception of liberal education in order to attain an understanding of the theory of truth that Klein employs throughout his theory of education and to prove the universal nature of Klein's educational theory, effectively overcoming the societal context problem for Klein.

Klein's theory of education is divided into three interlinked parts. The three parts of the theory represent three types of education that Klein identifies. These three types of education are elemental education, formal education, and liberal education. The three types of education are categorised according to types of questions, the implication being that certain types of questions are associated with a specific type of education. The further implication of this would be the claim that the nature of the questions one asks determines the type of education one is partaking in.

Klein outlines five groups of questions: Practical questions, gossip questions, exploratory questions, metastrophic questions, and other questions. According to Klein, The first three types of questions (practical questions, gossip questions, and exploratory questions) are primarily asked for one of two reasons: Either to identify an unknown that we believe can become known or to recollect that which was once known but has been forgotten.<sup>104</sup>

### UNDERSTANDING THE THREE GROUPS OF QUESTIONS

**Practical questions** are intrinsically tethered to action. These questions are asked to achieve an answer that will inform an action to be taken. These questions (practical questions) are

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<sup>104</sup> Klein, Jacob. 1960. "The Idea of Liberal Education." In *The Goals of Higher Education*, edited by Jr. W. D. Weatherford, 157-170. Harvard University Press. 163.

considered to be the most common questions that we face in our daily lives. The examples that Klein uses include the questions “how do you do that,” which enquires into an action for the sake of understanding the relationship between the action and the desired end, perhaps in order to replicate the action.<sup>105</sup>

**Gossipy Questions** are divided into two subgroups: Those that are emotionally driven and those that are driven by idle curiosity.<sup>106</sup> An appropriate example of an emotionally driven question would be the following, “have you heard this person is in a relationship with that person? One wonders what they saw in such a person anyway.” The question can be answered and can have some practical application if the inquirer wishes to imitate the personality which they are inquiring about. Still, for the most part, the question has no interest in action. Gossipy questions are not only driven by malevolent feelings such as envy but can be driven by benevolent emotions as well. Questions that are driven by idle curiosity have no emotional drive behind them. The person inquiring does not feel envious of the person they are inquiring into. There are neither malevolent nor benevolent feelings driving their curiosity: there is indifference about this sub-type of the gossipy question; the inquirer is driven purely by curiosity.

**Exploratory questions**, also referred to as questions of serious curiosity, are similar to both practical questions and questions of idle curiosity, with the only difference being the personal relevance of the question. This means that while questions that are of idle curiosity do not really have anything to do with the inquirer because the answer does not affect them in any way, in the case of the exploratory questions, the opposite is true. When we raise exploratory questions, we raise them because we believe that the answers they provide are important to us.

Owing to their importance, specifically their importance to the inquirer, these types of questions are considered different from those asked out of idle curiosity. Klein uses the example of a trial, where crucial facts have to be established. He also uses the example of a traveller travelling into unfamiliar territory. The traveller would have to ask questions pertaining to the customs of the foreign land to gain certainty about certain things, certain people and their character. The aim of asking these questions is to base a judgement on the knowledge obtained or just simply in order to know.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *ibid*, 159.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid*, 160.

## UNDERSTANDING THE FOURTH GROUP OF QUESTIONS.

**Metastrophic questions**, unlike the previously mentioned groups of questions, do not concern themselves with converting the unknown into the known, nor does do they concern themselves with recovering the once known. Instead, the focus is on that which is declared to be known. Metastrophic questions constantly reflect on what we consider as the known and look at it as if it is unknown.<sup>108</sup> This group of questions consists of questions that challenge the certainty of the things which one believes to be true, forcing us to consider questions such as: “why is it so” and “why do we believe these things are true.”

## UNDERSTANDING THE FIFTH GROUP OF QUESTIONS.

The fifth group of questions that Klein identifies is appropriately referred to as “**other questions**.” This group is composed of questions that do not fall under the four previously mentioned types of questions.<sup>109</sup>

## UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE QUESTIONS AND THE THREE TYPES OF EDUCATION

As stated earlier in the chapter, these groups of questions are an essential part of Klein’s educational theory. All three types of education are categorised through these types of questions and how these questions interact with one another. To understand how this interaction takes place, I would like to offer the following assessment of Klein’s three types of education.

**Elemental education** is defined as education in the elements of human life or the assimilation we receive from the members of our community in our childhood and possibly throughout our natural lives.<sup>110</sup> This type of education is said to be responsible for the reception of our customs, beliefs, opinions of all kinds, and manner of behaviour, including our emotional responses.<sup>111</sup> It is through this education that we are able to become members of certain communities, as it enables us to form an identity that is based on the principles of that particular community.

This not only refers to large-scale communities but small-scale communities as well, such as

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<sup>108</sup> *ibid*, 163.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid*, 160.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid*, 158.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid*

families, clans, and one's specific neighbourhood.<sup>112</sup>

A noteworthy claim that Klein makes about this type of education is the claim that for one to be considered a human being means to be educated in this elemental way, to be educated in the elements of human life.<sup>113</sup> This is a significant claim because it directly ties one's humanity with education. Klein bases the claim of elemental education being a necessary requirement for being considered a human being on the premise that our maturity as human beings does not necessarily coincide with our maturity as living organisms.<sup>114</sup> While what we may consider being our maturity as a living organism may depend on nutrition and various other biological processes, what we consider to be human maturity is provided for us by the members of our community through our interaction with our families, our neighbours, and those around us. We learn what it means to be human by assimilating the human behaviour around us.

We see good examples of Klein's point in Menkithi's text "Personhood and Community in Traditional African Thought" and Wiredu's text "Are there cultural universals". In "Personhood and Community", Menkithi states that in African thought "personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed".<sup>115</sup> In "are there cultural universals", Wiredu makes the statement: that without communication, a human community cannot exist. This implies that without communication, we would be unable to conceive of human persons: we would only be aware of human animals because a human person is a product of culture.<sup>116</sup> I believe these two claims are in line with Klein's claim about elemental education being a necessary component for the development of the human person. However, while Menkithi associates the idea that one's humanity is dependent on their association with the community exclusively with African thought, Klein and Wiredu associate this idea with all human beings and all societies.

Another scholar who ties one's humanity to their community is the ancient Greek scholar Aristotle. This is seen in the following extract from his text *Politics*.

Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a

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<sup>112</sup> *ibid*, 158.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>115</sup> Menkiti, Ifeanyi A. "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought." In *African Philosophy, an Introduction*, edited by Richard Wright, 171–182. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984. 172.

<sup>116</sup> Wiredu, K. (1990, December). Are There Cultural Universals. *Quest Philosophical Discussions: An International African Journal of Philosophy*, 2, 5-19. 5.

political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity; he is like the.<sup>117</sup>

We are informed that there are two ways in which we interact with elemental education. One manner, which is considered the lowest but essential level of interaction with elemental education, is through passive feeding.<sup>118</sup> This implies that we learn behaviours without actively seeking to learn them. In most cases, we are not even aware that we are adopting these behavioural patterns: we simply imitate them at a subconscious level. The other manner of interaction with elemental education is said to come through experience. By using the term experience, Klein is mainly referring to the hardships one has faced in life. Hardships that one has either succumbed to or overcome and keeps anticipating.<sup>119</sup> These hardships not only refer to those faced by an individual but to those faced by the community at large. Since the individual is an integral part of the community, the hardships of the community can, in a sense, become the hardships of the individual.

This form of education is primarily associated with practical questions. Since the aim of this education is to understand and adopt the elements of human life, we can safely conclude that one who partakes in this form of education is primarily concerned with assimilating what is considered to be the correct set of actions and behaviour for a human being.

**Formal education** can be appropriately defined as the systematisation of elemental education. When this systemization takes place, each experience is changed into a question. The question, by nature, identifies a possible problem (hardship) and the answer to the question identifies a possible solution to the problem that has been identified. Since a community consists of a number of individuals, there is a high probability that other members of the community have either faced the same problem or a problem that is similar in nature. This, however, does not entail that they have solved the problem the exact same way. The variety of solutions to the problem provides the opportunity to compile a large body of knowledge relating to the subject nature of the problem. It is in this manner that we begin to create formal disciplines. If, for example, if we are faced with a basic problem such as a lack of shelter, then the many ways in which this problem has been addressed becomes a body of knowledge that relates to the nature of the problem. This creates a discipline such as construction or architecture. Another example would be health problems. Each person, at

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<sup>117</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a.

<sup>118</sup> Klein, Jacob. 1960. "The Idea of Liberal Education." In *The Goals of Higher Education*, edited by Jr. W. D. Weatherford, 157-170. Harvard University Press.. 158.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

some point in their life, must have faced some health problem in one form or another. The manner in which the health problem was addressed becomes the body of knowledge that relates to the nature of the problem, creating the discipline of medicine or medical sciences.

Klein informs us that this type of education consists of a consistent interaction between the five different types of questions. Klein argues that our experiences produce a large variety of culturally accepted opinions and beliefs. These opinions and beliefs become subject to more questioning as we attempt to make what is unknown about our opinions and beliefs known and what we believe was known but forgotten known to us once again. Metastrophic questioning soon begins to take place, and we begin not only to question what we know but how we know it. This inevitably leads us to question our methods of inquiry and their efficiency. Once we begin to question our methods, we begin to develop them, further preserving what we deem useful and discarding what we deem useless. This enables us to create a system of what we consider to be trustworthy methods in relation to a particular subject, effectively creating a body of knowledge. Klein believes that it is a result of this metastrophic reflection, in conjunction with exploratory questioning, which inevitably leads to the establishment of formal education.<sup>120</sup> Another point that is noted by Klein is how formal education makes use of metastrophic questioning in relation to the living environment. This enables formal education to create a body of knowledge that has a dual function, the theoretical and the practical: in other words, disciplines and sciences that are produced in formal education can serve both as theoretical disciplines and practical disciplines that can be applied to our daily lives.

**Liberal education** is defined as education that is studied for its own sake and not for the sake of some external action or external good.<sup>121</sup> According to Klein, liberal education comes to be as a result of what he refers to as “radical metastrophic questioning.” While formal education makes use of metastrophic questioning in relation to the living environment, creating a body of knowledge that is both theoretical and practical. Liberal education does not concern itself with the desire to produce a body of knowledge that is practical to our daily lives. This is not to suggest that liberal education is incapable of aiding us in our daily lives, but rather that the production of applied disciplines and sciences is not the aim of this kind of knowledge. Liberal education only concerns itself with study for the sake of study. Therefore, formal education only becomes liberal education when it employs this “radical metastrophic

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<sup>120</sup> *ibid.* 163.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, 166.



questioning” and dedicates itself to inquiry for the sake of inquiry.<sup>122</sup> This presents us with a question that requires careful consideration: If liberal education is defined as education for its own sake (inquiry for the sake of inquiry), then are there particular subjects that fall into the category of liberal education while others fall into a different category of education?

The intuitive answer to this question is yes (some subjects fall under the category of liberal education, while others do not). This is based on the premise that specific disciplines, such as the applied sciences, are, by nature, for the sake of an external end. If the defining component of liberal education is liberal education, being education that doesn’t concern itself with external ends, then the applied sciences cannot fall under the definition of liberal education.

Klein, however, seems to disagree with the intuitive answer making the claim that liberal education is not associated with a particular subject but rather how a subject is studied.<sup>123</sup>

“Whenever a subject is being studied for its own sake, whenever the metaphoric way of questioning is upheld, whenever genuine wonderment is present, liberal education is taking place.”<sup>124</sup>

This statement presents us with three conditions for the study of liberal education: Firstly, it ought to be studied for its own sake: secondly, the metaphoric way of questioning must be upheld: and thirdly, “genuine wonderment” must be present. This presents us with another question. Should all three of these conditions be met for something to fall into the category of liberal education, or is it enough for just one or two of these conditions to be met? To answer this question, I would like to once again direct our attention to what I believe is Klein’s clearest definition of liberal education.

To study for the enjoyment of leisure and in leisure means to be engaged in liberal education, it is an arduous task. This kind of education does not look for some goal or good beyond itself. It is in itself its own end, long before Aristotle and long after him, even under totally different social conditions, this statement defined liberal learning and liberal education.<sup>125</sup>

This statement provides the necessary information needed to answer the following questions:

(1) Do only specific subjects fall under liberal education, or can all subjects fall under liberal

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<sup>122</sup> Inquiry for the sake of inquiry refers to a study that is not undertaken for the sake of an external end. This form of study is undertaken solely for the enjoyment of partaking in the activity of study.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, 165.

education depending on the manner in which they are studied? (2) Does education require that all defining elements be met for it to be considered liberal education, or is it enough to meet some of the defining elements? I believe the extracted statement confirms that education requires all three defining elements to be considered liberal education, and I believe it does so in the following manner: Liberal education is said to be education for the free and nobleman. The free man is said to be one who is enjoying leisure and thus does not need to perform any menial labour to support their daily life. Those who do not need to perform any menial labour to support their daily lives do not need to engage in studies that are strictly designed to develop skills to support their daily lives: thus, they are free to study purely for the sake of enjoyment. Those who study for the sake of enjoyment do so because they genuinely desire to know, as opposed to those who are forced to study for the sake of survival. This implies that the desire to know, in those that do so purely for the sake of knowing, reflects a genuine interest or wonderment in what they desire to know. I believe by applying this manner of understanding: one is able to see that all three defining elements are interlinked: thus, it does not only seem as if all these defining elements should be fulfilled, but it also seems as if fulfilling one of the defining elements is to fulfilling all of the elements.

This leaves us with one last question to address “if liberal education is defined as education for its own sake (inquiry for the sake of inquiry), then are there particular subjects that fall into the category of liberal education while others fall into a different category of education?

This remains a difficult question to answer: on the one hand, we can make the argument that it seems as if only certain subjects qualify as liberal education. This is because even the manner in which the subject is studied (with genuine wonderment) requires that the subject studied be studied for its own sake. Thus it seems subjects that are studied for an external end cannot be studied with genuine wonderment. Thus they cannot be studied liberally: once again, this is because these practical subjects cannot be studied for their own sake but rather for the external value they provide. However, we can also make the following counter-argument: one can study applied sciences and subjects of a similar nature not for the external aim they provide but simply out of curiosity. For example, studying medicine to heal the sick is not the same as studying medicine in order to supplement one’s knowledge of biology. While the first example is intrinsically tied to the aim of healing, the second example uses the same means: however, the aim is pure inquiry for the sake of inquiry. I am inclined to advocate for the second argument as it is not as limiting as the one that suggests that liberal education is limited to specific subjects of study.

## THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF KLEIN'S THEORY

A noteworthy point about Klein's educational theory is how the theory does not make claims that apply to a specific society or group: instead, the educational theory is applied to all groups and all societies regardless of location or era. I would like to argue that this indicates that Klein believes his theory is universally applicable, and I am inclined to agree with him. To demonstrate why I am in agreement with Klein, I would like us to take the following points into consideration.

I would like us to first direct our attention to Klein's account of elemental education and consider the following questions: Does Klein believe his theory of elemental education is universal?<sup>126</sup> And if he does believe that the theory is universal, is he correct? I want to suggest that Klein does believe his theory provides a universal account of education, and his belief is expressed in his claim that to be human is to partake in elemental education, an education that teaches us the elements of human life.<sup>127</sup> From this claim, we can deduce that Klein believes all humans are subject to this type of education. Klein's belief about his account being universal does seem to be a plausible belief to hold. This is especially convincing if we consider the following line of reasoning: while not all societies hold the same beliefs about the elements that pertain to being a human being, This in no way discredits the reality that each and every society is subject to its own version of elemental education. In fact, the difference in the type of elemental education one partakes in is the basis of cultural diversity and, of course, cultural bias. Showing yet again that the subjective comes to exist because of the existence of the objective. In conclusion, each and every human being that is part of any society is subject to participation in this kind of elemental education, making elemental education a universal component of human life.

While this argument provides reasons to believe that elemental education is universal, it only addresses a portion of the initial question: thus, we are still left to account for the universality of formal education and liberal education. However, I do believe that the universal nature of formal education has already been hinted at in the previous example.

We previously established that formal education could be appropriately described as the systematisation of elemental education. We made use of an example where one is facing a

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<sup>126</sup> "Universal" in this context refers to the theory being applicable to any and every society.

<sup>127</sup> Klein, Jacob. 1960. "The Idea of Liberal Education." In *The Goals of Higher Education*, edited by Jr. W. D. Weatherford, 157-170. Harvard University Press. 158.

problem such as a lack of shelter, concluding that formal disciplines such as construction and architecture are formed out of the body of knowledge accumulated via the various experiences one encounters when addressing the problem. Let's consider the fundamental similarities in human beings, such as the same essential needs due to the normal biological form of the human body. Human beings are bound to face similar, if not the same, problems. How these problems are addressed might vary, and this may result in (1) the discovery of solutions that differ vastly from those that were produced in other societies, (2) solutions that are similar to those in other societies, and (3) solutions that are the same as those in other societies. The essential point to note is that encounters with problems, regardless of the nature of the problems, are not an occurrence that happens to a specific group of people but rather something that happens to every person regardless of the society they occupy. Therefore due to each person's capacity to experience challenges and accumulate a body of knowledge through their experiences, every society, in virtue of it having humans, has the capacity to produce this type of education. Thus, just as the case was with elemental education, a form of formal education also exists in every single society. To better understand this example, we can make use of the example of shelter building. If we have two societies, one society based in a very warm climate and the other society based in a very cool climate, the needs of these societies will differ based solely on the environment that each group occupies. However, because both groups are composed of humans, there are certain traits that will be fundamentally the same: for example, both groups will need a form of shelter. Each group's individual needs will determine the type of shelter required: for example, the cool climate will require a shelter that is conducive for a cold environment, and this will dictate the type of material used and the overall structure of the house. In a warm climate, the shelter would have to be significantly different as it would have to be conducive for a warm environment. Now while there are particulars concerning how the shelter is built, it does not invalidate the fact that both societies require shelter. This example is even more prominent when we apply it to a fundamental biological requirement such as good nutrition. While every human being has their

individual nutritional needs based on what they lack and what they possess in excess. It does not in any way invalidate the claim that all humans require good nutrition to sustain their health and survival.

The last type of education to consider is liberal education. This form of education is associated with what Klein referred to as radical metastrophic questioning. We made a distinction between liberal education and formal education, stating that formal education makes use of metastrophic questioning in relation to the living environment, and this enables us to create a body of knowledge that is both theoretical and practical. Unlike Formal education, liberal education does not concern itself with the desire to produce a body of knowledge that is practical to our daily lives: liberal education only concerns itself with study for the sake of study. Therefore, formal education only becomes liberal education when it employs this “radical metastrophic questioning” and dedicates itself to inquiry for the sake of inquiry. The question which is the point of interest here, is whether this type of education could only exist in the society of its conception or could it exist as a component of every possible society. We have already established that formal education is present in every society: thus, we only need to confirm if every society has the capacity to partake in radical metastrophic questioning.

To make an attempt to approach this question, I would suggest we phrase the question in another way. Is the capacity to engage in radical metastrophic questioning an intrinsic part of human existence? The reason I opted that we adopt this phrasing is that each society can be fundamentally understood as a co-existing group of human beings. Thus, the assumption we can make from this is an intrinsic part of human nature becomes an intrinsic part of society.

To isolate this question, I would like to suggest the use of a hypothetical situation where we are looking at the example of a man who lives in complete isolation and ask ourselves the question, does Klein’s theory of education apply to the isolated man? If so, to what extent does the theory apply?

Though elemental education may seem to be dependent on the existence of a society, I would like to suggest that this type of education would apply to human beings who aren’t part of a society. This is because the isolated being is still subject to experiences through their interaction with the environment. These experiences will shape and form the isolated human being leading to the development of a systematic pattern of living, one composed of knowledge formed by past experiences. I want to suggest that this is still a form of elemental education because it is based on the question, “how do I, as the type of creature that I am (a

human being), navigate

in this world? This form of human behaviour may not be up to the same standard as that of the ones established in societies. However, it will still stand as a standard for the specific creature that is human. Therefore interaction with elemental education in some form or another is an intrinsic part of our human existence.

The same line of reasoning can be adopted when looking at formal education. If we reconsider the hypothetical example of the human being living in isolation, we can still conceive of a scenario where such a being is bound to contemplate the nature of its environment, as this contemplation would be linked to the survival of the being. The isolated human must wonder why the world is the way that it is, and surely they would wonder about the type of being that they are and why they are so different from other creatures that occupy their environment. These questions may not lead to formal disciplines in the manner that we understand them, but the nature of the questions are both exploratory and metastrophic, which are the types of questions that are linked to the establishment of formal education—showing us that like elemental education, formal education is an intrinsic part of human existence.

Unlike elemental and formal education, liberal education has specific requirements that must be met before one is able to partake in this type of education. It was established that liberal education is meant for the individual who is enjoying leisure. This implies that the isolated individual would have to be in a position where they are able to enjoy leisure for them to be able to partake in liberal education. Though this may seem to be a difficult position to secure, especially for a person who would have to labour alone to ensure their survival, a single individual living in a place that has an abundance of essential resources would have less of a need to labour for the sake of securing resources. This implies that the surrounding environment would still play an essential role in the individual's capacity to partake in liberal education. However, it does not seem to completely remove one's capacity to partake in it. Thus it seems the potential for liberal education exists whenever the potential for leisure is present. Thus if leisure is an intrinsic part of human existence, then we can also conclude that the potential for liberal education too is an intrinsic part of human existence.

It is interesting to note that elemental and formal education function under a harmonious interaction between universalism and particularism as both these two types of education are universal in the sense that both are present in every society, therefore implying that they apply to all human beings that are part of a society. Alternatively, both types of education are

particular in the sense that the manner in which these types of education manifest themselves are all particular to the environment in which.

Similar to the two aforementioned types of education, liberal education (specifically Klein's conception of liberal education) also functions under a harmonious interaction between universalism and particularism. However the manner in which liberal education functions under this interaction differs from the other types of education. Unlike the other two types of education, the manner in which liberal education manifest is not as heavily dictated by the environment. The greatest and perhaps only dictating factor that the environment has in relation to liberal education lies in one's environment having the capacity to allow for a life of leisure. In this case, the environment does not seem to dictate how liberal education manifests itself. The reason liberal education is not dictated by the environment beyond the limits of the previously mentioned point is found in the manner in which liberal education is defined (as a form of study that is undertaken for its own sake as opposed to an external end/good). The definition of liberal is one that is so specific to a particular method or manner of study (not for an external end/good) that the definition (not the environment) dictates the manner in which liberal education manifests itself in any given environment. If liberal education's manner or method of study is not upheld, then the form of study ceases to be liberal.

As we stated before, the assumption is whatever can be identified as an intrinsic part of human nature can be identified as an intrinsic part of society. If this assumption is true, then we can make the following conclusion: Leisure is an intrinsic part of society, and due to the relationship between leisure and liberal education, every society intrinsically has the potential for liberal education. By adopting this line of reasoning, one is able to understand Klein's theory of education as a study of human nature and the human capacity to learn. Furthermore, since the study focuses on the nature of the human being, the study can be applied to all humans regardless of their societal context. This is because it takes the relative nature of human beings into consideration, identifying it as an intrinsic part of human existence. Therefore by applying this line of reasoning, we are able to conclude that Klein's theory of education identifies forms of education that are either present or have the potential to be present in all societies.



## POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH THIS APPROACH.

There are a couple of potential problems with this approach: while the examples used to show the universal nature of elemental and formal education could be considered convincing, the same cannot be said for the example used to show the universal nature of liberal education. The example is based on a number of assumptions that aren't argued for: these assumptions include the claims: (1) whatever is an intrinsic part of human nature will also be an intrinsic part of society. And (2) the assumption that leisure is an intrinsic part of human existence. Strengthening the argument of the universality of elemental education requires the thesis to also argue for the assumptions' validity. But before we can even consider the validity of these assumptions, we would have to provide a convincing account for the existence of "intrinsic nature", specifically "intrinsic human nature".

## AN ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF INTRINSIC NATURE.

The idea of intrinsic nature is not a new concept: it has been used in philosophy throughout human history, with some instances of its uses being so normalized that we fail to even recognize that certain arguments were making a reference to the existence of intrinsic nature. We see one example in Plato's "Meno", where Socrates asks Meno to define virtue.<sup>128</sup> In Meno's attempt to provide a definition of virtue, he offers examples that contain virtue, to which Socrates replies by stating that he did not ask for an example of virtue. He asked for the definition of virtue itself in order that he may understand what makes all those examples, examples of virtue.<sup>129</sup> Socrates then attempts to explain what it is he requires of Meno by using an example of shapes, stating that if he were to ask what is shape, it would not be satisfactory to reply triangle is shape because triangle does not define what shape is, a triangle is merely an example of a shape as is a rectangle, a square and a circle.<sup>130</sup> The question what is shape is inquiring into the thing that makes all those examples of shapes, shapes. Thus the question does not ask for an example: instead, it asks for the definition that is not only found in all the examples, but it makes all the examples what they are.

There are a lot of things that we can identify if we assess the conversation between Socrates and Meno. For example, we can identify a one over manner relationship in definitions, specifically with the example of shapes. Socrates believes that there is one definition of shape

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<sup>128</sup> Plato, *Meno*, 70a.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*, 71e.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid*, 74a-75a.

that can be identified through many examples. This line of thinking is very similar to the one that Klein employs in his educational theory, where he is able to demonstrate the existence of the same type of education through examples of various societies. I want to suggest that what we see in Socrates' conversation with Meno is the search for an essential defining element or elements that are not only tied to specific things but also make these things what they are. If the defining element were to be removed from a thing, that thing would cease to be what it is, and it would be something other than what it is. In the same way that shapes are shapes because they abide by the defining element(s) of shape, elemental education is elemental education because it abides by the defining element(s) of elemental education, and the same is true for formal education and liberal education.

This brings us to the idea of intrinsic properties. If things are what they are because of certain defining elements, and the removal of those defining elements would cause the thing that was once a particular thing to become something other than what it was, then we can conclude that there must be properties that belong to a thing that make it a specific type of thing. If we continue with the example of shapes, but this time, we direct our attention to what differentiates shapes from one another. We would have to focus on the definition of particulars and ask ourselves the question, how does a triangle differ from a square? To answer this question, we would simply consult the definition of the two shapes in question. A triangle can be defined as a shape with three sides and three angles. A square can be defined as a shape with four equal sides and four angles. The definition outlines the properties that belong to each shape enabling us to identify where the shapes differ. The properties that belong to a specific shape define that shape: removing the defining properties of the particular shape would change the shape itself. This implies that these inherent properties are intrinsic parts of the shape.

We can apply this same line of logic to human beings. Though human beings have different characteristics, there are also characteristics that all human beings share. These characteristics give us the capacity to refer to all those who possess them as human beings. The most obvious of these characteristics is the biological form that we had previously mentioned. It is due to our understanding of these shared characteristics that we are able to apply certain knowledge to all humans. An example would be medical knowledge: if there wasn't a shared biological form among humans, then there would have to be a specific field of study for each and every individual's health as each individual would have their own private form of health that does not apply to anyone other than themselves. However, such a scenario is ridiculous: a good medical practitioner is able to attend to all humans because all humans have very

similar biological characteristics, thus giving them similar biological needs. It is also interesting to note that the human does not determine the biological form of the human, yet it is an essential defining component of a human being.

Ghanaian Philosopher Kwasi Wiredu also identifies biological identity as a common trait shared among humans.<sup>131</sup> Wiredu does not necessarily list biological identity as a universal trait: instead, he refers to biological identity as a component of what he refers to as biologico-cultural shared identity (which he lists as both a universal and an intrinsic part of human existence). Biologico-cultural shared identity refers to our shared identity as homo-sapiens: this not only refers to our physical human form but also encompasses all other components that belong to the type of being that we are as homo-sapiens. Essentially our biologico-cultural identity gives us the capacity to do the type of things that a being such as ourselves is capable of. For example, if we were to direct our attention to one of the essential components of our biologico-cultural identity identified by Wiredu (the human mind), we see that most of our human capacities depend on the existence of the human mind. In fact, Wiredu argues that our entire humanity is dependent on the existence of the human mind. This is because Wiredu believes the human mind plays a significant role in allowing us to become human persons as opposed to being human animals.

The human mind provides the necessary conditions for communication which Wiredu believes is responsible for the establishment of human communities and human cultures.<sup>133</sup> We had previously established that personhood is a product of culture. Thus it would not be unreasonable of us to make the claim that without the existence of culture, we cannot have the existence of persons. Since the existence of culture is dependent on the existence of other essential components, we would not be unreasonable in making the claim that human persons cannot exist where these essential components do not exist: thus, wherever human persons exist, these essential components are present. I believe this line of reasoning is enough to demonstrate the existence of universal intrinsic components that exist in all human beings. Furthermore, I believe this example is particularly helpful because the focus is on human beings that inhabit specific communities. The example demonstrates to us that no community can come into existence without the pre-existence of essential components such as the mind and communication. Any and every human community share this manner of coming into being in a similar way that all existing shapes share the defining factor of shape.

Wiredu's text outlines another interesting point about the relationship between

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<sup>131</sup> Wiredu, Kwasi. 1990. "Are There Cultural Universals." *Quest Philosophical Discussions: An International African Journal of Philosophy* 2: 5-19. 6.

communication and community. The text distinguishes between two types of communication which Wiredu identifies as intracultural and intercultural communication. Intracultural communication is communication between people belonging to the same community. We see a clear example of intracultural communication in Klein's elemental education, where people from a specific culture teach another member of that about their cultural norms and cultural conduct. Intercultural communication, on the other hand, refers to a form of communication that takes place between people belonging to different communities.

Intercultural communication is an essential part of Klein's theory because the universal application of his theory is premised on the claim that cultures are able to communicate and share ideas that can be applied to any and every culture. One example of intercultural communication can be found in the shared medical knowledge of the global world: a good example of this is how the global community approached the Covid-19 pandemic. It is due to the existence of the universals identified by Wiredu that we, an international community, were able to take collective action as a global community.

It is essential to understand that the idea of a global community can only come into existence with the pre-existence of the ability to communicate on a worldwide scale. Thus, in the same way, that communication enables individuals to come together to form small communities, communication also enables individual communities to come together to form a global community. This not only reinforces the idea of components that are intrinsic to human beings but also suggests that the intrinsic capacity of an individual becomes the intrinsic capacity of the community. This second point is essential to identify as it will be the focus of the following section.

#### WHATEVER IS AN INTRINSIC PART OF HUMAN NATURE WILL ALSO BE AN INTRINSIC PART OF SOCIETY.

This conclusion has been arrived at by adopting a line of reasoning which is similar to that used in the unity of multiplicity theory. The fundamental assumption here is the following: society, in its most basic sense, is a large group of people, this large group is composed of a number of small groups, and these small groups are also composed of a number of even smaller groups.

This process of division can continue until we reach the smallest indivisible part found in a society, and that is the individual. Suppose we focus on the nature of groups in societies, specifically how and why groups are formed. We can outline specific things about the

relationship between individuals and the groups they create. The first thing we can outline is that most, if not all, groups are formed based on commonalities, meaning the members of a particular group always share a common trait or common traits amongst themselves. This commonality can vary from physical attributes to ideologies and even the function the individuals serve in the society. For example, the term “students” is given to a group of individuals who study, the term children is used to describe a number of individuals who fit the description of a child, and the term colleagues is used to describe a group of individuals who work together(usually for the sake of a common goal). A group cannot be formed without the existence of individuals because it is only when these individuals come together to form a group that we begin to see signs of an existing society.

An important point to notice about the formation of these groups is how the nature of each group is interlinked with the nature of each individual in the group: the group is only a group of students because each individual studies and is, therefore, a student. If each student in the group was an outstanding student, the group would have the potential to be an outstanding group of students. If the students are poor-quality students, then the group has the potential to be a poor quality group of students. The reason I state that these groups have the potential to be the group equivalent of their individual parts as opposed to having certainty that each group will be the group equivalent of their individual parts is because of other factors that arise when forming a group, such as the compatibility of group members. While this is an important point to take note of, it mostly applies to groups that have been put together in pursuit of a common goal, as their compatibility for achieving the goal as a team would be a point of importance. This, however, does not invalidate the point I am trying to make, and that is that all groups inherit the nature of the individuals that make up the group. Since society is composed of individuals, society inherits the nature of each individual as the potential nature of the society. In this way, the thesis reaches the conclusion: whatever is an intrinsic part of human nature will also be an intrinsic part of society.

## LEISURE AS AN INTRINSIC PART OF HUMAN EXISTENCE.

Leisure being an intrinsic part of human existence, is perhaps the most important claim that requires validation. This is because the human capacity to engage in liberal education is based on the reliability of this claim. The claim that leisure is an intrinsic part of society was reached by adopting the following line of reasoning. Human beings labour for the sake of their survival: this implies that they do not labour out of the desire to labour but rather because they are compelled to labour out of our desire to survive. Once human beings have secured their survival, they are free to pursue things that they desire to do as opposed to doing things that they are compelled to do: thus, we can view such things as the things people survive for as opposed to things people do in order to survive. I believe Aristotle demonstrates a similar understanding of leisure in the following quotation.

But as more arts were invented, and some were directed to the necessities of life, others to recreation, the inventors of the latter were naturally always regarded as wiser than the inventors of the former, because their branches of knowledge did not aim at utility. Hence when all such inventions were already established, the sciences which do not aim at giving pleasure or at the necessities of life were discovered, and first in the places where men first began to have leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were founded in Egypt; for there the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure.<sup>132</sup>

That which people do out of desire as opposed to necessity is not done for the attainment of any end other than the enjoyment of the activity. This represents my understanding of leisure activities: thus to be enjoying leisure can be understood as being free to do what one desires to do as opposed to what one is compelled to do. There are numerous examples of leisure activities that can be identified in all societies. This includes participation in games, participation in social events, travelling for pleasure, and participation in sporting events (especially via spectatorship). Perhaps the best example of leisure in any society can be identified through the youth. In most cases, the youth in society has no responsibility to labour in order to ensure their survival. Thus the majority of their time is spent on leisure activities.

I believe this line of reasoning clearly demonstrates how leisure can be interpreted as an intrinsic part of human nature and an intrinsic part of society. Furthermore, I believe now that we have addressed the two aforementioned assumptions, the argument for the universality of

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<sup>132</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 981b15-20.

Klein's theory can be said to be more convincing.

At this point, it seems clear that Klein's theory functions on the epistemological premise that universal truths exist. Furthermore, it also seems that there is good reason to believe that Klein's theory can be viewed as a theory that argues for the existence of universal truths. These types of truths (universal truths) do not seem to be the only types of truths that Klein's theory advocates for if we consider the question, what makes Klein's theory universally true (especially when we take into consideration the fact that the societies that the theory is based on differ vastly" we come to the obvious conclusion that Klein's theory is not true because Klein says it's true. The truthfulness of Klein's theory is not determined by Klein or any of the societies that Klein bases his theory.

If anything, it seems Klein comes to understand what appears to have always been true concerning human learning. This is indicative of the existence of self-determining truths, self-determining in the sense that these are true, not because we determined them to be so. These truths are true regardless of what we believe about them. The best example of these truths are the natural laws that govern all of natural existence: these natural laws aren't what they are because we made them so. They are what they are, independent of us: we only come to discover their truthful nature. I believe that Klein views the concept of liberal education as a type of truth that is similar to the ones that govern natural laws, and that is the reason he views the concept of liberal education as something that cannot be altered without it becoming something else. In conclusion, due to the universal nature of Klein's theory of truth, the societal context problem is rendered obsolete against Klein's entire educational theory and Klein's concept of liberal education (with the exception of societies that actively prevent their citizens from pursuing a life of leisure).

#### Klein's conception in contemporary South Africa

Though I have argued that Klein's conception is not limited to a particular societal context, I do believe that Klein's conception of liberal education is best suited for contemporary South Africa, and I believe this is so for the following reason. Contemporary South Africa is a multicultural society consisting of a vast number of different cultural norms and standards to the enormous diversity of the multicultural space. Altering a conception to benefit a particular cultural group risks doing those at the expense of other cultural groups. Since Klein's conception focuses on properties that are primarily concerned with the human being regardless of the social space or cultural group they inhabit Klein's conception cannot favor

one group over another group. The implication of this is that one group cannot benefit at the expense of another group.

### Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide an in-depth assessment of Klein's entire educational theory with the goal of demonstrating the universal nature of his educational theory. Proving the universal nature of Klein's educational theory accomplished two essential things. (1) It indicated that Klein advocates for the existence of a theory of truth that acknowledges the existence of truths that are universal. (2) By showing that the educational theory is universal, the societal context problem no longer acts as a threat to Klein and his conception.

Demonstrating the universal nature of Klein's theory required an argument for the existence of intrinsic human properties. This was an essential argument to make due to its association with the principal claim I was making about Klein's education theory (the theory revolves around properties that are intrinsically linked to being a human being). To argue for the existence of intrinsic properties, I made use of Wiredu's arguments for cultural universals.

I then argued for the universality of elemental education by highlighting Klein's claim that for one to be considered human, they have to have learned these elements of human life. Thus making elemental education an integral part of being human. I argued the argument for the universality of formal education by demonstrating that the act of facing problems and coming up with solutions to particular problems is not something that occurs to an isolated human but rather something that happens to all humans in all societies, meaning all humans the capacity to form a body of knowledge out of their experiences. I based the argument for the universality of liberal education on the claim that any society that has the potential for leisure has the potential for liberal education. I then demonstrated how the vast majority of societies provide an opportunity for their citizens to participate in leisure activities, indicating that the majority of societies have the potential to participate in liberal education.

I then concluded by arguing that Klein's conception is better suited for a multicultural society like contemporary South Africa. I argue that this is due to the South African context consisting of a variety of different cultural norms and opinions which all occupy the same space social space. Due to the vast diversity of the multicultural space altering a conception to benefit a particular cultural group risks doing those at the expense of other cultural groups. Since Klein's conception focuses on properties that are primarily concerned with the human



being regardless of the social space or cultural group they inhabit, Klein's conception cannot favor one group over another group. The implication of this is that one group cannot benefit at the expense of another group

## CONCLUDING CHAPTER: A SUMMARY OF ALL THAT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED.

This chapter serves as a summary of all that has been established in this thesis project. This summary aims to present the entire project as a clear and concise summary: ideally, this chapter should aid the reader in understanding the entire project.

In the introductory chapter, I outlined the main aim of the thesis, which is defending Klein's conception of liberal education against the threat of the societal context problem, stating that this would be done by arguing that the threat of the societal context problem does not apply to Klein's conception of liberal education and the value he identifies because his conception of liberal education is based on an educational theory that is universally applicable to all human beings.

I began this argument by distinguishing Klein's conception of liberal education from that of other scholars, claiming that the key difference between Klein and the other scholars is the theory of truth adapted by each scholar (most scholars' theory of truth became apparent through assessing the manner in which each scholar interacts with the societal context problem). Scholars who attempted to overcome the problem by redefining, altering and reconceptualising liberal education displayed signs of a theory of truth that suggested that we determine what liberal education is and, thus, we can change the definition of liberal education at will. Klein, on the other hand, could not adopt the same approach because he rejected the idea of a malleable conception of liberal education.

As a result of Klein's inability to overcome the societal context problem via the method of redefining and reconceptualising, I opted to adopt a different method of overcoming the societal context problem (Demonstrating the universal applicability of Klein's theory). I argued that this method did not only overcome the threat of the societal context problem (by demonstrating that Klein's entire conception of liberal education applies to each and every individual regardless of the context they inhabit) it is also a superior method compared to the method of reconceptualization and redefinition.

## Arguments for the reconceptualization and redefinition method

A1: We determine what is true. We determine what conceptions truly are, liberal education is a concept. Therefore we determine what liberal education truly is.

A2: We determine what liberal education is, liberal education is whatever we determine it is. Therefore we can redefine and reconceptualize liberal education as we see fit.

I demonstrated that the main issue of the reconceptualization and redefinition method lies within the method's dependence on a theory of truth that undermines itself (We determine what is true). I reject the foundational premise and argue that as a consequence of adopting an unconvincing theory of truth as the foundational premise, the method itself becomes unconvincing. Due to the unconvincing nature of this method, I deemed the other scholars' attempts at overcoming the threat of the societal context problem ineffective. Furthermore, since their conceptions of liberal education and the values associated with their conception seem unable to overcome the problem of societal context without the reconceptualization and redefinition method, I found their conceptions of liberal education to be less convincing than the conception offered by Klein.

In the third and final chapter, I conducted an in-depth assessment of Klein's entire educational theory to demonstrate the universal nature of his educational theory as a means of overcoming the societal context problem. To accomplish this, I used Wiredu's argument for cultural universals to argue for the existence of intrinsic human properties. This was an essential argument to make due to its association with the principal claim I associate with Klein's education theory (that the theory revolves around properties that are intrinsically linked to being human). Thus by virtue of being human, one is subject to participating or having the potential to participate in all that is mentioned in Klein's theory of education.

I argued for the universality of elemental education by highlighting Klein's claim that for one's humanity is linked to one's participation in elements of human life (a claim that Menkiti also supported). Thus making elemental education an integral part of being human. I argued the argument for the universality of formal education by demonstrating that the act of facing problems and coming up with solutions to particular problems is not something that occurs to an isolated human but rather something that happens to all humans in all societies, meaning all humans the capacity to form a body of knowledge out of their experiences. I based the argument for the universality of liberal education on the claim that any society that has the potential for leisure has the potential for liberal education. I then demonstrated how

the vast majority of societies provide an opportunity for their citizens to participate in leisure activities, indicating that the majority of societies have the potential to participate in liberal education.

I then concluded by arguing that Klein's conception is better suited for a multicultural society like contemporary South Africa. I argue that this is due to the South African context consisting of various cultural norms and opinions, which all occupy the same social space. Due to the vast diversity of the multicultural space altering a conception to benefit a particular cultural group risks doing those at the expense of other cultural groups. Since Klein's conception focuses on properties primarily concerned with the human being regardless of the social space or cultural group they inhabit, Klein's conception cannot favour one group over another. The implication is that one group cannot benefit at the expense of another.

It is my belief that through this series of arguments, I have clearly demonstrated the universal nature of Klein's theory, thus, negating the societal context problem and validating all that was established through the assessment of Klein's conception of liberal education, including the identified value of partaking in liberal education.

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