The above is, in skeleton form, the program for the education called liberal at Thomas Aquinas College and the rationale thereof. Its natural effect, of course, is not good accountants, or good car­ penters, or good musicians, but good men. Such education tends to be regarded as impractical, but the fact is that a people cannot long neglect the type of questions it raises and answers except at that people's own peril, for such matters are basic to the good life. More than a decade of experience has confirmed the College in its conviction that such education is indeed beneficial in a deeply human way. Were this land of ours committed to education along these lines, its face would be remarkably changed-in the direction of justice and the other virtues, of general happiness, and, finally, in the direction of true human freedom.

**Liberal Education and the Humanities**

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ost modem educators, devoted as they are to the ideal of ac­

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ademic freedom, maintain that institutions of higher learn­ ing may not commit themselves to any particular philosophical tradition. Presumably, this is either because they regard the central philosophical issues as beyond resolution, or because they believe the resolution of those issues is not determinate enough to be the basis for a community of learning. However, although it may dis­ claim responsibility for the universe at large, a college or university can hardly escape the need to order its own affairs. In particular, it must divide and order its own curriculum, and, in doing so, it must perforce make certain assumptions about the natures of the various disciplines and the matters of which they treat. The educa­ tional consequences of these assumptions are seldom remarked.

Our purpose here is to examine a very basic division which is usually taken for granted: the division of the curriculum into the sciences and the humanities. We shall examine and criticize this division, the assumptions which underlie it, and the assumptions which it encourages in those who study within its framework. And since those who make this division clearly identify the humanities with the liberal arts and liberal education, we shall also examine the latter and determine how reasonable this identification is. By way of contrast, our discussion will also include an account of an older tradition on these same matters.

The*"Sciences" and the"Humanities"*

We begin, then, by asking: Which disciplines are "sciences" and which are "humanities"? And then: By what principle are they divided in this way, and how is that principle currently understood? Roughly, this is the division: philosophy, history, and literature are considered humanities, while physics, chemistry, biology, and the like are considered the sciences. There is dispute about borderline cases, such as the social sciences, but there seems to be widespread agreement about the aforesaid disciplines. This is sufficient for our

argument.

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Now, what is the principle or reason for this division? And why, in particular, is philosophy classed with literature and history rather than with the sciences? Perhaps it would be helpful to ex­ amine the term "humanities": No doubt it is used in a derived and specialized sense here, but if there is any point at all to the naming, it must involve some reference to the primitive meaning. For no matter what we do with the term "humanities;' there is no getting the "human" out of it, so that any intelligible interpretation of the term involves some reference to man and the things of man: the things he does, the things he makes, the things he thinks. Accord­ ingly, it would seem that certain disciplines are named "humani­ ties" because they are about man or are pre-eminently referred to man in some way.

*Distinguishing between the Natural and the Human*

If this is so, it would seem that a distinction between the natural and the human is crucial here. For science, as understood nowadays, is virtually the same as natural science, while history and literature are concerned with human affairs, and literature is itself a human artifact. So it is likely that the division of the sci­ ences from the humanities is based upon the distinction between the natural and the human. But as regards philosophy, it is more difficult; nevertheless, we do find that those who put philosophy among the humanities tend to regard it as human in the present sense. For example, it is a commonplace that philosophy is an inte­ grating discipline; that is, it puts all the varieties of human experi­ ence and knowledge together and determines their overall mean­ ing and significance. Now it becomes quite clear from the literature on the subject that significance, as currently understood, means significance for man. Man and the life of man have become the standpoint from which all things are to be viewed and the princi­ ple whereby all studies are to be ordered. Otherwise, it is said, our studies will lack "relevance." Furthermore, the method of studying philosophy has become increasingly historical in modern times. Research and teaching have turned away from reality itself and its causes and principles and have fixed upon man's various attempts to understand that reality, and thus upon the variety of philosophi­

cal systems which he has produced in the process.

Coming to the heart of our discussion, we also find that the humanities tend to be identified with the liberal arts and with lib­ eral education. We hear frequent statements to the effect that the humanities are the core ofliberal education, which suggests that if the humanities are not the whole of education, they are at least that part which makes it liberal. This is not surprising when we reflect upon the typical modem understanding of liberal education. It is said that such an education is directed to freedom, and this free­ dom is understood as the liberation of man from that which pre­ vents the full expression of his humanity. Thus, it humanizes him inasmuch as it enables him to become himself, and the studies that accomplish this are called "humanities:'

It is rather puzzling, of course, to speak of man becoming himsel£ There are several ways of understanding this, but what it seems to mean in the present context is that man becomes himself more fully through self-discovery and self-awareness. Since art, lit­ erature, history, and philosophy are all expressions ofhis humanity, he becomes conscious ofhimself as man through studying them. In this view, then, man is liberated insofar as he is humanized, and he is humanized by becoming conscious of himself through the study of culture. Liberal studies are the same as humane studies.

A sign that we are on the right track is the way in which theol­ ogy-the study of God-has recently joined the humanities by be­ ing transformed into "religious studies." This is significant, not only because of what goes on under that name, but also because of the name itsel£ For God is not a religious being-He has no religion. Religion is something that man has, even though a particular reli­ gion may be from God. So the focus has shifted from God to man, and whereas theologians used to speak about God, students of re­ ligion now discuss the various ways man has thought about God, the "faith experiences" of various communities, and so forth. By this humanistic orientation, it is supposed, religious studies have at long last become liberal.

*Anomalies in the Modern Curriculum*

It seems, therefore, that certain disciplines are now called "humanities" and are described as liberal because they are sup­ posed to be about man or to center around him in some way. Let

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us now examine this.

When we look at what are now classified as sciences and hu­ manities, we immediately perceive certain anomalies. First of all, we find that many philosophers-notably Plato and Aristotle­ hold that philosophy is not primarily concerned with man, but with things that are better than man. But the very structure of the modern curriculum rejects this view. By the framework within which we now work, a perennial issue of philosophy has been rath­ er abruptly settled, or there is at least a definite leaning toward a particular settlement.

Secondly, we find that the natural sciences also treat of man, for man is a part of nature. So we might ask why the humanities are not therefore classed as part of natural science. No doubt there is some point in distinguishing between the natural and the human (for everyone does so); however, it is difficult to see how one can appeal to the self-evidence of this distinction in the present case, for everyone likewise agrees that philosophy may properly study the nature of man, and many hold that there is a philosophy of na­ ture as well as of other things.

Thirdly, the traditional liberal arts, which were conceived as

an introduction to liberal education, do not favor this way of divid­ ingthe curriculum. Logic, for example, which is part of the trivium, is presumably as important to the scientist as it is to the humanist, and perhaps more so. Furthermore, the arts which comprise the quadrivium-geometry and astronomy, arithmetic and music­ are all mathematical. (The astronomy and music which are liberal arts explain their subject-matters by mathematical principles ex­ clusively, since such explanations are proportioned to beginners.) There is probably no part of ancient learning more like science as it is now conceived than these, for modern natural science is pre­ dominantly mathematical in method. Thus, the view which identi­ fies liberal arts with the humanities cannot claim continuity with the older tradition ofliberal education.

***AnotherView of Liberal Education***

These difficulties, among others, immediately arise when we accept the modern distinction between the sciences and the hu­ manities. They were not proposed in order to refute conclusively,

but in order to prepare the way for an alternate view of the division and order of liberal studies. This view, of course, is not a new one but goes back, in its essentials, to the best of Greek learning. Our presentation of it will involve a deeper criticism of the modern cur­ riculum and its consequences.

To begin with, we define liberal education as the education of a free man, much as the moderns do, although our understanding of freedom is somewhat different from theirs. A free man is a man who lives for himself in this sense: He realizes within himself the end for which he lives and is joined to it in his own person. He is contrasted with a slave, for the good which the latter realizes by his activity exists in other men or even in other things. Thus, a free man is one whose life has intrinsic meaning, and liberal education will be that which befits such a person and enables him to live in such a way.

Now some would immediately dismiss this distinction be­ tween the liberal and servile as something entirely relative to those societies-happily long gone-in which there were masters and slaves. But here we do not mean that sort of slavery, the condition of certain men in certain places at certain times. Rather we are thinking of a universal slavery which oppresses all men, for human nature, as Aristotle says, is in many ways in bondage. For we see that, despite the legal freedom of which we boast, the better part of our lives is taken up with actions which are only necessary; they are not desirable in themselves and are no part of happiness, but are needed for something else. And this something else is all too often no more than simply to continue to exist. Already a third of our lives is taken up with sleep, and if we also subtract the time spent in necessary work or in amusement (which is also necessary in a way), the remainder is precious little and seems hardly enough, in quantity or quality, to justify the trouble ofliving.

Perhaps the most bitter part of this condition is the bondage of the intelligence, which in spite of being the best and most divine thing in man, spends nearly all its time and effort in caring for the body and has little or nothing for itsel£ For the proper good of the intelligence is truth and knowledge, but because of the necessities of this mortal life, it is compelled to put aside its quest for wisdom

in order to attend to the inferior parts of man. In consequence, life

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is not intrinsically worthwhile; we are always preparing to be hap­

py, but we never are happy.

*Liberal Education Ordered to the Divine*

However, this present life does allow some leisure to some of *us,* and liberal education seeks to exploit this leisure so that we might achieve as much freedom as possible. Accordingly, it is di­ rected to the kinds of knowledge that human understanding seeks for its own perfection. Thus it is not concerned primarily with practical knowledge-the knowledge of making and doing-for no such knowledge is desirable in itself. If we could have the practi­ cal results without the knowledge, we would not bother with the latter; for example, if the sick could get well by themselves, no one would study medicine. We might say, then, that the free man does not desire learning in order to change the world, but sees in learn­ ing itself the kind of change that the world needs. While he can­ not neglect the necessities of life, he finds his end and freedom in knowledge. And this knowledge is primarily theoretical-that is, it is sought, and is worthy ofbeing sought, for its own sake.

But what is this knowledge which is a free man's happiness?

Surely it cannot be a knowledge of things inferior to man. Can it then be a knowledge of man himself and of the various expressions of his humanity? Or does this depend upon another question: Is man the most excellent of all things that are? If he is, we shall have an answer, since the knowledge of man will then be the most ex­ cellent and worthwhile knowledge, and the poet's statement will be true: The proper study of mankind is man. For what better use could he make ofhis life?

On the other hand, if man is not the primary being, but the effect of superior causes and derives all the excellence he possesses from them, he will not achieve happiness through knowledge of himself, but rather through the knowledge of those causes. Liberal education, then, will not be humanistic-it will not be ordered to the human but to the divine. Even though it may humanize man through self-awareness, this will not be the measure of its success. This is Aristotle's argument in the tenth book of the Nicomachean Ethics:

But such a life would be too high for man; for it is not insofar as he is man that he will live so, but insofar as something divine is present in him; and by so much as this is superior to our composite nature is its activ­ ity superior to that which is the exercise of the other kind of virtue. If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in compari­ son with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think ofhuman things, and, be­ ing mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything.

On these premises, humanistic studies will never be the core ofliberal education.

*An Orientation to Things Better than Man*

The traditional liberal arts are a sign that liberal education was not originally humanistic, but rather followed Aristotle's doctrine. Within the quadrivium especially, we find this doctrine confirmed; for astronomy and music are principal in that division, since geom­ etry is ordered to the former and arithmetic to the latter. Now it is reasonable to suggest that astronomy is a prefiguration of the theo­ retical sciences generally, where knowledge is the end, since the stars are not things we can do something about-we can only learn about them. And the stars certainly seem to be, and were originally thought to be, of a higher order than man, immortal, and even di­ vine. Furthermore, theoretical studies are ultimately concerned with the order of the universe as a whole, and it is from star-gazing and astronomy that we first begin to apprehend and wonder about that order. And the image of the astronomer, the man who does not see the things at his feet because he is looking up, forcefully sug­ gests that liberal education concerns the things higher than man.

This is perhaps the reason why mechanics, as interesting as

it is, is not one of the liberal arts. For in mechanics, geometry is applied to certain problems which are sublunar and on our own

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level, so to speak. Thus, it does not express the fundamental orien­ tation of the human mind, which is toward things better than man. Now whether the stars are really as the ancients supposed is not important for this argument; what is important is that they made astronomy rather than mechanics a liberal art.

The science of music, on the other hand, would seem to pre­

figure the practical or moral sciences, which concern the ordering of man's soul. For inasmuch as music imitates the passions of the soul, the discovery that arithmetic principles may be applied to mu­ sical tones suggests that a parallel order exists within the passions themselves. One is thereby led to suppose that the inclinations and affections can be ordered by reason and that it is possible to un­ derstand how they ought to be ordered. However, the fact that the science of music is completely theoretical in mode also suggests that the basis of man's moral life is given by nature, rather than in­ stituted by man himself This runs against the first principle of hu­ manism, that man is the measure of all things, as well as against its corollary, that beauty is only in the eye of the beholder. (Hence the intimate connection that we observe between moral relativism and the denial that there is a natural musical harmony is understand­ able: The one view is very much akin to the other.)

***The Failed Logic of Humanism***

If, therefore, man is not the measure of all things, liberal edu­ cation does not consist primarily of humanistic studies, and phi­ losophy in particular is not rightly classed among the humanities. Rather, as Aristotle argues and the traditional liberal arts suggest, it is concerned principally with things better than man. Now, in con­ clusion, we are going to take this argument one step further and attack something we conceded beforehand. We said that if man is the highest being of all, then education will primarily be concerned with man. Even as a hypothetical statement, this is not quite true. For even if man is the most excellent of beings, he is still some­ thing which comes to be and passes away. Therefore, there must be explanatory causes and principles of man, for we ask the question "Why?" first and foremost in the case of beings which come to be and pass away. And, in point of fact, there is no philosopher, even

among those who hold that man is the supreme being, who does

not think that man needs to be explained and who does not look for principles in terms of which to make an explanation.

Now, if these principles are to explain the human, they must be other than human. But also, by our present hypothesis, they would have to be subhuman. Therefore, the human would have to be explained in terms of the subhuman and the rational in terms of the sub-rational, and, furthermore, they would have to be fully explained in such terms. Now what this means is that man could not be, in final analysis, anything essentially better than the non­ human and nonrational. This consequence may be gathered from the testimony of the philosophers themselves. For not one of those who attempt to explain human nature in terms of the subhuman has not finally said that man is essentially no different from the rest of things. For example, the atomists, both ancient and modern, hold that higher beings are simply combinations of various simple particles, and not essentially different from or better than those particles or the other things made out of them. We see this also in the evolutionary philosophers. Darwin, for example, holds that the difference between one species and another is at bottom the same sort of difference as that between one variety and another. So the difference between man and horse is in principle the same as the difference between one horse and another. Teilhard de Chardin is a more recent example of this point of view. And, given the premises, this is the only reasonable point of view, for to assume otherwise would be to assume that an effect is more than all its causes put together.

The final outcome of humanism, then, is that we are led to regard the difference between man and the animals (as we ordinar­ ily conceive it) as an illusion. Thus, all the reasons given for the preeminence of humane studies are finally destroyed by the logic of humanism itself The upshot is that each man orders his educa­ tion by his own particular taste or by what is currently fashionable, for he can no longer find any reasons for preference in the natures of the objects he studies. The wonder which characterizes the phi­ losopher has been replaced by curiosity.

It would be a mistake, of course, to attribute the mindless disorder of modern education to a bad division of the curriculum. However, those who are attempting to restore some order usually

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fail to realize how much a defective understanding of such matters stands in their way. The alternative to such "muddling-through" is a wholehearted return to older traditions ofliberal education, par­ ticularly as regards the natures of the various disciplines, the order

**Accrediting Agencies**

of their importance, and the order in which they are to be learned.

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