TRIVIUM 21c

preparing young people for the future with lessons from the past

Martin Robinson

foreword by Ian Gilbert

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Introduction

An Unexamined Life is not Worth Living

> It is our moral obligation to give every child the very best education possible.
>
> Archbishop Desmond Tutu

It has often been said that history is written by the winners. The same could be said about education. Articles, books, exams, courses, academic studies, textbooks, books on pedagogy, and even policies, are usually written by those who have a clutch of worthwhile exam results at secondary, university, and post-degree level. This, of course, makes a great deal of sense, but it does mean the system has a flaw. The voices of those who have not benefitted from schooling are not usually heard in the great education debate. If real change is going to happen, then those who have struggled in the system need to be heard; their experiences and ideas should be at the centre of the debate and not ignored at the margins.

I was what you would call a school failure. Yet somehow I ended up as an advanced skills teacher and an assistant head in East London. This introduction is not the story of how I arrived at those dizzying heights, but some background detail that explains why I have written this book.

Failure

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My parents moved house when I was 12 and I took the opportunity to reinvent myself. My first year at secondary school in a large comprehensive on the outskirts of Oxford had proved instructive. I had been a good student: I did my classwork and my homework and I played the violin. In 1974 this was not a good combination and I had been marked out as an easy target for those who, shall we say, had a slightly more philistine view of the world. Although they were not outwardly violent, the threat was sufficiently compelling to force me to cut the horsehair of my violin bow and to acquiesce to having my exercise books ripped to pieces and thrown out of the window of the school bus. Even though this wasn't the reason my parents decided to move house, I was glad that we did. I started at my new secondary school, a rural Oxfordshire comprehensive, with one thing on my mind: I did not want to be the target of any vitriol due to a love of learning and playing a musical instrument.

Grammar School for No One

Luckily for me I wasn't challenged in my new school to do much study. It was 1975 and the school had recently become a comprehensive: a girls' grammar had amalgamated with a boys' secondary modern with predictable results. This traditional 'grammar school for all' hadn't bargained on the 'all'. The senior management team were almost entirely drawn from the girls' school and had no idea how to cope with boys, let alone those who'd had their expectations shaped by being confined to a second-rate education. It was glorious, awful chaos. As I was a new boy, untainted by any particular history, I was immediately put in the bottom set for everything, until they realized that perhaps I had 'potential', and I was then immediately moved into the top set for everything. Even though I had missed out a couple of months learning, no one thought to help me catch up. I didn't care anyway; I had already ingratiated myself with some of my fellow bottom-setters; two in particular had already asked me for a fight. One of them I dispatched with

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relative ease in the school washroom, and the other, who had challenged me on the staircase, foolishly from a lower position, was easily toppled. This was going to be easy!

The chaos of the school continued in the classrooms. Teachers who could hack it were OK; those who couldn't weren't. And there was never any backup for those in need. When it came time for the headmistress to retire, the school staff made it very clear what they wanted: a traditional, disciplinarian head who could sort out the boys. I was, by this time, coming up to my O levels and hadn't done much apart from cultivate a rebellious nature, so that when the new head arrived we were not destined to hit it off.

I was not the sort of rebel who would burn down the school; I was far subtler than that. I started a school newspaper, I set up a debating society, and I was trying to set up a branch of the National Union of School Students. In lessons I would ask questions and challenge what was being taught. I was most probably a proverbial pain in the posterior. Despite being put in detention on occasion, and even whacked with a slipper, no one seemed to worry unduly about my incomplete classwork and lack of homework. I sat my O levels and got three at grade A–C and one CSE grade one, which was an O level 'equivalent'. I stayed in the sixth form to do A levels and to resit some O levels; I achieved two more in November 1979. However, my attitude wasn't liked, my refusal to wear the newly introduced school uniform for sixth formers wasn't going well, and when I was told off for not wearing the new tie, I turned up the next day wearing the tie but no shirt. I was sent home.

Rock 'n' Roll

This was all very wearisome, both for the school and for myself, but the roots went further back. At no point had I seen the purpose of this poor 'traditional' education I was being offered. Perhaps, had I arrived at the school five

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years later, the more ordered atmosphere that was being brought in would have inspired me to be the academic student I needed to be, but I shall never know. After a meeting with the headmaster at the end of 1979 I left 'by mutual consent'. I had five O levels and one grade one CSE. This was my winter of discontent. My education was to be found in the pages of the *NME*, the lyrics of the Clash, Ian Dury, Elvis Costello, and the theories I had come across while researching David Bowie, piecing together learning based on a left-field look at the arts, resistance, and pop culture.

Away from the world of sex 'n' drugs and rock 'n' roll, I worked in Oxford Polytechnic Library, then spent a year trying to get A levels at the college of further education, a place where 'progressive methods' held sway in the arts and humanities. Looking back, I see another wasted year. I was incredulous at the behaviour of some of the lecturers who thought nothing of luring their young female students into bed. I even had the wife of one of these lecturers trying to do the same with me, though somewhat unsuccessfully.

My social life at 17 was far more important to me, so when I got a job at a market in the middle of Oxford selling joke items and novelties, this seemed to me to be far more useful. I worked six days a week, had money in my pocket, and was having fun. The stall's turnover doubled, as did the stall. I discovered I had a gift for retail and stayed there for two years, only leaving it for a job as a window salesman! Again, I was a success, and quickly promoted. However, I knew this wasn't the career for me, so I set up my own business promoting bands and, in between times, being a parcel delivery driver for Securicor.

University: An Act of Belonging or Subverting?

Although I was often in Oxford, my only firsthand experience of the university had come from attending a

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party at a college where an acquaintance was studying. This was quite eye opening. A student came up to me, 'Where are you from?' I said, 'Oxford.' 'Oh,' he replied, 'which college?' 'Er,' I said, 'not the university, I am *from* Oxford.' If looks could kill – he stared, incredulously, 'Oh …' And at that he walked off without so much as a by-your-leave – the town versus gown atmosphere of Oxford in the 1970s and early 1980s was so marked. My vision of what a highly educated person looked like and sounded like was shaped, indelibly, by seeing them walking around town as if they owned the place – maybe some of them actually did!

It was at this time that I saw an advert in *The Face* for a degree course at a polytechnic in London, a course called cultural studies. It seemed tailor-made for me. The course director took a punt and enrolled me onto the course despite my lack of qualifications. At the age of 23 I was studying again, for the first time since I was 11 years old. I struggled at first: because I had no academic grounding to fall back on, I had no way in. My poly was an old cigarette factory in Stratford, East London. This was education that didn't look like education; this was education as subversion – just the sort I liked. Miraculously, I got a 2:1 BA honours degree, something I never thought would happen. In my spare time I set up an arts group with others, called The Big Picture, and we wrote, produced, directed, and performed in plays, including a punk musical I wrote that went on to be performed on the stage of the Theatre Royal Stratford East. Now, I was waiting for the world to open its arms and invite me into its inner sanctum. As it turned out, I became an advertising salesperson at *Marxism Today*.

Working in the hub of the Communist Party of Great Britain was fascinating, especially as I was the 'capitalist' wing. I loved the dichotomy. I sold more advertising space for the magazine than anyone else had done before. Strangely, *Marxism Today* seemed to be employing the same Oxbridge types I had come across before, only these were lefty ones. I realized that no matter what your

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politics were, it was your education that held you in good stead. Yes, I could sell advertising space, windows, and novelties, but being a salesman wasn't going to satisfy me sufficiently; I needed to do something more positive. I was headhunted by a national newspaper – the sales manager had heard I was good at selling. I met him in a pub in London's West End, dressed as poorly as I could, looking like the worst sort of lefty nightmare someone in advertising could come across. It worked; I had broken my ties with that world. I resigned from *Marxism Today* and applied to take a PGCE in that most subversive of subjects, Drama.

Teaching

I did my teaching practice in what was called then a 'sink' school in Canning Town. I did well as a teacher and, at the end of the course, I got a job and spent the next 20 years of my life as a drama teacher. Early on, I also doubled as an English teacher, not that I knew how to teach English. In drama I was successful, becoming a head of department, head of faculty, advanced skills teacher, and assistant head teacher. Ofsted always judged my work to be outstanding. Yet, as I continued teaching, I became more aghast at what was happening to education. It had become the opposite of the sink-or-swim experience that I had grown accustomed to during my schooling.

Now, the whole system was so controlling of knowledge that pupils had become totally dependent on their teachers. Data followed each child; if any were in danger of getting a D they would be tracked mercilessly. The exams changed and became exercises in writing only what was deemed acceptable by the exam board. It was the awarding body who told teachers what they wanted to see, and who sold them the textbooks they had produced in order to do it. Successful schools seemed to be those that best played the system. Alas, the children who seemed to do well were those who acquiesced the most. I didn't want spoon-fed factory fodder. I wanted a flicker of

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rebellion alongside the ability to traverse within society as full citizens. I wanted creative sparks who could also contribute.

Parenting

Then I became a father. Having seen what was happening in education, I now was wondering: what kind of education do I want for my daughter? Certainly not the one I'd had, and also not the systematized schooling that we educators are churning out now. Was there another way?

This then is my aim: I want my daughter and other children to have an education that will enable them to live 'a good life' and attain the necessary wisdom that will equip them for the challenges of the 21st century and yes, though it seems a long way off, beyond.

The Quest

The purpose of education is to change people's lives. How it can best do this is the subject of this book. The question is: how do we want to see our young people change? This book examines some of the history of education to find out what is still valuable and explores how we might use the rich tradition of the trivium to help understand the roots of great teaching and learning. I hope that readers of this book – whether you are students, teachers, or parents – will find something of interest between the covers.

In the process of writing this book I found myself reading books I wish I had been directed towards at an earlier point in my education. I have explored philosophy, classics, art, science, literature, European studies, linguistics, logic, politics, and cognitive psychology, as well as revisiting areas from cultural theory, theatre, and pedagogy. I have been extraordinarily lucky on my journey to be able to count on people with real expertise

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in all these areas, who were most willing to enlighten me with their knowledge and thinking around the issues I was encountering, many for the first time. Without being able to talk things through with them, I would not have been able to attempt the book and my quest would have remained unexamined.

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Chapter 1

A Trivial Pursuit?

> Ringmaster: (*with a monkey dressed up as a man*) Roll up, ladies and gentlemen. Examine this beast as God created him. Nothing to him, you see? Then observe the effect of art: he walks upright and has a coat and trousers …
>
> Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*

Drama Teacher

Those who can, do; those who can't, teach. With that hoary old adage ringing in my ears, at the age of 29, I entered the teaching profession. Good grief. What was I, an educational failure, doing here in the very profession that had managed *not* to educate me all those years ago? But here I was, employed as a teacher of drama and English. I quickly went about ensuring I got my classroom survival sorted out: not smiling before Christmas and negotiating that bizarre relationship between one adult and 30 teenagers, based on 'Somehow, together, we have to get through this' and, well, generally, we did.

One thing became clear to me: my main subject, drama, was not really a subject in the usual sense of the word. Somewhere along the line it had become 'educational drama', a methodology for exploring sociological issues. On my PGCE I had been introduced to schemes of work covering homelessness, drugs, suicide, and all sorts of other explorations of the seamy side of life. This was drama as social commentary. I was introduced to 'freeze-

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frames' – where social relations between the powerful and powerless could be explored, and 'conscience alleys' – where two lines of children would watch the protagonist walk between them and they would call out what was in the protagonist's head (usually some utterance about misery due to homelessness, drugs, or suicide). It was deadly and strangely uncreative, and I struggled with this approach during the early stages of my teaching.

In the GCSE drama exam children had to work in groups to prepare, through improvisation, a devised piece of original theatre. I went to see what work schools were producing for these final exams. There would be many chairs, with kids sitting on them, talking of misery. Every now and then a character would die, usually at the denouement, and there would be much wailing and gnashing of teeth. Drama education seemed to be firmly stuck in the black-and-white social realism of the 1960s. Paradoxically, it was also extraordinarily unrealistic and it did not move me; its inauthenticity shone through. I decided then and there that this was not what I wanted to be teaching.

Creative Liberation

My first move was to 'ban' chairs – a ridiculous act, but a liberating one. This was the time when physical theatre was all the rage and I wanted to embrace that energy. Instead of issues, I wanted physicality; instead of talking, I wanted activity. Theatre is a physical subject; I summed this up with the phrase 'Movement First'. Our drama lessons were physical because acting is the art of doing. In discipline terms, this became problematic so I introduced stillness too: the act of 'centring' where the actor stands still with their eyes closed for a period of time. This then became the beginning of lessons. I would wait until every participant had centred before the lesson would start. We were all actors, so we all had to 'act'. I got rid of unnecessary homework: writing about misery and colouring in pictures of misery, and replaced it with a

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notebook in which kids would be expected to collect fragments of writing, experiences, dreams, stories, poetry, lyrics, history, theory. You name it, they got it.

Method in the Madness

This was to be the beginning of the work, ‘Fragments of Movement and Fragments of Text(s)’. We would look at what we had to make sense of – the symbols, the text, the verbal and the physical ideas that seemingly had little connection – and we would try to ‘sense’ what connections there were. Both the students and I would search for links, no matter how abstract. We were alchemists. There might be connections of sound, physicality, coincidence, or juxtaposition, but mostly we would look for an emotional connection, for the sublime, the beautiful, the surprising, or the funny. We would delay knowing what the final piece would look like for as long as possible; we were looking for ‘what the play is trying to say’, in the same way a sculptor chips away at a piece of marble before determining its final form. This then was summed up with the word ‘Emotion’. We would then use the idea of connecting up ‘framed moments’ and collect as many moments as we could. We would then perform them slowly, quickly, forwards, backwards, in differing orders, at the same time, or separately. We would then interrogate the piece that was beginning to emerge, looking for logical connections or arguments.

Once we got to know our pieces, then characters and a theme (or themes) would emerge. This we summed up with the word ‘Intellect’ – this was our thinking about the piece. We would research thoroughly, finding out about what we had and then finally we would pull the process together by honing it as a performance for the practical exam. ‘What is your play trying to say?’ became, ‘If in doubt, spell it out!’ We would then refine our pieces for performance. This then became the process: Movement, Emotion, Intellect, and Performance.

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Each lesson began to take this basic shape, and then this shape was practised over increasingly longer periods of time, over days and weeks. But the mantra was there at its core – Movement, Emotion, Intellect, Performance – and the material transformed from fragments to connections. This became the clothesline on which the lessons were hung. We used this ritual, we used it repetitively, and the results were extraordinary. Firstly, literally, the results were extraordinary, but beyond that, and far more importantly, the exam pieces were at their best 'great art', as precise and as moving or funny, as Pina Bausch, Théâtre de la Complicité, or Peter Brook.

Tradition

It was at this time that I launched an A level course in theatre studies, which became an altogether more difficult step for me. I had developed a ritual, a way of working, that was successful for devised theatre, but would it work for an A level? Indeed, the A level included a devised theatre piece, but it also included scripted work. Most challenging of all, there were two three-hour written papers on play texts, theatre practitioners, an 'unseen' piece, and a review of a play.

The results weren't great for the first cohort. I had to do something else, so I went about echoing the devising mantra: we would explore, research, and learn about the texts and practitioners; we would learn the language of the discipline; we would 'give Caliban his language' through the 'semiotics of theatre'. I had absorbed linguistics – how we understand theatre – and developed a shared language to ensure we knew what we were talking about. I then fed this language into the GCSE. Gone were freeze-frames and the concepts of the drama GCSE bubble; instead, in came terms from the rich history and traditions of theatre. We would go and see lots of theatre, from a wide range of performers, practitioners, and authors. I refused to take students to see things they would 'normally' see, so we never went to *Blood Brothers*;

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instead, we went to see Beckett, Berkoff, and Bausch. We saw Greek tragedy and comedy, Brecht, Complicité, and a writer and a play I fell in love with, Büchner's *Woyzeck*. Here was a moment of inspiration; this play had so much to offer it would become central to my teaching.

Woyzeck: Where Three Paths Collide

As part of the A level course we were expected to teach one practitioner. In those days there were no exams in Year 12 so I took the chance, and we began the course by teaching three practitioners under the general heading of 'Truth'. Each practitioner wanted to communicate their truth in very different ways: Stanislavski in a naturalistic way; Brecht wanted to communicate social truth; and Artaud – well, Artaud wanted a metaphysical truth based on the idea of the energy of life, necessity, or what he called 'cruelty', that we are most 'alive' when we realize our own mortality. Stanislavski helped hone the language of drama and acting; Artaud took my work to another level, the discipline of the art, of the physical, which became even more important; and Brecht helped refine the argument, the dialectic, not only in theatre but in our understanding of how to teach, learn, and challenge by seeing the world in a different 'scientific' way.

We looked at the works of Freud, Marx, Socrates, Saussure, Darwin, Gramsci, Breton, Chaplin, and Büchner to supplement our understanding of these approaches to truth. Artaud and Brecht both cited the play *Woyzeck* as being of great importance, and the implicit naturalism in the play also encompassed the ideas of Stanislavski. Therefore, in *Woyzeck*, the three great practitioners, with their conflicting ideas, had a place where they could 'agree' to congregate, to commune, to argue, and it is this that gave even greater significance to this play and to our studies.

Socratic Method

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Other influences came in from the texts we were studying: Sophocles, Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Dürrenmatt. These were weighty subjects; this was not dumbing down. The approach I took was: we would find our language, research our texts, look for ways in, and understanding(s). We would then take an unashamedly Socratic approach: questioning, arguing, and prompting. The kids would do the same with each other, which made our sessions lively and challenging. Finally, we would look at how to take our approach into the written exam, and also the viva and notebook which, at the time, were integral parts of the assessment. The exam was a celebration of our exploration; not a 'jumping through hoops' approach to getting grades. We had found a way to bridge the divide between practical and theory. That year I was told the A level results were among the best in the country, as were the GCSE results.

Creativity

This approach became the basis for my involvement with education in a wider sense. Professor Ken Robinson was working on bringing 'creativity' into the curriculum, and I was invited along to the launch of his report. From this I was asked to become part of a delegation to Chicago to see how a form of 'creative partnership' was being used to educate 'downtown' kids in schools. This was a very odd experience: it was great to be in Chicago, but odd to see what comprised 'creative' teaching. Four actors were teaching science to a very unimpressed group of kids. The lesson was about energy transference and this involved actors pushing kids over (not all the way, Health and Safety ...) and, I kid you not, that was it. There was no need for this to be done by 'actors', but I'm sure it ticked a box somewhere: yes, we were creative in science because we got actors in. This was a warning: creativity is neither the sole preserve of artists nor are all artists necessarily creative.

I began to take workshops in other schools and countries

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in what I was now calling ‘creative drama teaching’. My work was controversial, especially in those drama departments where many of the teachers continued with their still images and social work themes. In 2004, *The Guardian* described one of my sessions thus:

> ‘This work is in the tradition of the kind of fragmented or cut-up expression associated with the work of William Burroughs,’ he [me] explained as he armed delegates with ‘statement cards’ and invited them to find the person with the words that complemented theirs. Of course, there were no obvious pairings and we were off on an afternoon of free association and creativity that would have us dancing, moving, chanting.
>
> Robinson explained how his preferred working practice was to encourage students to remain as intuitive as they could for as long as possible. He described how his students have become used to researching and bringing ideas, actions, music and other stimuli to their group’s work while at the same time stalling the desire to define the work in hand for as long as possible. ‘In the end, there always comes a time when we have to pause and say, what have we got here? And it is then that they can move on to create something formally for presentation and assessment.’
>
> It was clearly a challenging session for some especially since, as Robinson explained, it relies entirely on the co-operation and commitment of his students – who are required to take wholehearted responsibility for their work. ‘It is a sure-fire way,’ he emphasised, ‘of avoiding clichéd drama work. Of course, preparing the ground so that students are receptive and not alienated by such an approach takes time. But it is worth it – you don’t get pastiche EastEnders after several weeks of this kind of

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exploration.' (Monahan, 2004)

Advanced Skills Teacher

I was now an advanced skills teacher and being asked to use my skills to work with not just drama teachers but with teachers in a wide range of disciplines. The stated aim was: how can we get our staff and the lessons to be more creative? I had visitors to my lessons from Japan, the Czech Republic, and a number of organizations looking for hints about how to *be* creative. Looking back, I'm not sure that the creativity in lessons movement in the UK was after quite the same thing as I was producing. I think many in the educational establishment basically wanted their teachers to be more entertaining because they thought that teachers were boring the kids. However, my view is that creativity is a disciplined process and can be quite contemplative and even boring at times. This difference in position meant that I was sometimes regarded as an outsider even in the creative education movement. No matter, I carried on developing my approach.

Independent Learners

A visitor from the Good Schools Guide sat in on my lesson, a Year 11 class preparing for their GCSE. We chatted and watched as the 28 kids came in, centred, got into their groups, and followed the ritual of Movement, Emotion, Intellect, Performance. I said nothing, I didn't even acknowledge the kids; they were working, I was chatting. I learned a lesson that day: the mantra had allowed the kids to be truly independent, not at first, no, but by the end, when they needed to be, they were. I had never done this before and, though I didn't show it, I was just as amazed as the visitor from the Good Schools Guide who watched that lesson. We stayed there for two hours before I uttered anything, which was a 'well done' to the

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class. When the Guide came out later that year there was a special mention for the ‘excellent’ drama lessons. University professors came to watch my classes; they too mentioned how unusual it was that the methodology I had stumbled across had, in the end, enabled me to step away and for the students to work, successfully, in a manner that showed their ability to be truly independent.

Constraints Can Lead to Creative Freedom

At this time, various gurus were all the rage in education land – and they were talking about how to be creative. These included the aforementioned Ken Robinson and the Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking of Edward de Bono, amongst others. Some teachers interpreted creativity as an example of 1960s-influenced progressivism and the idea of free thinking, which was all about allowing freedom and the ethos of allowing a thousand flowers to bloom.

Although I could see where that was coming from, I was working with the great and eccentric theatre improviser and practitioner Ken Campbell, who had pointed me in completely the opposite direction. Creativity is about constraints, he would tell me. This became part of my mantra; limitations were indeed important, whether you were engaged in a piece of improvised theatre, trying to compose a symphony or a tune with the same eight notes, or making a cake with a list of ingredients. Ken was right: constraints are an essential part of creative expression and freedom. Other drama teachers asked me how we came up with such bizarre and varied work, because whenever they asked their pupils to think of an idea they always came up with the same old clichés.

Competencies

A number of education theorists came to the conclusion that the way forward was to develop competency-based

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curricula, in order to cultivate within pupils a 'language of learning'. This was fascinating to me, as someone who had developed a mantra in his drama teaching that had enabled students to take control of their own learning; there was something in this. When I was at school I had never really thought about what was lacking in my own education. I just thought that I was belligerent or stupid and that academia was a locked room. I was attracted to competency-based curricula because I knew what it was to be incompetent. So perhaps competencies were the key.

However, there were so many different approaches on the market, all peddling different taxonomies, that it became difficult to know which one to choose and why. Schooling was changing rapidly. We were now examining kids in modular formats. We seemed to be examining and testing them all the time. We were being told to have lesson outcomes and objectives, and to assess them against these objectives. The exams began to define in detail what are called 'assessment objectives', which stated almost exactly what students were expected to write. This was a utilitarian approach to learning, allied to league tables, where departments would compete with each other to drain their pupils of the very fibre of their souls in completing coursework, mock exams, exams, tests, practicals, and controlled assessments. After-school activities became exam oriented, levels were all the rage, and C/D borderline kids were targeted to ensure they became C-grade kids. Against this very uncreative backdrop, I was being asked to look for creativity.

QCA

A new curriculum was on the cards and I was invited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to help in the assessment of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills – a kind of language of learning that had grown from the competency-based approaches of key skills and other formats. This I did, but I was suspicious of what lay

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behind it and of the language that was being used – the language of the committee and the bureaucrat. Surely there was something more?

Customers

Most poignantly I was beginning to see the results of the changes in education: kids were more focused on exams, grades, and learning how to pass, and as a result were becoming less independent and less creative. My methods were going against the tide. This new breed of students were customers demanding a service, and the school was delivering this service to them. These customers sat at the table getting fat on the courses they were being fed, some of them force-fed. No longer were the students expected to enter the kitchen; rather they chose from a menu and expected it to be served up ready-cooked. This is the problem with spoon-feeding: the whole process devalues the making and concentrates on the service.

Prospero Parenting

In 2006 my wife and I became parents. As a father, I did not want my daughter to become a 'customer of education'. I did not want to be regularly updated on what level she had reached, how globally aware she had become, or how good at teamwork she was. I wanted her to be able to talk about the things that matter; not to ignore the latest ideas, but to allow those ideas to emerge from an engagement with great works of culture, art, science, and the historical and literary achievements of … for example, Maurice Sendak, Lewis Carroll, A. A. Milne, and Greek mythology.

I began to consider a 'classical education' – having her engage with the works of the great and the good. But at the back of my mind was this nagging doubt: how do I give her a language of learning, a way of taking control of the process? Is this akin to me, as a parental Prospero

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figure, imposing a language on my Caliban of a child? Yet it is Miranda, not Prospero, who teaches Caliban to speak. This makes a difference because she has innocence, an ethereal quality, and a far more gentle approach to life. Caliban complains that she has, '… taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse.' Will this always be the relationship between teacher and pupil?

The utilitarian education establishment wants my daughter to develop the language of skills for the workplace. But surely there must be something greater than the language of the committee and the aspiration of middle management. If I look at language as representing culture itself, and if I consider all the great works from the past – those great creative, artistic, and scientific achievements – then there is a way into this which offers a key that I can give to my daughter so that she can unlock the door and continue to discover life's richness and complexity, long after I have fallen off my perch and shuffled off this mortal coil.

Mantra

There was a clue to be found in something I had discovered in drama improvisation and in teaching theory. This was an approach to learning that could help my daughter process knowledge, relate to truth, and have the freedom to express herself. I began to search for constraints – a mantra that would assist her in her learning and allow her to develop her own voice. It was an attitude to learning that is at once based in knowledge, argument, engagement, belonging, and the capacity to make a difference. I needed to go back to the beginnings of learning inherent in my own conventional schooling. This was a tradition that had failed me because it was taken for granted that I had the key. I didn't.

But here I found it – a key that I only wished I had known about long before: the trivium.

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Chapter 2

The Trivium

O, had I but followed the arts!

Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*

So says the character Sir Andrew Aguecheek in bemoaning the quality of his education. The arts he refers to would not have been the subjects that we would think of today as the arts, but the seven 'liberal arts' that were the mainstay of a grammar school education in Shakespeare's time. The seven liberal arts were divided into the quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, which were more about number and *content*; and the trivium: grammar, dialectic (or logic or *logos*), and rhetoric, which were more about language and *ways of doing things*. The three arts of the trivium would be developed simultaneously, and once mastered it was expected that a student would have acquired the knowledge, the reasoning skills and the ability to communicate well that would stand them in good stead for the further study of the quadrivium.

If there were three ways underpinning my education I was blissfully unaware of them. I was not taught any meaningful grammar; I argued the toss but was not taught how to use dialectic, nor did I understand the purpose dialectic had as an integral part of the learning process; and, aside from a couple of performances in school plays, I was never taught how rhetoric – the need to communicate well whether in written or spoken form – would help me in my future. Perhaps I can join in with

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Aguecheek's anguish. I can only conclude that the trivium had passed by the teachers in my school.

The fact that in most of my 20 years of teaching I knew nothing of the trivium also makes me wonder why it disappeared from the curriculum. I was attracted to the trivium because it was a mantra, and I had found that a mantra can really help students work independently, creatively, and in a focused way. I was also drawn to this mantra because it was not devised by some learned professor with money to make. No, it was rooted in tradition. Some of the finest minds had learned through the trivium; it had been tried and tested. But – and this is a big but – it had also, obviously, been abandoned. This set me wondering: how and why did the trivium come to prominence in the first place? Why did it stop being the basis of our curriculum? Is there anything from the trivium that survives in our schools today? Should I consider it as the basis of education for my daughter?

I began my journey armed with a library card for the British Library, a list of websites and bookshops, and a gregarious and curious nature, determined to ask questions of people who might have some answers or at least be able to point me in the way of more interesting questions. I started with the question: what are the roots of the trivium, before it even came to be known as 'the trivium'?

I was lucky to hear the classics professor, Mary Beard, give a talk on rhetoric. Afterwards, I approached her and enquired nervously where I should begin my quest. She said, 'Books!' and recommended a couple. I opened the first, a rather large tome, with great trepidation; it smacked of the world of temples, porticos, dusty Oxbridge professors, and their all too confident students. For me, this was a journey into the hitherto unknown. I was apprehensive, but I was curious.

Curiouser and Curiouser

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It seems that curiosity, the ancient Greek idea that the world was a question to be answered, is the basis of the Western tradition of a liberal arts education. Sometimes referred to as the first scientist, the Greek philosopher, Thales (*c*.624–*c*.546 BCE), asked, 'What is the world made of?' And although his answer, 'Water,' was misguided, his question inspired the idea that young people should be taught to ask questions rather than just be given information to memorize. Could this be the beginning of the trivium: grammar, the art of interpreting the world through foundational knowledge and skills, is joined by dialectic, a way of testing the world through questioning, dialogue, or argument? A nice story about Thales is that he was so curious about the stars, and spent so much time studying them, that while he was looking up at the sky he fell down a well! I don't know if this is the first example of a figure in education making an idiot of himself, but it does show that the pursuit of knowledge is not without its risks. My nervousness at engaging with this knowledge was clearly because I was scared of falling into that well. But perhaps Thales teaches us that wrong answers are an integral part of learning: curiosity, wonder, and uncertainty are as much part of education as answers, facts, and logic.

Pythagoras (*c*.570–*c*.495 BCE) brought logical and mathematical thinking to the solution of practical problems. Ironically, as a leader of a religious cult, he saw no conflict between his beliefs in the metaphysical and the 'scientific' approach he introduced. This may have been because his questioning of the world brought such extraordinary, universal answers that he thought he was experiencing divine revelation. There is a beauty in the natural world that is akin to a religious experience – a sense of wonder that unites the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dalai Lama, and Richard Dawkins – and as this beauty unfolds it can arouse the curiosity of any child. What did it for me was seeing the moon landings and that image of our Earth, so small and insignificant from afar. Others have found it in wildlife documentaries on TV, standing on a cliff in a storm, the Gothic splendour

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of a cathedral, a pin-point pass on the football pitch, a first view of the Rosetta stone, listening to Allegri's *Miserere*, jumping up and down in a mosh-pit, falling in love, or even the first time one discovers the golden ratio.

Facts, questions, beauty, curiosity, and uncertainty; these are a lovely way to start my pursuit.

It's All Greek to Me

Becoming a parent brings together a sense of awe and wonder with the need to take responsibility and build for the future. When my child comes across 'important' things for the first time, I need to develop the empathy to know why that something is significant. She needs to ask questions and make sense of that importance from her point of view; and then she needs to be able to develop the ability to communicate about it using suitable methods in an apt or surprising way to express her newly forming feelings and ideas. Zeno (490-430BCE) saw the third art of what, in the Middle Ages, would come to be known as the trivium: rhetoric as an open hand reaching out to others. It is this image that can, perhaps, best describe how a child can be encouraged to communicate their growing understanding effectively. I hold out my open hand and she holds out hers, and community is the result. This is how we begin to build our shared experiences, our shared culture.

It's not all nice though. Zeno, considered by Aristotle to be the inventor of dialectic, also saw dialectic as a closed fist. This is the dialectic that can be used to punch the pomposity that sometimes accompanies the teaching of Important Knowledge. It is a skill we all need, especially when we see the emperor's new clothes for what they are. Zeno used questioning in a way that seemed to reduce everything to the level of the absurd. There is clearly a tension between someone telling you what 'the truth' is, and then someone undermining that truth through diligent and persistent questioning. There is a balance to

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be struck in the art of dialectic: a certain amount of questioning can cause most things to collapse under the weight of absurdity – as any parent knows when they try to answer every ‘why’ thrown at them by a curious child in their indefatigable and destructive search for meaning.

The questioning approach was to find its zenith in Socrates (*c*.469–399 BCE) and his desire to examine life in the search of a ‘good’ one. His endless questioning was to be the basis of not only Western philosophy but also, later, through Bacon, the foundation of inductive scientific empiricism. Unfortunately, Socrates’ dialogues got him into trouble with the state authorities for his questioning of morality and his ‘corruption of youth’. He was eventually put to death through the proffering of the hemlock cup, a punishment I have yet to see used in contemporary schools!

It is with the Greeks that we see the start of the trivium. We have the art of grammar, learning about the way things were or are; which is challenged by dialectic, questioning the way things were or are; and communicated through the art of rhetoric, showing how things could be. I present them here as though it was the most natural thing in the world that they would come together, but these ideas are not natural bedfellows; beneath them are very different ideas about how the world is organized and understood. Over the years, the three arts of the trivium have been in conflict, they have been responsible for their own decline, and, I will argue, they are still today at the root of many of the problems in deciding what sort of education we want for our children.

Dichotomy: The First Sign of a Problem

If I am to be a good parent, I need to encourage the idea in my daughter that curiosity is not best served by prejudice. If I want her to be an independent and free-thinking individual, I must not model the closed mind of someone who thinks there is only one way to wisdom, one

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True Path that leads to the number 42 and the Meaning of Life (Adams, 1979: 152). I need to investigate ideas from across the ranges of opinion. The three arts of the trivium challenge because they are, fundamentally, different ways of seeing the world. Just as I saw Stanislavski, Artaud, and Brecht as seeing truth in fundamentally different ways, so do the three arts. It would be far easier to be a grammarian, a dialectician, or a rhetorician rather than being an advocate for the trivium, because such an advocacy requires embracing contradictions and living with uncertainty, even paradox.

Although some teachers want politics out of education, we need to note that education is essentially a political act, as is parenting. Do we want our children to be just like us, or do we want them to be different and thus end up challenging us? This uneasy relationship between control and freedom is played out in every nation, every classroom, and every home. This tension is implicit in the relationship between grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric.

So, how did this tension play out in ancient Athens? The Athenian city-state's impulse to be conservative and ordered was in conflict with Socrates' Promethean impulse to be rebellious and innovative. Socrates might have been killed, but his influence on Athenian life was profound. Was it the ability to hold two or more contradictory approaches to learning at the same time that made Athenian culture so great? In *Full Circle: How the Classical World Came Back to Us*, the Conservative thinker Ferdinand Mount writes about how, in education, the progressive theorists and conservative traditionalists seem to re-enact the ancient falling out between Socrates and the needs of the Athenian state to prevent the corruption of the youth. With the progressives arguing for the importance of critical thinking to allow freedom of thought, and the traditionalists retorting that critical thinkers will end up educating people to be so cynical that they believe in nothing:

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> ‘True education does not consist in pumping children full of a mass of unexamined knowledge and prejudice, the critical theorists declare. On the contrary, without a deposit of knowledge and settled moral principles a human being is helpless, the traditionalists retort.’ (Mount, 2010: 271)

The killing of Socrates is our metaphor for the battle at the heart of the trivium, the conflict between grammar and dialectic; it is the dichotomy, as Mount points out, between traditionalist and progressive educationalists, which is still relevant to this day. Grammarians were thought of as protectors of the language and sustainers of cultural continuity; dialecticians, such as Socrates, seemed to challenge accepted knowledge for destructive reasons. Maybe these are two distinctive approaches to education and, rather than being two sides of the same coin, they are completely at odds with one another. So, if grammarians and dialecticians have an uneasy relationship, what about rhetoricians?

Classical Rhetoric

The Athenian state educated boys for citizenship through the orator’s art: rhetoric. It seems that, possibly because of the battle for supremacy between grammarians and dialecticians, rhetoricians subsumed elements of dialectic (*logos, inventio, disputio*; truth, invention, dispute) and ‘good’ grammar (including *doxa*, probable knowledge, and *episteme*, certain knowledge) into the art of rhetoric. At its best, rhetoric included a belief in ethics, sound argument, and an appreciation of the beauty of language. This was, seemingly, a version of the trivium, brought together in the name of rhetoric. However, even at this time, people could see that without substance rhetoric could become not only empty but, far worse, a dark art for persuading people to follow ethically unsound ideas.

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Rhetoric came to the fore in the Roman world through its championing by Cicero (106–43 BCE). When he was young, rhetoric was not considered appropriate for a Roman to study, but Cicero had received his education in Greece, where he had learnt all the skills he would need to become a great orator. It was because of Cicero's oratorical success that Greek rhetoricians became popular in Rome; many made a living by educating young Romans in the art of rhetoric. Cicero's support for rhetoric included adding the vocational study of law to the Greek tradition and it was through his insistence that rhetoric was deemed to serve the 'common good'.

Education needs a purpose. However, what this purpose should be is still under discussion. Should it be to serve the common good, or should it enable someone to live a good life? Are these two objectives mutually exclusive? A nation state can define the common good according to its own needs, and we can define a good life according to the requirements of an individual. Without purpose, education, like rhetoric, can be empty. By clarifying its purpose we can make judgements about what to bring to the curriculum and how it is best measured. The arguments about exam passes, league tables, and 'evidence-based' education policies can only carry weight if we understand what we are trying to achieve. At the moment, the core of the argument seems to have deserted the visionaries and is mainly in the hands of bureaucrats and data-chasers.

Furthermore, in the 21st century, should we be looking forward and not back? Does our communication age need a formal education system at all? Perhaps the key to learning will become so personalized and so distant from the concept of a ritualized mantra that independence and creativity will be found in each individual rather than in any shared experience. Perhaps teachers will sell their wares over the internet, through blogs, YouTube, Twitter, or their more modern equivalents. Children might have a diet of subject-based and customized knowledge served up on plates, turning them into passive recipients who

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want nothing more than to know enough to get them an exam pass and a good job, in order to get a wage to pay for second and third helpings. Is this what we want? No.

Can Opposites Attract?

If grammar is represented by the Athenian state, dialectic by Socrates, and rhetoric by citizenship and the future of the community, how can the trivium become a mantra that makes sense today? It clearly has the capacity to be very destructive. If I am right that grammarians seem to be the forebears of today's traditionalists and dialecticians of today's progressives, then part of my quest will need to bring both those traditions together. In order to contemplate this, I will need to know the grammar of the trivium: what were the three arts, how they changed through history, and where are they now? I need to embrace complexity. And I need to read more books.

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Chapter 3

Our Dramatis Personae: The Grammarians, the Dialecticians, and the Rhetoricians

From ancient grudge ...

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

Where the Wild Things Are

I proffer my hand; she puts her hand in mine. I clasp it gently but firmly, not wanting to hurt her but not wanting to let go. She looks at me and smiles. 'Instead of going to school,' I say, 'today I am going to take you back in time to find out what sort of schooling you would have had if you were born hundreds of years ago.' She giggles and tells me, 'Don't be so silly, Daddy.'

Perhaps I am being silly, but as we walk we pass Victorian terraces, then on through baroque architecture, past trees planted in Tudor times, climb a hill to view a small relic of the Roman era, and gaze out over an ancient river and the temples of corporate modernity, it is clear that everywhere around us there are traces of the past, easily ignored but not too difficult to find. I tell her we are going way back in time to follow the tangled history of the three different types of teacher: the grammarians, the dialecticians, and the rhetoricians. We are going to find out who they were, what happened to them and their ideas, and how they have opposed and accommodated each other over the years. I say, 'I want to find out why

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and how this has happened and, by looking at their history, I want to answer the following questions …' She looks quizzically at me and runs off and climbs a tree.

Hmm, another approach is needed, maybe a bedtime story. That night, with her tucked up in bed, I begin, 'Once upon a long time ago there were three arts …' 'What, like painting, drawing and …?' 'Er, no. Three ways of teaching, um, three types of teacher …' 'Three?' 'Yes, three. The first group were the grammarians, who were like parents; the second type were the dialecticians, who were the Wild Things; and the third type were the rhetoricians, who were like priests, politicians, and the people in adverts.' 'What did they look like?' 'Oh, the grammarians were rather stern looking; they dressed very smartly and never had a hair out of place. The dialecticians were scruffy, constantly moving around and looking for a fight. The rhetoricians were well turned out, friendly, smiling types.' 'Who were the baddies, the grammarians or the dialecticians?' 'Ah, yes, well, in each group there were goodies and baddies, but as they didn't get on, each group thought the other two were baddies, and they would steal some of their best ideas.' 'Stealing is bad.' 'Yes, it is, and they would also do down one another, saying things like, "Grammarians are boring", "Dialecticians don't care about anything", and "Rhetoricians are big fat liars". But one day a man called Boethius brought them together and said, "Hey guys, you should get rid of your bad friends and work together and set up your own school. Grammarians can make the rules, dialecticians can make the kids think, and rhetoricians can help the kids communicate well." So they did that and it was very good.' 'Can I go to that school?' 'Well, no.' 'Why?' 'Well, maybe, one day.' 'Why not tomorrow?' 'Well, because the school closed.' 'Why?' 'Ah, well …' 'Perhaps there were more baddies than goodies?' 'I don't really know. Let's look at it in a bit more detail.' I turn the metaphorical page …

The Grammarians

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Telling it How it is

Typically, when I begin to talk about grammar, her eyes glaze over and very soon she is asleep. Perhaps she is dreaming of a white rabbit grammarian looking at his pocket watch and muttering about being late – I think of grammarians as sticklers for time. But no matter, let us leave her to her dreams.

A few months ago, I decided to teach my daughter Latin. *Nunc est bibendum* it says on my teacup; it was this bit of writing that started us off on our pursuit, 'What does that mean, Daddy?' I showed her the translation on the other side, "Time for a drink". 'It's in Latin,' I tell her. 'Would you like to learn Latin?' 'Yes,' she says. 'OK, I'll get some books.' As I sit down with my daughter to teach her and, of course, myself, Latin, all sorts of grammatical constructs become clear. As she learns to write and construct sentences in Latin, and translates them into English, we are both learning some fundamental rules, and both for the first time.

And, now, here I am learning about grammar and, thanks to my schooling, for the first time too.

Grammar, it transpires, in Western education, originally meant the study of Greek and only later Latin and Hebrew. It consisted of theory: the study of language; and the practical: the study of poetry. The intention behind the teaching of grammar in the ancient world was to enable people to gain a deep knowledge of literature. Dionysius Thrax (170–90 BCE) wrote the first surviving book on grammar. In it, he defines grammar by incorporating the work of the dialecticians and the rhetoricians. He believed that grammar had six parts:

1 Versification (trained reading)

2 Rhetoric

3 Dialectic

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4 Etymology

5 Analogy

6 Drama and performed poetry criticism

If we include etymology and the learning of verse in grammar, analogy in dialectic and drama and performed poetry with rhetoric, we have the trivium. To Thrax, therefore, grammar is more than just 'telling it like it is'. He has included the contradictory and complementary traditions of rhetoric and dialectic *within* the study of grammar. This is clearly not the image of the stern grammarian I had been led to believe in. However, in *On the Marriage of Mercury and Philology* by Martianus Capella (fl. 5th century), grammar is offered by Mercury to his fiancée Philology. Minerva, listening to the equivalent of the PowerPoint presentation at a school's inset day, quickly interrupts Mercury's presentation saying, 'Stop! Because the Gods are bored!' Something clearly happened to grammar. Why is it often, perhaps unfairly, seen to be dull? Perhaps the answer lies in when grammar became synonymous with the writing down of language.

Written Beginnings

It might come as rather a shock to those of us who love to read to discover that the root of written languages is not the work of the great writers. Writing arose as a utilitarian activity. Phoenician traders traded with the Greeks and introduced them to their alphabet; it was trade, not the desire for poetry, which drove the spread of writing. Poets, whose business was storytelling, might even have seen it as a threat. Plato quoted Socrates, for one, as asserting that writing would destroy memorization. Imagine writing considered as a sign of dumbing down! Religions and leaders, however, soon saw the potential of writing and used it to help establish their own mythology and rules. It was clear that the written word had power; due to its permanence it had become a

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symbol of authority. This meant that rules could become fixed; something is more difficult to challenge when it is written down. The accountants, bureaucrats, pedantic rule makers, authoritarians, and religious zealots were all early adopters of written language; the poets, dramatists, philosophers, novelists, and journalists were laggards. This monstrous conclusion perhaps could explain the problems that many have with the study of grammar. It is not that it isn't needed and doesn't exist in our utterances, but that the way it is taught – its rules and perceived lack of flexibility – is authoritarian. Some of us react with annoyance. As dialecticians, we hate being told what to do – we want to break rules!

Boring Grammar

Boring rote learning, chanting repetition, ritual humiliation, and a swipe across the knuckles – grammar as learned through a dark, dismal dictatorship. In the western facade of Chartres Cathedral the Liberal Arts are presented in relief, probably dating back to 1145; Grammar is shown holding a book and an instrument of punishment, and two children are cowering at her knees. No wonder kids have traditionally entertained themselves in the dialectical pursuit of undermining their teachers' authority: doodling in their books or scratching graffiti on their desks that mocks their teachers' idiosyncrasies. The cheeky response to the power of the teacher seems to go back a very long way. There is an example of Mesopotamian writing from *c*.1700 BCE: on one side of a stone (the exercise book of its time) a schoolboy has carved whatever the focus of his lesson was and, on the other side, a rude caricature of his teacher. For some reason, the gatekeeper of knowledge, the teacher, always seems to be held in a degree of critical contempt by the person who is meant to receive this knowledge. 'Why should we learn this? It's boring!' could be the cry of a generation who want to make their own impact on the world. To the young, the times they are always a-changin'! Grammar provokes due to its relationship with

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authority.

Grammar as Cultural Glue

Later in antiquity, grammar became perceived as the first step, the foundational knowledge, not only of language but also of culture. This took grammar away from being purely concerned with the workings of language into the area of our lived experience. In these terms, grammar becomes more contentious because it represents the underlying common fund of knowledge and, consequently, the cultural glue of society for the authoritarian ruling class. The power to decide what is worth knowing, and who should know it, has been contested ever since.

If my daughter is not taught what constitutes the common fund of knowledge, then what should she be taught? Should she be allowed to follow her own path and discover the things that she wants to know about? I am not allowing her to develop completely in her own way, of course. Should she want to run across a road, I restrain her. Should she want to stay up late, I put her to bed. Should she want to eat chocolate, I give her broccoli. I am feeding her cultural practices that I consider important; I am imposing a way of living that is the result of my (however limited) wisdom and experience. Sometimes this experience says, ‘No, you can’t,’ and in others, such as learning ballet, playing piano, or writing poetry, it is, ‘Yes, you can.’ If we want our children to take part in society, they will need to be able to access certain knowledge and behaviours that will enable them to participate in this culture more easily. However, this relationship doesn’t have to be one way and nor is it fixed. It could be argued that Bob Dylan is now part of the establishment that he did so much to undermine. Have the times changed so much that Dylan is now part of ‘the old road that is rapidly ageing’?

There are children, schools, and families who respect order and discipline. The youngsters present themselves

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with their ties properly knotted, every hair in place, and ready to fit into the system. Other young people, on the other hand, who might feel like rebelling, already see the purpose of learning and flourish despite their environment; they are able to ignore some of the obvious contradictions and pedantry. At school, I was rebellious and questioned the whole chaotic system that had tried to impose a facade of order. Now, as a parent, I have to consider: do I want my daughter to be happy and accepting, passively absorbing knowledge as its torrents flow over her, or do I want her to have a rebelliousness that rejects the old with the 'shock of the new'?

The Dialecticians

Dialectic and the Art of Annoying People

Most nights, the bedtime regime goes like this, 'Time to switch the light out …' She is reading. I love the fact that she is reading, but now it's time to sleep. 'Time to go to sleep …' Usually she complies, sometimes she does so with a hint of belligerence, and sometimes, occasionally, defiance. This, as ever, is part of parenting. I represent authority, rules, and standards, and I want her to respect that. I have told her I do these things for her own good. How do I cope with rebellion? Don't I want her to have a bit of a creative, divergent, and belligerent spark? If she defies me, isn't that a sign of character? Hmm, maybe, but not tonight. Tonight is not the moment to explore her burgeoning character development, 'No debate,' I say. 'Good night, love you!' 'I love you too,' she says, and my heart melts.

Ignorance

I bet as a young kid Socrates was a nightmare at bedtime. Perhaps it was a childlike quality that made him approach the art of dialectic from the standpoint of one who knew nothing, and to question people who professed to 'know

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everything', thereby exposing the contradictions and gaps in their knowledge. He insisted he was assisting in 'the birth of new ideas', rather than annoying some rather self-important people. He thought he was the wisest man in Athens, not because he knew everything but because of his self-confessed ignorance, which, paradoxically, was a very wise thing to realize.

The Dichotomy: Grammar and Dialectic

The dichotomy between grammar and dialectic is at the root of a fundamental and fascinating relationship in education. On the one hand, we have the grammarian idea that education means to pass on knowledge from one generation to the next and, on the other, the dialectician's notion that education can help in the birth of new ideas. Grammar is tradition; dialectic is modernity. Perhaps we can take this further into two views of what an educated person is: the first is the educated person who knows everything and passes all their exams; and the second is the person who professes to know nothing but asks awkward questions and gives birth to new ideas. Confusing? The dichotomy is an old one. Is education about 'putting things in' or 'drawing things out'? Hang on, though: drawing things out implies there must be something in there in the first place in order to be able to draw it out. Did Thales' well have water in it?

I asked Natalie Haynes, the comedian, writer, critic, and classicist, what she thought of Socrates and how he fitted into the education of his time:

> *Socrates refused to call himself a teacher. He proudly boasts that he's never taken a fee for teaching because he's not a teacher. This makes him differ from the Sophists of the time, some of whom, grammarians, were teaching the right name for things, and rhetoricians, who were teaching rhetoric – both of which they would charge huge sums of*

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money for. If you read Aristophanes' play, The Clouds, *Socrates is presented as the über-Sophist who runs the Thinkery, which, in the play, teaches you to be completely immoral. In the play, like the word,* educere, *to lead out, Socrates would be leading people out of their delusion, but he didn't know where he'd be leading them. The end goal for Socrates was to prove that we all know nothing. He was quite nihilistic, although occasionally that was not true. Mainly he was very negative, very critical*.

This is fascinating; our characters are coming alive. The three different types of educator are becoming clearer: the grand style of the rhetorician, whom I can imagine with a resonant and fruity voice; the fact-finding pedantic grammarian; and the most dangerous underminer of all, the person who refused to see himself as a teacher, Socrates, who perhaps saw himself as an enabler. We can also see the debate enfolding about the role of the teacher: we have the grammarian passing on knowledge, the rhetorician passing on skills of oratory, and the dialectician questioning you to the point of ignorance. Socrates used a question-and-answer approach, *stichomythia* (a term from Greek drama in which characters converse by single lines only, a kind of uttered tweet), which was later turned by Lucian (*c*.125–after 180) into satire. I like to think dialectic has been much loved by radicals, revolutionaries, and cheeky school kids ever since.

Dialectic is the Word

Dialectic, though, is not as simple as I have so far made it out to be. Over its long history, it has been variously referred to as *dialectic, logic*, or *logos*. If these words all meant the same thing there would be no problem. However, they are not interchangeable because their meaning has altered over the years. So, which word should I choose? Is that dictionary of etymology going to

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help me?

Logos is often translated into English from the ancient Greek as ‘word’. That seems simple enough. The word *logikos*, or logic, came from the word *logos*. Logikos was about the breadth and depth of all thought and reasoning. It was associated with any spoken thought that grew into narrative, even if this covered the meaning of works of art or myths, and anywhere an idea or opinion is given full rein. The word dialectic comes from the Greek *dialektos*, which meant discourse or even conversation, which seems almost mundane. *Logos*, on the other hand, lends itself towards a religious or metaphysical interpretation of ‘truth’. In the first century, the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (*c*.20 BCE–50 CE) said it was *Logos* (‘the Word’) that organized the creation of the world under instruction from God. As it says in the Bible:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Christians used *logos* to mean ‘universal truth’. It was the root of creation and was also Christ: the prologue to John’s Gospel states that the Word (*Logos*) is ‘made Flesh’. The apostle equates Jesus with truth, with *logos*. This stems from the Platonic idea of *logos* = truth = good.

At root, the three words – dialectic, logic, and *logos* – are quite different and carry very discrete power. *Logos* is the ultimate creator, the ‘truth’; logikos is lesser but still represents all thought but seems more human; and dialektos is that most human of activities, a chat. Apparently, it was St Paul’s (*c*.5–*c*.67) suggestion that truths in the Christian faith might be superior to truths in rational argument that really opened up a Platonic and Aristotelian schism in *logos*. Now, what on earth does that mean? I think I’m going to have to look at how the two great philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, differ. I warn you,

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this gets messy, because the words dialectic and logic become interchangeable but, by the end, I hope to have a definition of dialectic, *logos*, and logic that works for me.

Plato vs Aristotle

Plato (*c*.427–*c*.347 BCE) believed that when dialectic is used as an approach to critical self-awareness it could attain insight into one's higher reality or self. As Natalie Haynes put it, 'Plato came along with "the forms", realizing there was a big gap in the core of Socratic thinking, that there isn't an answer, there are just more questions. Plato used the idea of the forms as an answer to that: that we, as "pre-born" people, learn about truths.'

This is one of Plato's key ideas. Maybe the reason that we know how to pick up language, how to feed, breathe, recognize our mothers, and all sorts of other things that seem innate, is because our souls existed before they were planted into our bodies at birth. The rest of our learning is about rediscovering or drawing out what our souls already know. Plato used the word 'dialectic' to describe the ultimate part of the process that leads us to 'the truth' – rediscovering the true, universal essence (for example, the perfect redness of red, the perfect horseness of horse).

Natalie continued, 'In some ways I am quite Platonic. I do, slightly, believe in some things, that there is the perfect answer somewhere. I am not a cultural relativist. I think, for example, advertising is based on a belief that subconsciously, somewhere in our souls, is the Platonic ideal.' Dialectic in this sense is far from destructive. Plato thought dialectic was a way to uncover the greatest truths of all. *Logos* points to higher truths; it is what Heraclitus referred to as the universal, everlasting idea – the cosmos that exists within and without and where *even opposites come together*. Part of this art is how we get from dialogue to *logos* – the holding together of differing views.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) wrote extensively about logic and

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turned dialectic into a formal art. Aristotle believed dialectic was a useful approach in everyday discussion about important subjects where certainty was not always possible. He wanted words to describe reality as experienced. Does this mean Plato is rooted in the idea of certainty and ultimate truths, and Aristotle engaged in the cut and thrust of debate on a human level and happier with uncertainty and doubt?

In order to help me answer this question I needed to understand how Plato and Aristotle's ideas have affected philosophy down the years. Some philosophy books divide philosophers into two types: those who are mainly Platonic and those who are mainly Aristotelian. As we have seen, Plato believed that there is universal 'true' knowledge or intelligence (*noesis*) that comes from before (*a priori*). Therefore, philosophers who believe in universal truths or solutions that are timeless and beyond what happens in day-to-day life have tended towards a Platonic view. In contrast, Aristotelian philosophers would not philosophize in universal, a priori ways; they would start in the 'real' world as experienced and take an approach more akin to an *a posteriori* (what comes after) view. This is messier and engages with uncertainty, and thus is more likely to go with the flow.

Both Plato and Aristotle are open to the other's way of thinking. Plato wrote about Socrates and his engagements with 'not knowing'; Aristotle wrote extensively about logic and trying to get near to 'truth'. But, generally, the dialectic between Plato and Aristotle is one of *certainty* versus *uncertainty*, the *universal* versus the *particular*. This, I suppose, is typical of dialecticians – they are prone to argue amongst themselves. In order to have a simple way of differentiating these three parts of the dialectical art, I will categorize the Socratic approach as dialectic; the Aristotelian as logic – an analytical or scientific process; and the Platonic process as *logos* (for example, as witnessed in the famous dialogues where Plato uses Socrates as an interlocutor who enters into chats (dialectic) to find truth (*logos*)).

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Can our schools be establishments that embrace complexity and uncertainty? On the whole, they tend to be places where certainty rules, ‘Write this down, in this way and you get an A. Get an A in this and that and the other, then go to this university and get a good job,’ and so on. Do I want my daughter to believe in the certainty that Father Christmas exists, or should she entertain the possibility that he might not? The grammarian will tell it like it is, either by agreed practice or imposed rules; the Socratic dialectician will ask about it until it is no longer; the Platonic dialectician will discuss it until ‘ultimate truth’ is revealed; and the Aristotelian dialectician will use an approach that should uncover possible truths with differing degrees of probability.

The Rhetoricians

Now You’re Talking: The Art of the Orator

The formal teaching of rhetoric seems to be missing from my daughter’s schooling; it lives on in the idea of performance. I have seen my daughter perform in nativity plays, music recitals, and dance shows. At home, she has put on her own plays and performs the parts of the three witches in *Macbeth* with frightening authenticity. Performance is an important part of our relationship: it gives her a point of focus and it gives me an opportunity to pause and listen to her expressing herself formally at a given moment. In this instant, she expresses something of herself within a given discipline – she has learnt the ‘grammar’ of rehearsal and now performs her part.

Cicero (106–43 BCE) highlighted the importance of rhetoric in *On the Orator* (*De Oratore*). In this work he emphasized that by placing the art of oratory in the ‘right’ hands, rhetoric becomes the highest form of the expression of humanity. Cicero believed that proponents of the specialized arts of philosophy, logic, mathematics, cultural studies, literature, and music were numerous and

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could reach any target they wished to set themselves, yet would rarely achieve mastery. For Cicero, it was the rarity of great orators that set the art apart. He implied it was the character of cultured and ethical men that enabled them to speak great truths. For him, to be a great orator you needed a formidable quantity of knowledge, the ability to arrange and choose words well, to understand every emotion, have a good sense of humour, be 'appropriately' cultured, quick yet sensitive, and have a great memory. Rhetoric reflects the good and virtuous person who has truly mastered knowledge – the cultured individual, the 'great man'. Do I want my daughter to be a 'great man'? Hmm, there is a lot to unpick here.

Is rhetoric an art to which only a few can aspire? Cicero expands this idea in *On Obligation* (*De Officiis*), in which he sees the search for, and scrutiny of, truth as obligated to wisdom and prudence. For him, community cohesion is essentially part of decency and decorum; justice and beneficence come to be virtues, as do kindness and generosity. Proper behaviour is obligated through the desire for knowledge, and ignorance should be something to be ashamed of. This would make a possibly controversial school motto, 'It is shameful to be ignorant.' For Cicero, dialectic and research are essential but we are obligated to public service, where thinking will be taken up by projects for a good life or through advancing learning and knowledge. Education is tied to virtue and ethics, particularly the idea that the pursuit of knowledge is proper behaviour and that to even contemplate ignorance is reprehensible. Oh, that we keep this wisdom in sight: to be wilfully ignorant is an evil unto yourself; for a school, or any institution, to hide knowledge or make it difficult to obtain is similarly wicked.

Cicero absorbed dialectic into rhetoric through the idea of a debate which presented both sides of an argument. He generally liked to leave these dialogues unresolved, allowing readers and listeners to make up their own minds – something that could be seen as a precursor to a more open-ended dialogic approach. In contrast, the

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Socratic approach had as its aim the defeat of the interlocutor. Again, this is the idea of dialectic as dialogue, with its etymological roots in *logos*.

Can You Teach Virtue?

Ancient Greek, Roman, and Chinese societies all saw the need to educate young people in the ways of morality and to prepare them for a role in civic society. The first question that Meno asks Socrates is whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice. Sophocles seems to be open as to whether it is taught, practised, or even a gift from God. Later, in a dialogue with Protagoras, Socrates seems to say that virtue is based on knowledge and is in fact made up of four virtues: courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom. When, at his trial, Socrates is accused of 'corrupting the young', he retorts that all of society teaches virtue, so it wasn't his fault because, by implication, if the young are corrupted, then we have all had a hand in it.

This defence did him no good, but it is an important consideration. If we are surrounded by crime or anti-social behaviour, do we all have a responsibility for it or can we just wash our hands and blame our schools? Can you have a good school in a bad society? Can you have a good class in a bad school? Can you have a good student in a bad class? Can a good action come from a bad student? Schools can't solve all the ills of society, but they can contribute to them. As a parent, I want to know what are the virtues upholding the school my child attends, what is the ethos, and how are they expressed? This is because, if I know what a school's values are, I can work with them as part of the greater community.

Why Bring the Three Arts Together?

We have the authoritarian grammarians with their 'valued' knowledge and rules. We have the communitarian rhetoricians with their great oratory, who

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bestow citizenship and are interested in the development of virtuous character. The former tell you what to do; the latter encourage you to get involved. Added to these we have the awkward dialecticians, those who want to enter into debate, dialogue, or even just have a chat. We have the scientifically thinking logicians, all reason and slightly removed. We also have the Platonic dialecticians (*logos*), the believers in higher truths – perhaps they are quasi-religious types or have artistic 'vision'. I might even suspect that they are prone to megalomania. Whatever they do or believe, they operate on a different plane. In the interest of education for wisdom and a good life, all of these come together under the umbrella of the trivium.

However, I can also see how by bringing all these contradictory ideas together we might possibly have the root of the destruction of the trivium. Is it inevitable that the trivium can't work because people are unable to see their way to accommodating different ways of thinking about and seeing their world (especially when you are a school student with no idea about how to articulate some of these differing worldviews, let alone all of them)? In my own case, as a schoolboy, I was unprepared for any of this thinking.

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Chapter 4

The Liberal Arts: A New Curriculum is Born

> And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed
> In dignity, and for the liberal arts
> Without a parallel; those being all my study
>
> Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

The Spread of Christianity and its Grammar

Throughout the early Middle Ages, the so-called Dark Ages, Christianity proliferated rapidly throughout Europe. At this time, Christian texts were written and memorized in Latin. There was an urgent need to educate people in religious ideas, so it was necessary for them to learn Latin in order to read these sacred writings. Consequently, the learning of Latin and Christian doctrine used up most of the time on the curriculum, and instruction came from didactic grammarians who taught in repetitive and boring ways. The Church frowned upon the idea of two-way dialogue, preferring the one-way catechism (literally 'to sound into ears') by which the master instructed his pupil. Even the word 'dialogue' was understood as a one-way tool for transmitting 'truth'. In order to teach Christian dogma, grammar became the main art of learning. Significantly, the study of grammar was not only used for the literal and allegorical interpretation of the Bible but also a few other classical texts. And thus began the canon of the great Western tradition.

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Although much maligned by modern-day progressives, a canon brings together the concepts of rules, the sacred, and the authentic with ideas of quality. How a text enters the canon is controversial. It can be accepted because it is genuine or because of its accuracy or value. Once a text has entered the canon, it is treated as authoritative. A respected canon is certainly useful because it makes the teaching of children much easier. All a teacher needs to say is, ‘Here is a work of quality. Now sit there and realize why. And if you don’t, then you are at fault for not having the necessary taste and sensitivity to accept or understand quality.’ Can this one-way process truly be called an art? And can teaching be a one-way street? Perhaps, in the Middle Ages, it was possible because what was being taught was new, exciting, and ‘the truth’, and mainly was taught to boys as a vocation. My daughter, however, is not being brought up within a vocation, or in a world where one book dominates, or where the ‘truth’ goes unquestioned. She is faced not with simplicity but complexity.

Augustine’s Argument on Dialectic

When instructing children, you soon realize how complicated even the simplest things can appear. The pulpit approach to teaching works to a degree, but the neo-Platonist, Augustine of Hippo (354–430), thought that complex spiritual ideas needed to be taught in different ways. A fraught relationship with faith led him to pray, ‘Lord make me chaste, but not yet!’ Augustine believed it was possible to know things; he was not a sceptic. He thought about the use of language and whether it was simple or complex. He defined a simple word as meaning ‘one thing’ and a complex word as meaning ‘more than one thing’.

By implication, the grammarian approach works reasonably well when language is describing simple things, but is found wanting as the level of complexity increases. Complexity, for the Milanese professor of

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rhetoric, meant there was a need for dialectic, which he described as the art of arguing well. Augustine's approach was to adopt Plato's idea of education as 'leading the truth out from within' rather than 'pushing it in from without'. In order to awaken what was already within the pupil's mind, he began with the familiar and moved on to the unfamiliar. He decided that students should be actively engaged in the learning process and he used the trivium in a flexible way, rather than just starting with grammar and shovelling it all in. This challenges the idea of the trivium as being used in a particular order. The ritual of the trivium, once understood, is infinitely adaptable.

In Augustine's time, the Ciceronian idea of the discrepancy between a writer's intention and his words became reinterpreted as the difference between literal and spiritual explanations. It is through this distinction that Augustine was able to connect classical Platonic thinking with Christianity. He thus brought together simple grammar and dialectic for more complex ideas, with the idea that rational thought served faith, but did not surpass it as God was always and ever will be 'truth'.

So, perhaps, the teacher can begin with didacticism: there are certain simple things that can be taught, but because the world is, and always has been, complex, there are ideas beyond the simple and these are dealt with through dialectic. We start with the simple that can be known, move on to the complex that can be discussed and investigated, until we reach another, more metaphysical understanding. This I take to be *logos* – faith or universal essence – which is known or felt.

The Seven Liberal Arts

Grammarians, dialecticians, and rhetoricians – along with astronomers, architects, and others – relied on Greco-Roman institutions to ply their trade, and this brought these different types of teacher together. The classical

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liberal arts education was on the rise. In classical antiquity, a variety of subjects comprised the liberal arts, but it is generally down to two men that the seven liberal arts came to the fore. These founding fathers were the neo-Platonist Roman philosopher Boethius (*c*.480–*c*.525), who had translated Aristotle's work on logic (the only work of Aristotle to be translated at the time), and Martianus Capella (*c*.430–*c*.500), who was responsible for *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*. But even as some young people were beginning to be taught these seven arts, Boethius was imprisoned by a group of conspirators and wrongly accused of treason. While in prison he wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*, a book that, apparently, did nothing for his cause; he ended up being executed. Not much consolation there.

Other influences on the liberal arts were Augustine's *On Dialectic* and Varro's (*c*.116–127 BCE) *On the Latin Language*. Significantly, Varro also wrote nine books (now lost) on what he referred to as the 'disciplines'. The first three books were about grammar (which he also called 'literacy'), dialectic, and rhetoric; the others were arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, medicine, and architecture. The use of the word 'discipline' rather than 'art' is significant. Isidore of Seville (*c*.560–636), who is known as the last scholar of the ancient world, drew on these works and others for his *Etymologies*, in which he dropped the more vocational disciplines of medicine and architecture.

The first part of Isidore's *Etymologies*, Grammar, starts by looking at distinctions between art and discipline. He explores the ideas that 'discipline' (drawn from the Latin for learning, *discere*) is where 'the whole thing is learned', and 'art' (drawn from the Latin *artus* (strict)) is defined by strict precepts and rules. Isodore also points out that the Greek word for virtue is ἀρετή (*arete*), which is the word the ancient Greeks used for 'knowledge' and is another possible source of the word art. Art, for Isidore, who was influenced by Plato and Aristotle, was drawn from opinion, resembled truth, and meant that things can

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end up with a variety of different outcomes, virtues, or meanings. In contrast, the word discipline was based on ‘true’ arguments, meaning you could reach only one outcome or meaning. This distinction is vital. It allows for the possibility of the student either having to find their own way through the ‘arts’ or developing in a more rigid way by means of the ‘disciplines’. The trivium, being the basis of the liberal *arts*, is therefore a process in which a student begins a subject or topic by learning about its language – the rules and precepts. They then develop their own ideas and begin to express themselves in a variety of ways. The liberal arts are open-ended. A *discipline* on the other hand would be illiberal by having pre-ordained outcomes. This brings out the reasoning behind the trivium: grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric are arts through which we are taught a way of thinking that is liberating. An art offers an open-ended approach, as opposed to a discipline where we are trained to follow one path, which is closed.

How do we want our children to be when they leave school: open to possibilities or closed to follow one path? Our Western cultural tradition chose to situate education in the liberal arts rather than the disciplines. The mantra that the trivium delivers is one that enables free thinking – its essence is creative. So, should schooling ever be about fixed outcomes, such as answering exams in ‘correct’ ways by responding to a limiting list of assessment criteria? Or should we be looking to our schools to encourage variable outcomes and to develop virtuous characters with mindsets that are creative, open to challenge, and able to change?

The Trivium: Where the Three Roads Meet

Boethius and Martianus Capella defined the liberal arts as the four *calculating* arts (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy) and the three *philological* arts (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic). The word ‘philology’ meant a mix between literary study, history, philosophy, and

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linguistics. However, it was not until medieval times that the term ‘trivium’ itself would come to prominence and the seven liberal arts would be established as the basic curriculum. Perhaps it was the trivium that helped unleash the huge step forward in art, ideas, and literature in what is known as the Carolingian Renaissance (*c*.800–900).

It was trade with the Orient (where ancient Greek heritage and manuscripts had been preserved) that brought further changes and challenges to Western European culture and, consequently, to education. In Islamic culture, Aristotle was known as the first teacher and his teachings had quite an impact. The excitement around such pagan texts was understandable, considering the importance of education in a modern, dynamic 12th-century Western society. When further of Aristotle’s works were translated into Latin they caused great consternation in the Christian world: his ideas on experience and reason challenged Christianity’s view of the fundamental truths.

The grammarian Hugo of St Victor (*c*.1096–1141) proposed that secular learning was a necessary foundation for religious understanding. This meant that as well as the study of religious texts, grammar and the canon were being opened up to a number of secular or pagan texts. Hugo said that the purpose of the liberal arts was ‘to restore God’s image in us’. This is significant as he is suggesting that a worthwhile aim is to aspire for something beyond the particular, something more than ourselves. We need to see study as a restorative, a way of finding God within us – or, as we might put it in our rather more secular age, fulfilling our potential or allowing ourselves to be more than who we think we are. It is necessary, therefore, to consider what our aims and purposes should be.

The Purpose of Education

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The trivium was now becoming the foundation of all learning, so it is important to clarify the benefits of educating pupils in this way. John of Salisbury (*c.*1120–1180) talked about the power of the trivium to create independent learners, ‘Those to whom the trivium has disclosed the significance of all words … do not need the help of a teacher in order to understand the meaning of books and to find the solutions of questions.’ He went on to suggest that grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric are arts because they ‘delimit’ the self: they nourish, they enable us to grow, they strengthen the mind towards wisdom from rules or virtue, all of which result in our ‘liberation’. A laudable aim; this is the arts as cultivation, as the roots of culture. And, as we increase our understanding of the vast complexities of culture, so we will define what education is for.

Autodidacticism, the art of teaching yourself, is something we all need to be able to achieve. I do not expect my daughter to leave school knowing everything there is to know, but I would like her to acquire the habit of learning on her own, of having knowledge, processes, and criteria by which to judge what she is yet to learn. The trivium is a *way* of learning rather than just the *what* of learning.

In ancient Greece, the arts equated knowledge with virtue and gave a purpose to study for the good of all, not just the self. Plato’s aim for education had been that it ‘should be for its own sake’ and result in freedom. But freedom for whom? Those to whom full citizenship was bestowed were men, not women, and were free, not enslaved. Socrates desired that these free men use their leisure time productively in thought. Aristotle made a further distinction between the superior pure forms of art and the more practical, inferior arts of designing and making. Thus the liberal arts became associated with a privileged education for the independent elite – another schism that abides to this day.

For my daughter, independence – an ability to understand and find solutions – would seem to be a good thing, and I

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would like her to love learning for its own sake. We are lucky to live in a culture that recognizes the rights of women to be educated as free citizens. I would like her to be educated to spend her spare time in worthwhile activities, including a pursuit of the pure forms of higher culture However, I would also like her to have experience and skills in the so-called inferior arts, such as an engagement with a craft in which the authentic experience of doing is as important as thinking.

This is a notion that I need to make clear: the breadth of study I am arguing for is not purely academic. Nor do I support the idea that the well-to-do should solely study the academic superior arts and the poor the inferior arts. If we are to retain private schools, they need to produce as many good bricklayers as bog-standard state schools produce Nobel prize-winning authors and scientists. Schooling is reflective of our civilization and our values. Schools are not places which absolve us of our responsibility for the education, care, and behaviour of all our citizens. Schools can help shape the future, but not without the help and examples set by all.

The Conflicts Continue

With the trivium firmly in place it was perhaps to be hoped that the three roads would settle down in harmony with each other. The story of what followed shows that at times this was possible, but at other times contradictory tensions would rise to the surface.

Abelard and the Importance of Dialectic: Castration and Scholasticism

In the Early Middle Ages, boys alone were taught in cathedral schools, unlike monasteries where both sexes were taught. It was at Notre-Dame Cathedral that the Aristotelian Abelard (1079–1142) was a teacher. Twice condemned for heresy, Abelard’s preference was for

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dialectic over all other parts of philosophy, and this emphasis put him in direct conflict with older and more traditional grammarian teachers. Although his work resulted in a very masculine world of verbal sparring, later institutionalized in the universities, Abelard’s best student was a woman. Her name was Heloise. It is thought that somehow she attended some of Abelard’s lectures and they fell in love. Abelard, 20 years her senior, was appointed as Heloise’s tutor by her uncle. They married in secret and had a son together, Astralabe. Abelard’s role in the battle between dialecticians and grammarians was such that, it is reported, he shouted, ‘Heloise, dialectics has made me hateful to the whole world!’ One cannot be sure that it was Abelard’s insistence on using dialectic that caused Heloise’s uncle to attack and castrate him one night, or the anger her uncle felt about the seduction of his niece. Either way, Abelard’s interest in Heloise’s claims that passion led to devotion waned somewhat after the incident. This may have given rise to his coining of a new word, ‘theology’, by which he meant the use of rational argument to sort out acts of faith. This dialectical form of knowledge was now to be exclusively the preserve of men and definitely devoid of passion. Abelard’s famous work, *Yes and No*, listed the contradictions of the Church, using this as the basis for exploration rather than as a threat. Consequently, medieval thinkers began to embrace the plurality of truth and the importance of reason. Crucially, some universities were now able to operate as semi-autonomous centres of learning in pursuit of truth and rationalism, rather than just institutions of religious dogma. Into this atmosphere the new translations of Aristotle were welcomed with open minds.

Some universities in the 12th century excluded grammar from their teaching, relegating it to the new grammar schools, where it was taught to students in order that they would have the knowledge necessary to enable them to face the more challenging dialectical approach of the universities. However, these schools were few and far between. The idea that schools should teach the more

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simple grammar to prepare students for the more complex dialectic of the universities is something that, it could be argued, remains to this day. So, if my daughter doesn't attend university, does this mean she will have only a limited experience of the trivium? After all, attending a grammar school and learning 'stuff' turns you into a vessel, and by learning grammar alone this vessel is not balanced enough to navigate the complexities of the world.

What balance do we require? The idea that (grammar) school prepares you for university presupposes some kind of progression, a learning journey through which one moves from simplicity to complexity, from facts to wisdom. There is the danger that, if these stages can only be reached through formal education, and we leave education early on we will lack the tools to reach the next stage. I would advocate that *every* stage of schooling should prepare students for becoming wise, knowledgeable, and virtuous.

Aquinas and the Rise of Aristotle

Most universities were not so progressive. The study of Aristotle was banned in many, although some radical teachers ignored this ruling. Albertus Magnus (*c*.1206–1280), a religious man who, like Hugo of St Victor before him, insisted on the importance of secular learning. Crucially, he was the teacher of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). It was because of his teacher's influence that Aquinas was able to create a Christian Aristotelian philosophy to defend the Church's doctrine and faith. This was to be of momentous importance in philosophy and education, and by doing so he helped set in motion a scientific revolution.

Aquinas thought reason was the highest state of being. This contradicted Augustine's more Platonic view that reason was subservient to faith. Aquinas felt that philosophy and religion are separate, but that it was

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through reason that man would find God, thereby uniting certain Platonic approaches with Aristotle's views. Aquinas thought that the highest ends were reached by humanity striving towards them.

Aquinas, who coined the term *tabula rasa* (usually attributed to Locke) was in conflict with more conservative theologians who had reacted to the difficulty of uniting Aristotle's thinking to Christian grammarian orthodoxy and the dangerous outbreak of thinking that had occurred in some of the universities. He asserted that all of our knowledge of the world came from reflecting on our experience. Aquinas's thinking is highly empiricist. Despite the knowledge gained through our senses we cannot prove that God exists, and although we might see that things can and do change, those things were made by other things and not by God. However, if we were to keep going back we would find the first thing that occurred, the beginning, and that would be because of God. So to Aquinas, if we reason correctly, we cannot come to any other conclusion that there is a God. Aquinas's nuanced thinking brought together philosophical thought and Christian belief.

In December 1273 Aquinas had a breakdown, and in 1274 he was summoned by the Pope to explain his ideas, but he collapsed and died on the way. Was this a sign of God's anger? Four months previously, during mass, Aquinas had experienced such a cathartic episode that he said it made all his work seem like straw. What that experience was we shall never know. His death saw the Church revoke much of his teachings and widened the schism between the dialectical scientific thinkers and the more grammarian traditionalists. His work was condemned in the universities of Oxford and Paris, despite Aquinas having studied and been a master there.

The great contribution that Aquinas made was to set the mind free, allowing people to explore their humanity, whilst at the same time still holding onto their faith. The Church took time to accommodate Aquinas's way of

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thinking, as did some universities. Paris revoked its condemnation 50 years later, although Oxford has yet to take this step. The Church was now able to take on Aristotelian ideas, bringing together grammar and dialectic, faith and reason, but there was an inherent paradox. With the benefit of hindsight, it was this freeing of thought that ultimately enabled people to later challenge both the teachings of the Church and Aristotelian philosophy, and helped lead to the decline of the trivium.

Common Good

To Aquinas, the common good of the community was superior to the common good of the individual, meaning that virtue was both outward looking as well as an intrinsic good. He took on Aristotle's idea of the virtues (although he changed the virtue of intuition to understanding) and went on to describe the superior cardinal virtues: courage, justice, prudence, and temperance, and the secondary virtues: art, science, understanding, and wisdom. He thought you could become a good artist or thinker through the secondary virtues but you could only become a good person through the cardinal virtues. Above these qualities come the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

This idea of the virtues reaching outward is inherent in the idea of rhetoric, for it is in community that we are most human, and it is in the conversation with humankind that we reflect most on ourselves. By taking on the idea of the liberal arts as arts we encompass an idea of virtue, although the arts liberate the idea rather than dictate the terms. If virtue is dictated to us as a set of behaviours which we cannot adapt or change then in itself it is not virtuous.

Ockham's Razor and the Victory of Aristotle

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The medieval age finally came to an end when the English philosopher William of Ockham (*c.*1288–*c.*1348) applied his razor; that is, where there are competing theories the simplest answer is often right, thereby fully integrating Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology in the 14th century. Universal ideas, said William of Ockham, were products of man not God. Nothing relies on anything else in order to exist: we can discover and know things from the application of grammar and logic. For William there were but two realities – empirical scientific truth and religious truth – and the two were separate, with no way from one to the other. In one swift cut, science and philosophy were free from theology and could become part of mainstream thought. The liberal arts tradition began to thrive.

This flourishing of learning led not only to Latin grammar being studied but also national languages. For example, the first grammar schools in France began teaching French grammar in the 1300s, and this practice soon caught on in other countries. National grammar schools began to spring up in most large towns, and they had a need for accessible teaching and learning materials. In the 12th century some grammar books had been written in verse (was this an early example of dumbing down?). By the end of the 14th century, thanks to these schools, students arrived at university far better prepared than before. This meant there was more time for students to study at a higher level. This scholasticism saw the liberal arts enshrined in the curriculum at the universities of Oxford and Prague, and both flourished as places where intellectual freedom was cherished.

Renaissance, Petrarch, and the Return of Plato

Petrarch (1304–1374) saw the medieval emphasis on Aristotle as a period of decline in thinking, literature, and morality, and declared the previous thousand years to be a 'dark age'. He wanted to move beyond Aristotle, demanding that a wide range of classical works, including

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the work of Plato, should be studied on their own terms, without having to be 'Christianized'. Petrarch added to the great Western canon the works of Cicero, Virgil, Homer, and Plato, amongst others. Petrarch had begun a new education, reuniting grammar, *logos* (as opposed to just dialectic or logic), and rhetoric. Added to the trivium was the *studia humanitatis* (philosophy, history, and poetry), which, I argue, is also an extension of the trivium, with history pertaining to grammar, philosophy to dialectic, and poetry to rhetoric.

Petrarch also restored the ancient Greek creative tension between Aristotle and Plato: the particular and the universal, reason and imagination, exterior and interior. That this creative dialectic brought forth the Renaissance was also mirrored in the figure of Petrarch himself – his spiritual, psychological, humanist, and aesthetic approach to the world made him, arguably, the first Renaissance man. Petrarch also admired Socrates and was a major force in seeing his age as a rebirth of classical times. The Renaissance was to unite the intellect, the imagination, and the spiritual in a neo-Platonic combination of contradictory creative forces. Pythagoras was again in vogue, influencing Copernicus (1473–1543) to use mathematics to measure the world. This was history as cyclical rather than linear. Promethean man had returned, but now, significantly, it was divine genius that could drive a man to create wonderful things. No longer was divine creativity the sole preserve of God (or gods); truths were to be found in art and literature. The Renaissance shifted mankind towards exercising the critical faculties for uncovering greatness and universal truths, but these were now the truths of humanity rather than of the gods. Platonism saw beauty as an essential part of the search for truth. For example, the Renaissance humanists had a desire for rhetoric to be persuasive but also to be convincing through its aesthetic, its elegance, and its eloquence. This attitude led to a revitalizing of poetry – and grammar – in the reading of the great texts.

The Renaissance began in the 14th century in times of

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turmoil and economic depression. There was tension between East and West, corruption in the Church and State, violence and disease, the decline and rise of new nation states. Against this backdrop there were many new inventions, including that most transformative agent of change, the printing press. The liberal arts flourished. Cicero's work on the importance of good character, virtue, leadership, and versatility in times of change was rediscovered, and this led to the adaptable liberal arts coming to the fore in education.

In 1479, Rodolphus Agricola (1443–1485) set out a method for reading a text dialectically. In Florence, the trivium held sway and soon enabled a fertile breeding ground for contradiction and argument. In the 15th century, a fully fledged Platonic centre of learning was founded under the patronage of de'Medici family. The de'Medicis were famously a family close to the papacy, especially the Borgias; this comradeship brought the Church fully on board. The trivium had reached another high point, as evidenced by Thomas More's letter to his daughter in 1517 in which he wrote, 'I see … you have not left aside any of your usual pursuits, either in exercises of logic, in the composition of declamations, or in the writing of verses.' Now, if I were to write a letter to my daughter, what would I comment on? The usual pursuits in contemporary schooling do not lean towards logic and declamation.

Tensions, of course, remained. Erasmus (1466–1536), the Schoolmaster of Europe, wrote many books for use in grammar schools. An old grammarian, he was intent on re-establishing grammar in a world where dialectics and rhetoric held educational sway. The writer Rabelais (*c*.1494–1553) attacked the humanist neo-Platonic curriculum as established by Petrarch and his followers, protesting that there was so much content in the course of study that pupils would have no time to think. For him, education meant liberation. Montaigne (1533–1592) agreed with Rabelais and wanted to educate the whole person, with the emphasis on understanding rather than

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simply knowledge. The trivium retains this debate at its core: the balance between what and how much to learn, how much time for thinking and criticizing, and how much for developing your own ways of communicating – how to be a free-thinking citizen. In other words, we have the eternal compromise between free individuals and the demands and mores of the community.

Milton: Of Education

By the mid-17th century, Milton (1608–1674) had written, in *Of Education*, that a virtuous and noble curriculum should include the study of Plato, Plutarch, Aristotle, Demetrius, Longinus, Hermogenes, and Cicero, and that the purpose of education was for the good of the state. He believed novices should start their educative journey to mastery with the laborious study of 'some good grammar'. They would then reach the more fertile slopes of the hillside, by reading some Socratic discourses, tempered by lectures and explanations that would 'draw them into willing obedience'. As they become 'enflam'd with the study of learning', by which they may 'delight in manly and liberall exercises', they would come to use eloquence and persuasion. They would then learn ethics and morality and the 'knowledge of personal duty'. Milton was a great believer in the importance of exercise, diet, music, and other activities, such as travel, in forming character, or 'breeding'. However, he did not think every teacher would have the wherewithal to teach this form of education, which was heavy on knowledge and included 'the queen of the arts', logic. Logic, he believed, was especially ill-served by poor teaching. Crucially, in *Of Education*, Milton showed his idea of the journey of education – learning that progresses from sense experience through the abstract to citizenship.

The Good Life

The three ways of the trivium – knowing, questioning, and

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communicating – had come together as the basis of a great education. *This* is what I want for my daughter. I want her to know about things and how to do things. I want her to be able to question, both to find out more and also to realize that some things aren't known, can't be known, or aren't fully understood. I want her to communicate about things she has discovered, surmised, or created in the way of an open hand to the world. Finally, I want all this to have a purpose, which can be summed up by the phrase 'a good life' (because I certainly don't want her to have a bad one). When I look at the three arts of the trivium and the pursuit of a good life, I wonder why it was beyond the wit of my school to give me this grounding, and why it shouldn't be the grounding for a great education now. Surely, there is nothing that could stop the trivium from being the foundation of schooling for my daughter in the 21st century?

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Chapter 5

The Rise of the Rational: The Fall of the Trivial?

> So throughout the world children are spoon-fed all the opinions under the sun before they are able to acquire the capacity to make judgements.
>
> Voltaire

The trivium, as a child of philosophy, was enhanced both by the thinking that brought Aristotelian philosophy and the Christian religion together in theology, and by the burgeoning educational institutions. It was the other children of philosophy – science and rationalism – that would threaten the trivium, and then destroy it as the avowed basis of the curriculum. The modern era rejected many of the ways of thinking and communicating based on traditional classical or religious knowledge and reasoning. Added to this, the economic need for society to educate more of its citizens to ever higher levels would mean that what and how to teach would take on a more utilitarian purpose; that is, how to educate children to become productive, malleable workers and managers rather than independent thinkers.

Nowadays, education is almost wholly a ticket into the world of work. No longer is the emphasis on the idea that we are to be educated in order to attain wisdom or to live a good life. The focus has shifted from educating for your leisure to educating for your wallet. The liberal arts have become disciplines. Education is dominated by discussions around the right systems, subjects, and skills

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in order to achieve the closed outcomes of high test scores in a global marketplace. This has raised the question about whether there has been a decline in standards. Grammar, ethics, aesthetics, virtue, citizenship, creativity, character, contemplation, critical thinking, imagination, innovation, independent learning, and communication skills have all been neglected, at various times. The 'education debate' has become a topic of discussion, where politicians and educationalists let off steam to ease their frustration. Want a scapegoat for all of society's problems? The easy target is to blame schools or teachers for today's ills, from too many teenage pregnancies to the financial crash ...

Behind all this is an important question: what is education for? Do we want our sons and daughters to leave education fully up-to-date with the 21st-century skills necessary for the workplace that we envisage and able to specialize in just one or two areas? Or do we want them to be polymaths, with wide and adaptable expertise, particularly ranging across the sciences and the arts, with an ability to think for themselves, and to be fully engaged citizens who live flourishing, virtuous lives on the way to achieving wisdom? Do we want our children to study hard traditional subjects or soft modern subjects? Do we want them to be trained in soft skills – such as empathy and working in teams – or to know their times tables and be able to use the possessive apostrophe? Do we want our young people to know key dates and events from history or to be able to use the internet to find out anything they want to know? Often referred to as false dichotomies, these choices are very much part of modern educational discourse and have become ever more urgent due to the perception that widening access to knowledge has completely changed what and how we should educate our young people.

There is no doubt that technology has inexorably altered our lives. Perhaps by being interconnected on the internet our children have access to the democratic wisdom of crowds, which gives more importance to knowledge

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emanating from a popular authority than that acquired through expertise. In our social media age, information comes from sound bites, aphorisms, and rhetorical flourishes rather than by recourse to any particular authoritative body of knowledge. The ignorant become just as respected as the wise, and in many cases far more influential. For example, in January 2013, James Argent, from the popular television series *The Only Way Is Essex*, had more than a million followers on Twitter, whereas the controversial scientist Richard Dawkins had to make do with less than half that number, and the popular philosopher, Alain de Botton, about a quarter. If each tweet is a portion of the knowledge of our age, democratically accessed from computer or mobile phone, which knowledge has the most effect? Without hierarchy do we have a democratic levelling of knowledge where every brick can be perceived as great art?

This means that the trivium is relevant because we live in a more democratic, scientific, technological, and culturally relative age. Does the trivium need the cultural authority that comes from a limited Christian and classical canon and access to 'truth', but which has also rendered it useless in the march to modernity? What were the main challenges to the trivium that eventually led to its downfall? It was the modern age that was to see the decline of the trivium. An increasingly secular age, believing in the power of science to discover truth and measuring value through the market, would not be satisfied with the old ways of learning.

The Republic of Letters, the Challenge to Aristotle, and the Triumph of Science

Harking back to Cicero's ideal of a *respublica literaria* (the equivalent of a Facebook group of interested and engaged people), an international community of learning uses written rhetoric to knit its community together. The Republic of Letters (dating between the late 17th and 18th centuries) included many Renaissance polymaths

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and others who had been enriched by a liberal arts education and the trivium. In their number were philosophers and early scientists: Copernicus, Galileo (1564–1642), Bacon (1561–1626), Descartes (1596–1650), Locke (1632–1704), and Newton (1642–1727). Throughout the modern era, science would challenge the authoritative knowledge of the Church. Galileo, inspired by Pythagoras and Plato, and in opposition to Aristotle, was imprisoned by the Church for his heresy in questioning one of the basic tenets of faith – that the Earth was the centre of the universe. This argument between belief and knowledge threatened the basis of a classical liberal arts education. Copernicus's publisher saw the danger and tried to save the liberal arts by claiming that the sun-centred universe was but a set of 'novel hypotheses'.

Paradoxically, this scientific thinking was also threatening the very philosophy of those who had been at the forefront of the epistemic approach: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. As reason and rationality became the new buzzwords, it was the trivium's link to Christian theology and education that was trivializing it. But why did this happen? Is the trivium really only of use in a time where knowledge is fixed and authoritative, where there is but one God, one Book, and one set of transcendent values? If dialectic is used to prove one 'truth', to reach one 'true' conclusion then, indeed, the trivium does become problematic in a world of uncertainty.

The Trivium in Decline: The Trivial, Grandmothers, and Sympathy for the Devil

Evidence that the trivium was in decline during the 16th century can be seen in the literature and vocabulary of the period. For example, in *Doctor Faustus,* Marlowe (1564–1593) ensures that Faustus dismisses logic on his way to making a pact with the devil.

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> Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin
> To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess;
> Having commenced, be a divine in show,
> Yet level at the end of every art,
> And live and die in Aristotle's works
> Sweet analytics, 'tis thou hast ravished me!
> (Reads) Bene disserere est finis logices.
> Is, to dispute well, logic's chiefest end?
> Affords this art no greater miracle?
> Then read no more; thou hast attained that end.

Marlowe was educated at Cambridge in rhetoric and dialectics, and there is much in the play that reflects Marlowe's education. Could Faustus's pact with the devil be an allegory of the demise of the trivium? Probably not, but it is clear that belief in the trivium and its component arts was on the wane. In the 16th century, rhetoric first began to be regarded as artificial or ostentatious, and the whole of the trivium itself became associated with the modern interpretation of the word 'trivial'. In 1589, the first use of 'trivial', meaning ordinary or common, is recorded and, soon after, Shakespeare reflected a further decline in the status of the trivium: in *Henry VI, Part II,* the first recorded use of trivium meaning 'insignificant' occurs. In Act 3, Scene 1, Suffolk says, 'And yet we have but trivial argument'. For the trivium to be seen as trivial, in its modern sense, is devastating. Both the idea that it is common and that its study leads to nothing of any particular importance, ensures that it is open to further adjustments and attacks.

The Advancement of Learning: Knowledge is Power

Was the trivium dead or was it adapted for new times? Science would slowly outgrow philosophy and, eventually, to all intents and purposes, make a land grab for all of

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philosophy's concerns. In his work *The Advancement of Learning,* the grammarian Francis Bacon, considered by many to be the originator of scientific method, refashioned the trivium for the modern scientific age. He was concerned with rational knowledge and how to transfer it to others. This was an inductive, logical way of thinking, drawn from the pre-Socratics, which linked philosophy and mathematics. This undid much of the medievalists' work linking theology with the trivium. He called this rational knowledge 'tradition' (in effect, the trivium renamed). The three component arts were Organ, Method, and Illustration. Organ was speech, including gesture and words, and is more akin to our contemporary understanding of grammar. Method was no longer dialectic or *logos* but 'empirical logic'; that is, teaching a form of argument in order to secure reason (not to be confused with abstract principles), or moving from deductive methods to inductive ones. (Deduction is reasoning from the general to the particular; induction from the particular to the general.) Illustration was to fill the imagination with reason and to communicate in such a way as to adapt to your audience – in other words, rhetoric.

Bacon was so distrustful of the dialectical model that he said it should only be used to remove pre-judgements, and not to administer doubt and dispute. He believed there was a moral imperative to secure emotions to reason, implying that reason was far more important than emotion. He felt that emotion should not distract man from the pursuit of wisdom. Bacon thought that the followers of Aristotle knew how to collect data, but they didn't know how to read it. He asked that people take the same empirical approach, no matter what the subject matter. He disliked the way that different types of proof were sought in different subjects, saying that, 'the rigour and curiosity in requiring the more severe proofs in some things and … contenting ourselves with the more remiss proofs in others, hath been amongst the greatest causes of detriment and hindrance to knowledge' (Bacon, 2002: 229).

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Bacon wanted to focus on facts and wished to avoid theorizing, 'analyse experience, take it to pieces and by a due process of exclusion and rejection, lead to an inevitable conclusion' (ibid). He is suggesting that an inductive, empirical approach that avoids abstraction will lead to rational conclusions. He thought that by beginning in doubt, one ends in certainties. This reflects a belief that the world can be categorized and understood, and that empirical science can bring us to certain truths. So, although the movement from deduction to induction is significant, Bacon inhabits a world where we might begin a quest with uncertainty but end it with certainty. Even results that showed a hypothesis was wrong were of interest to Bacon: if something was proved to be false it could be dismissed. It was this idea, perhaps, that would be of greatest interest to a man who would be influenced by Bacon's ideas and who will come into our story later, Karl Popper. By 1672, traditional grammar had become the object of Molière's (1622–1673) satire. In *The Learned Ladies* (*Les Femmes Savants*), he continued the long line of those who enjoyed satirizing the grammarians. *Grammaire* had now become *grand-mère,* a grandmother whose offspring would grow up and live in a very different world than the one she recognized. This issue is still very current in the 21st century, where modernity seems to remake the world with alarming rapidity; one becomes a grandmother all too easily. As technology and culture change, it doesn't take long for us to become out of touch or to hanker for a past that has already passed us by.

For the trivium, there is a problem with a world that seems to be changing ever more quickly. For example, how can grammar – which needs a certain amount of stability and authority – retain relevance in a world where capitalism, technology, globalization, and mass communication threaten its claims to correctness, rule making, and belief in tradition? In an ever-shifting world, the young are more likely to look to each other as travelling companions, rather than listen to the sage-like advice of grandmothers sitting at home telling them how

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things were better in her day.

I Think, Therefore I Don’t Know

It is from the Enlightenment that the challenges to the ideas that underpin the trivium – authoritative knowledge and dialectic leading to certainty, and rhetoric communicating that truth – would now come thick and fast from philosophy, science, and commerce. Using the scientific method, Descartes wanted to learn whether there was anything we could actually be certain about. He argued that anything based on our senses and beliefs are open to doubt except one, and that is, ‘I think, therefore I am’. Reason was the only way to acquire knowledge, which he called rationalism. Descartes thought that dialectic could contribute nothing to the discovery of truth and declared that it should be a branch of rhetoric. Dialectic was only be used to explore truths that were already known; everything was to be in doubt until one found certainty through deductive reasoning.

Conversely, Locke thought that we are born with our mind a blank slate or *tabula rasa*, and although we have innate capacities, we do not have innate ideas. He judged that everything we know is gained from experience: a pure empiricism. Newton, who believed that we stand ‘on the shoulders of giants’, thought that the real reason we could see further was because of the enlightened, rational approach – and this would bring about the triumph of science. His scientific method was to harness both the induction beloved by Bacon and deduction revered by Aristotle.

David Hume (1711–1776), however, echoing Locke and reaching back to the ideas of Sextus Empiricus (*c.*160–*c.*210), believed that we should be sceptical and opened up ‘the problem of induction’. Hume viewed human perception of nature as intrinsic to our understanding. He understood it as our first perception, the strongest perception. This awareness comes before,

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and connects ideas through, memory, imagination, or reflections. Influenced by Bishop Berkeley (1685–1753) – who thought that if empiricism was fully taken on board then this would mean that all things exist in the mind rather than outside of it – Hume stated that impressions come first and ideas second, and are experienced as a faint copy of the impression.

Hume's greatest contribution to philosophy is his theory of causality. What causes these impressions? His answer was chaos. He thought chaotic whirlwinds of sensations leave impressions, and from these impressions ideas are formed, which occur as they are ordered in the mind. The fundamental importance of this view is that our ordered ideas come from our imagination, rather than a relationship to any truth beyond those impressions. Hume's fork separates reason and enquiry into two prongs: *relations of ideas* and *matters of fact,* something *demonstrable* and something *probable*. In mathematics, we can demonstrate 2 + 2 = 4, which is an example of a priori, deductive logic. To Hume, these relations of ideas are worked out in thought and need not tell us anything about our existence. We can only demonstrate whether matters of fact are probable if we provide empirical evidence for them. Now, this is taken a step further when Hume looks at the way we infer things from evidence in the past. Just because something has always occurred when an event is observed, does not mean it always will, and this becomes the problem of induction. For example, if every swan you see is white, it does not mean logically that the next one you see will also be white and not black.

Hume's theory of causality means induction, and therefore science itself becomes difficult to justify. In order to deal with this, Hume argues for a 'mitigated scepticism' where common sense tempers the excessive scepticism, or Pyrrhonism, which holds we cannot ever know truth. These opinions are ordered in our minds into narratives that become our worldview. We rationalize that view, and by seeing the world from our viewpoint, we convince ourselves that our thinking is based on reason.

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