

TRIPOD "SPECIAL" REPRINTS PHI BETA KAPPA LECTURE BY DR. HARRY TODD COSTELLO

Tripod Dubs Lecture Oratorical Milestone

THE SEVEN LIBERAL ARTS

By Professor Harry Todd Costello

I have told students from time to time that the presence of distinguished speakers, military and civil, on our campus at Commencement and other ceremonies subserves a useful purpose. The Seniors can look at one another and say, "What our professors used to hand out was not so bad after all." And now the Committee has chosen me as the distinguished speaker. My bluff has been called!

In the Middle Ages those who just wanted a general education at the universities might, as they thought, get a well-rounded course by studying all the Seven Arts under the Faculty of Arts. The specialist might go on to take a professional degree under the Faculties of Law, Medicine, or Theology. But what were the Arts, and why seven? Arts were any subject presented systematically from first principles, an Art being the Roman name for a Science. For a time the Romans thought of nine Arts, but Medicine and Architecture got detached as more specialist and professional. Seven is a nice number. There were the four ways, the Quadrivium, which came down from the Pythagoreans, through Plato's school, the Academy. To these the Romans added three, the language Arts—shall we now say, the more trivial?—the Trivium.

The followers of Pythagoras were a religious fraternity, whose religion warned them against stepping over a crowbar or sitting on a quart measure or eating beans, but whose higher thoughts turned to the mysteries of arithmetic and geometry. So, as Bertrand Russell has said, there were united in one group those who loathed beans and those who loved right-angled triangles. I could have been a member. They found that strings in simple ratios made harmony, and so founded at once the scientific study of music and the first mathematical physics. An interest in the stars led to a sort of applied geometry up there, and they combined music and astronomy in a conjecture about the music of the spheres. So we got the four sciences, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music, which latter was acoustics; and these were taken over by Plato for his school, called the Academy. You may read about this curriculum in Plato's Republic.

Worthy Pursuits for the Freeman

The Romans cared not too much for such abstract studies. The ideal citizen, as Cato said, was a good man proficient in speech, a warrior and an orator. We tend to contrast the man of action and the man of words. But for the Roman the use of words was extremely practical; you controlled your fellows with words, and your enemies with the sword. So the most practical studies were, to the Romans, the Trivium, namely grammar, rhetoric, and argumentation or logic. The list of seven were the liberal studies, meaning not the studies that liberated the mind, but the studies, as Aristotle said, which were worthy pursuits for the man who was free and not a toiling slave. Skipping over many details, we may point to one Martianus Capella, a lawyer at Carthage about 400 A.D., who wrote a curious allegory entitled *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*. There were seven attendants, like bridesmaids, who turn out to be the Seven Liberal Arts, each eager to tell what she stood for. A more disgusting perversion of the spirit which should animate a marriage ceremony would be hard to imagine. Yet this thing became a standard textbook for the study of the Arts, and the astronomy section even encouraged Copernicus.

We need not dwell too long on the medieval university, with its four Faculties, and its rented buildings. Usually it grew out of the cathedral schools, at the seat of the bishop, to train the secular clergy. On arrival one might get a little stick certifying admission, from which comes the name Bachelor. So you got the Bachelor's degree at once. Carriers of a bigger stick, the shepherds in the fields, were often unmarried, and got called bachelors also. Professor Dadourian has told us we should give the Bachelor's degree at once to our Freshmen today. Then those who wanted to remain and engage in real study could be really helped by the Faculty, unencumbered by present-day drones and playboys. In the medieval university those who had studied all the Arts, to a point where they were fit to teach them all, were granted a professional degree of Master of Arts. Others, though not interested in teaching, took the examinations and the certificate to get proof they had studied at the university. The Doctor's degree was at first given in the 12th century to students in law and theology, rather as an extra or *cum laude* citation. This was only

churchmen, Nominalism became a theological heresy. But the student in Arts could go along studying his bits of argumentation, untroubled by the storms overhead.

At the present time logic still survives in some quarters as the old syllogisms of Aristotle, defended, as Bertrand Russell says, as "an excellent propaedeutic," which means, says Russell, "a training in those habits of solemn humbug which are of such great use in later life." But once more there are storms overhead. There are the Formalists, who invent perfect languages, and the Semanticists, who have discovered that the English language is terribly complex. Both groups call themselves "analysts." The son of Trinity's old Professor Kleene is President of the Society for Symbolic Logic, a group of quiz kids who throw whole blackboards of hieroglyphics at one another, which they say, and truly, are simpler and more exact than ordinary English. The Semanticists, on the other hand, as Russell says, are "the most influential school of philosophy in England at the present day, . . . perpetuating the muddleheadedness they have taken over from common sense, . . . and discussing endlessly what silly people mean when they say silly things" (*British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, Feb., 1953). I long ago asked Mr. Russell why he did not write a simple textbook of modern logic for college use, and he replied, "I really don't want to tell so many lies." Practically all texts for beginners are hazy on fundamentals, yet where is exactness

Plato on rhetoric was bad, creating a semblance where there was no truth.

Rhetoric and Social Climbers

The road of ambition in Rome under the Republic was through public speaking, when men spoke of freedom. Under the Empire the way upward was the same use of oratory, when the climbers used it to flatter the Emperor, and the less they had to say the more ornate became the language. Rhetoric most usually came to be considered pre-law study, though the Christians were interested in its use in preaching. By the Middle Ages rhetoric became the preparation of letters, legal documents, and state papers.

The Power of Oratory

In our modern age we have college courses on public speaking and argumentation, but in no adequate proportion to the tremendous influence which speech now possesses, due to our new media of communication. My friend Houston Peterson of Rutgers published in 1954 an annotated "Treasury of the World's Great Speeches," which got hardly any attention from the general reviewers, but which makes you feel as if this were the age of rhetoric, speeches backed by bombs. As he says, "In no period of history have public speakers swayed such masses of people and held such positions of power," and he quotes from Dennis W. Brogan about America, "Oratory, phrases, the evocative power of verbal symbols, must not be despised, for these are and have been one of the chief means of uniting the United States and keeping it united." Of course it is not merely political. Every occasion has to have speeches, as for instance the present one. The Faculty of Science looks across at the Faculty of Arts in a modern college, and says, "What a lot of language is being spilled over there all day long!" In their own laboratories the scientists may be tinkering around with bottles and gauges, but it would be very dumb if there were not language to convey at every turn the meaning of it all. The first year or so a science has unfortunately to be spent in memorizing a language. The businessman looks at the college, and says, "What do they do there all day long, but talk and pile up pieces of paper?" But what do business men do all day long, but talk and pile up pieces of paper? True, the paper has dollar signs on it, but talk is their chief stock in trade, for business men are all salesmen at heart. But let us not be contemptuous of business, and industrial management. While poet and philosopher have been talking about a better world, business men and industrialists have been giving us one, and it is not altogether their fault if we make a mess of our opportunities. But to do it they had to do a great deal of talking. After all we must distinguish between the showy rhetoric and the real rhetoric. As Louis XIV said of his two court preachers, "I go away after hearing his sermon, and I say what a wonderful sermon that was; but when I have heard the other, I go away saying to myself, 'What a bad man I have been!'"

Let us turn to the science of grammar, that Roman science, which took very calmly all literature for its province. There were books of grammar as we conceive it, Greek and Roman. There were eight pages of classified parts of speech by Donatus; nearly six hundred of Priscian, mostly on language forms, but like our Bartlett assembling quotations from two hundred fifty-five authors. People did also read literature in all the first thousand years of the Christian era, and not in the monasteries only. They read Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Cicero, Boethius, but yet they hardly read them as literature, but rather as information. When literature began to be written in the vernacular languages, the literal-minded mothers pointed out Dante as the man who had actually been in hell. But what is literature? Literature is creative writing. It lives in two worlds at once, the world of fact and the world of imagination. Real literature is like believing in Santa Claus. Stupid elders tell the boy there really is a Santa Claus, and he soon knows better, and wonders why they are telling him lies. The adults lose face with him. But then some more intelligent adult tells him Santa

Tripod "Extra" for Alumni and Parents

The Tripod has undertaken the task of re-printing the Phi Beta Kappa Lecture of Dr. Harry Todd Costello, which he delivered to the College on March 8, 1956, shortly before his retirement.

This re-print has been especially compiled for alumni, parents of students and friends of the College. The Tripod is glad to pass a copy of this valuable speech along to each of you, in hopes that it might re-ignite some old memories, some old thoughts.

We, the Editors of the Tripod, believe this lecture is important to every alumnus, parent, or friend of the college who knows and loves the liberal arts.

We are proud to print a lecture as timely, as keen and as perceptive as one entitled "The American Scholar," delivered one hundred and nineteen years ago by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Claus is like when you do battle as a cowboy, or play with space ships. Then he understands perfectly, for that is the double world he lives in most of the time. He lives literature, he knows perfectly well that it is something you create, and very enjoyable, but of course you have to come out of it at times to eat. It was not the discovery of literature itself which made the so-called Revival of Learning. It was the discovery that the Greeks and Romans had written some, and it was good. But Greek literature was seen afar, a thing to be yearned for. A full appreciation of Greek literature as literature, the dramatists for instance, did not come until perhaps the 18th century, though good translations of the Greek philosophers came with the early 13th. I read again in a recent book that when the Turks took Constantinople in 1453, Greek scholars fled to the West and so we got to know about Greek literature. Good heavens! No Greek scholars fled to the West in 1453.

Let Latin Live

With the High Middle Ages, the 13th century and for some time after, Latin was still the useful language, the international language, the tongue especially of law, science, logic and theology. The passion for literary Latin reached a point, however, after 1400, that led the men of the Renaissance to go back to the perfect Latin of Cicero, which had sounded archaic in the time of the Roman Empire. So they killed Latin as a fully living language, and made it a subject for school-teaching instead. They called it studying the Classics. Classic meant the top social class in the Roman state, as Proletarian meant the bottom class. So classic literature came to mean the best literature, and all Latin writing came, in the Renaissance, to mean something better than anything modern. Greek writing, which is better than Latin, ran second most of the time. There were reformers who wanted to turn men's attention from words to things. There was Francis Bacon, for instance, and Comenius, a follower of Bacon, who conceived of a textbook with pictures numbered on one side of the page, and the numbered Latin names on the other side. But the schoolmasters kept the boys' eyes on the Latin side of the page, and it was Latin that boomed, not things. John Locke wanted to turn from words to observed things, but added that the value of education consisted in discipline and character training, with learning about fourth on the list. This praise of muddleheadedness is very English, "Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever." It was about this time that the schoolmasters discovered that Latin was good discipline, especially good when painful. Always there have been new reasons for studying Latin. Latin has great value even today. It enables the man of culture to catch

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later extended to medicine in the 14th century, though now "doctor" has become the special name for a medical man. I believe the Ph.D. in Arts is quite modern. The university itself was a group of men, not a curriculum embracing the universe of knowledge. Also a college was a group of men, perhaps living in the dormitory provided for members of a monastic order.

Are Words Only Words?

Let us trace the development of some of these Seven Arts, beginning with Logic. The name is Stoic, the first formal treatises earlier by Aristotle. Modern scholars are finding new virtues in the writings of the Greek Stoic logicians, but the Logic of the Seven Arts remained always rather rudimentary. It was a bit about syllogisms, definitions, and fallacies. The Schoolmen came in the 13th century. They were teachers in the universities, the schools or places of leisure—doubtless ironically so called, I would think. That great period was introduced around the 11th and 12th centuries by a great controversy based on logic, the Nominalist-Realist controversy, whether or not words are only words, convenient tags for groups of individuals and nothing more. As this led to saying the Trinity are three, and the Church are the many

more essential than in logic? The authors are like the small boy who put the slug in the Sunday School collection plate intended for the little heathen. When taxed with it, he said he "knew it wasn't good money, but the little heathen won't know the difference." Whether logic courses can even help to make students more logical, I really do not know. I found theoretical economics and cost accounting rather better. It would be a fine thing, if we could do it, to get a sense of formal exactness into the student mind.

Rhetoric was more adequately handled than logic by both Greeks and Romans, with many teachers. Quintilian was the first professor to be subsidized by the Roman state. Unhappily we now say "sophistry and rhetoric" in a tone of contempt, after the Sophists, the first Greek teachers of rhetoric. "Mere propaganda" we say today, which is a word derived from the serious missionary organization of the Catholic Church. "Propaganda" referring to the material disseminated is very recent; fifty years ago that was called awkwardly "a campaign of education." The name has of course acquired a bad odor. But there is good rhetoric and good propaganda. Aristotle's logic had been good rhetoric, a social thing, how to really prove something to somebody. But usually from

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Costello Address . . .

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the full flavor of the erudite puns in the Latin citations at Commencement. When I came to Trinity elementary Latin was not even taught. The choice was Greek or mathematics. So we turned out B.S.'s in French and History, but mostly we hardly turned out anybody, for the students did not come. This was called saving the Classics. Our Alumni of the 20's were few, but very select. I heard the old professors say, "A student should do a real piece of hard work for once in his life. If he is willing and able to do neither mathematics nor Greek, why should we bother with him?" I found myself objecting to putting something in just because it was hard. I rose and propounded a riddle: "What is the difference between a red-headed fool and a looking glass?" I then consented to give the answer: "The fool speaks without reflecting, and the looking glass reflects without speaking." But the reason for the red-headed fool? No reason. I just put "red-headed" in to make it hard.

Requirements Should Be Gateways

I have never seen too much virtue in making things hard. It is surely a pity that elementary Greek is hard; and so is ordinary mathematics for many people, though much of the latter is due to bad teaching lower down at the beginning. I knew a student back in the 20's who spent two years on his first college mathematics course, and three years on his second—they required two years then, since they hoped this might drive some people into Greek—or maybe to drink. That this student died rather early was not, I think, due to mathematics, but I think also he wasted a bit of his life in useless endeavor. I think a student should be forced to work very hard in his specialty, economics for the young business man, real theoretic economics and not descriptions of business forms, and the same hard work for those who choose history or English. I watched young men in France getting ready for competitive examinations in English literature, where they were asked to be prepared on all the works of thirty-seven authors, and the ability to criticize each. That is good. But why make the requirements for distribution and broadening hard? I would except the case of writing English, which is an essential tool. In other cases you do have to make a man work hard enough so that his mind takes hold, and he sees in the new subject an opportunity and a joy, an awakening of new interests and new powers. Requirements for spread should be opportunities and not tasks to be written off, and thrown aside—good-bye forever! They should open up new vistas, making the student aware of worlds unrealized, gateways and not dead-end streets. I would not require any subject without alternative. If a man loathes a subject, let him take something else, something he likes. But to keep the loafers from going out that way, I would say take three courses you like for the one you hate, though you can count the three as only one for the quantity requirement at graduation. The other methods are wastes of human resources. We hold year after year committee meetings about the square pegs and the round holes, and trying to find the magic formula for some new sort of salve to help force in the square pegs. Someone has said professors should also enjoy academic freedom, which consists above all in freedom from committee meetings.

The Humanities vs. The Sciences

The mention of freedom brings us back to the Arts of Free Men, the Liberal Arts. What a painful collapse the scientific ones suffered in the early Middle Ages! Arithmetic became the power to calculate when Easter comes. Geometry, the measurement of the earth, became geography. Astronomy turned into astrology, telling fortunes from the stars. And music, so far from developing into mathematical physics, became the rudiments of church singing. The universities later got back on the track.

But now what about the later expansion today of the science of grammar into the fields of Literature? This development has now overshadowed the rest of the Trivium. It has added to itself History, and Art and Music,

and even Philosophy, when the latter ceased to be serious by ceasing to be Theology. The whole has been named The Humanities, possibly from Cicero's reference to "the more humane letters." The imaginative arts, the arts that play with the world, creative rather than of new worlds, these truly liberal arts, are the world of culture. And a great world it is, a world of the possible alongside the actual. Certain parts that took themselves too matter of fact have been spawned off into new sciences, economics, government, sociology, psychology, anthropology, in short, the social sciences. Situated somewhere well in the background of our modern culture are the natural sciences and the mathematical; not too significant for culture except when they do something annoying, such as setting off a hydrogen bomb. You put a little of them, not more than two or three courses out of twenty, into the curriculum, alongside the core of Humanities. They are probably there just to make things hard.



"We shall miss Dr. Costello greatly and hope that for many years to come his genial presence will continue to grace our campus and library, places he loves so dearly." Dr. Albert C. Jacobs, President of the College.

Sane Men and Dreamers

Plato thought of his sciences, the four Arts, as being abstract thinking, that is, as abstracting out the essentials, or rather seeing them by the eye of thought, and getting away from the cloudy intuitions of the senses and emotions. He condemned the artist for clinging to sense and feeling. For science today, the sense-data are chiefly significant as pointer readings, confirmations, signs of the real existences, which existences are what science seeks to know. Plato was too hasty, however, in thinking the sciences do not need the senses. Modern art and literature also build directly on sense and emotion, but the important thing is that each fine art and field of literature introduces you to a new ideal world. As Mrs. Langer says, "When you still see the paint, you do not yet see the painting;" for they are not even in the same space. Analysis of the given world provides the elements to both science and art, particularly picking out essential systematic relations amid the irrelevancies which are also given, though even this "analysis" calls for thought. But out of those elements of system you build new constructions: for example, a system of mathematics, a grasping of a systematic interpretation of history, a great organized piece of music. We live, as civilized beings, whether in Science or in The Humanities, in two worlds, the actual and the ideal, and they interpenetrate and interlock without destroying one another. Great literature and great science are alike products of creative imagination. To paraphrase Willard Gibbs, poetry and pure mathematics can dream about anything, but the physicist and the historian have to be sane—at least part of the time.

"Yes," it may be said, "you talk of dreams, but what are you going to do when the rent comes round?" You are confronted by a wall down the center of every campus, on the one side the Sciences, on the other side what are now called The Arts. How are you in practice to make the Arts students at home in the Sciences, and Science students at home in The Arts.

To the Arts student each science is a narrow specialty. Professor Kriebble told me a story of a young girl who went to the library to get a book on penguins. The next day she brought it back and slammed it down, "No good!" The librarian said it was considered excellent on penguins, to which she replied: "It tells me more about penguins than I want to know." For the Arts student the Science side of the campus is full of penguins, it is all spinach, and you know what you can do with it. Or as Professor Sterling Smith describes the janitor's insight into the nature of chemistry: "It comes in big bottles, and I pour it in middle-sized bottles, and the Assistants put it in small bottles for the students,—and they pour it down the sink." A scientist tries to tighten up his course, and what happens? I overheard in the hallways the other day this comment: "Geology used to be easy and interesting, but now it has got as bad as biology."

Philosophy and Science

We in the Philosophy Department have tried to meet the situation in part with a course whose cumbersome title reads, "Origin of Modern Civilization with particular relation to the History of Science." Science students rather like it, for it pulls together their various science courses. The Arts students, for whom it was planned, are less satisfied. They like the cultural history and surveys of social conditions, but they hope for a minimum of scientific penguins. Yet the growth of science has been a great drama. The biggest actual applications of science have come only in our own day, say since Faraday. Ordinary inventive ingenuity produced the steam engine, but not the power reactor. Copernicus revolutionized men's thoughts about themselves, but the astrophysics of today leaves us stunned. Ten thousand million suns like ours in our system, and yet a good average photograph from Mount Palomar may show more other systems equal to ours off yonder on its field than it shows separate stars from our own system. Then there is the whole sweep of theories of evolution, astronomy, geology, biology, social fields. There is the great range of modern anthropology, or of the rediscovery of the pre-historic past of man. Even more important are the methods by which results have been reached, and the new study of methods called the philosophy of science. And there are the biographies of great investigators and organizers, not to speak of great doctors and lawyers. We must not, however, try to spread a student's attention over everything. I would not minimize the value, also, of one good stiff laboratory course in one abstract and general science. But there should be in these fields requirements for breadth which really stretch the mind, which was the original aim of the Liberal Arts, from Plato on.

What happens when the young scientist tries to broaden his mind by going over to the Arts side? German or a little economics is not very broadening. Some say be sure students take a course in American History, for patriotism's sake. I am not too convinced all of our sainted ancestors will bear too close scrutiny at the college level of facing facts. One Trinity history student came out with the solid fact that Disraeli wore green pants; and another learned that the look of benevolent dignity on the face of the Father of His Country was due to false teeth that hurt him. The Humanities, as Howard Mumford Jones has been indicating recently, give the young man an odd picture of our greatness. Pessimism, defeatism, frustration, anxiety—there is Freud, there are Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Kafka, there are reaction and disillusionment, even straight nausea in Sartre. In current philosophy there are revivals of old materialisms and hedonisms, narrow positivism, opportunist pragmatism. Professor Raphael Demos tells us in teaching a philosophy suitable for free men he has stated the case and tried to make the student choose between great alternatives as an independent thinker. The professor should not impose his dogmatic will! And what does the student do then? He does not choose either big alternative, but goes back to intuition, that is, to emotional prejudices he had before.

"I am already here"

We say we Americans have the American way, which praises freedom and respect for the individual. I wish it were so. But it seems as if the people who are most anxious for others to go the American way frequently do not themselves have either a desire for others' freedom or a respect for the other man's individuality. The most obvious American way is that of whizzing off in automobiles and then whizzing back again, after having been nowhere in particular except to collect where the roads are crowded. They whiz down to Florida. That is a sort of goal, for that is about as far as you can whiz in that direction, though you may take off to sea south of St. Petersburg or to Key West. The Florida back country is often less pleasing than at home, and the

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beaches hidden by motels, as at Miami. Then, as somebody has said, there are the long rows of palms—all of them itching. I like better the calm sanity of the Boston lady, when asked why she did not travel more. "Why should I travel? I am already here." We Americans do not care for a thought-out and systematic philosophy. So the Communists, who have a philosophy not cogently thought out, in the absence of anything better from us, may succeed in deceiving two-thirds of the world.

Why study The Humanities? There is no good reason unless we study the best. There is now so much of the best, that we do not have time to study anything else. Let us examine the best things that have been written and thought, that have been dreamed and felt among men. The only way man can grow mentally is by aid and inspiration from the greatest products of past thought. When you have these you have the truest Liberal Arts.

The best college is said to be Mark Hopkins on one end of a log, and a student on the other. Do you wonder where the college President comes in? He is the fellow who polishes the log.

The Prexy in Heaven

I remember a story about a college President, who loaded his chief professors in the college station wagon, and took the wheel. As they left town at sixty miles an hour somebody in the back said, "I am sure we are going diametrically in the wrong direction." The President glared back over his shoulder, and proclaimed, "No backseat driving, please." As a result he did not notice the curve in the road, and they went straight off the precipice. They arrived practically simultaneously at the Pearly Gates. Saint Peter smiled a welcome, and said he had been expecting them. He first showed the President to a magnificent palace on the widest of the golden streets, a palace carved of a single amethyst. Then he led the rest of the bunch down a side street to rather humble but commodious quarters. One Faculty member was puzzled. "But Pete," he said, "I thought there was a rule about the last shall be first . . ." "Yes, very true," said Saint Peter, "but this is an exception, almost a red letter day here in our celestial city. This is the first time a College President ever got this high up."

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