

MJLA editorial

In Liberal Arts and Sciences education, there is an interesting tension between scholarship and activism; between seeking to understand the world in objective terms and seeking to change it. On the one hand, this educational philosophy is grounded in the scientific method, and the scientific method requires impartial analysis. It is this dispassionate approach that makes academia distinct from mere opinion and gives it its value. If one has an activist agenda for one's work, one is likely to interpret data in ways that support one's ideas – and might ignore contradictory evidence, making one's conclusions less reliable. On the other hand, Liberal Arts and Sciences education is also about taking social responsibility and engaging with the community, and from this perspective any pretensions of objectivity are not only illusory but also a dereliction of duty. Rather, one must take a stand and use one's education to contribute to a better world.

While these two attitudes might seem mutually exclusive, this tension is perhaps more theoretical than practical. In fact, these outlooks can actually complement each other. Activism can benefit enormously from academic rigour, because it enhances the credibility and impact of one's arguments. And, as long as one remains precise in one's thinking and open to dissenting voices, having a clear point of view need not reduce academic work to just another opinion. The trick is to always remain intellectually honest; to be able to constantly distinguish between what one knows and what one believes, and to never let the latter get in the way of the former. To achieve this, one must never take shortcuts, always be precise and explicit in one's thinking, and submit oneself to the critical scrutiny of one's peers. Only then can one ensure that one's activism does not undermine one's scholarship. But if one pulls it off, one's work can overcome the tension within Liberal Arts and Sciences education and realise its twin ambitions.

The papers in this year's edition of the Maastricht Journal of Liberal Arts and Sciences all represent the ideal of marrying first-rate scholarship with socially engaged activism. They all clearly seek to contribute to exposing injustice, promoting awareness of suffering, or the rejection of dangerous dogma. And yet they do this not through mere rhetorical assertion, but through careful use of theory, well-researched facts, and impeccable research methods. Moreover, these papers have been carefully reviewed by peers and experts and selected by a team of critical editors to ensure that they meet the highest standards of scholarship. As such, they are shining examples of how Liberal Arts and Sciences research can be both rigorous and relevant.

Perhaps more than ever before, the world needs activist-scholars. Whether it is in dealing with the coronavirus crisis or in combatting racism and discrimination, change will not come from those who merely shout. Nor will it come from those who merely describe what is going on. Only those who can combine these approaches have any chance of success. That is why Liberal Arts and Sciences education, as it is showcased in these pages, is more relevant than ever before.

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